



# CELLO

## The Mobile Left Hand: How to Choose and Execute Agile Fingerings

by David Carter

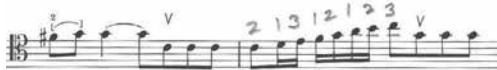
Choosing fingerings may be a matter of personal preference, technical expedience and musical sensibility, but certain fingering patterns allow for easy motion in the hand. I would like to investigate how this happens, and define some guidelines for choosing fingerings.

I believe the underlying principle in a mobile left hand is the ability to release tension from the fingers. Both in the playing finger, which does not need to mash the string into the fingerboard, and in the transfer of weight as you change fingers, each finger needs to be able to feel a minimum of weight. Keeping only one finger down (lightly) at a time, and keeping the other fingers hovering loosely above the string, is the most evident way of laying the groundwork for a relaxed left hand technique.

Once the left hand is as relaxed as it can be, we can investigate fingering patterns and how they contribute to a mobile left hand. Consider the following scale passage, in this case found in Haydn's C major Concerto, third movement:



Here the fingering allows for smooth motion by capitalizing on the hand's natural momentum. The releasing of 1 and then 2 creates a sense of forward motion in the hand, which should, if not thwarted by the cellist, allow the hand to flow right through the 4<sup>th</sup> finger up into the higher positions. The following fingering, however, does not provide the hand a chance to release:



It should be mentioned that at the fastest tempi there might not be time to release weight as one goes from finger to finger. In this case the latter fingering might be more effective as it keeps the 4<sup>th</sup> finger out of the fray and keeps the hand in the same shape throughout the scale. The player will have to observe how tempo affects the left hand's movement.

The following example from Brahms' E minor sonata illustrates how the hand's motion lends smoothness to the fingering. I believe this fingering, all on the C string, allows for a more efficient release of tension than going across to the G string within the first two measures. The release of 1<sup>st</sup> finger allows the hand to smoothly shift up to B. Several measures later the release of the 4<sup>th</sup> finger on B allows the hand to smoothly shift from 4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> position.



Another example of the importance of releasing tension in the hand comes from the third movement of Saint-Saens' Cello Concerto #1:



Here the release of 1 and 2 in each group prepares the hand for the upcoming shift. In the same way the descending passage in the 2nd measure prepares the hand for shifting back up to B by releasing 3 and 2 on the way down. The arm simply swings back around as you begin the E#, then releases 1 in preparation to shifting back to B.

Finally the concepts in choosing a fingering are illustrated in the following excerpt from Brahms' Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano.



While the lower fingering is certainly safer from an intonation standpoint, it does not allow the hand to release. The "reaching back" across the hand between the second and third notes keeps the feeling of tension in the hand. The upper fingering, on the other hand, flows easily through the extension and then the shift. By releasing 1, the hand begins its upward flow, singing through E to the height of the phrase.

While choosing a fingering is a matter of taste, good execution can widen the possibilities available. If the left hand releases whenever possible, a sense of momentum can be found in the hand. The cellist can capitalize on this for the best possible musical effect.

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