
BASICS

Single-finger scales

The first person I saw recommending single-finger scales was Yehudi Menuhin during a masterclass in a rather small, crowded room at the old Guildhall School of Music, before it moved to the Barbican. When he demonstrated them he played them extremely fast – shooting up the scale and down again, perfectly in tune and clearly articulated. He had a wonderful left hand.

Why practise single-finger scales?

One simple answer is that they improve your sense of the geography of the fingerboard. If you cannot play them perfectly in tune, and then after practising them you can play them more in tune, it must mean that your sense of the fingerboard has improved.

Also, since so many shifts use only one finger, i.e. 1–1, 2–2, 3–3, 4–4, a simple way to improve shifting in general is by playing broken intervals, scales and arpeggios using only one finger.

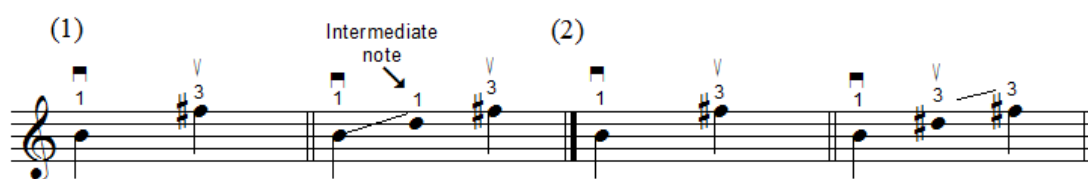
At the same time, this also improves the accuracy of the silent intermediate notes that help measure the shift when it is played with different fingers, i.e. 1–4, 2–4 and so on.

Finding the common denominator

In basic maths, adding fractions is easier when the lower numbers are the same, e.g. $2/6 + 3/6 = 5/6$. When the lower numbers are different, e.g. $1/2 + 1/4$, you have to find a ‘common denominator’. In this case, $1/2$ is the same as $2/4$, so $2/4 + 1/4 = 3/4$.

Similarly, when a shift seems to be from one finger to another finger (1–2, 1–3, 2–4 etc), in many cases the actual shift is really 1–1, 2–2, 3–3 or 4–4. When shifting up from, say, first finger to third finger, think of only one finger, not two:

- Is the first finger the ‘common denominator’, so that you move on the first finger as a 1–1 shift, and just drop the third, in tune, directly down on its note?
- Or is the third finger the common denominator, so that you move on the third as a 3–3 shift?



- (1) Classical shift (or ‘Beginning shift’ – shift on the finger you begin with). The note you are shifting to, third-finger F^\sharp , is in 3rd position. Shift with the first finger to 3rd position. This note – D – is the intermediate note. Whether it is audible or not depends on the passage and the bowing.

Having arrived there simply drop the third finger on F^\sharp . Although the sound of the shift is a perfect fifth, the actual distance of the shift is a minor 3rd, B to D played first finger to first finger.

Instead of shifting to the D the first finger could go to a D^\sharp , making the shift a major third.

- (2) Romantic shift (or ‘End shift’ – move the hand on the finger that ends the shift). Having played the B with the first finger, place the third finger lightly on the string as if to play a harmonic. This is the intermediate note, though it should never be audible.

Shift with this finger on the string, sliding the finger into the F^\sharp from below. The actual distance of the shift is again a minor 3rd, D^\sharp to F^\sharp played third finger to third finger.

Instead of starting the shift from the D^\sharp the third finger could begin on a D, making the shift a major third; or it could reach up to an E, which would make the actual distance of the shift just a whole tone.

BASICS

Broken intervals

Thirds Sul D

As dotted as possible

Sul A

Sul G

Sul E

Fourths Sul G

Sul D

Sul E

Sul A

Fifths

Sul E

Sul G

Sul D

The dotted rhythm forces the correct timing of the shift with the bow change. Play the dotted note as long as possible, and lighten the finger during the short note so that it is almost inaudible. In the end it naturally begins to disappear on its own.

- Stop each note with as light a finger as possible, without pressing the finger down hard into the string for each note. Lighten the finger even more during the shift.
- Keep the unused fingers close to the string, i.e. hover above the string with the fourth finger while shifting with the first finger.

Scale and arpeggio patterns

An interesting and original way to approach the scales and other intervals is to start with the chromatic scale and then gradually make the intervals wider through the minor second, minor third and major third. Then add the scales and arpeggios. For example:

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

- Practising single-finger scales and arpeggios on the fourth finger is a good way to improve it in general, in the same way that doing lots of vibrato exercises on the fourth finger makes it stronger too.