
BASICS

Balance

Everything in Nature is a constant striving to maintain balance, or to return to a state of balance when it is lost. When we look at the different elements of violin technique from the point of view of balance and proportions, the answer to many technical questions becomes obvious.

For example, how should the finger be positioned to play a particular note high up on the fingerboard? To find the answer you have only to look at the hand on the violin, and the finger on the string, in terms of what would look right: what is the most gracefully curved, the most balanced, symmetrical, natural-looking, all-of-a-piece, comfortable, normal and ordinary-looking hand position.

The process of finding the right proportions is a matter of asking simple questions: should the hand be higher, should it be lower; should it be more to the left, more to the right, more curved, less curved, more on the tip of the finger, more on the pad, and so on. Whatever looks balanced and feels comfortable is likely to be the 'correct' position.

You do not have to consult a teacher or a book to find this correct position because finding the right proportions is almost entirely just a matter of instinct and common sense. The process consists simply of trying more and trying less, going either side and narrowing the distance between the extremes until you find a perfect balance-point.

Of the hand positions shown in Fig. 1, it is clear that (a) looks the most balanced, the most all-of-a-piece, natural and comfortable.

In (b) the hand is too high, so that the finger is too tilted over on the fingertip towards the bridge; in (c) the hand is too low, the finger is too straight, there is too much pad on the string, and the palm of the hand is resting on the shoulder of the violin.

In (d) the elbow is too far to the right, and in (e) too far to the left, each resulting in an off-balance feeling in the hand. In (f) the fingers have squeezed together, locking the hand instead of allowing the hand to remain in a state of balance.

Examples of key areas in which to maintain a sense of balance fine-tuned proportions in violin playing:

- Balanced posture – not pulling down, pulling in, twisting, leaning to left or right
- The head balanced on top of the spine, not 'held' in place
- The right arm working from a constant point of balance and feeling of buoyancy
- Balanced bow hold, the thumb and second finger being the centre with a feeling of two fingers one side of the thumb, two fingers the other
- Balancing the bow in the hand, rather than gripping it, before placing it on the string
- Balanced feeling of the bow sitting in the string – tilt, angle to bridge, string level
- Balance in the left upper arm – not pulling the arm one way or the other
- Balanced position of the left hand, giving each finger maximum advantage
- Correct part of the fingertip contacting the string to give balance to the finger and the hand

BASICS

Pressing and squeezing

Any degree of pressing may cause knock-on effects because the moment there is pressure, there must also be counterpressure – and this leads to a feeling of squeezing. Squeezing causes contraction in the muscles, leading to loss of elasticity or springiness; and with the loss of springiness, the loss of unconscious instantaneous adjustment and mobility.

The most common examples of squeezing:

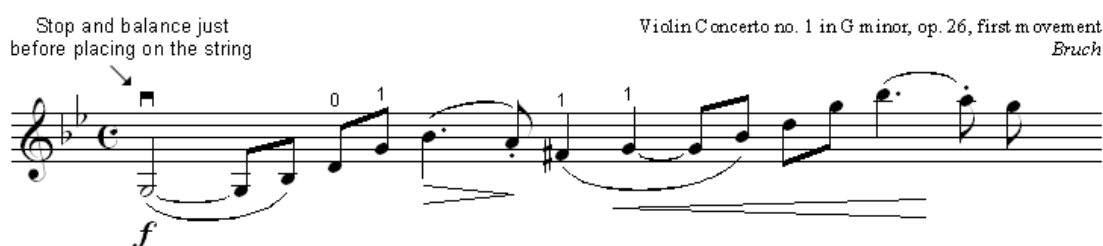
- Squeezing together the base of the left thumb and the base of the first finger
- Squeezing the left fingers together
- Squeezing the neck of the violin between the fingers and thumb through over-pressing the strings
- Squeezing the violin between the neck and shoulder or collar bone
- Squeezing the bow between the fingers and thumb
- Pressing upwards with the right thumb while pressing down with the first finger.

Finding the moment of balance

In the fraction of a second before beginning a stroke – whether before attacking the string from the air, or before placing the bow on the string – there must be a moment of complete balance.

Example 1

To begin the opening of the Bruch G minor concerto, bring the bow to within a couple of centimetres of the string, and then stop. Find a feeling of balance – of the bow in the hand, the weight of the bow balanced by the little finger; of the feeling of the arm suspended in the air with only the minimum effort to stay there, and a feeling of floating – and then place the bow on the string to begin the G:



Positioning the feet for balance

The feet must have sufficient space between them to form a solid base.

- The feet cover the smallest possible area when they are side by side and touching. Spreading the feet further apart creates a larger base.
- Turning the feet slightly outwards increases the area further.
- Positioning one foot slightly more forward increases the area still further.

Apart from the weight moving from foot to foot as the player ‘sways’, if weight is to rest on only one foot it should be on the left foot. This is the ‘stable’ side, while the bow arm is the unstable side.

Although there is greater stability when the left foot is positioned slightly behind the right (because of the increased surface area), the best position of the feet is probably when they are side by side (slightly turned outwards) and the weight is distributed equally between both of them. Then there is no twist in the spine.

However, so long as nothing is ‘fixed’, a small imbalance caused by the right foot sometimes being slightly more forward does not cause problems.

There are three points of the foot to stand on (Fig. 2). Stand with your balance slightly more on the forward two points than on the single, rear point.

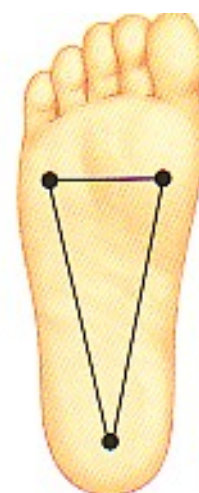


Fig. 2 Stand slightly more on the forward two points