

Cross-String Ornaments, Part 2 of 3

By Douglas Niedt

The Slow-Practice Technique

After one to three weeks, if the fast-practice methods detailed in Part 1 do not seem to be working for you, try some of the four slow-practice methods listed below. They will help you gain the agility and finger independence needed to use the fast-practice methods already described. Start each one slowly and gradually increase the speed over a period of days or weeks.

If one of the exercises seems very easy and presents no difficulty, skip it. You can also combine them in different ways. You could use the altered rhythms of #4 on exercises #1-3. You could use the slow/fast practice technique of #1 on the others. You could use the patterns in #3 on the other exercises. You could do the open-string arpeggio patterns of #2 on the others. In other words, you could probably spend hours working on these. Try to hone it down to the ones that seem to help you the most.

1. Alternate slow and fast note groups:

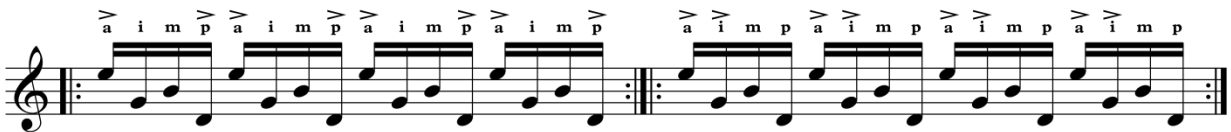


2. Practice the “aimp” trill pattern as an arpeggio on open strings, varying the accent:

The basic pattern:



Accented patterns:



3. Practice the "aimp" trill pattern on two strings but start on different fingers:



4. Practice the "aimp" trill pattern in altered rhythms:

The same pattern in altered rhythms:



Guitarist Sharon Isbin's Exercises

Sharon Isbin recommends practicing three-string arpeggios using her "miai" cross-string ornament pattern. If you are using another four-note pattern that does not use the thumb (aimi, amim, miai, mimi, aiai) you can practice it as arpeggios on three strings as well. Isbin recommends beginning slowly and gradually speeding up with a metronome. She uses this next exercise as a starting point. Again, it can be adapted for the other patterns as well:

p i m i a i m i p i a i m i a i

For "aimi" pattern: p i a i m i a i
 For "amim" pattern: p i a m i m a i
 For "mimi" pattern: p i m i m i m i
 For "aiai" pattern: p i a i a i a i

Isbin also suggests practicing these exercises:

Isbin's pattern:
m i a i

Other patterns:
a i m i
a m i m
m i m i
a i a i

The image displays musical exercises on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first exercise is labeled 'Isbin's pattern: m i a i' and consists of a single melodic line in the treble clef. The second exercise, labeled 'Other patterns:', shows four variations of the pattern: 'a i m i', 'a m i m', 'm i m i', and 'a i a i'. Each variation is presented as a two-part exercise, with the first part in the treble clef and the second part in the bass clef. The exercises are written in a rhythmic style with eighth and sixteenth notes, and the bass clef part often features a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Here are more variations:

Isbin's "miai" pattern beginning on 2nd note ("i"):

Other patterns
beginning on
2nd note:

i	a	i	m
a	i	m	i
i	m	i	a
i	m	i	m
i	a	i	a



Continue pattern on all strings
as in previous exercise

Isbin's "miai" pattern beginning on 3rd note ("a"):

Other patterns
beginning on
3rd note:

a	i	m	i
m	i	a	i
i	m	a	m
m	i	m	i
a	i	a	i



Continue pattern on all strings
as in previous exercise

Isbin's "miai" pattern beginning on 4th note ("i"):

Other patterns
beginning on
4th note:

i	m	i	a
i	a	i	m
m	a	m	i
i	m	i	m
i	a	i	a



Continue pattern on all strings
as in previous exercise

As you see, you could spend an incredible number of hours practicing these exercises. Every player has different technical strengths and weaknesses. An exercise may be a total waste of time for one person but very helpful for another. You must carefully choose which ones you think will benefit you the most.

The Left Hand

String Damping

When playing the final note of a cross-string ornament, it will usually be necessary to damp the previous note to prevent unwanted dissonance. There are three ways to damp the note.

1. Release the left-hand finger pressure off the note

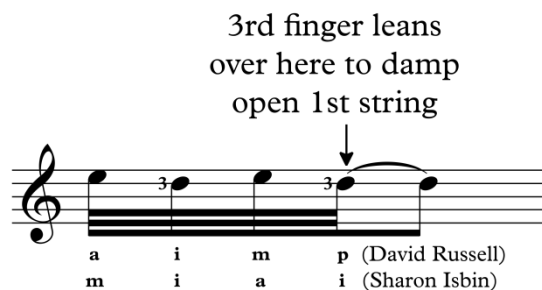
Sometimes you can just lift a finger off the string to stop it from ringing. But lifting off the string suddenly will often produce the unwanted pitch of the open string or other noises. Releasing the finger

pressure from the string first and then lifting the finger off the string will prevent that. Sometimes other unwanted pitches will sympathetically resonate requiring additional damping from the right hand.



2. Lean a left-hand finger onto the string that you want to damp

This is easy and usually produces a very clean damp.



Sometimes when the last note of an ornament is played, unwanted sympathetic vibrations or harmonic resonances can be heard. The right hand thumb or a free left-hand finger can be used to damp those strings. In the example above you may hear harmonics ringing on the bass strings. The left-hand 1st or 2nd finger could be used to damp those strings. Or, if using Isbin's fingering, the right-hand thumb can be placed on the offending bass strings.

3. Use a right-hand finger to damp the string

This technique often produces the cleanest damp but is harder to do at first. Sometimes it is the only method available to damp a string. Any finger available at the end of the ornament can be used to damp the string.

Damping with right hand:

Set "m" or "a" on
1st string here



The musical notation shows a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first string is played with a natural (0), a fourth (4), a natural (0), and a fourth (4). The notes are beamed together. An arrow points to the fourth fret of the first string, indicating where to set the vowel "m" or "a".

a i m p (David Russell)
m i a i (Sharon Isbin)

Set "m" or "a" on
1st string here



The musical notation shows a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first string is played with a natural (0), a fourth (4), a natural (0), and a fourth (4). The notes are beamed together. An arrow points to the fourth fret of the first string, indicating where to set the vowel "m" or "a".

i p i p

Watch me demonstrate these techniques using the preceding three written examples.

Right click on video to choose to view on full screen (recommended). Click escape key to return to normal view.



Tech Tip Cross String Ornaments String Damping

Left-Hand Fingerings

Sometimes a cross-string ornament can be fingered using an open string. For example, a trill on F to E can be fingered as two fretted notes or with the F fretted and the E played open. Look at these options:



(Any left-hand finger may be used on the F)



(Any left-hand finger may be used on the F)



Same as preceding example but different fingering at end

(Any left-hand finger may be used on the F)



A trill from C to B presents similar options. Both notes can be fretted or just the C fretted and the B played open:

