



Spiccato Variations

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Mastering spiccato involves slow, deliberate practice that mirrors eventual stage performance. You need to simulate, as closely as possible, the motions and musical ideas you will use in the final tempo.

In the second movement of Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor, for example:



Practicing slowly, pay close attention to the following:

Bow placement: Simulate the exact position of the bow that you will use in the fast tempo.

- How far away from the frog will you want to be? Spiccato works best in the lower third of the bow or a bit closer to the frog.
- How close to the bridge can you be? This will take some experimenting, as you want to find a good contact point that does not sound overly scratchy.

Bow distribution: Simulate the amount of bow you will use in the fast tempo. How much bow will you actually need when playing fast?

“Sticky” sensation: As you use less bow and pursue a contact point closer to the bridge, keep your fingers and arm flexible.

Musicality: Don't neglect your musical ideas! Shape the phrase but preserve the same bow placement/distribution.

Left-hand articulation: Make sure that your fingers fall assertively into place.

Once you master these elements in a slow tempo, it's time to increase the tempo gradually.

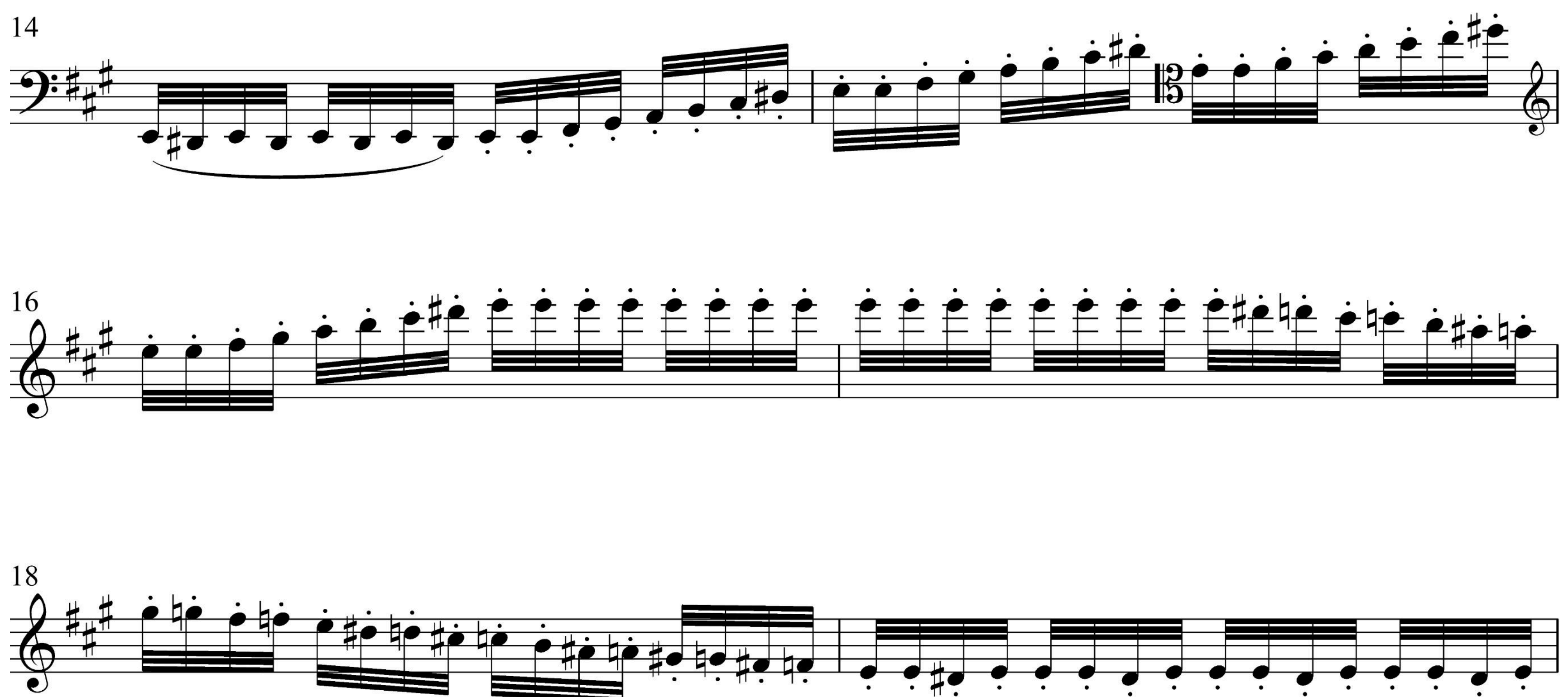
- As you approach the final speed, the stick of the bow should bounce lightly, but the bow should stay *on the string and preserve that “sticky” sensation.

Your musical ideas will eventually dictate how bouncy you want your bow stroke to sound and how you want to practice the passage.

- For instance, if you believe that this passage from Dmitri Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No. 1 calls for a stickier spiccato, you will see results with a similar approach to the Elgar:



But you might want the bow stroke to be bouncier in other passages. For instance, in this passage of Tchaikovsky's Variations on a Rococo Theme:



- Practice this passage slowly with the feeling that the string is a trampoline, and allow the bow to jump *off the string.
- This bouncy, “trampoline” feeling comes at the cost of some sense of control in the right hand. As such, it works best in passages where you don’t want to shape a long musical line.

For showpieces such as David Popper’s Elfentanz, for example, you might want to use a combination of a bouncier and stickier spiccato.



In such cases, you will benefit from practicing slowly in both ways: with the off-the-string feeling of a trampoline and with the sticky, on-the-string feeling.



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