

Viennese Bass Method

Lesson 2. Scales: Shifting Patterns

www.viennesetuning.com

In this lesson we will extend the range of D major to the higher positions and also present the three shifting patterns peculiar to the Viennese technique. The shifting technique in itself is the same one used on the modern instrument, however the general distribution of shifts in the Viennese system is quite different. The goal is always to shift as little as possible and keep the left hand in one position for as long as possible within a phrase or a section of music.

This approach is different from the modern teaching, where the evenly distributed shifts across all four strings are the goal. In our modern system, we are trained to leave the lower strings gradually as we climb in the higher register. Often, however we tend to depart lower strings too soon and prefer to play everything on the top string alone. Thus we regularly hear of the rule: "play in the middle positions and use vibrato", or translated: "use the timbral opportunities of all four strings in the lower positions equally".

However, in the Viennese bass technique the blending of string registers is not an issue and neither is the preference for the top string. Here, to the contrary, all that matters is the fingering convenience alone. Thus the new rule should sound: "Find the fingering with the least number of shifts and when you really have to shift, find again the new position in which you can stay for as long as the music allows you".

Assuming those principles, let us now explain the three basic shifting patterns that are common in the Viennese technique:

1. The Vertical Pattern. The first shifting pattern is the one we usually associated with Bottesini solo music - which is the standard shifting on the top string where the left hand goes straight up or down. This pattern is present in Viennese literature too, but not as often as in the romantic pieces.
2. The Conventional Pattern. The second shifting pattern concerns the standard orchestra system of thinking, which essentially uses a variety of shifts to move from the lower to the higher register. In the modern technique we will usually distribute the shifts evenly across the strings by assigning the one or two shifts maximum per string, until we reach a desired height. This is also used in the Viennese system, but would not have been the preferred way for the period bassists.
3. The Position Pattern. The third shifting pattern is the most convenient and specific to the Viennese tuning, as it affords us a performance of entire scales and passages in a single position, with greater comfort and faster speed than the modern tuning can afford! In this pattern we do not shift but move from the lower to higher register by simply changing the strings and remaining in the same position, sometimes even over all four strings and sometimes even by using the extended positions. Whenever the opportunity for such a Position Pattern fingering is recognized in music, it should be used, as this would also be the most probable fingering a period performer would have used.

The additional peculiarity of the Position Pattern style is a necessity to leave on occasion this prolonged single position section with a "4 to 4" finger shift in order to extend the phrase, or move to a new fixed position. Although "4 to 4" is relatively uncommon in the modern technique, it has been proven by practice to be of great use in the Viennese technique.

Exercise 8. Extended D major scale - Bass Clef - Conventional Shifting Pattern

III | II | I | II | III | II | I

I | II | III | II | I | II

II | I | II | I

I | II | III | II | I | II | III | II

Exercise 9. Extended D major scale - Bass Clef - Position Shifting Pattern

III | II | I | II | III | II | I

I | II | III | II | I | II | III

III | II | I | II | III | II | I

I | II | III | II | I | II | III | II | III

Exercise 10. Extended D major scale - Tenor Clef - Conventional Shifting Pattern

III — II — I — II — III — II — I —

I — II — III — II — I — II —

II — I — II — I —

I — II — III — II — III — II —

Exercise 11. Extended D major scale - Tenor Clef - Position Shifting Pattern

III — II — I — II — III — II — I —

I — II — III — II — I — II — III —

III — II — I — II — III — II — I —

I — II — III — II — I — II — III —

Exercise 12. Extended D major scale - Treble Clef - Conventional Shifting Pattern

Exercise 12 consists of four staves of music in treble clef, D major (two sharps). The notes are: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The exercise is divided into four systems, each with a staff of notes and a line of position markings below. The first system has positions III, II, I, II, III, II, I. The second system has I, II, III, II, I, II. The third system has II, I, II, I. The fourth system has I, II, III, II, I, II, III, II.

Exercise 13. Extended D major scale - Treble Clef - Position Shifting Pattern

Exercise 13 consists of four staves of music in treble clef, D major (two sharps). The notes are: D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. The exercise is divided into four systems, each with a staff of notes and a line of position markings below. The first system has positions III, II, I, II, III, II, I. The second system has I, II, III, II, I, II, III. The third system has III, II, I, II, III, II, I. The fourth system has I, II, III, II, I, II, III, II, III.

Exercise 14. Mozart - Eine kleine Nachtmusik (Slow at the first reading!)

1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

II III II III II III II I I II I II III

1 1 4 2 1 4 2

II I II I

1 2 4 1 2 1 2 4 1 4 1 4 1

III IV III II III IV III

4 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

III IV IV III IV

1 4 1 4 4 1 1 4 1 2

III IV III IV III II I

1 4 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2

II III IV III IV III IV III II

2 2 2 1 4 1 2 1

II III IV III

2 1 4 1 1 1 4 1

III II I II I

Exercise 15. Mozart - Eine kleine Nachtmusik no. 2

In this exercise we will continue with the famous Mozart's "Nachtmusik" but without indicated fingerings. You are welcome to play and explore fingering options in this example on your own, and then write them in the score too. As you may already be aware, for each given phrase the period performer may have had several fingering options available.

The first 8 bar phrase can be performed with at least 4 different fingerings, including a fingering pattern where everything is played in the single position. Try to find that "single position" pattern if you can. See how many more fingering options you can find. The indicated open strings and the position brackets are here just for your orientation. You are more than welcome to find your own fingering patterns that may differ from the suggested ones.

