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# BASICS

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## Two-octave scales on one string

As a teenager I never practised two-octave scales on one string. I was brought up on the Carl Flesch scale book, which doesn't have them. It wasn't until I was a post-graduate that I first saw the Galamian scale book and was chastened to find that I wasn't very good at playing the two-octave scales on one string, and positively bad at playing two-octave arpeggios. I could see that my work was cut out for me. The usual logic applied: a really good violinist can play fluent two-octave scales and arpeggios on one string; I want to be a really good violinist; therefore I must become good at playing them. And then when the scales and arpeggios on one string feel easy, all those fingerings in the general repertoire that go up the string 1-2, 1-2 etc. already feel easy when you come to them.

Scales in two octaves on one string are the real final test and aiming point in the mastery of scales – not four-octave scales across the strings. Four-octave scales can use no more than the two-octave range of the fingerboard, so they go no higher than two-octave scales anyway.

Of course what the Flesch does feature is one-octave scales up one string, and you should play them in every possible position. So once you are beginning in sixth or seventh position you are covering the second half of the string anyway. But still, one-octave scales, even if they are played in high positions, are not the same as two-octave scales up the whole length of the string.

### Fingerings

The American violinist and teacher Gaylord Yost, in his book *The Key To The Mastery of Double Stops*, wrote every exercise only on the lower two strings, starting either on the open strings in G major, or on first finger in Ab. His reasoning was that by practising just this range of keys you were covering – in shorthand – every key or eventuality you could encounter in general playing.

Apply the same principle to two-octave scales to reduce the 'load' you need to practice: focus on G, D, A and E, and Ab, Eb, Bb and F. There are various routes you can take, though the fingerings for the minors never seem perfect. Starting on the open string:

Major

Melodic minor

Harmonic minor

Starting on the first finger:

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# BASICS

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Major

Melodic minor

Harmonic minor

## Practice methods

It goes without saying that scales should be practised both with separate bows and with slurred, but in the beginning use long slurs – at least an octave to a bow and then two octaves – because then there are few problems of co-ordination between the bow and the left finger. All separate-bow passages in the repertoire also benefit from slurred practice, which is a focused way to develop a truly flowing and legato left finger action.

One of the first things to do is rhythm practice. You can practise with much more complicated rhythms than the following simple two-note patterns, but they are the basic ones with which to start:

## Keep fingers close to the strings

An essential characteristic of a really good left hand is the way the unused fingers are always ready just above the strings. The thing to avoid is lifting too far up, back and away. The violinist Yfrah Neaman used to say that the fingers should be like helicopters or vertical take-off planes, which hover just above the landing pad.

A super-effective way to strengthen this ability to keep the fingers close to the strings is to practise playing the first three fingers while holding the fourth finger down silently on another string. Two-octave scales are naturally good candidates for this type of practice since they employ the fourth finger only rarely:

Lift the fourth finger

Replace the fourth finger on the lower string

Fourth finger held down silently on the lower string

Should you wait until you are an advanced player before tackling these 'virtuosic' scales? Certainly not. If two octaves on one string seems overly-difficult, and you do not yet play four-

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octave scales, the point is that three-octave scales and arpeggios feel very straightforward after tackling two octaves on one string. They are worth practising for that reason alone, even if you will never play up to the top of the fingerboard in your normal playing.