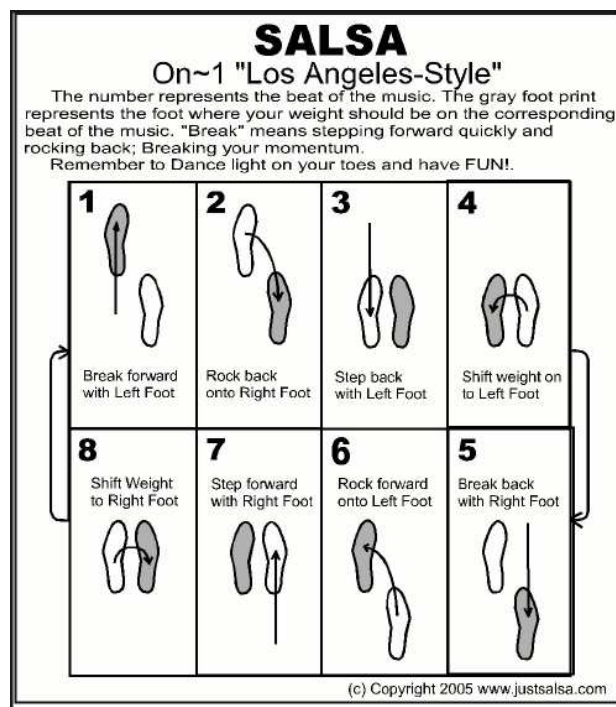


Sequencing and the Myth of Coordination

Epiphanies can come at the strangest of times. A few years back I was enjoying dinner with Larry Wolfe of the Boston Symphony, and he made a casual non sequitur that stopped me dead in my tracks (I don't even think we were talking about bass playing at the time).

“Coordination is an illusion. You put your finger down, then you move the bow.”



Could it really be that simple? Obviously not, I thought, but this offhand remark fired off something in my brain that transformed my understanding of coordination, or at least how I process the semantics of the word “coordination”.

Coordination is usually understood as the process of doing multiple actions simultaneously (e.g. coordinating the bow with the left hand), but I think this definition is better reserved for instrumental activities that involve movements that are complete processes on their own. For example, coordinating left and right hands on piano or drum set is very different from a string instrument since each hand is complete in its own actions and does not require the other hand in order to function (as opposed to the requirements of the music itself).

This way of understanding coordination has more in common with program coding than with treating your body parts as if they were some sort of biological ensemble that needs to play “together”. It allows you to visualize the order of actions in a progressive sequence similar to the dance step pictured above. There is infinite variety in the actual timing and order of the sequence, but start with the conscious awareness of always having the left hand down before moving the bow.

An example of an exercise to work on this might be to take a passage that has a consistent string of notes (e.g. Mozart 35, 4th movement), and deliberately anticipate each new note by half of its rhythmic value.





“Dotted” rhythms are frequently used to facilitate bringing a passage up to performance tempo. In those instances the bow changes and note changes would still be consistent with the original passage regardless of the practice rhythm that is used. This application of sequencing is designed specifically to address issues of timing.

Sequencing can be broadened to incorporate more nuanced and advanced concepts depending on the level of the player. A beginner might think something along the lines of “L-R-L...” etc. A more advanced player would be aware of the various stages of movement. For example, accounting for preparation and follow through in both hands as part of the order of operations. Scott Dixon of the Cleveland Orchestra has a fabulous way of visualizing this 3-part sequencing. He describes the left hand as being an awkward party guest that arrives early and stays late.



“Oh. You said LEFT hand.”

The expressive potential of sequencing opens up a whole array of musical possibilities, and we will explore this in the context of shifting in a future Fractal Friday article.



Fractal Bassist



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If you have any questions, comments, ideas you'd like explored, or inspiration you'd like to share please email: davidallenmoore@fractalbassist.com.

With Love,

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