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Silvio Dalla Torre

***BASSics 1***

Basics of the four-finger-technique for playing the double bass  
according to the “New Dutch School”

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# *BASSics 1*

**Basics of the four-finger-technique for playing the double bass according to the “New Dutch School”**

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## *What is the "New Dutch School"?*

Neither Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven nor any other pre-1800s composer had ever heard of the "two-semitone-application" for playing the double bass. This technique, which is used worldwide today was not propagated until 1809 by Wenzel Hause and popularized by Franz Simandl's method book published around 1870. Therefore, this 1-2-4 fingering technique is also known as the "Simandl Technique".

140 years have passed since then, which amounts rarely a third of the 500-year history of the double bass. According to the latest research, the instrument has always been played - in addition to a variety of fingering techniques - in the 1-2-3-4 system. Johann Matthias Sperger (1750 - 1812), the great double bass virtuoso of the Viennese Classical period, and Domenico Dragonetti (1763 - 1846) may have been the most prominent representatives of this technique.<sup>1</sup> Upon analysis of the melodic movement of the classic double bass concertos, most of which were conceived in close cooperation with the performer and in consideration with the playing technique used at the time, one can conclude, that the four-finger-technique must have been the standard for above-average players. This theory is supported by the first double bass methods by Nicolai and Friedrich Christoph Franke<sup>2</sup>, above all, both of who taught the four-finger-system without considering it something special. Not until later when the new two-half-step-system became known, did Franke defend himself against hostilities: "There is hardly anything more natural than to use all four fingers equally to stop the four notes (which separate one string from the next)."<sup>3</sup>

Because of its historical development the "New Dutch School" is also known as "The New Renaissance". The English double bassist Anthony Woodrow, a student of James Merrett, adopted the four-finger-system (see below for explanation by Friedrich Warnecke) and introduced it in the Netherlands, where he taught at the Sweelinck Conservatory in Amsterdam. His student Hans Roelofsen developed the technique further and added the use of the little finger in conjunction with the thumb position, the "extended position" as well as an absolutely novel bow. The technique of the "New Dutch School" can be applied without a problem with the high-quality strings available today. In its time, Simandl's method was a great progress compared to the "fisticuffs" frequently used at the time. But the future lies in the four-finger-system because it offers the most possibilities for both musicality and technique of all applications.

### **Friedrich Warnecke (1856-1931)<sup>4</sup>:**

"Just like one had to - after much resistance - acquiesce to utilizing the third finger in thumb position, one will have to surrender to employing it for the rest of the fingerboard, because not only the ever increasing level of technique but also the progressing knowledge of phrasing, its rules and exact rendition must eventually lead to it."

"The popular excuse that the third finger is too weak to produce a clean sound is invalid and not only every doctor but also practical experience, particularly as played in the Italian School, will convince every disbeliever."

<sup>1</sup> Fiona Palmer: *Domenico Dragonetti in England - the Career of a Double Bass Virtuoso*, Oxford 1997

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Christoph Franke: *Anleitung, den Contrabaß zu spielen*, Chemnitz (around 1820)

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Christoph Franke: *Ueber den Contrabaß*. Article in "New Journal for Music", Leipzig 1851

<sup>4</sup> in: *Ad Infinitum - Der Kontrabaß. Seine Geschichte und seine Zukunft. Probleme und deren Lösung zur Hebung des Kontrabaßspiels*, Hamburg 1909

## *Suggestions*

This compilation of exercises (volume 1) and practical examples (volume 2) is my response to the increasing demand for practice materials and playing instructions for the four-finger-technique. A comprehensive, multi-volume method book is in its planning stages. Until this method book is published I would like to provide some basic information about this new technique. Previous knowledge and experience in playing the double bass are helpful in understanding the exercises and examples. This is not a conventional double bass method and it does not claim to be neither exhaustive nor complete.

Please bear in mind the following points for self-study:

1. **The four-finger-technique has nothing to do with stretching!** You would risk serious damage to your left hand through overstretching. The most important basic rule is to place only the stopping finger (and its neighbor finger if necessary) on the strings in its ideal position. Static hand position, pre-placing the finger, leaving it in position and placing first and fourth fingers simultaneously (as used in conventional technique) should be avoided and used as an exception only.
2. The "Innervation-Technique" needed in exercise #1 is a motion sequence which utilizes neuro-physiological insight (interaction between antagonists forearm flexor and extensor) for playing the double bass. It is designed to reduce the necessary effort and to improve the quality of sound and intonation equally. Place the indicated finger on the string (the contact point should not be under but slightly behind the fingertip). Where indicated with "i" pull the following finger up quickly using maximum strength (away from the string) without lifting the stopping finger off the string. The synchronization with the bow arm creates the desired bow accent. Keep the active finger energized until it has to reach for the next stop. Avoid slapping your finger. Allow your finger to sink onto the string in a slow and controlled manner while maintaining the energy. This exercise requires great concentration but its effect will surprise you once you have mastered it.
3. Taking breaks at regular intervals is far more effective than practising continuously and overtaxing yourself. Be patient, the process of reorientation will take its time. It may take a year or more until you feel comfortable with the four-finger-technique.

Please visit my website ([www.silviodallatorre.com](http://www.silviodallatorre.com)) if you would like to learn more about the "New Dutch School". You will find background information, answers to frequently asked questions, impressions of double bass studies in Rostock as well as numerous suggestions. Additional exercises (scale and chord studies) and some of my adaptations for double bass and piano as well as for violoncello and double bass can be found at "Edition Hoffmann" ([www.editionhoffmann.de](http://www.editionhoffmann.de)).

Rostock, October 2004

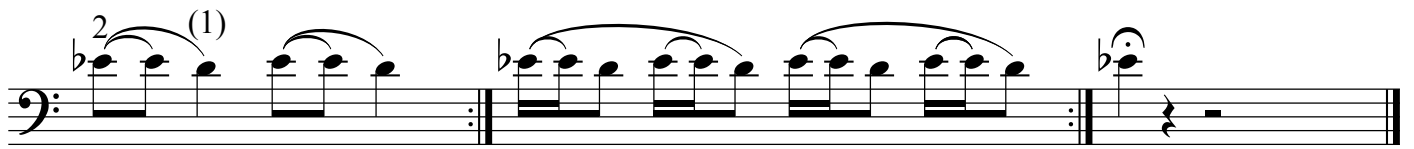
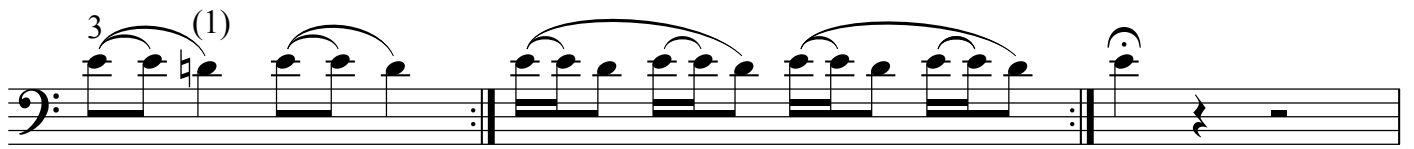
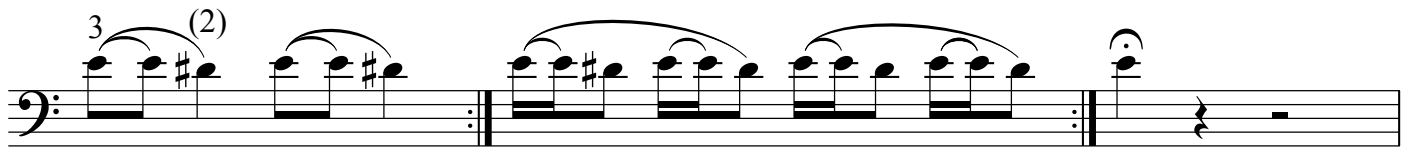
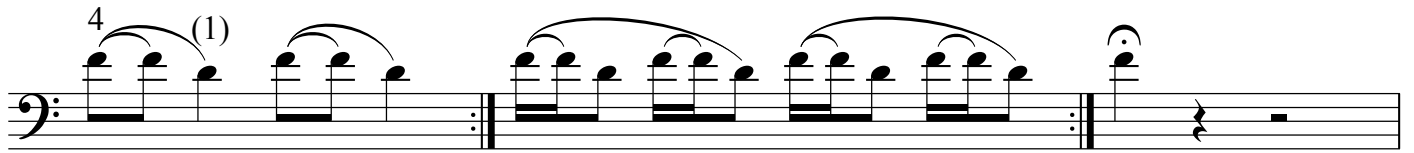
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Silvio Dalla Torre". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.

# 1

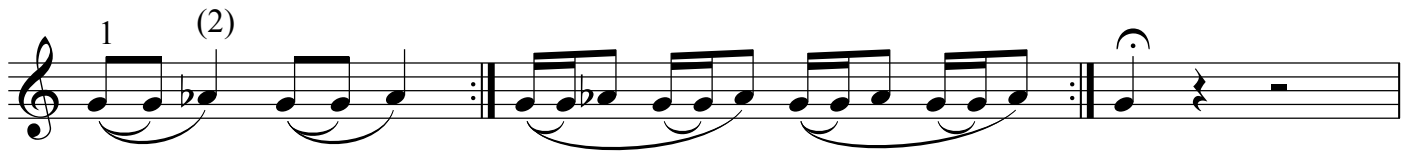
## Elementary exercise

*Exercise to “liberate” the active finger while simultaneously “innervating” (=i) the following stopping finger. Mastering this technique is a prerequisite to learning the four-finger-technique. Avoid the widespread slapping of the fingers on the string. It invalidates the desired effect of physical coordination (“self regulation”) and is thus counterproductive.*

*etc.*



*Use of all fingers also in thumb position: this is facilitated by the technique described.*



*etc.*

*Basic position:* 

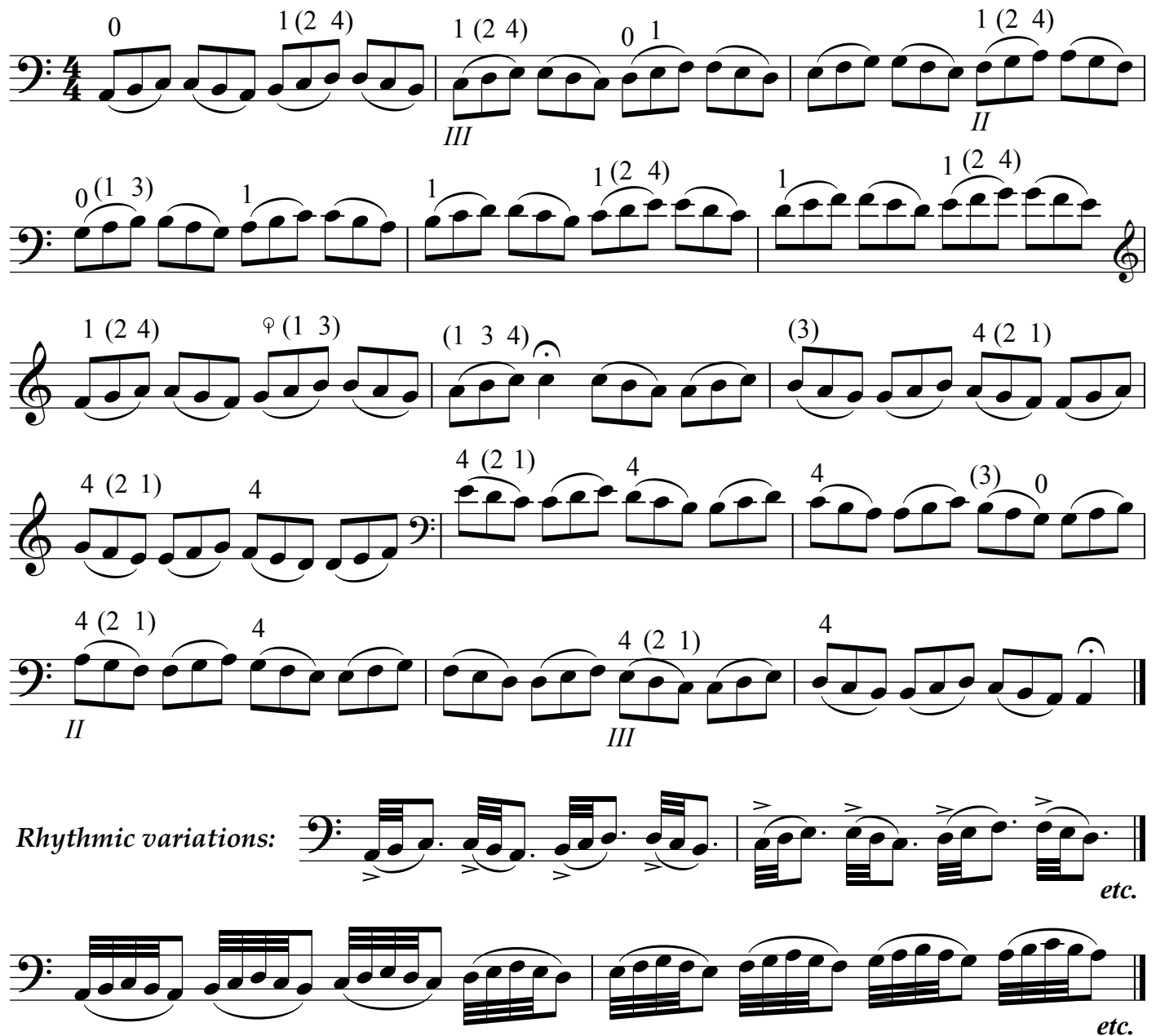
*Extended position:* 

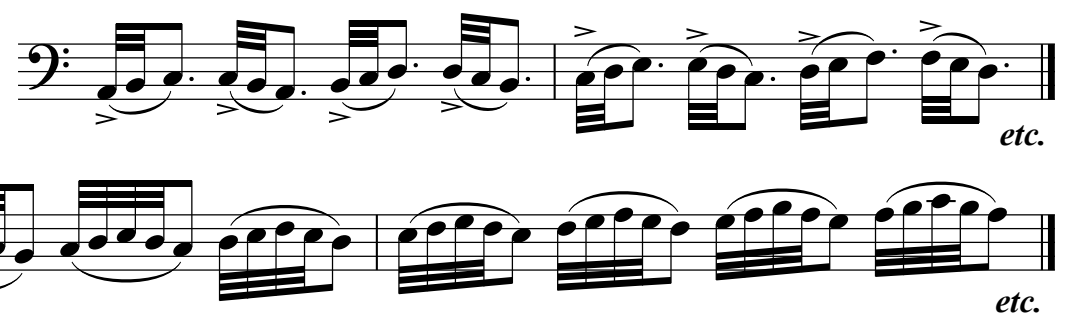
*Close position:* 

## 2

*Triplet exercise*

*Let the fingers "run". Similar to playing the piano the fingers should enjoy the freedom to approach every note. Static hand and finger posture impedes the flexibility necessary to take the respective ideal position.*



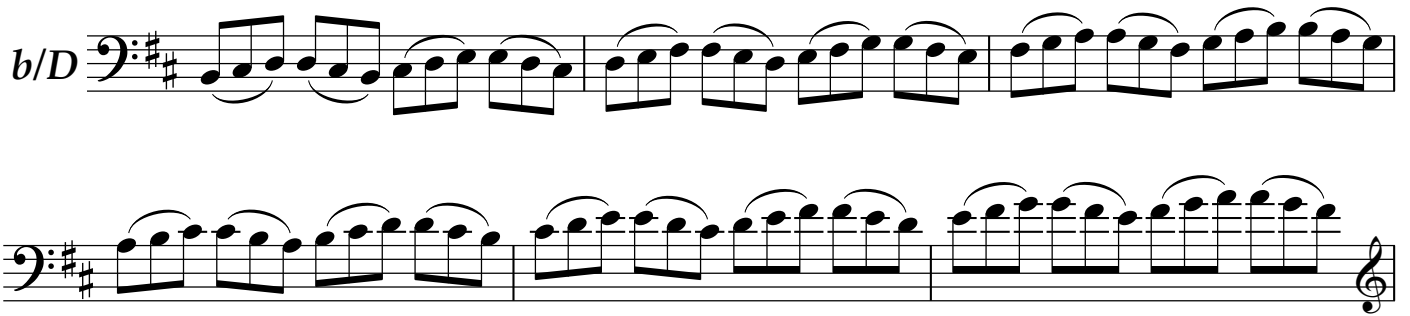
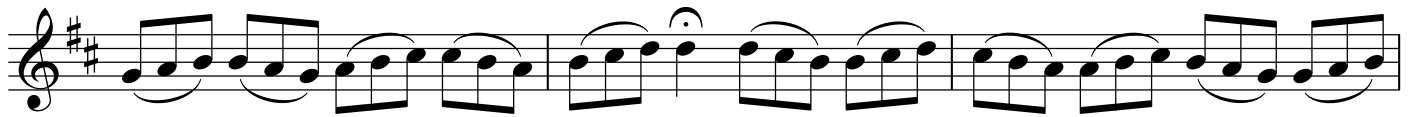
*Rhythmic variations:* 

*etc.*



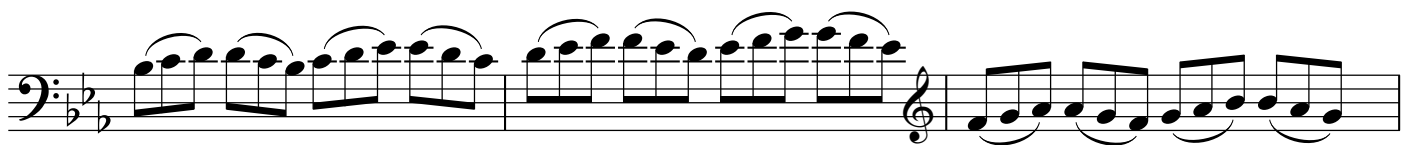
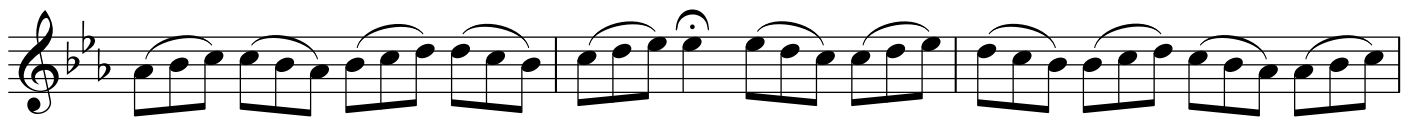
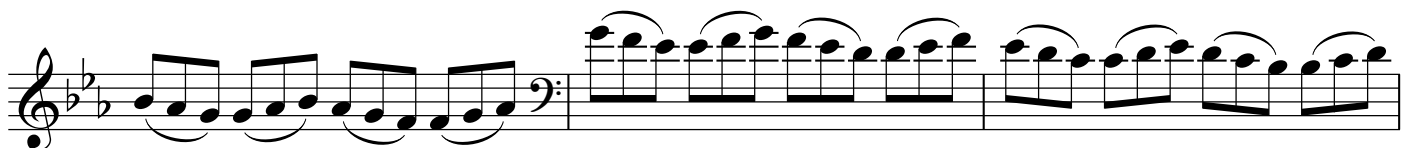
*Examples in other key signatures. The fingering pattern always stays the same:  
 triplets each in one position (minor third: basic position, major third: extended position) and  
 inclusion of the open strings;*

*b/D*



*c/Eb*

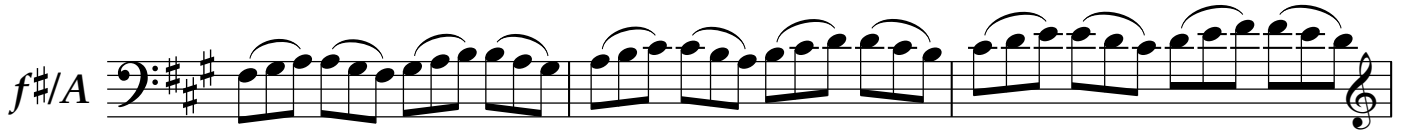





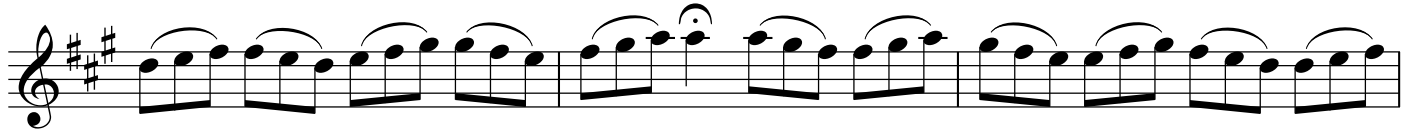

*d/F*

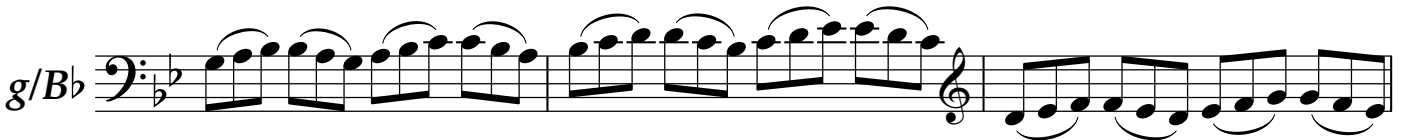
This section contains five staves of music in the key of D minor (one flat). The first staff is in bass clef and contains a continuous eighth-note pattern with slurs. The second staff begins in bass clef and then switches to treble clef, continuing the eighth-note pattern. The third and fourth staves are in treble clef, with the third staff featuring a half-note rest in the second measure. The fifth staff is in bass clef and concludes the section with a double bar line.

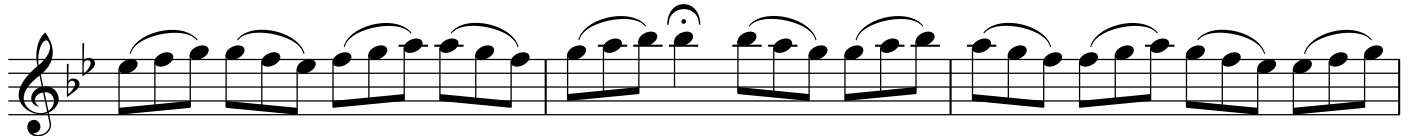
*e/G*

This section contains five staves of music in the key of E major (two sharps). The first staff is in bass clef and contains a continuous eighth-note pattern with slurs. The second staff is in treble clef and continues the eighth-note pattern. The third and fourth staves are in treble clef, with the third staff featuring a half-note rest in the second measure. The fifth staff is in bass clef and concludes the section with a double bar line.

*f*  $\sharp/A$  



*g*  $B\flat$  

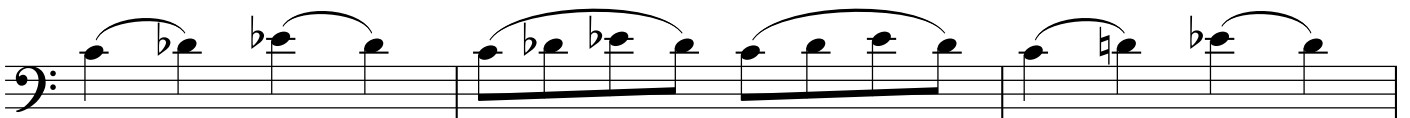
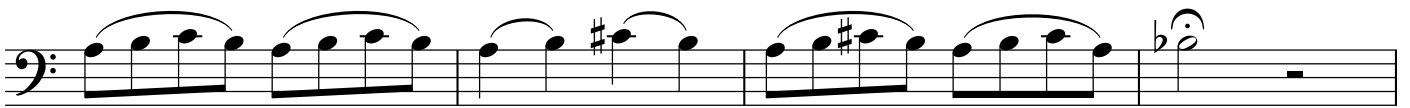
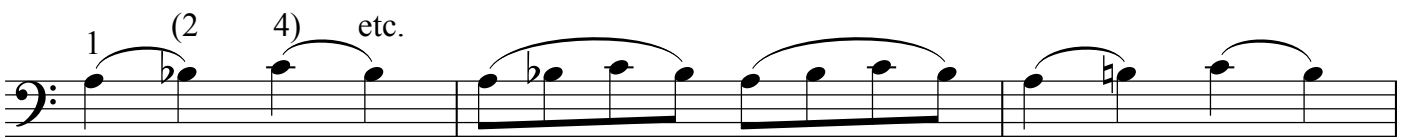
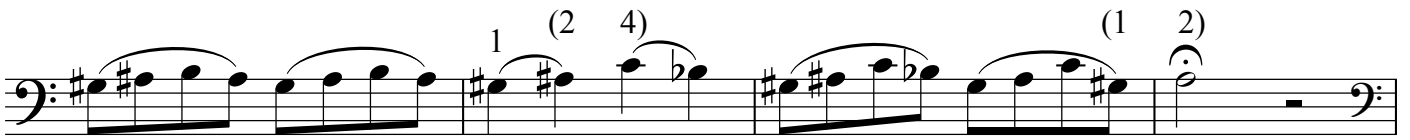
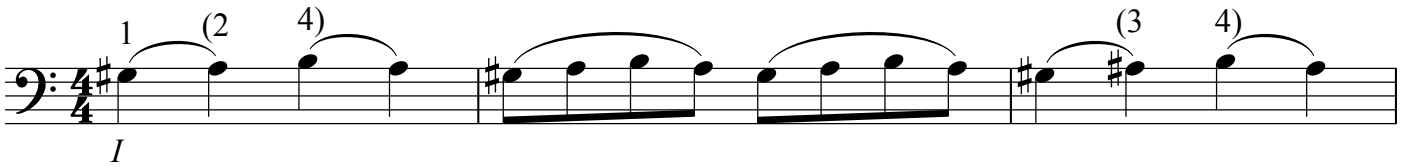


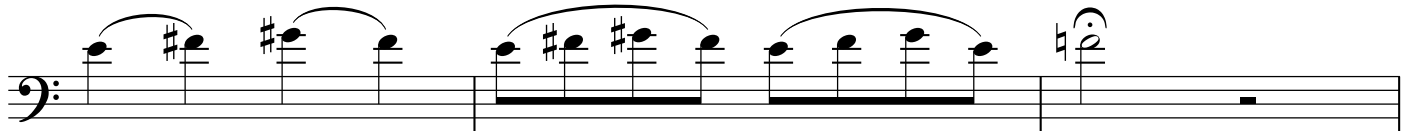
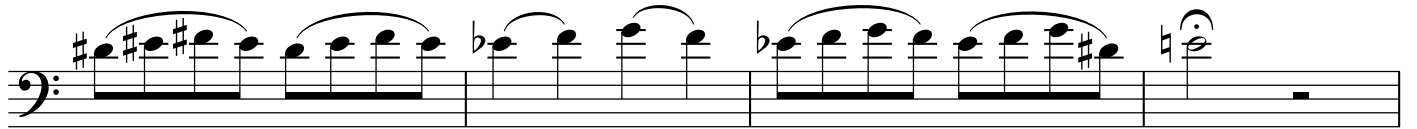
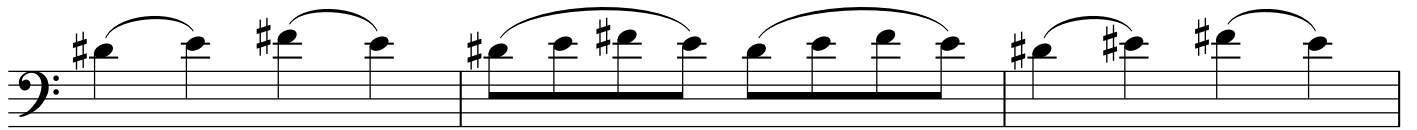
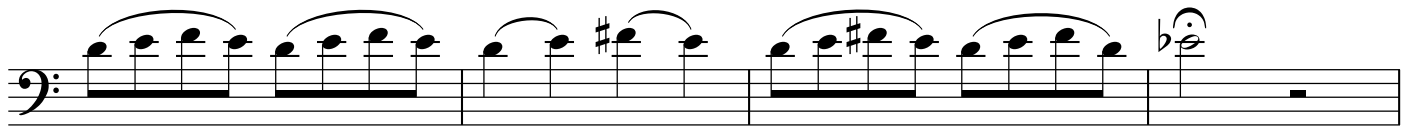
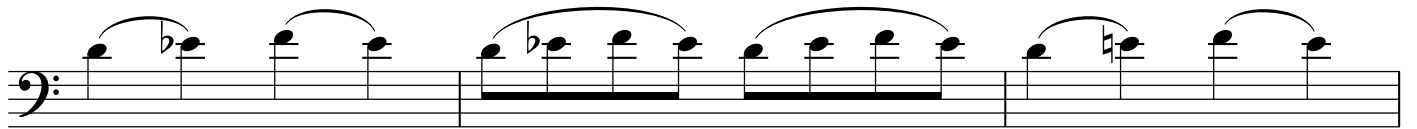
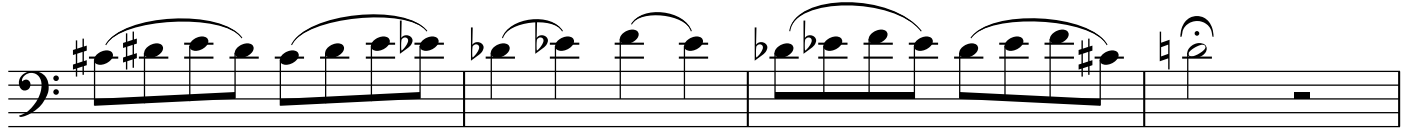
*etc.*

## 3

*Position exercise*

*You should practice this exercise until you are able to play halftones, whole tones and thirds with absolute precision. The fingers have to get accustomed to "walking".  
This will take time - so be patient!*





## 4

*Shiftless scales**a: on one string*

*Ab-maj*

4/4

1 3 2 4 1 3 1 2 1 2 4 1 3 1 2 4 1 3 4

*Fingerings are according to above-mentioned pattern!*

*A-maj*

4/4

*Bb-maj*

4/4

Two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, treble clef. The first staff contains four measures of eighth-note patterns, each with a slur. The second staff contains four measures, with the final measure ending in a whole note.

*B-maj*

Staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, bass clef, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It contains four measures of eighth-note patterns with slurs.

Staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, treble clef, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It contains four measures of eighth-note patterns with slurs.

Staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, treble clef, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It contains four measures of eighth-note patterns with slurs.

Staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, treble clef, with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It contains four measures of eighth-note patterns with slurs.

*C-maj*

Staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, treble clef, with a key signature of no sharps or flats. It contains four measures of eighth-note patterns with slurs.

Staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, treble clef, with a key signature of no sharps or flats. It contains four measures of eighth-note patterns with slurs.

Staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, treble clef, with a key signature of no sharps or flats. It contains four measures of eighth-note patterns with slurs.

Staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, treble clef, with a key signature of no sharps or flats. It contains four measures of eighth-note patterns with slurs.

*b: over the strings in basic position*

The image displays ten staves of musical notation for bass guitar, arranged in a single column. Each staff begins with a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. The exercises are organized into pairs, with each pair consisting of two staves. The first staff of the first pair is marked with a Roman numeral 'III' and a fingering '2'. The second staff of the first pair is marked with a Roman numeral 'V' and a fingering '2'. The second staff of the second pair is marked with a Roman numeral 'IV' and a fingering '2'. The remaining staves in the pairs are marked with a fingering '2' or '0'. The exercises involve various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together and accented. The keys of the exercises are: D minor (one flat), A minor (no sharps or flats), E minor (three sharps), and B minor (two sharps). The exercises are designed to be played over the strings in basic position.



*c: over the strings in basic and extended positions*

**C-maj**

The C major section consists of five staves in bass clef. The first staff starts with a '2' above the first note and ends with a '2 (1 2 4)' above the last note, with a 'III' below. The second staff has fingerings '(1 4)', '3', '(1 2 4)', '(4 3)', and '2' above notes, with 'III' below. The third staff has a '2' above the first note and a 'III' below. The fourth staff is in treble clef with a 'φ' above the first note. The fifth staff is in treble clef with fingerings '4', '1', and 'V' above notes, and 'II', 'II', 'III', and 'IV' below.

**G-maj**

The G major section consists of five staves in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff has a '2' above the first note and a '0' above the last note. The second staff has a '2' above the first note. The third staff has a '2 (1 2 4)' above the last note and a 'III' below. The fourth staff has a '3' above the first note and a '2' above the last note, with a 'III' below. The fifth staff has a '4' above the first note and '(2 1 4 2)' above the last note, with a 'I' below the first note and a 'IV' below the last note.

*D-maj*

2 (1 2 4)

3 (1 2 4) 2

III III

φ (φ)

(φ 1 2 4)

1 (3 4) 1 4 2

II II

*A-maj*

0 2

1

2 (1 2 4)

III III

(1 2 4)

3

(1 3 4) 4 3

III

*E-maj*

Musical score for E major in bass clef. The piece consists of six lines of music. The first line starts with a bass clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It features a descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '2' and a triplet '(1 2 4)'. The second line continues the scale with a fingering of '3' and another triplet '(1 2 4)'. The third line is in treble clef, showing a similar descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '1' and a triplet '(4 1 2 4 1 3)'. The fourth line continues in treble clef with a fingering of '1' and a triplet '(4 1 2 4 1 3)'. The fifth line is in bass clef, showing a descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '2' and a triplet '(1 2 4)'. The sixth line is in bass clef, showing a descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '2' and a triplet '(1 2 4)'. The piece ends with a double bar line.

*B-maj*

Musical score for B major in bass clef. The piece consists of six lines of music. The first line starts with a bass clef and a key signature of two sharps (F#, C#). It features a descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '2'. The second line continues the scale with a fingering of '2'. The third line is in bass clef, showing a descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '3'. The fourth line is in bass clef, showing a descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '2'. The fifth line is in bass clef, showing a descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '2'. The sixth line is in bass clef, showing a descending eighth-note scale with a fingering of '2'. The piece ends with a double bar line.

## 5

*Chromatic exercises*

a:

The image displays a musical score for chromatic exercises, labeled 'a:'. It consists of ten staves of music, arranged in two groups of five. The first five staves are in bass clef, and the last five are in treble clef. The time signature is 4/4. The exercises are organized into pairs of ascending and descending lines. The first pair (staves 1-2) starts with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and ends with one flat (Bb). The second pair (staves 3-4) starts with one flat (Bb) and ends with one sharp (F#). The third pair (staves 5-6) starts with one sharp (F#) and ends with one flat (Bb). The fourth pair (staves 7-8) starts with one flat (Bb) and ends with one sharp (F#). The fifth pair (staves 9-10) starts with one sharp (F#) and ends with one flat (Bb). Each staff contains a sequence of eighth notes, often beamed in pairs, with slurs indicating phrasing. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 0, 1, and 2 above the notes. The first staff is marked with a '1' at the end. The second staff is marked with a '0' at the beginning. The third staff is marked with a '1' at the beginning and a '0' at the end. The fourth staff is marked with a '1' at the beginning and a '0' at the end. The fifth staff is marked with a '1' at the beginning. The sixth staff is marked with a '1' at the beginning. The seventh staff is marked with a '1' at the beginning. The eighth staff is marked with a '1' at the beginning. The ninth staff is marked with a '1' at the beginning. The tenth staff is marked with a '1' at the beginning and ends with a fermata.

The image displays ten staves of musical notation, primarily for guitar. The notation is organized into sections labeled I through IV. Each staff contains musical notation with various chord voicings and fingerings. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, various chord voicings, and fingerings. The music is organized into sections labeled I through IV, with specific fret numbers and techniques like double stops and bends indicated.

Staff 1: Treble clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 1-8.

Staff 2: Treble clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 9-16.

Staff 3: Treble clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 17-24.

Staff 4: Treble clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 25-32.

Staff 5: Bass clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 33-40.

Staff 6: Bass clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 41-48. Includes a double stop (2) and fret 0.

Staff 7: Bass clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 49-56. Includes a double stop (2) and fret 0.

Staff 8: Bass clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 57-64. Labeled III.

Staff 9: Bass clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 65-72. Labeled IV.

Staff 10: Bass clef, 4-fingered chords, measures 73-80. Ends with a whole note chord.

This page of musical notation is for guitar, written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is organized into 12 staves, with the first four staves in bass clef and the last eight in treble clef. The notation includes various fingerings (1, 0, 2, 4), slurs, and articulation marks. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the Roman numeral III.

Staff 1: Bass clef, 4/4 time. Key signature: one flat. Fingering: 1, 1, 0 (2).  
Staff 2: Bass clef. Fingering: 1, 0.  
Staff 3: Bass clef. Fingering: 1, 1, 1.  
Staff 4: Bass clef. Fingering: 1, 1, 1.  
Staff 5: Treble clef. Fingering: 1, 1, 1.  
Staff 6: Treble clef. Fingering: 1, (4), 4.  
Staff 7: Treble clef. Fingering: 4, 4, 4.  
Staff 8: Treble clef. Fingering: 4, 4, 4.  
Staff 9: Bass clef. Fingering: 4, 4, 4.  
Staff 10: Bass clef. Fingering: (0), 4, 4, (0).  
Staff 11: Bass clef. Fingering: 4, 4.  
Staff 12: Bass clef. Fingering: 4. Ends with a double bar line and the Roman numeral III.

This musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of ten staves. The first five staves are in bass clef, and the last five are in treble clef. The piece features a complex, rhythmic melody with many slurs and ties. Fingering is indicated by numbers 0, 1, and (1) above notes. Dynamics include *sim.* (sforzando). The score concludes with the instruction *etc. until* followed by a fermata over a final note.

The image displays a page of musical notation for a bass line, consisting of ten staves. The music is written in a 3/4 time signature and begins with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). The notation includes various musical elements such as slurs, fingerings (0, 1, 2, 3, 4), and accidentals (sharps and flats). The first staff is marked with a 'd:' and a bass clef. The music progresses through ten staves, each containing two measures of music. The notation is complex, featuring many beamed eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The fingerings are indicated by numbers 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 above the notes. The accidentals are placed above or below the notes as needed. The overall style is that of a classical or contemporary bass line, possibly for a double bass or electric bass.



Bass clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings (1, 4, 3).

Bass clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings (0, 1, 4, 4).

Bass clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings (1, 1, 1, 1, 4, 4, 1).

Treble clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings ((2) 1, 1, 4, 4, 1).

Treble clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings ((2) 1, 1, φ, 4, 4, 1).

Treble clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings (1, 1, φ, (4), 4, 4).

Treble clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings (1, 1, φ, (4), (φ) 4, 4).

Treble clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings ((2) 1, φ, 1, 2, 4, 2).

Treble clef musical staff with notes, accidentals, and fingerings ((2) 1, φ, 1, 4, 4, 1).

## 6

## Shifting exercises

*Both exercises should be worked out on one string with different fingering variations.*

a:

The musical score consists of eight staves of music in 4/4 time. The exercise is a single-line melodic line on one string, featuring various intervals and accidentals. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and slurs. The key signature changes from C major to G major, then to D major, and finally to A major. The exercise concludes with a double bar line.

This page of musical notation is set in 4/4 time and begins with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation is organized into ten systems, each consisting of two staves. The first system starts with a bass clef and a B-flat key signature. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth-note runs, quarter-note pairs, and dotted rhythms. The notation includes numerous slurs and ties, indicating phrasing and melodic connections. The key signature changes to one sharp (F#) in the fifth system. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the tenth system.

## 7

## Final exercises

a:

1

V

1

etc.

b:

2

III

c:

2

etc.

d:

4 (3)

4

etc.

e:

1 (3) 4 2)

V

4

f: *f*  $\frac{4}{8}$  1 (3 4 2) 1 1 1 1 1 1

*V* 4 4 4 4

g:  $\frac{2}{4}$  (2 4) sim. 1 1 1 1

*II*

1 1 1 1

h:  $\frac{2}{4}$  (1 2 4) sim. 2 2 2 2

*II*

*f*

2 2 2 2

i:  $\frac{2}{4}$  1 1 1 sim.

*see vol. 2 page 11!*

k:  $\frac{4}{4}$  2 *IV* dolce, molto legato

(2) (IV) 1

(2) 1 etc.

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