

Mel Bay's

MB95997G

# SUPER

Fiddle  
Bowling

# TECHNIQUES

By Ed Marsh

*"The left hand makes the notes, but the right hand makes the music."*



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# SUPER FIDDLE BOWING TECHNIQUES

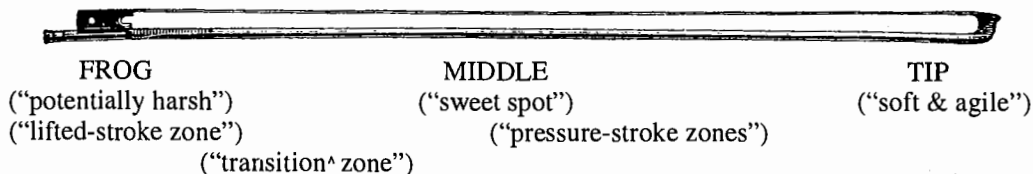
## THE BOOK

### GENERAL BOWING PRINCIPLES

#### BOW CONTROL:

The basic idea of bowing is quite simple: put the bow hair in contact with the string and move the bow up or down perpendicular to the string. Pressure and direction are the keys to good tone; the right hand controls both. In Part One of the video I address how the right hand accomplishes this.

#### THE "ZONES" OF THE BOW:



The illustration (above) shows the areas or "zones" of the bow (the parts of the right hand work differently in each zone). It's important to realize that some bow techniques cross all three "zones", while others take advantage of the characteristics of one particular zone. Since the bow is controlled differently in each "zone", I demonstrated each zone separately (playing a few "zone-specific" techniques) and then I demonstrated the full-length bow stroke. The full-length stroke requires the player to make a smooth transition between the "lifted-stroke zone" and the "pressure-stroke zones."

## THE PARTS OF THE HAND:

The Index Finger -- In the "pressure-stroke zone" the hand rotates counterclockwise, forcing the bow against the string. The index finger exerts pressure against the bow stick with the aid of the thumb (which lies at the center of this rotation and pushes upward on the stick.)

The "Pinky" Finger -- When the bow is lifted, the weight of the bow on the up-bow side of the thumb causes the frog end of the bow (below the thumb) to rotate upward against the "pinky". When playing in the frog zone you are using a controlled lift. In the frog zone, gravity is pulling down on the bow, so the pinky controls the pressure of the hair against the string.

## BOUNCING TECHNIQUES:

Bouncing strokes are of two kinds: those in which index-finger pressure is pushing (or "dribbling") the bow back on the string, and those in which the bow is dropped from a lift and caught again. The bow bounces best in the middle where the hair is most springy.

**CORRECTION:** In the video I incorrectly use the term *saltando* for the "drop and catch" stroke. The proper term is *spiccato* (which is often used for both "drop and catch" and "dribbling" strokes).

*Saltando* Bowing -- A bouncing stroke that takes advantage of the transitional area between the lifted-stroke zone and the pressure-stroke zone. When alternating rapidly between up- and down-bow, the bow leaves the string slightly and returns with a little "bite" that creates a *staccato* sound.

*Spiccato* Bowing -- A bouncing stroke where the bow is dropped from a controlled lift and caught on the rebound. In practice (especially at faster tempos), it is hard to feel much difference between *saltando* and *spiccato*, which is probably the reason the term *spiccato* is sometimes used for both techniques.

*Ricochet* Bowing -- A bouncing stroke where the bow is "thrown" against the string by index-finger pressure and allowed to "dribble" a certain rhythm (either to one or to several different pitches) before coming back into constant contact with the string.

NOTE: The New Harvard Dictionary Of Music has a good article on bowing, with written examples, for those who want to look deeper.

## THE EXERCISES

I have chosen four bow-rhythm patterns that fiddlers use a lot. These "bowings" are patterns of single and/or multiple notes per stroke. The main idea is this: play the same rhythm over and over with the bow and superimpose that on the melody of a tune. There are melodies that lend themselves perfectly to such patterns (many fiddle tunes), and others that would be ruined by their use.

In practice, these patterns don't always sound the way they feel. When you cross from one string to another, it sounds like you have changed bow direction (even though you haven't). Likewise, when you are listening to another fiddler, you might think he/she has changed bow direction at these points.

As you become comfortable with these exercises, allow yourself to listen objectively to the sound you are making. Once you experience the sound and feel of these patterns, it gets easier to hear them in the playing of others.

### EXERCISE ONE: SINGLE BOWING

Don't let the simplicity of this stroke diminish its importance; this is the very foundation of bowing. If you can make your up- and down-strokes indistinguishable from each other, and make your string-changing smooth and clean with even tone, you are very good. Try this in all the zones of the bow; notice the different tone of each.

Example 1: The Sequence

□ v □ v etc.

□ v □ v etc.

Example 2: The "Swing-Style" Passage

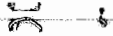


EXERCISE TWO: THE STANDARD SHUFFLE

In this three-stroke pattern we will link two notes and single-bow two notes.

**CORRECTION:** On the video tape I incorrectly said that this is a two-stroke shuffle, although, of course, it has three strokes. I went on as if I had said "three" and the rest of the information is valid.

Play the "lick" with and without double stops; notice how the melody seems to change. (Sometimes when I am transcribing another fiddler's playing in this style, I am not sure which string is the melody and which was intended to be harmony. Ideally, you will press the bow a little harder on the melody note, but this takes a lot of control.)



Example 1: The "Lick"



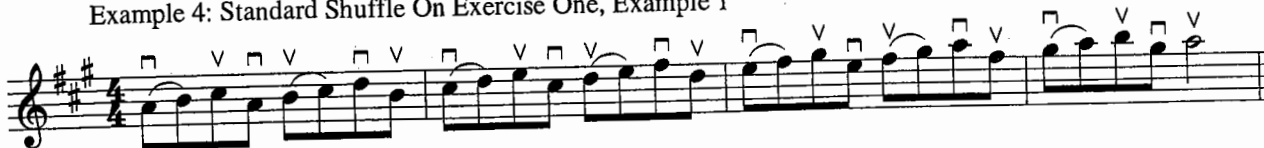
Example 2: The "Lick" With Double Stops



Example 3: The "Cajun" Shuffle (A Standard Shuffle Variation)



Example 4: Standard Shuffle On Exercise One, Example 1



### EXERCISE THREE: THE GEORGIA SHUFFLE

In this two stroke pattern we will play one note single-bow and then link three notes. As demonstrated and explained on the tape, players start this pattern at two different places in the beat structure. Because of the "short-long" bowing, you will tend to advance toward the tip of the bow. Learn to overcome this by drawing the single (short) bow the same distance as the long bow. At first you will get an uneven tone because of the change in bow speed, but as you learn to adjust the pressure, the tone will even up (not completely).

Example 1: "Soldier's Joy" Lick



Example 2: "S. J. Lick" on the Strong Beat (As In the Tune)



Example 3: "S. J. Lick" on the Weak Beat



NOTE: In this example I just moved the lick over a beat and had you start on beat 2 instead of beat 1 but, in normal practice one wouldn't do this. When players use this bowing in a tune, they leave the melody unchanged and wait a beat to start the bow pattern (as shown below).



Example 4: Ga. Shuffle With Exercise One, Ex. 1 (Strong Beat)





Beat: 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1

**EXERCISE FOUR: THE DOUBLE SHUFFLE**

This shuffle has no linkages of notes per bow stroke; it is all single-bows. The key feature of this bowing is the division of single-bows into groups of three. Since most fiddle tunes are in “four-four” time (or “cut” time), there is room for eight eighth notes per measure. The natural strong beat/weak beat flow of meter causes players intuitively to accent the first and fifth notes in a measure full of eighth notes (see below).

eighth notes: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Beats: 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 ee & a 2 ee & a