

E D W I N B A R K E R



Left-Hand Setup

T O N E B A S E D O U B L E B A S S



ABOUT THE LESSON

Edwin Barker discusses the approach he uses for his left hand, how he uses body weight and musculature to close the string, and an in-depth discussion of vibrato. He presents some exercises to learn the motion for vibrato, time left hand movements to coordinate with the bow, and more.

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If you have any corrections, comments, or critiques relating to this workbook, please send them to marek@tonebase.co. We strive to deliver the highest quality enrichment experience. Thank you!

T O N E B A S E D O U B L E B A S S



Edwin Barker takes us on a journey through different fundamental techniques of the left hand, from basic setup, to changing between fingers, to learning how to use vibrato.

BASIC SETUP

While sitting, Edwin sets the left arm at approximately a 90-degree angle to the neck of the bass. This positioning allows use of both musculature and gravity to control the string. The shoulders should feel as if they are “hanging” off the bass, as if we are “part of the instrument” or that the instrument is an extension of the player.

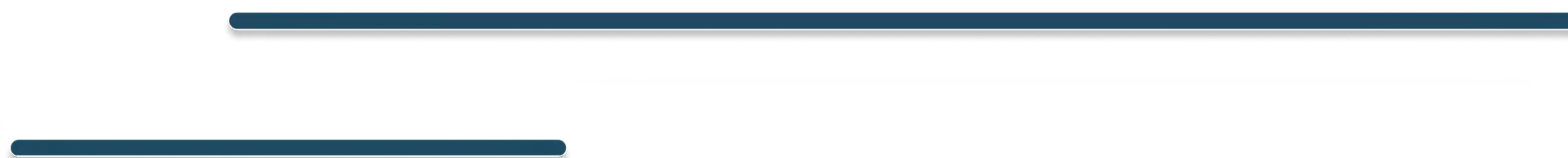


The fingers should be curved, not flat or hyper-extended in the joints. Edwin uses a left-hand “form” or “template” to the hand, with a half-step between the fingers 1 and 2, and another half-step between fingers 2 and 4. The weight of the left arm should hang off the neck of the bass.

Finger movement should be as efficient as possible:

- Use the momentum of the finger coming down from above the string, onto the string.
- Once the string is stopped to the fingerboard, use as little pressure and energy as possible to keep the note closed; any more than this is a waste of energy.
- No need to raise the finger away from the fingerboard before dropping it to the string.
- Move from point A (above the fingerboard) to point C (into the string on the fingerboard), skipping point B (somewhere further away from the fingerboard than point A).
- Let the left hand fingers travel the shortest distance possible from above the fingerboard to the fingerboard.

It is important to anticipate the movement of the left hand. Edwin demonstrates this using a finger exercise, playing between the fingers of the left hand in first position, A, B-flat, B-natural. He then moves this exercise over to the D string with the same fingering pattern, showing how the fingers need to anticipate the move to the next string before the bow arrives there.



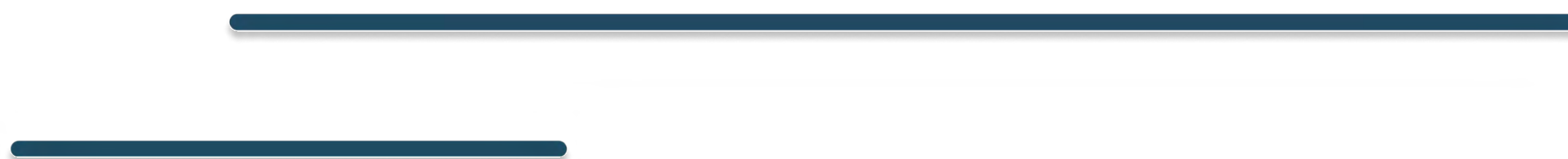
VIBRATO

Edwin thinks of vibrato as a combination of shaking a soda can, and pivoting. The motion is a lot like shifting, involving a movement of the hand like shaking a soda can, but also using the thumb as the pivot.

He starts with an exercise showing the motion on a macro scale:

- Slide the finger in four oscillations per bow stroke.
- Then, narrow the oscillation and do six faster oscillations per bow stroke.
- Then, eight oscillations and faster still.
- Keep the ends of the oscillations rounded (don't stop on either end).
- Continue speeding this up to include 10, 12, 14 per bow stroke, etc.

When switching between fingers while vibrating, the weight in the left hand needs to adjust to the active finger, and all other fingers need to be relaxed. In other words, keep only one finger active at a time. Pressing down other fingers at the same time as the active finger (playing the note) will inhibit vibrato. Be careful about not using stacked fingers to widen the oscillation of the vibrato, as it can distort the pitch (making it sound sharper than the actual centered note).



THUMB POSITION VIBRATO

Take care not to let the joints of the fingers collapse! This hyperextension tends to happen more often in thumb position than neck position. In thumb position, the motion is basically the same and can be learned the same way. However, without the thumb behind the neck, the geometry of the hand changes somewhat. Vibrato on the thumb is possible — following the same combination of a shift and a pivot — but not as easy as with the fingers. Generally Edwin avoids this type of vibrato, but it is occasionally necessary.