Appendix A

The "Release" Exercise for the Right-Hand

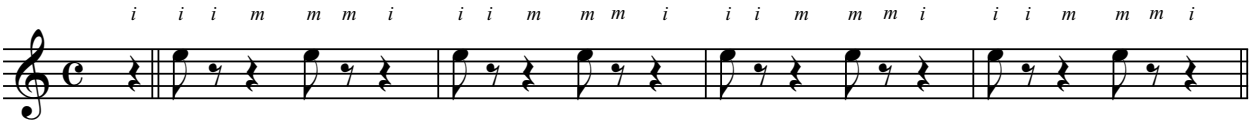
Some teachers believe that one of the very best things that a new student can learn is how to feel the release of tension as the primary function of the right-hand. We like to say that we "ballistically twitch" at the instant that we play the string, and then relax between the notes. You can see this in the right-hand work of the great concert artists. It almost appears as if their right-hand is *not moving,* even when they are playing very fast passages.

This "releasing and relaxing" awareness is grown by understanding what happens after you play a string. The best way to "feel" this release is to *immediately* return the finger to its midrange, "un-flexed" position after you pluck the string, and before you play the next note. In other words, try not to keep the finger clenched in the palm after a free-stroke (or resting on the next lowest string after a rest-stroke). Allow the fingers to swing freely and lightly, using the natural elasticity of the tendons to replace the finger in its ready position..

Beginners are often trained to follow through into the palm when they are learning free-strokes. This is good advice. But at some point, when it comes time to play at faster tempos, the student must forgo this full stroke and shorten the free-stroke follow-through. When you are ready, which means that your right fore-arm has found a point of reference and your fingers are swinging freely, the following exercise will help you become aware of your "ballistic release and relax" potential. This often takes a few weeks of one minute a day practice. Once you have it, it's yours forever. Here's how it works.

- Lightly place your index finger on the first string.
- Displace the string and pluck, and *immediately* return and damp the first string with your index finger.
- Take the index finger off the first string and lightly place the middle finger on the first string.
- Displace the string, pluck, and *immediately* return and damp the first string with your middle finger. Repeat.

Soon, you will be able to practice this exercise without the damping and preparation on the string (playing half-notes). Just allow the finger to return to a ready position above the string, ***before*** the next finger begins to play.



As a student, you should understand that there is some disagreement among instructors concerning the validity of this technique. Some instructors coach that the fingers can remain in the palm until needed. Some coach that the finger should reach just as the other finger is playing -the "walking fingers" approach. And still others teach an active extension done by the extensors in the forearm.