
BASICS

Fast fingers

One way to measure or assess technique is to look at the speed of the movements of the left hand. You want fingers that move with quickness and alacrity; light, quick shifts, and fast, narrow vibrato. There is also the question of the degree of energy in the bow speed, particularly at the beginning of accented strokes.

It is relatively easy to improve someone's playing quite drastically simply by concentrating on speeding up these key areas. Then the entire energy and brilliance of the playing increases. Of course, there are as many musical occasions when you want slower fingers, slower shifts and slower vibrato, but what we are talking about here is how to bring more life and brilliance into the playing in general.

'Fast fingers' is about the speed of the left finger towards or away from the string, not the speed of the notes, i.e. you can play with fast fingers in slow passages as well as in fast. It is a sort of *waiting* before moving a finger, and then a fast movement of that finger.

- The faster the finger drops on to the string or lifts from it, the *later* the dropping or lifting must begin.
- The later the finger drops or lifts, the *longer* the time between each finger action.
- The longer the time between each action, the *slower* the passage feels.

So for a player with faster-moving fingers, fast passages feel slower than they seem to someone with slower-moving fingers, even if they both play at exactly the same tempo. Fast fingers make everything feel easier and more comfortable to manage. The faster the fingers the better the co-ordination, since any toil or reluctance on the part of the finger has a knock-on effect in the timing of the bow.

Speeding up the fingers

Exercise one

In Exercises 1-4 the 'tempo' of the fingers is slow because they move only on each beat; but the speed of the finger movement has to be fast to co-ordinate with the bow.

Perfect co-ordination, the tone entirely pure and ringing

The exercise consists of two staves of music in 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a series of eighth notes with fingerings: 0, 1, 0 1, 0 2, 0 2, 0 3, 0 3, 0 4, 1 2, 1 2. A 'simile' marking is placed below the first few notes. The second staff continues with eighth notes and fingerings: 1 3, 1 3, 1 4, 2 3, 2 3, 2 4, 2 4, 3 4, 3 4, 3 4, 3 4. Below the second staff, there are additional fingerings: 1 2, 1 4, 2 3.

- Play as fast as possible so that the fingers have to move very quickly to get to their next positions in time. Start at $\text{♩} = 92$. Repeat the exercise at $\text{♩} = 120$, and then at $\text{♩} = 144$.
- There should be no extra sounds when changing the length of the string by placing or lifting a finger. Move so quickly that there is no 'fuzz' at the beginning of a group caused by bowing a not-completely-stopped string.

Play on each string.

Exercise two

Place the lower note of each pair on the D string. Play only one line at a time, first the top line and then the bottom. Because the finger has so far to travel, it has to move even faster than in Exercise 1:

The exercise consists of two staves of music in 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a series of eighth notes with fingerings: 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 3, 1. A double bar line is present after the first four notes. The second staff continues with eighth notes and fingerings: 1, 3, 1, 4, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 4, 2, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4. Above the first staff, the instruction 'Play only the top line or the bottom line, whilst fingering both' is written.

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Again, there must be no extra sounds or ‘fuzz’ at the beginning of a group caused by bowing a not-completely-stopped string.

Also play on the G and A strings.

Play very fast *détaché*, stopping on a sharply accented quaver. Play the quaver with a pure tone, however strong the accent is, with the finger completely stopping the note before the bow plays it:

Exercise three

Perfect co-ordination, tone entirely pure and ringing

Use the same finger pattern as in Exercise 1. Play on each string.

Place the upper finger of each pair on the G string without playing it (written as x-notes). Play the top line only, holding the finger on the G string until the instant it is needed on the A string. Because the finger has so far to travel, it has to move even faster:

Exercise four

Perfect co-ordination, the tone entirely pure and ringing

Also play using the E and D strings.

The wider the string vibrates (the louder the volume), the faster the fingers have to stop or un-stop the string.

- Begin *pianissimo*, dropping and raising the fingers slowly.
- As the volume increases wait longer and longer before dropping or lifting the finger, and then having waited move the finger faster and faster.
- Whatever the dynamic or speed of finger movement, the sound should always be pure, without any ‘fuzz’ as the finger touches or leaves the string. Playing *mf* or *ff*, listen to the ‘ping’ as the finger is dropped or raised.

Exercise five

Soundpoint 5 = near the fingerboard. Soundpoint 3 = centre point. Soundpoint 1 = near the bridge.

Play on each string using the same patterns as Exercise 1.