Introduction

Scales and arpeggios are part of every violist's daily practice routine. The most commonly used viola scale books are transcriptions of violin methods, by such revered pedagogues as Carl Flesch and Ivan Galamian. They have certainly stood the test of time - Flesch's method was published nearly a hundred years ago, for example. But whilst such systems have great merit, they don't suit everyone and the fingerings are often not adapted from the violin to suit the viola; nor are the routines necessarily aligned to more recent thinking on intonation. Dedicated viola methods do exist of course, but they by and large adopt a similar methodology and approach to fingering as their violin cousins. What follows in this book is a system of scale exercises specifically for viola players, based on some thirty years of teaching experience and research. I hope that violists will see the logic in the way the scales and arpeggios are approached and the rationale that underpins my system of fingerings, and find that practising them will help build strong technical foundations and consistent stable intonation.

Fingering

Some established methods start scales and arpeggios on the second finger from the key of E flat onwards, with some unwelcome consequences: for example for many players a stretch in the hand from the third to fourth step and the seventh to eighth step of the first octave, and the awkward stretch when using adjacent fingers to play the interval of a fourth at the top of the arpeggios. My fingerings for three octave scales and arpeggios from D flat to G flat start with the first finger. which allows the first octave of the scale - the one with the widest intervals - to be played within an octave hand frame, and avoids awkward stretches and big shifts in the arpeggios. A different pattern of fingerings is employed from G onwards, reflecting the narrower spacing of fingers in these higher keys.

None of this is particularly radical but my fingerings for the double stops are more of a departure from other methods. My argument is that the conventional "substitution" fingerings (i.e. in thirds

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3 4 3 4 etc and in 6ths 1 2 3 etc)

can, depending on the key, create unnecessary tension in the left hand, and make it hard to play double stops smoothly and truly legato. In a piece it is often better playing parallel intervals (e.g. moving from a major third to major third, or a minor third to minor third) with the same pair of fingers rather than with substituted fingers. So my fingerings for thirds and sixths follow that principle (albeit with exceptions). Once you are familiar with and have memorised these patterns, the double stops will be more seamless and more consistently in tune.

Less haste

I have often felt that the emphasis in scale practice is too much on speed and fluency and not enough on harmonic awareness and sound. Exercises for sound production and for harmonic context need to be important parts of our scale practice.

Intonation

Pedagogues often talk about "melodic" or "expressive" intonation and advocate always treating thirds and sevenths as leading notes that should be played on the high side, but nearly all the music we play has a harmonic context and ignoring it will often lead to problems — for example the seventh in a major scale often acts as the major third in the dominant key and therefore in that case needs to be played low. This has a lot to do with Equal Temperament, the tuning system we use, which is explained below.

Violists who play orchestral and chamber music, embedded as they are in the middle of the harmonic landscape, are arguably more aware of the harmonic context than their violinist colleagues, and more alert to the pitfalls of favouring melodic over harmonic intonation. When to employ melodic intonation (say through playing higher major sevenths) over harmonic intonation (say playing lower major thirds) is partly a matter of taste. Yet it is also often a matter of speed — we need to be aware of the acoustic phenomenon that the faster we play a passage, the closer the

semitones need to be to sound "in tune". A trill is a simple example of this — the faster you play a semitone trill the closer the notes need to be to each other to sound correct.

So when playing the scales and arpeggios in this book, be aware that slow scales and fast scales need a different approach, and that context is everything. By playing scales together with drone notes and chord sequences (as in the exercises that follow) you will become more confident at finding the ideal intonation for each situation you find yourself in and the ideal balance between the vertical (harmony) and the horizontal (melody). And remember that your musical intuition and taste are important too - good intonation is a balance between culture (your musical intuition and taste) and nature (acoustical characteristics).

Why no harmonic minor scales?

I have decided to include only melodic minor scales as I feel they appear more frequently in our repertoire than harmonic minor scales. Also, when they do appear, harmonic minor scales, with their characteristic augmented second, need to be fingered in quite different ways depending on their context.

Melodic minor scales, in spite of their name, and depending on speed (see above) still need to be practised with their harmonic context in mind. Note that the descending form of the melodic minor scale is also known as the natural minor scale — which employs exactly the same notes as the relative major scale.

Tuning

There's no point trying to play scales in tune if the instrument is itself not in tune. And anyway, how do we define "in tune"?

Standard modern tuning varies between around A = 440 Hz and A = 445 Hz depending on where in the world you are making music. Make sure you tune to the appropriate pitch, and set your tuner to "Equal Temperament" or "Violin Family".