

CHAPTER 4 THE LEFT HAND

4.1 GENERAL PRINCIPALS

The best *l-h* position is that which is the most functional: small, economical, precise movements involving the minimum use of energy, perfect coordination with the *r-h*, and minimal fatigue. The following description aims at giving an initial idea of the principals governing the role of the *l-h*.

1. Begin with the left arm hanging relaxed at your side. Bring the hand up to the neck; stretch the thumb out behind and do not bend any of the fingers (which would lead to tension and would only diminish the performance of the fingers on the fingerboard). The shoulder should be relaxed, the elbow slightly away from the body, the arm a little away from your side, giving the feeling of space between it and the torso.

2. Keep the thumb still, behind the second fret and in the center of the neck, with the fingers bent but not touching the strings, letting the forearm rotate slightly on itself, but keeping it still in relation to the main axis. Watch how the distance changes between the fingers and strings. If the forearm rotates to the left, the fourth finger moves away from the strings; if it rotates to the right, the fingers move nearer. The aim of the exercise is to achieve a position where all fingers are the same distance from the strings. The wrist must not be sticking either out or in. The line that connects the knuckles of the main joints should be as parallel as possible to the neck (figs. 4-5).

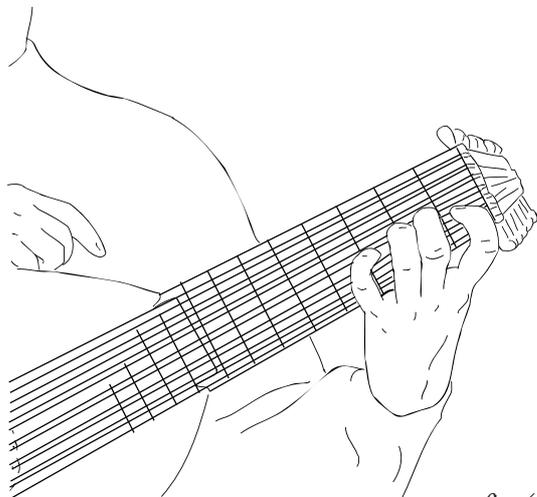


fig. 4

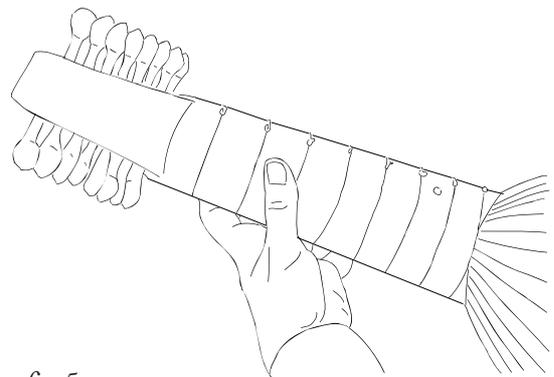


fig. 5

3. There are two main hand movements:

a) latitudinal: the forearm guides the hand on the arm, letting the thumb go up and down from the high strings to the low strings and vice versa. Hand and wrist move as one; main finger movements on the fingerboard are therefore determined by the small movements of the arm;

b) longitudinal: following the same principle as above, but along the neck of the instrument, from head to body. The thumb runs up and down the neck guided by the forearm.

4.2 PREPARATORY EXERCISES

The following exercises establish initial contact between the fingers and strings in order to find the strength required for pushing the strings down.

1. Starting from the position described above, begin with 2, placing it parallel to the frets; the thumb should be behind the second fret. From a distance of around 3 cm (1.25 in.), press down on the 1st course at the second fret.

a) The movement starts at the main joint and provokes a fall without stopping the finger.

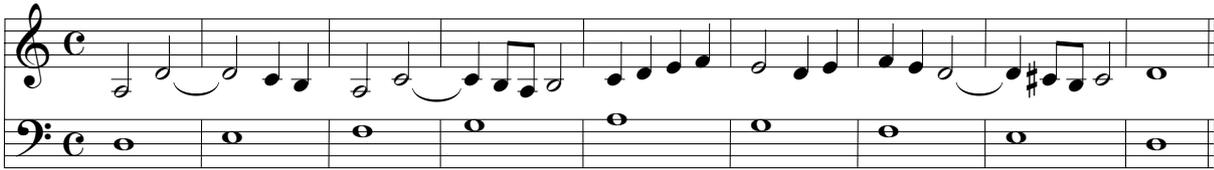
b) The finger traces an arc, with the last phalanx perpendicular to the neck of the instrument.

c) Let the finger fall onto the 1st course at the second fret more than once, without using any muscle action or tension. If carried out correctly, the fall will produce a sound from the string.

d) Contact with the strings should be made with the fingertip; the center of the fingertip is normally the best point. As with the *r-h* fingers, try to feel the contact between fingertip and the double string. Again as with the *r-h*, if done correctly the *l-h* fingers always make contact with the strings at the same point.

10.3 FLORID COUNTERPOINT

A further step toward genuine polyphonic composition, florid counterpoint is made up of the combination of the preceding species; the main criterion is the search for variety in the creation of interesting, non-repetitive rhythmic and melodic combinations.



EXERCISE 61

In 61a (based on a *Benedictus* by Isaac), the *c.f.* creates the descending tetrachord *g, f, e^b, d*. Each of these notes is repeated four times, with each tone considered a single held note. The repetitions are therefore not accented, but treated as echoes of the original note. The upper voice should be played legato; a light accent whenever there is a change of note in the bass should be enough to mark its progress. It would also be useful to practice this exercise one tone higher.

In 61a-d the *c.f.* should be studied on its own first, adding the upper part later. The two voices must remain distinct. Do not put too much weight on *p* when playing unaccented notes – learn to develop its dual role by giving a full sound to the *c.f.*, a lighter sound to the upper line. In 61c and d the *c.f.* is transposed a fifth lower.

a

<i>a</i>	<i>d b a b a</i>	<i>d c a</i>	<i>d a a b d</i>	<i>b a</i>
<i>c</i>	<i>c c c c</i>	<i>a a a a</i>	<i>a b d</i>	<i>d b d b a b d</i>
2+				<i>d d d d</i>

a

<i>a</i>	<i>d b a b b a a</i>	<i>c a</i>	<i>d c d c</i>
<i>c</i>	<i>c c c c</i>	<i>e e e</i>	<i>d</i>
2+			

<i>c a</i>	<i>d c a c a c d</i>	<i>c a a d</i>	<i>d c a</i>	<i>a c d</i>	<i>d d c d c</i>
<i>a b</i>	<i>a c</i>	<i>e d</i>	<i>a c</i>	<i>e b</i>	<i>a c</i>
1+	1+	3+	1+	3+	1+

b

<i>a</i>	<i>a a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a b d</i>	<i>a b a</i>
<i>d c a a c d</i>	<i>d c e</i>		<i>d b a</i>	<i>a b d b a</i>	<i>b a b d a b a</i>
<i>a c</i>	<i>c e</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>c d</i>	<i>a a</i>	<i>c a</i>
3+	1+ 3+		2+ 3+	2+	

