

INTRODUCTION

“Play a scale, and I’ll tell you what kind of a violinist you are.” This sentence, which is usually uttered at the first meeting between teacher and student, says much about the value and importance of these exercises, which are popular, though not particularly liked by the students. Scales, as if through a lens, focus all a violinist’s faults and strengths, especially in such elements as intonation, quality of sound, changing of position, and playing apparatus.

Is it worth practising scales?

Analysis of difficult fragments in concertos and virtuosic compositions shows that the majority of these places are based exactly on scales and passages. The answer to the above question can be only one: it is worth practising these and one should do this, because the violinist who regularly practises scales and does so with pleasing results has to a great degree resolved technical problems, is better prepared to play difficult pieces and – importantly – can get to know pieces more quickly. The playing of a violinist who does not practise scales always smells of diletantism and a lack of technical-tuning certainty, and so starting daily work with the instrument from scales is orderly, more exact and more professional.

In the first part of this collection we find selected two-octave scales in first position intended for beginners. Something new when compared to those arrangements in use is the introduction of broken chords for the harmonic triads (T-S-D). This reinforces the young violinist’s sense of function, developing harmonic hearing. A feature of our publication is our seeking rhythmic regularity and proportionality of individual sections of the scale. This type note layout gets the player used to metrical-rhythmical playing and teaches formal discipline.

Part II – two-octave scales with a change of position, more extensive passages and double-stopping is more demanding. Smooth transition from upward direction of movement to downward (without stopping on the highest note) gives the scales “melodiousness”.

I based the three-octave studies (Part III) on *Das Skalensystem* by Carl Flesch, expanding them in the direction virtuosic fluency. Not being an advocate of the exclusive use of single-name scales (as they are often played), I have divided major from minor and placed them in separate blocks. Starting both blocks from the lowest note (g) takes gradation of difficulty into account – climbing to ever higher positions.

In regard of the grouping of notes, I have chosen the most common four-note layout to be found in concertos and other such works (initial triplets in three-octave scales I treat as a quiet warm up, and with the vibration problems, I use them as a study of continuous vibration). The four-note layout with a melodic “flourish” at the beginning and end of the scale allows the use of scale text for various typical violin bowings and articulation. I have placed the most important of these under the base-scale.

When it comes to fingering, I used the finger pattern (slightly different for major scales and for minor scales) which makes it easy to master scales and passages *en bloc*. The creation of appropriate finger habits which allow for independent problem solving to find fingering pieces being played is a further target in this action. In the scales starting from the notes F and F sharp, in addition to the commonly used fingering (starting on the G string), I provide alternative fingering (starting on the D string), requiring more agility in the left hand, but giving a better sound.

In playing double stops, as a rule I took the principle of “impulsive fingering” (change of position on the strong notes of rhythmic groups), which when playing two notes *legato* brings simultaneous changes in the bowing and position. Exceptions are situations when it seems physically more favourable to depart from this principle and also to bring positions closer together (I - II instead of I - III), while at the same time using an empty string.

Change of position, either up or down, should be performed with the technique of close contact of the finger with the strings, best done with the “new” (target) finger. In major scales and passages, as well as in passages belonging to minor modes, the first finger should be held on the string after reaching the top position until the return of the same note in the descending sequence. In octaves, I only give the Thomson fingering ($\begin{smallmatrix} 3 & 4 \\ 1 & 2 \end{smallmatrix}$); usually is obvious for violinists. Octaves and tenths from the key of F major, F minor, for purely practical reasons, as well as sound, are only given up to the sixth degree of the scale. In the chromatic scales from the tonality of D major, D minor, in descending figures I introduce chromatic *glissando* (a combination of *glissando* with vibration) – a technique often used in virtuosic pieces.

Selected four-octave scales (Part IV), without the “flourishes”, are intended for more ambitious pupils, students, as well as for mature violinists who want to maintain maximum technical capacity for many years. Two-octave scales on the G string (Part V) are excellent training for changes of position (smooth movement of the hand around the neck) and a way to quickly warm up. I resigned from the carrying the latter onto the other strings, believing that the ability to play in high positions on the D and A strings is not as essential as on the G string (on the E string we get it in four-octave scales and three-octave scales that begin higher up).

Here are some recommendations on how to perform scales, including for technical auditions and examinations:

- in two-octave scales (Part I and II) the teacher chooses how to play according to the needs and possibilities of the student, let's say in a number up to four, varying bowing and articulation;
- in the legato block of three-octave scales (ways 1, 2 and 3) it is the best to join them into one whole (without interruption). The remaining ways – *spiccato*, *sautillé* and *staccato* should be separated with a short break. With significant technical advancement I propose to leave the 4th way (double *sautillé*) and 6th (preparatory exercise for the rapid *staccato*), and with less advancement to leave the 5th and 7th ways and limit oneself to the double *sautillé* and slow *staccato*. Double *staccato*, requiring specific predisposition (way 8) is also not compulsory for obvious reasons;
- four-octave scales should be played as they are written (sixteen and thirty-second notes *legato*), and then apply the 3rd, 5th and 7th ways from the three-octave scales. In the double stops it is the best to go to the three-octave scales. Dynamics in all types of scale should be moderate (*mf*), but flexible, taking into account the direction of the melody, mode, etc.

Chromatic scales and those in harmonics, as optional, have been written after double stopped scales. If a player selects the chromatic scale they should place it as the last way, i.e. before the passages, and if harmonics – at the end, so after the double stops.

And one more important thing – try not to practise scales from music. We should become acquainted with the fingering, grouping of the notes and types of bowing, and put the music aside. Playing from memory (by ear), the practitioner focuses on the pitch and the quality of the sound, embeds the fingering more quickly, and after some time the “pre-emptive” playing starts to function (hearing the note before playing it). Apart from this, we always practise only one scale; when you reach relative perfection move on to play another, preferably in a different manner.

Working on scales, one should not lose musical sensitivity and care for the sound. It would also be a mistake to play without engagement (a dead sound, without the appropriate contact between the bow and the string), and allowing the musical imagination to sleep. We must remember that scale-passages positions in concertos and pieces fulfil different functions and are saturated with musical content, they have a role in building musical tension; they often express movement, giving an occasion for virtuosic display, but can also be used to create various moods. A similar “musical” approach is worth instilling in students practising scales. Dynamic shading, lyricism (in *legato*), a certain rapacity (in *sautillé* and *staccato*), “veiled” minor fragments – these are all useful to make scales sonically attractive and students who are not too enthusiastic about them will eventually bestow them, if not with love, with sympathy combined with respect.

At the end of the collection, I give a set of selection of pieces based on scale-passage technique. In working with the student they can be treated as a test of skills acquired at through scales.

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