

How this book came to life?

The idea of presenting a preparatory guide of violin orchestral excerpts came to me a few years ago when a student of mine interrupted her lesson to ask how I learned to play the excerpt from Richard Strauss' *Don Juan*. She commented on some of its passages as being almost unplayable, noting that it is even difficult to know where to begin preparation. This caused me to reflect—having practiced this excerpt for more than ten years and, in the process, exhausting every possible fingering, bowing, shifting, and stroke. Working on every detail and bringing it as close to perfection as I was able; experimenting with vibrato, phrasing, and tempo. Playing for so many other orchestra players, teachers, colleagues, and performing it in a considerable number of auditions, I had forgotten there will always be violinists who still need to begin this journey.

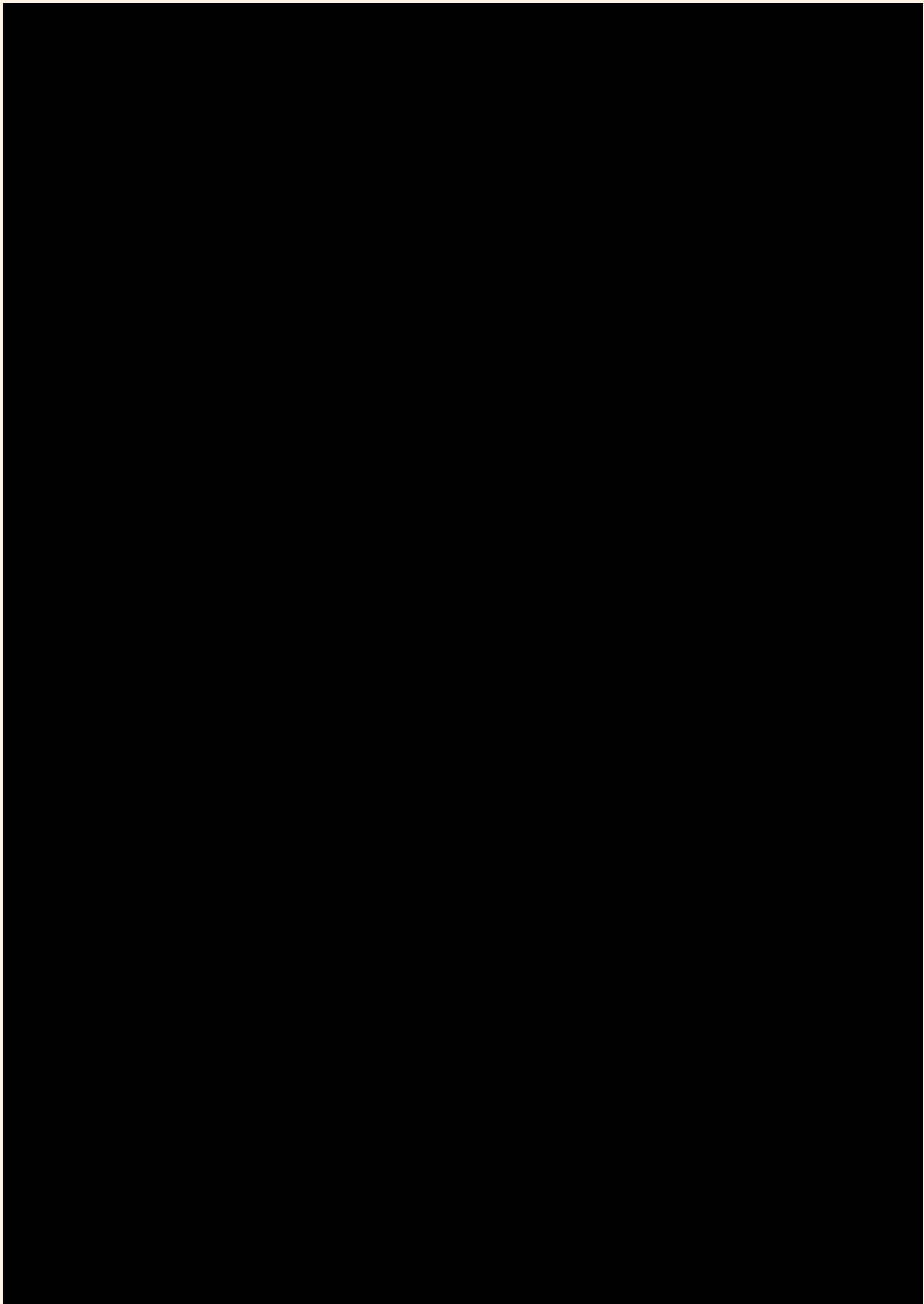
Violinists preparing for auditions usually use copies of first violin orchestral parts, which are readily available for purchase from the publishers, or for free download on the internet, as most of the compositions are in the public domain. For those which are still copyright-protected, orchestras are required to send a copy to all invited applicants. Orchestral parts, however, lack bowings, fingerings, and specific directions for execution of the variety of bow-strokes, making the preparation process unnecessarily long and frustrating. Only students at the college level, where orchestral repertoire classes are offered, have access to edited parts from their teachers. Colleges offering such classes in their curriculum, however, do not represent the majority of the music schools in the United States.

Why another book with orchestral excerpts?

Well, the available literature does not favor the beginning orchestral violinist. The few orchestral excerpt books available are simply compilations of first violin parts spanning the vast orchestral repertoire and do not provide guidance on specific problems in preparing for orchestra auditions. *The Orchestral Excerpts from the Symphonic Repertoire*, compiled and edited by Josef Gingold, is one of the most substantial extant books of its kind, comprising, in three volumes, 240 excerpts from the most popular orchestral pieces. This tome has served its purpose well since its first publication in 1953 but the recent trend for professional orchestras is a more limited, yet quite similar, selection of excerpts appearing on most of the audition lists. Other similar books include collections of all the Brahms, Beethoven and Mahler symphonies. Even though these remain valuable sources of orchestral music for violin, they lack many facets necessary to prepare for an audition. They provide no assistance with technical problems nor do they explain stylistic characteristics.

How is preparation of orchestral excerpts different from the rest of the repertoire?

The process of understanding, learning, and performing any piece of music is usually comprised of two angles: the technical aspects, or the ability to play the piece, and the interpretation, the musical image the performer creates according to the directions of the composer. These are two sides of the same coin, very interconnected, but each has a different



46 *ff* *tranquillo* *p flebile*

51 **C** *molto vivo* *p*

56 *p* *p* *cresc.*

60

63 *ff*

THEORETICAL PLANNING

Theoretical preparation is essential for proper understanding and interpretation of an excerpt. This includes gathering information about the composer as well as the composition. Care must be taken when examining sources, as insufficient or exaggerated materials abound. A very authoritative source with which to begin one's theoretical planning is the article from The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, readily available through most college and public libraries. The Grove's research is done by experts on the specific topics and it is

thoroughly updated to the most recent concepts. If one seeks more information than is contained in New Grove, the author list can be consulted for related, well researched publications. As an illustration: New Grove's article on Richard Strauss is by Bryan Gilliam and Charles Youmans. Gilliam is also the author of *The Life of Richard Strauss*, and editor of ***Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and his Music, and Richard Strauss and his World***. Youmans is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss*, and the author of *Richard Strauss's Orchestral Music and the German Intellectual Tradition: The Philosophical Roots of Musical Modernism*.

TECHNICAL PREPARATION

The excerpt from Strauss' *Don Juan* is arguably the most complex of all the excerpts examined in this project. This passage contains an incredible rhythmic variety, an extended range, virtuosic passages, and quite unusual phrase shapes.

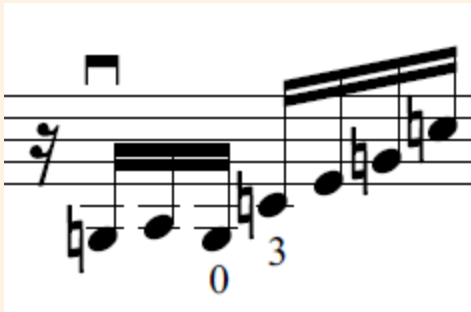
mm. 1-8

The work begins (or one could say catapults) with a unison flourish in the strings, followed by bombastic brass and wind passages. This opening should sound very energetic, and should be phrased until the end of the eighth measure.

The sixteenth-notes in the first measure can be executed with various combinations of fingerings. One option is to remain in first position; another is to shift to third position.

Example 1: Strauss—*Don Juan*, m.1

A.



B.



The advantage of the first position fingering is that the string crossings fall on a down bow, as opposed to an up bow if third position fingering is employed. However, with the third position fingering, the long E at the beginning of m.2 will have more energetic vibrato played with the second finger, and the shift to seventh position, at the end of the measure, will be shorter and more secure.

Example 2: Strauss—*Don Juan*, mm.1-2

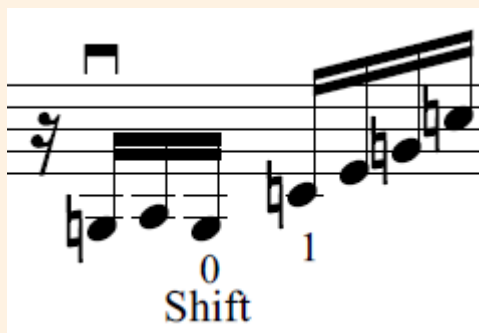


Shifting

There are three ways to properly measure a shift: measuring the distance with the finger that is on the string before the shift, measuring the distance with the finger to be played after the shift, or a combination of the two. The first option, above, will be employed in the majority of position changes, that is: at the end of the note before the shift, the arm must move to the new position, measuring the distance with the last finger on the string. Then, when the new position is reached, another finger could be dropped. All of this is done in the duration of the note before the shift, so the finger in the new position presses the string before the next note starts. It is essential that the moving finger must barely touch the string and that the hand moves as a block, so that all of the fingers are ready to play in the new position. The bow pressure should be released for a split-second, while the finger is moving, to eliminate any unnecessary noise.

In the first measure of *Don Juan*, the shift between the first and third position is done while the open G is played, so the left hand needs to start moving up with the lift of the first finger.

Example 3: Strauss—*Don Juan*, m.1



It is easier to learn a shift that starts with a finger, than with an open string. Practicing the shift between A and C will help secure the distance the arm needs to travel.

Example 4: Shifting from A to C-sharp



The shift at the end of the second measure is done during the rest but, in order to execute it effectively, one needs to practice a shift from B to E. In this case, the most accurate approach will be to use the second finger to measure the distance to seventh position. The reference note F-sharp in seventh position should not be played but just used as an aid to get to the right place on the fingerboard. In a performance situation the second finger will be in the air, not touching the string after reaching the E, but still will be leading the hand all the way to seventh position. If the left hand finger is relaxed during the shift, no extra sound will be heard; if there is a sound however, it is an indication that the second finger is pressing the string too hard while moving to the new position.

Example 5: Shifting from B to E with the old finger.



Reverting to the first position in m.4 should not pose a problem. The next shift that must be measured accurately occurs at the end of m.5. This shift is done during the rest and the

optimal way to practice is G-sharp to A using the second finger, dropping the fourth finger for the C-sharp.

Example 6: Shifting from G-sharp to C-sharp



If more specific information on shifting is needed, Yost,¹ Sassmannshaus,² and Fischer³ have excellent tutorials explaining this technique.

¹Gaylord Yost, *Exercises for Change of Position*, (Pittsburgh: Volkwien Bros. Inc., 1941), 1-19.

² [www.violinmasterclass.com/ Masterclasses/ Left Hand/ Shifting](http://www.violinmasterclass.com/Masterclasses/Left%20Hand/Shifting).

³ Simon Fischer, *Practice: 250 Step-by-step Practice Methods for the Violin*, 2nd ed., (London: Peters Edition Ltd, 2006), 145-184.

Exercises

1. Intonation.

Start by practicing slowly, listening for intonation and checking with a tuner. In the following exercise each note is repeated twice, the purpose of the first one is to find the correct intonation, whereas the second one is played to memorize how it feels in the hand, arm, and whole body to play this note in tune.

2. String crossings.

String crossings are executed at the end of the previous note. A good exercise, in order to make the string crossing smooth, is playing on both strings for a split second. Combine this with different bowing patterns and you will be rocking.

Don Juan mm 1-8 Intonation exercise

♩ = 60

0 1 0 1 3

1 4 2 3 4

1 2 1 2 3

4 0

4 3 0 1 1

2 3 4 1 2

1 3 1 1 4

Don Juan String Crossings Exercise

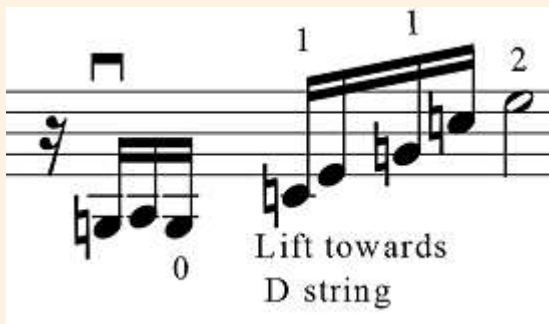
This musical score is a string exercise titled "Don Juan String Crossings Exercise". It is written for a string quartet, with each of the four staves representing a different string. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and the time signature is common time (C). The exercise consists of nine measures. Each measure contains a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together in groups of four. The notes are frequently beamed across string boundaries, creating a dense texture of string crossings. The first measure begins with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the ninth measure.

This musical score consists of nine staves of music, numbered 1 through 19. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music is written in a single melodic line on a treble clef. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with frequent triplets and slurs. The notation includes various note values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as rests. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 19.

Finger Dropping and Lifting

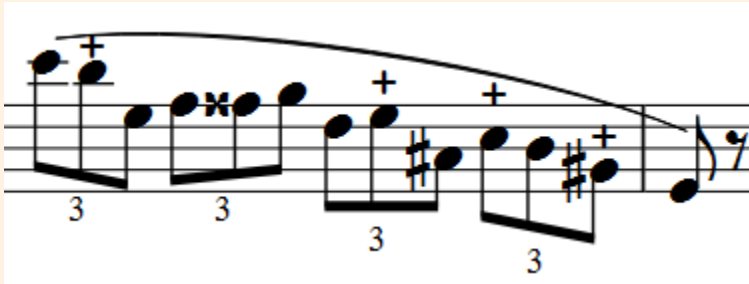
It is essential that the fingers drop onto the string with a lot of speed but then immediately reduce the pressure to avoid tension. The excerpt starts in fortissimo, so the wider the string vibrates, the faster the finger must drop on the string to stop it with the new pitch. When the fingers are then lifted, it must be toward the next string that is going to be pressed. This is imperative when playing fast passages, such as the opening measure. For example: When lifting the first finger from the C it must go in the direction of the D string, so it is ready for the next G.

Example 7: Strauss—*Don Juan*, m.1



The slurred triplets in m.6 also require very good articulation in the left hand fingers. Again, drop the fingers down with a lot of speed and also use a quasi-left-hand-pizzicato motion when lifting the fingers.

Example 8: Strauss—*Don Juan*, m. 6



Note that even when practicing in a slower tempo, finger lifting and dropping should be done rapidly, just as one would do in the real tempo.

String Crossings

String crossings are executed at the end of the previous note, a good exercise to get the precise timing is to practice it this way:

Example 9: Strauss—*Don Juan*, m.1



Somewhat different is the string crossing at the end of the m.6 from the A to the D string. It is under a slur and, in this case, the string crossing is responsible for the correct rhythm. When practicing this crossing slowly, one must bring the right elbow closer to the D-string level in advance, as this will facilitate the correct timing.

Example 10: Strauss—*Don Juan*, mm. 6-7



A good exercise, in order to make the string crossing smooth, is playing on both strings for a split second.

Example 11: Strauss—*Don Juan*, mm. 6-7

