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A Viola Player's Scale Book

Scales and Studies for the Advanced Violist

Scales are a basic element of music, and players have been practising them throughout the history of stringed instruments. The importance of daily scale practice has been emphasised by numerous virtuosi and teachers from Jascha Heifetz onwards. Practising scales is one of the cornerstones of learning to play a stringed instrument, providing a neutral framework for concentrating on such things as tone, intonation and position shifts.

Most of the scale books used by violists are transcriptions of ones designed for violinists, and with a view to meeting the requirements of Classical-Romantic violin literature. My book addresses scales from the violist's perspective. My fingerings allow both for large instruments and for players with small hands. They accordingly avoid over-stretching by, for example, reducing the frame in the low positions and using the third finger for stretches in the highest positions. The double-stop scales do not enter the highest registers, and they omit both fingered octaves and tenths *. They do, however, include the two-octave scales on one string and four-octave scales not found in most viola scale books because many solo and orchestral works require a smooth command of high positions.

For the most part, the book proceeds progressively. I begin with one-octave scales and arpeggios in order to develop a broad command of shift technique and to strengthen the player's feel for position in both even- and odd-numbered positions. My fingerings for these scales use fingers in pairs because this involves more position shifts. They also pave the way for the technique required in particular for scales in thirds. The circle of fifths develops the player's command of adjacent strings and feel for the higher positions. The one-octave scales and circle of fifths also prepare the player for handling three-octave scales and arpeggios. The two-octave scales and arpeggios on one string act as a bridge to four-octave scales and arpeggios.

I have devoted separate sections to chromatic and whole-tone scales because, being symmetric forms, they are not directly tied to major–minor tonalities. I have likewise given fourths and fifths separate sections in the double-stop scales, because practising them is vital to the intonation on adjacent strings. Practising fifths also strengthens the left-hand frame and guides the hand towards a

natural playing position **. Combining octaves with fifths, so that the first finger rests on the fifth, also helps to strengthen the hand frame.

*Cf. William Primrose in *Playing the Viola* (Oxford University Press)
**Cf. Rodney Friend in *The Violin in 5ths* (Beares Publishing)

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