



THE VIOLIST'S GUIDE TO

SCALES & ARPEGGIOS

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I. Introduction

Dear Violists,

Practicing scales and arpeggios has been a constant throughout the history of violin and viola schools, and it is easy to see why. The benefits of regular practice of scales and arpeggios are numerous, from strengthening intonation and shifting, to improving a general familiarity with the entirety of the fingerboard. From a practical aspect, the main benefit of practicing scales in my eyes is the following: basically, any passage work in the repertoire is a combination of elements from scales and arpeggios, therefore by being well-versed in scale and arpeggio patterns, hardly any passage work you will encounter in the tonal repertoire should surprise you!

On the following pages, I have compiled some tips and practice routines that I find very beneficial and especially efficient. Of course, in an ideal world with unlimited time to practice etudes and scales every day, working your way through the entirety of scale systems of numerous pedagogues on a regular basis would be fantastic. However, to me personally, the effectiveness of scale practice partially lies in the adaptability of returning fingering and grouping patterns, rather than trying to have hundreds of different variants of scale routines in my fingers at any point.

For this reason, especially when we approach 3-Octave Scales, rather than exercising through all key signatures, we will focus on a handful of key signatures that represent distinctly different fingering patterns, which in turn are adaptable to cover all key signatures when required.

If you're just starting out on your journey to establishing your scale routine, think of this as a starting point. Don't play anything that's too difficult for you; a 2-octave scale is a great way to solidify fundamentals and focus on intonation and sound quality. If you're a more advanced player, consider this a checklist of common scale routines to incorporate into your practice routine every few days!

Happy practicing!

II. Fundamentals

Practicing scales will inevitably draw your focus to your left hand. Intonation, shifting, and articulation will naturally require a lot of your attention. However, it is important to keep fundamentals in mind. Are my shoulders relaxed? Is my left hand relaxed? Are my shifts smooth and soft, or stiff and sudden?

Additionally, we should never be too busy with our left hand to forget about producing a nice, round sound with our bow at the same time. To bridge the gap between the natural focus on the left hand and the need to sustain a nice sound regardless, the following practice routines, without exception, suggest the use of the entirety of your bow, with a calm and steady bow arm.

- Stay relaxed
 - Monitor tension in your body consciously
 - Produce a nice, round sound with your bow
-

III. 2-Octave Scales

Two octaves are a great way to explore all strings of your viola in different key signatures. If we start on the 1st finger on the C-string (for example: C-Major, D-Major, E-Major, F-Major, F#-Major), there is no need to shift during a 2-octave scale, and the fingering pattern will stay the same throughout.

The following can be a fun routine by itself: start with a D-Major scale, beginning with the 1st finger in the first position on the C-string, and complete the 2 octaves up, followed by returning back down. Simply shift the 1st finger up by half a step to D#. As the fingering pattern will stay exactly the same, you can now continue with a D#-Major scale, and after its completion, shift your 1st finger another half step up to E and start an E-Major scale. This could be continued indefinitely, through F-Major, F#-Major, etc., or until you run out of space on your fingerboard!

Of course, at this point, you may as well advance to 3-octave scales, but it goes to show the adaptability of returning fingering patterns, something we will lean on heavily when approaching 3-octave scales as well.

2-Octave Major Scales Fingering Pattern

The image displays eight musical staves, each representing a different major scale. Each staff is written in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The scales and their starting measure numbers are: C Major (measure 1), G Major (measure 9), D Major (measure 17), A Major (measure 25), E Major (measure 33), B Major (measure 41), F# Major (measure 49), and C# Major (measure 57). Each scale is shown for two octaves. The notation includes notes, rests, and specific fingering numbers (1-4) placed above the notes. Slurs are used to group notes that are played together. The scales are arranged in ascending order of key signature, from C major (no sharps or flats) to C# major (three sharps).

F Major

65

Bb Major

73

Eb Major

81

Ab Major

89

Db Major

97

Gb Major

105

Cb Major

113

The same two patterns can be used for almost all 2-octave scales

- Every scale starts on 1st finger (except for C and G Major), so you will shift to the position where your 1st finger finds the correct starting note

Scale Patterns:

- Scales that start on the C-string: 1234 1234 1234 123
- Scales that start on the G-string: 1234 1234 123 - 1234

Intonation

When reading a scale for the first time, feel free to play one note per bow and focus on intonation and general orientation on the fingerboard for each note of the scale. Utilizing open strings as reference tones can be a great tool to check your intonation while slowly playing a scale. For example, when practicing a C-Major scale, the neighboring G-string is a perfect reference tone for the 1st finger's D (4th) and 2nd finger's E (6th).

Bowing Patterns

When you feel you have a good grasp of where your fingers have to go to play the 2-octave scale of your choice, it is a good moment to introduce bowing patterns. This has several benefits: it highlights clean articulation of the left hand, brings rhythmic structure to increasing tempo, and as a bonus, can help to practice fluent string crossings with the bow.

$\text{♩} = 30-60$

9

13

15

In the above routine, the tempo is marked confusingly as 30–60 per quarter note. The reason for this is that this sequence is meant to be played consecutively without changing the tempo. So, while 30 bpm may seem awfully slow to start with, once you are approaching the 32nd notes, it may already feel quite rapid. Additionally, playing at a very slow tempo in the beginning leaves ample room to really listen to and check intonation, while producing a nice sound and monitoring the relaxed state of your body before progressing with the faster notations. Practising with a metronome is highly recommended.

Rhythmic Patterns

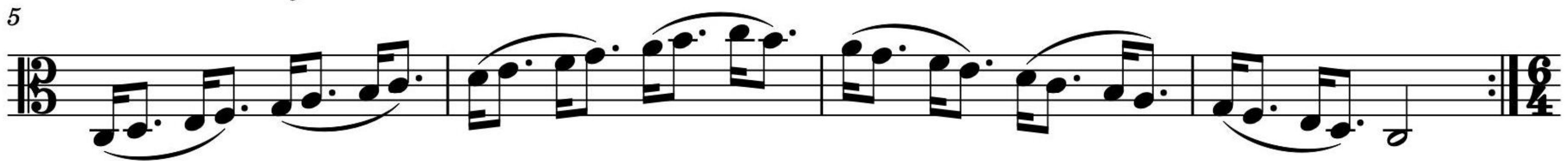
Another way to bring variation to scale practice is by practicing with rhythmic patterns. This is a common practice method for complicated passage work and can really help with coordination and clarity of left-hand activity. There are also numerous ways to get creative with rhythmic patterns. For example, the tie-over pattern ties breaks with the sequence and slurs over string crossings, which can be a nice twist to a stale scale routine. Feel free to experiment with patterns you come up with; however, it is recommended to utilize a metronome while doing so to ensure that the rhythmic patterns are stable, purposeful, and under your control.

Dotted Rhythm



Inverted Dotted Rhythm

5



Tie-over Pattern

9



Application

Bowing patterns and rhythmic patterns can be adapted to any 2-octave scale and are, by themselves, already incredibly helpful tools in any personal scale routine.

IV. 3-Octave Scales

3-octave scales inevitably confront us with extensive shifting and higher positions. Similar to 2-octave scales, there are only a few fingering patterns that are crucial to master, with the pattern starting on the 2nd finger probably being the most versatile and most common pattern to be found in the repertoire.

While we have only addressed major scales so far, we will now introduce 3-octave minor scales as well, as the fingering patterns will slightly differ from the major scale fingering patterns, which is not the case when practicing 2-octave scales.

The fundamentals stay the same:

- Stay relaxed
- Monitor tension in your body consciously
- Favor slow, soft shifts over abrupt, stiff shifts
- Produce a nice, round sound with your bow

3-Octave Major Scales Fingering Pattern

C Major

Measures 1-7 of C Major scale. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Includes fingering numbers (0, 4, 4, 2, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 3, 2) and Roman numerals (IV, II, I).

Measures 8-12 of C Major scale. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Includes fingering numbers (1, 4, 3, 4, 4, 4) and Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV).

D Major

Measures 13-19 of D Major scale. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Includes fingering numbers (1, 4, 4, 2, 1, 1, 3, 1, 4, 4, 4) and Roman numerals (IV, II, I).

Measures 20-24 of D Major scale. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Includes fingering numbers (3, 1, 2, 4, 4) and Roman numerals (II, III, IV).

E Major

Measures 25-31 of E Major scale. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Includes fingering numbers (2, 3, 1, 3, 1, 4, 4, 4, 3, 2) and Roman numerals (I).

Measures 32-36 of E Major scale. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Includes fingering numbers (1, 3, 2, 1, 3, 4, 4, 4).

A Major

Measures 37-43 of A Major scale. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Includes fingering numbers (1, 3, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 3, 2) and Roman numerals (III, II, I).

Measures 44-48 of A Major scale. Treble clef, 4/4 time. Includes fingering numbers (1, 3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 3, 4) and Roman numerals (II, III).

- D-Major: D flat-Major use the same fingering
- E-Major: E flat, F, F sharp/G flat and G use the same fingering
- A-Major: G sharp/A flat, A sharp/B flat and B use the same fingering

Similar to our experiment while practicing 2-octave scales—shifting the 1st finger by half steps for the starting note to cover a range of different key signatures—when practicing 3-octave scales, the pattern starting on the 2nd finger is the most adaptable. Also, feel free to experiment with the suggested alternative fingerings (printed below the staff) as preferences may vary depending on personal setup and shifting technique.

Bowing Patterns

You may have realized that in the previously shown scale examples, we added a few extra notes at the beginning and end of the scale. This is with the following bowing patterns in mind, as it gives us the opportunity to explore a host of different groupings in a fluent, progressive routine.

Identical to the 2-octave scale bowing pattern routine, we want to be mindful when choosing our initial tempo because eventually, we want to progress all the way to 32nd notes in one sweep across the strings and positions—one bow all the way up and one bow all the way down—while maintaining the initially chosen tempo.

However, it is very important to keep in mind that high tempo is not the ultimate goal. Only good shifts, intonation, and sound justify progressing to faster groupings, so do not hesitate to spend time refining the fundamentals in the same, comfortable grouping and tempo before progressing to the faster grouping and tempo.

As previously mentioned, monitoring the relaxed state of our body is crucial, and the use of a metronome is highly recommended.

♩ = 30-60

The image shows two staves of musical notation for a 3-octave scale. The first staff is in 12/4 time, starting with a bass clef and ending with a treble clef. The second staff is in treble clef, starting with a 7 and ending with a 13. The notation shows a scale with various bowing patterns indicated by curved lines above and below the notes.

Rhythmic Patterns

Identical to the 2-octave scale, you may also experiment with dotted rhythms (and inverted dotted rhythms). I personally found these especially helpful when practiced complementarily to progressing through increasingly faster scales.

V. Arpeggios

Last but not least, arpeggios! Arpeggios are the ultimate complementary essential to scales and are especially recommended for advanced violists wanting to improve general mobility, intonation, and shifting security. Similarly, as we focus on adaptable patterns that can be utilized across the entire repertoire, the following routine covers every arpeggio variant over major, minor, inversions, augmented, and diminished.

G-Arpeggios

The image displays four staves of musical notation for G-Arpeggios, starting at measure 31 and ending at measure 42. The notation is written in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The arpeggios are presented in various positions and directions, with specific fingerings indicated by numbers 1-4 and -4 above or below the notes. The first three staves (measures 31-38) are in the bass clef, and the fourth staff (measures 39-42) is in the treble clef. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals to represent different arpeggio variants.

Same fingerings for: G flat/F sharp, A flat/G sharp, A, B flat, B

Bowings & Tempo

I suggest to start with one bow per quarter beat and do not shy away from very slow tempo, which can really give you the time to focus on the quality and accuracy of the shiftings and overall intonation. As soon as you feel more secure, you may try to use one bow going up and one bow going down each arpeggio variant and letting the fingers fly!

VI. Afterward

Of course, there are many ways to infinitely expand on the presented scale routines and practice suggestions and this collection is not intended to provide a complete overview of the entire universe of viola scales. Instead, it is meant to focus on applicable and adaptable patterns, that you may encounter across the viola repertoire. Also, I absolutely want to encourage you to explore other variants and fingerings, or coming up with your own routines as well!

Best of luck, and I hope you find this scale routine helpful!

Christian Kim

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tonebase Viola – Coming Summer '24

We hope you have enjoyed this guide to scales! Ready for more helpful viola resources?

Stay tuned for the release of tonebase Viola! Over the next few months, we'll be sharing occasional updates ahead of the launch including new artists added our roster, courses we're filming, and more. Whether you play professionally or just for your own enjoyment, there's going to be something for you on tonebase!

Feel free to write to team@tonebase.co with questions, comments, or corrections. We can't wait to share with you all what we've been working on!



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