

## 6 LEFT HAND STRING CROSSING AND POSITION SHIFTS

### 6.1 STRING CROSSING IN THE SAME POSITION

When changing strings, both the 'new' and the 'old' string must be kept down and the left hand must prepare, or anticipate, the change well in advance. If the 'old' note is required again it is usually helpful to keep it down. In fig. 6.1 for example, both fingers 'stay put' (especially helpful when playing at speed). See also 5.1(iii). Only when this technique hinders vibrato or the mobility of the other fingers, should it not be used as a general principle.

Fig. 6.1



### 6.2 EXERCISES

Exercise 6.2(i) and (ii) are designed to train the LH to anticipate the bow during string crossing.

In exercise 6.2(i), the bow changes strings on the fourth quaver of each bar. The LH anticipation is indicated in brackets (the finger should hammer down, a semiquaver after each third note). Revise 2.5 and do not let the bow cross too soon.

In exercise 6.2(ii) the notes with white heads indicate a preparation or a finger that is held down – play only the black note! Keep in 1st position and gradually increase tempo. Notice how much more relaxed the left hand becomes when practised in this way.

Fig. 6.2(i)

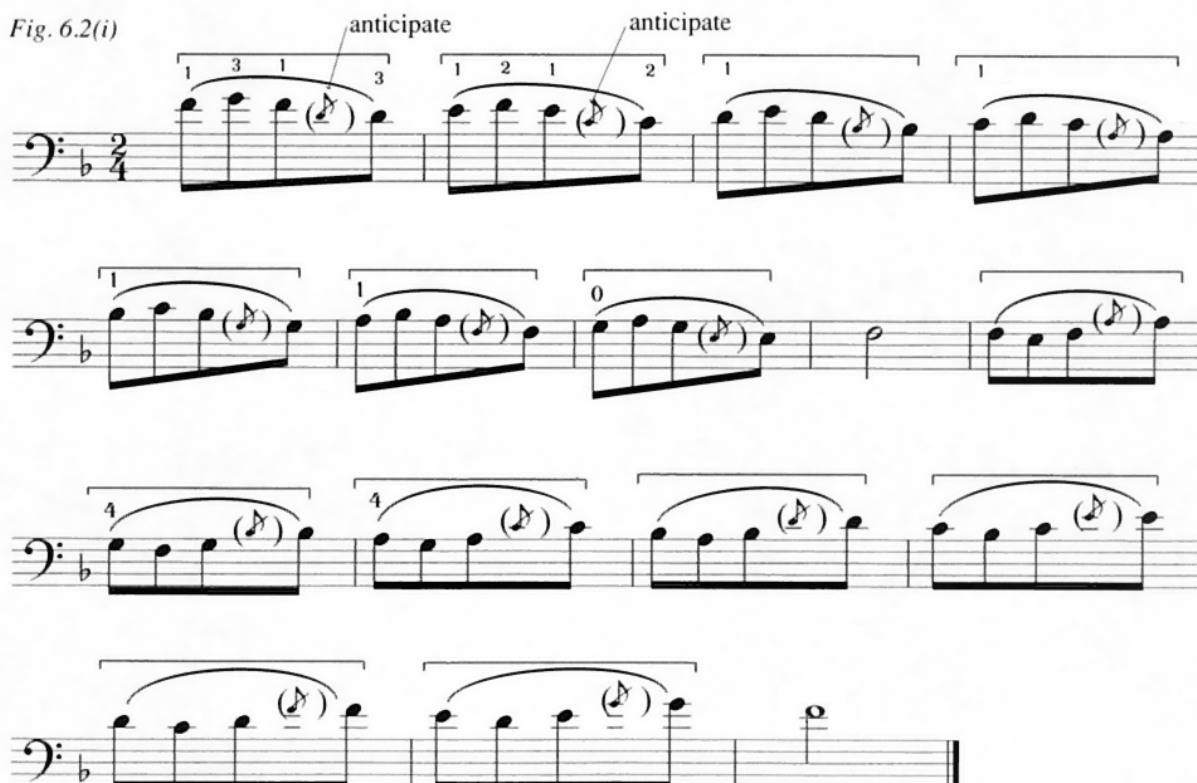


Fig. 6.2(ii)



Fig. 6.2(i) & (ii): Exercises for independence of the right hand from the left.

### 6.3 STRING CROSSING WHEN THE INTERVAL IS A FOURTH

Fourths across the string are awkward to play legato on the double bass, without the use of special techniques.

In lower positions the most usual is 'barrée' (French: "broken"), when the last joint of the finger 'breaks' or collapses and is laid more than one string at once – **before** the bow change. This is more easily achieved with some fingers than with others, and vibrato may suffer. It is sometimes helpful to turn the hand a little towards the barred finger.

If one is playing 'cantabile' and wishes for a free vibrato 'bridging' is used. Two different fingers are placed opposite each other, on neighbouring strings. (See fig. 6.3(i).) This technique is especially useful in thumb positions.



Fig. 6.3(i): Two finger bridge.

A third possibility is to slide the playing finger from the old to the new string as the bow crosses. One should depress the new string in advance with another finger, so that the string lies close to the fingerboard to accommodate the slide.

Another solution is, of course, to change position, thus avoiding use of the same finger on two strings. Use of the thumb in bridging (or even barrée) should not be discounted. By bending the last joint inwards, there is room for the first finger beside it on the string below (fig. 6.3(ii) & (iii) a and b (the latter from the Hindemith Sonata). The thumb here can remain in place the whole time, making intonation more secure.



*Fig. 6.3(ii): Bridging with thumb and first finger.*



*Fig. 6.3(iii) a & b: Applications of thumb and first finger bridge.*

## 6.4 STRING CHANGES COMBINED WITH CHANGES OF POSITION

Again, both strings should remain depressed during the change of string (i.e. during the shift). Look at fig 6.4. There 4 must depress the G string while 1 is still sounding. The change will be most acceptable if the bow remains on the D string until the fourth finger has finally arrived at c'-sharp. (The first finger slides from E to about F-sharp on the D string, while the fourth finger slides from about B to c' -sharp on the G string.)

In passages such as this, it is better to avoid using the same finger for both notes, as it is much more difficult to keep the two strings depressed during the change. It is bad practice to attempt it when using thumb position: secure location of the new string with the same finger is hazardous.



Fig. 6.4: Both strings to be kept down during shift.

## 6.5 CHANGING POSITION ON THE SAME STRING (LEGATO).

Although portamento (Italian "carried", i.e. small glissando) between notes of different positions often has its musical value, the habit should generally be encouraged of making position changes inaudible. There are two ways of camouflaging the shift in fig. 6.5(i).

1. Bow pressure and speed are partially reduced during the shift. That is to say, play more quietly at the moment of the shift, remembering that a) the higher note needs more bow-speed than the lower, and b) the bow **must not stop** between the notes. This technique is particularly useful when shifting on one finger, or if the shift is large.

Fig. 6.5(i)

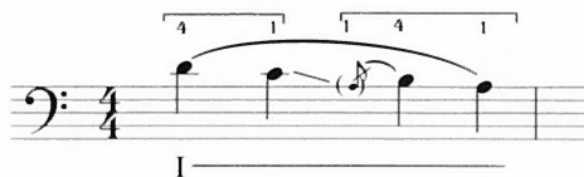


Fig. 6.5(ii)



Possible execution of fig. 6.5(i) in order to avoid a glissando.

Fig. 6.5(iii)



Avoiding glissando in downward shifts.

2. The 'old' finger may slide up (with the string held down) until the 'new' one is ready to hammer down the final note (see fig. 6.5(ii)).

In this way a short glissando is followed by a clearly articulated note. This articulation fools the ear into ignoring the glissando.

A series of descending legato notes can be treated in a somewhat similar manner in reverse (see fig. 6.5(iii)).

When these techniques have been fully developed they can be used at any tempo.

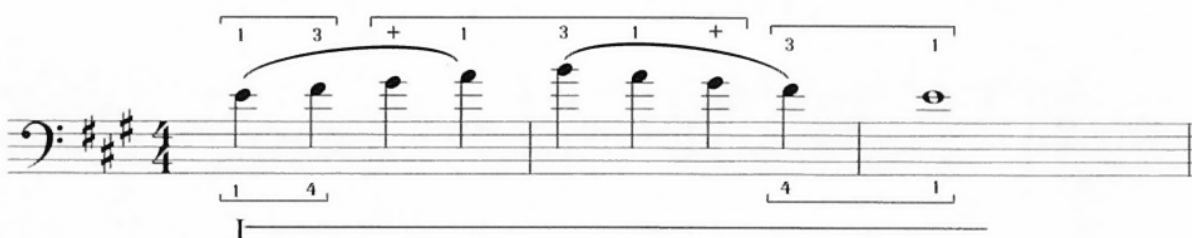
## 6.6 MOVING INTO THUMB POSITION AND BACK

When changing to and from thumb position, the string must remain down the whole time, just as in normal changes of position. (The only common exceptions are a) when the 'new' note is a harmonic, or b) when, in very rapid passages, lack of time demands that the hand should be **thrown** from one position to another.)

Play exercise fig. 6.6 (legato) and note:

– The first crotchet (e') is played with the thumb resting in the corner between the body of the instrument and the neck. During this note the left elbow is raised, preparatory to the shift.

– During the second crotchet (f'-sharp), the elbow is raised to the height required for the thumb position, and the thumb is placed on the string close behind the playing finger (3 or 4).



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Fig. 6.6: Shifting between normal and thumb position.

– The transition to the third crotchet (g'-sharp) is then made **as a change between two thumb positions** and the following four crotchets played as usual.

– Moving back, the eighth crotchet (f'-sharp) is approached by sliding the thumb past the new note, so that the new finger (3 or 4) can be placed on the string for the final note. The articulation helps camouflage the shift.

– As soon as the new note is established, the thumb is moved back behind the neck, and the elbow returned to its normal position .

The whole of this process should be joined into a smooth progression to give a sense of flow to the phrase.

The technique is basically the same when using other types of bowing, e.g. détaché or staccato.

For larger shifts it is more practical to establish the 'new' finger earlier, sliding on it instead of the thumb. **Always prepare as many of the elements as possible, well in advance** (elbow, upper body, etc.), remembering also to move the bow nearer the bridge in anticipation of larger rising intervals.

One should think of (and feel) such a change to a higher (thumb) position as an accelerating 'free fall' down the fingerboard. If it is really to be a 'free fall', the left arm must be raised so that it falls clear of the edge of the instrument!