

4. Fun with scales and arpeggios

The word, “Scales”, has long been the “enemy” of many students for years, even up till now. The single most common reason they gave for not practicing scales is, “*Scales are so boring!*”

Yes, scales may seem boring, but do you know that in almost every piece of music, there are fragments of scales and arpeggios here and there? Three very good examples are Mozart’s *Sonata in C, K545*, Beethoven’s *Sonata No. 9 for violin and piano*, “Kreutzer” and Liszt’s *Un Sospiro*. If you know your scales and arpeggios inside out, you can immediately spot them in any piece and you will almost immediately know which fingerings to use. This will save you a lot of time and effort.

Scales and arpeggios are the most important, basic technical foundations. Below are a few ways to practice them to make them more interesting:

1. **Practice with dynamics.** For example, you can use crescendo when ascending the scale, and decrescendo when descending, and vice versa. You can also alternate crescendos and decrescendos between alternate octaves to create a “swelling” effect. You can also practice one hand playing loud, the other hand playing soft.
2. **Practice with articulations.** Instead of playing legato or staccato all the way, you can try alternating different octaves with different articulations. For example, you can play the first octave legato, the second octave staccato, the third octave legato and so on. You can also use a “two by two” method, for example, slur the first two notes, then staccato the 3rd and 4th notes, and slur the 5th and 6th notes, then staccato the 7th and 8th notes and so on. You can also practice this way “four by four”. To make it more challenging, you can practice each hand doing a different articulation, such as right hand legato, left hand staccato. You can also switch articulations between both hands at different octaves. This method is especially useful because from our past experiences with students, many have difficulty handling different articulations in both hands.
3. **Practice with different rhythms.** Instead of playing every note at the same speed, try using dotted rhythms, triplets or alternating between groups of four quavers and four semiquavers, and vice versa. You can also invent your own rhythm.
4. **Practice a different scale in each hand.** For example, left hand will play C Major and right hand will play G Major. Or left hand in D harmonic minor and right hand in F# Major. Or left hand in Ab melodic minor and right hand in Eb harmonic minor. This is very challenging and students need to know their scales really well before they can attempt this method fluently and successfully.

So now you know, practicing scales and arpeggios can be very fun and interesting. You can mix and match the above 4 methods or use them all together. Or simply use your imagination and create your own style and method. You can improve your technique and have fun at the same time. Try it!