

M U R I E L R A Z A V I

S H I F T I N G
F U N D A M E N T A L S

T O N E B A S E V I O L A



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

Join world-renowned soloist and pedagogue Muriel Razavi in a comprehensive two-part course on shifting techniques for viola. The course begins with the fundamentals of shifting, emphasizing lightness, fluidity, and bow coordination, with practical exercises and applications in repertoire. In the second part, Razavi focuses on large distance shifting, highlighting the importance of the thumb, and providing advanced exercises to help you confidently navigate shifts to fourth position and beyond.

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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 V I O L A



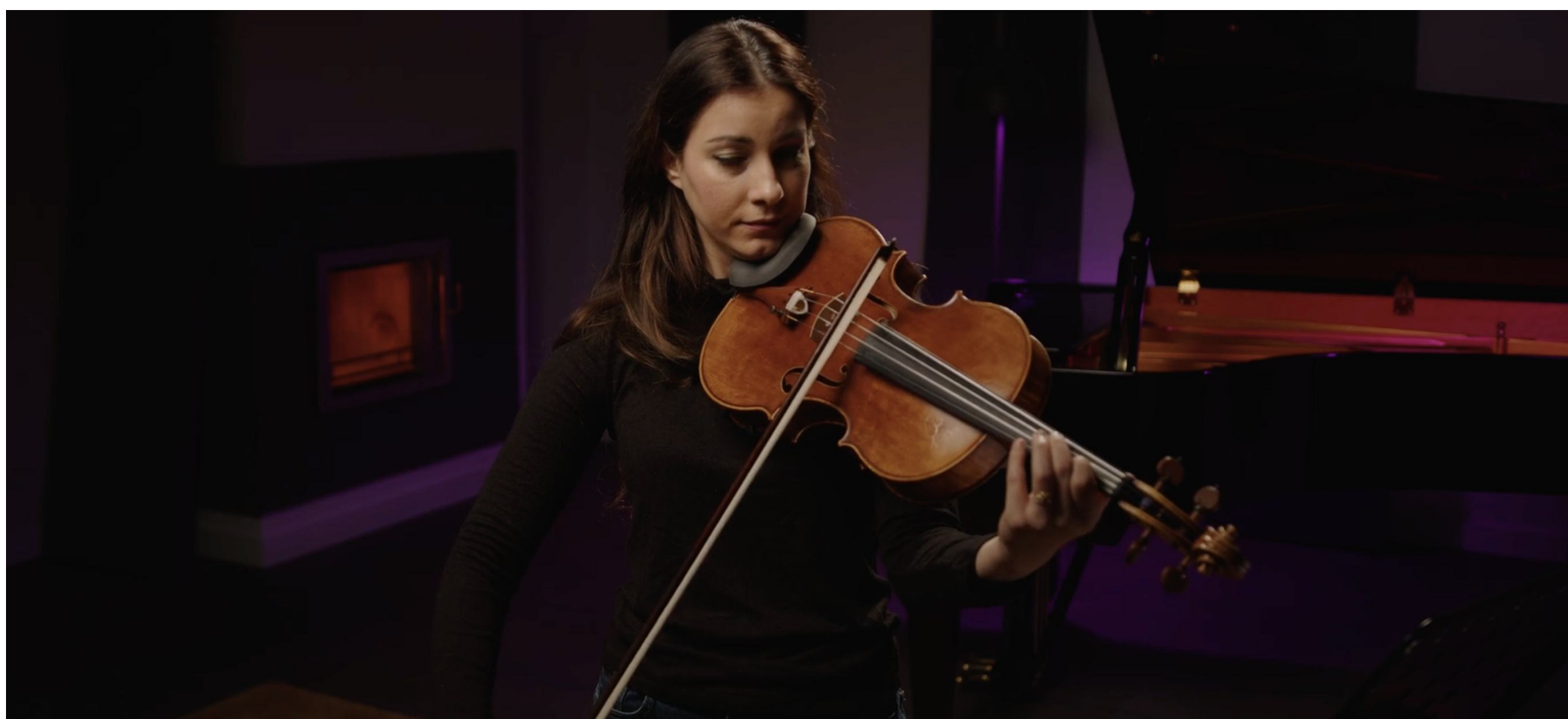
Shifting Basics

There are larger distances to cover on the viola than on the violin. Razavi encourages the idea of shifting smaller distances more often, rather than not shifting very much until you have to make a large jump suddenly. **How should we go about doing this?**

Shifting is not only about timing but also about balancing the weight. You should lift the finger slightly while shifting towards the second note to avoid a glissando. Do not lift the finger completely off the fingerboard; keep contact with the string. Always slide on the string while feeling connected to it, using more of a movement with a harmonic/flageolet touch.

Gliding

Start by gliding up and down the instrument while gently touching the string. Razavi likes to use the imagery of stardust to describe the sound created when shifting between two notes.



The bow

The right arm also lifts the bow very slightly between the two notes. However, be very aware about whether you are using the bow during a **legato** stroke, a **portamento** stroke, or **two separate notes** because the difference in use is significant. Never lose the connection with the string, but also be sure never to add extra weight; don't press too hard into the string.

Guide finger vs. target finger shifting

There are two ways to approach shifting:

1. **Going from A to B:** The guide finger is “A,” the finger that plays the last note before you need to shift somewhere, transporting you to note “B.”
2. **Using the target finger:** Using the “B” finger to transport you to the “B” note.

How do we choose between these two techniques?

Our musical ear and intention will essentially guide us, but technique also always takes a role. For instance, in the opening of the Brahms f minor sonata, where the target finger is the fourth finger, it's more advisable to use the guide finger to shift. The fourth finger is more unstable and not the most secure in general. In this passage, the guide finger brings you into the ideal position where you can “plop” your fourth finger onto the correct place in the fifth position. In this situation, the guide finger can be considered an anchor, helping guide the hand along the fingerboard “map.”



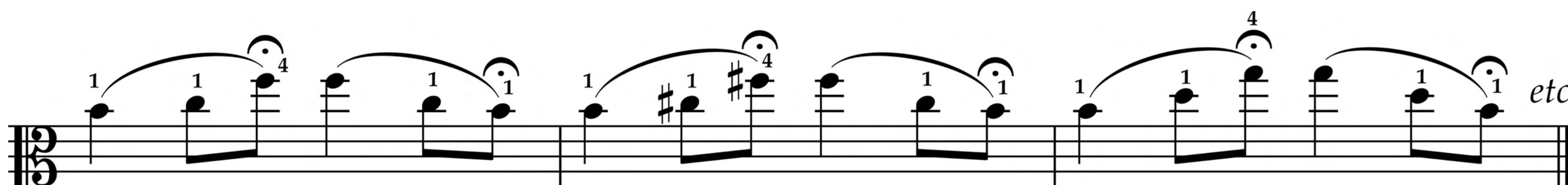
Shifting with the target finger allows us to make a more Romantic, blissful sound — a portamento sound with a lot of “schmalz,” — but it's not always as technically stable as shifting with the guide finger.

- **Guide finger = stability**
- **Target finger = color**

Exercise

First of all, take time “mapping” out your instrument so that you know what position you are in, and take some time to explore each position individually. Here are two versions of an exercise that will help you “map” out your viola.

- **Guide finger version:** Guide finger — shift guide finger — “plop” down target finger — back to guide finger note — shift back to original note. Repeat, going to the next position, but start the guide finger in the first position each time.



- **Target finger version:** Guide finger — shift target finger — place and play guide finger in new position — play target finger again — shift back down to first position. As before, repeat, going to the next position, starting in first every time.

It is essential to understand your position and start training a hand frame using fingers 1 and 4. Do not have fingers up in the air or too far away from the neck. All the fingers should be close and ready to “plop” down onto the fingerboard.

Coordination

This is especially important when shifting between notes using separate bow strokes. Be sure to shift before playing the second bow stroke. This situation is about timing, where your left hand needs to move quickly before you change your bow direction.

Always move your left hand before your right hand.

It is essential to work on “disconnecting” the two arms during slow movements, when we generally need slow bow strokes but fast, fluid shifts. In this situation, the left hand always needs to be faster than the right.

Large Distance Shifts

The thumb

The thumb guides us through the different “bus stops,” different positions of our “city trip.” It moves up with the hand from the first to the third positions, but then the biggest change in its position happens between the third and fourth positions.

- **Action item:** Practice this change by switching between third and fourth to develop smoothness.

Due to the large body of the instrument, you need to use both the left arm and the thumb to guide you into the next “sphere” of positions.

Beyond the fourth position

The thumb stays in this new position from the fourth position onwards, generally until the eighth, where you need to release the thumb to achieve more flexibility. On the way down, you tuck the thumb back in again and work your way down from the eighth position to the fourth, then tuck it back again further, along with the elbow, from the third to the first positions.

- **Action item:** For fluidity, drag a finger up through all the positions, noticing how naturally the thumb moves up and down the neck.

If the thumb doesn't move at the fourth position, the intonation is too flat. The goal for the fingers in each position is to drop naturally down to the instrument and land in the right spot.

- ***Action item:* Exercise for Lightness and Fluidity**

Focusing on the thumb, go up and down from first position to second, then first to third, then first to fourth, etc. to eighth position. Be sure to include chromatic notes, too. Keep the thumb flexible and relaxed, and keep the fourth finger hovering above the fingerboard.

