

Legato String Crossings

Eliminate Jerky String Motions

Learn

- The basic string crossing is a whole arm motion with all the joints of the arm maintaining freedom to interact in their own subtle and natural ways.
- The wrist and fingers often are used for faster back and forth crossings on adjacent strings.

Feel

- For melody and legato crossings, the motion should feel and sound smooth and continuous. This “wavy line” feeling comes from fluid, continual motion and flexible finger, wrist, elbow and shoulder joints. Avoid isolating or blocking one part of the arm from the other.
- The most fundamental string crossing is a whole arm motion initiated by lifting and lowering from the shoulder socket. The upper arm moves up and down from inside the “ball and socket” shoulder joint. The shoulder itself stays low and relaxed--avoid hunching.
- When moving rapidly back and forth between two adjacent strings, keep your thumb soft and use the smaller muscles of the wrist and fingers.
- A tight bicep muscle stiffens the elbow and upper arm.

Think

- A legato crossing must be timed so there is no snap, jerk or lunge toward the new string. Anticipate the new level by moving early. Moving late creates a jerk or accent; the motion is too quick. You can move during the entire length of the previous note or, in faster passages, even several notes ahead.
- The amount of bow-hair contacting the string should remain consistent. For example, when crossing from the C string to the A string, if you arrive with the bow turned on its side with less hair contacting the string, you are probably crossing with your wrist and fingers and neglecting to lead the lift with your upper arm.
- If, during string crossings, your elbow or your wrist become too high or low and you feel awkward, uncomfortable or unbalanced, you are not moving the whole arm as a unit.

Listen

- A truly legato crossing is essential for long lines and unbroken melodies. Do you hear continuous, uninterrupted sounds, or stops, starts and accents? A seamless legato can enhance the beauty and emotional power of a phrase.