Patterns are culled from Irish, Scots, French-Canadian, Appalachian Old-Time styles. Establish good bowing rhythms first in any style, then add left-hand ornaments, which must fit over the bowings. You right hand is your groove!

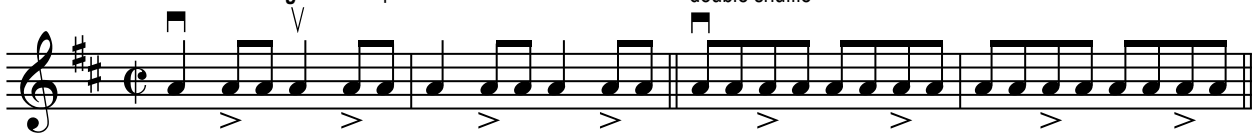
Rhythm bowing sampler

edited from Donna Hébert's "Fiddling Demystified for Strings"

reels

Appalachian Old-Time

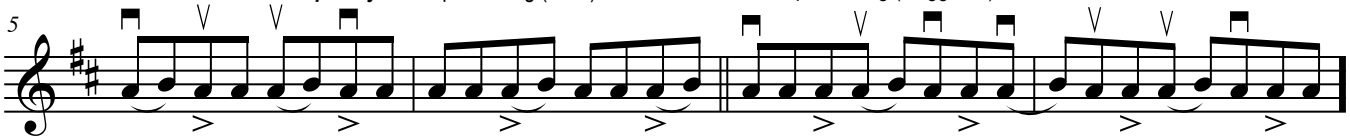
The fundamental bowing lick: simple shuffle



Note the strong offbeat accent. This will hold true for all reels in all styles. It creates a danceable groove.

The next level of complexity: 2+2 split bowing (even)

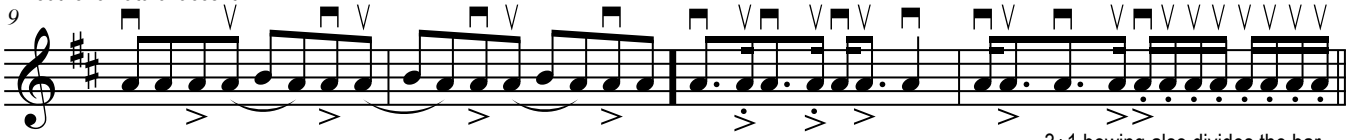
2+2 split bowing (staggered)



3+1 syncopated bowing: variously named the Georgia, Tennessee and Shetland shuffle, this is found everywhere. Note how it pops the offbeat out for a natural accent.

Scots snap - driven upbow accents - played down-up

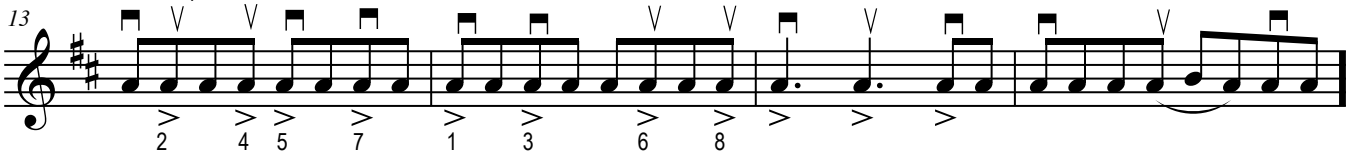
Note spiccato bowing at the end



French-Canadian syncopation
driven-upbow accents

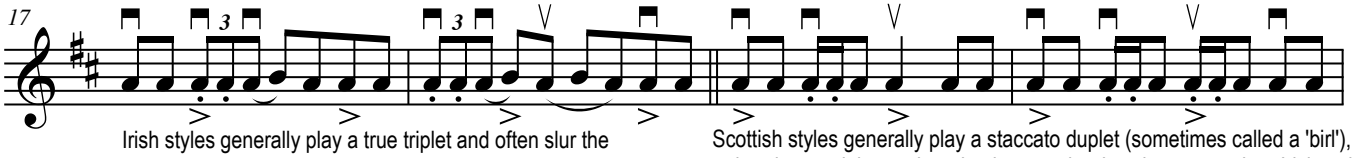
syncopated accents divide bar in uneven thirds:
1 2 **1** 2 3 **1** 2 3 **1**23 **1**23 **1** 2

3+1 bowing also divides the bar unevenly, but in a more subtle way:
1 2 3 **1** 2 3 **1** 2



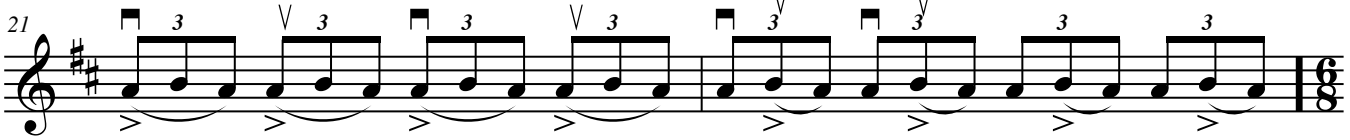
accents can start on 1 or 2 depending on melodic movement

Triplets



Irish styles generally play a true triplet and often slur the last triplet note into the next note or phrase.

Scottish styles generally play a staccato duplet (sometimes called a 'birl'), rather than a triplet, and tend to lean on the downbeat more than Irish styles.



French-Canadian styles slur the triplets or split them for a characteristically Québecois percussive sound. Accent first note of slur.

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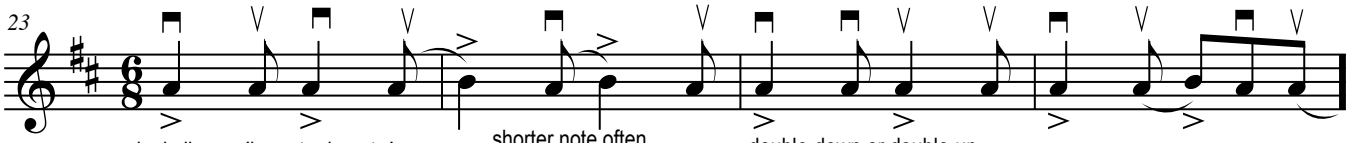
jigs

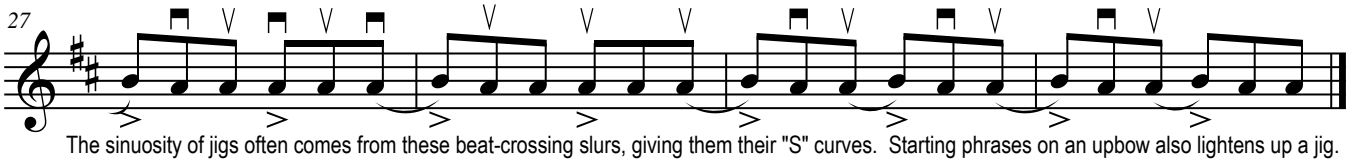
6/8, 9/8 and 12/8s often use the same bowing patterns. Jigs have Irish, Scots, English and French-Canadian roots. Unlike reels, the accent is on the downbeat, so be wary of a heavy arm. Use bow speed rather than weight for your accents.



single jigs go 'humpty-dumpty,'
while doubles go 'rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat'

shorter note often slurs into longer one

double-down or double-up bows can help keep a jig light



The sinuosity of jigs often comes from these beat-crossing slurs, giving them their "S" curves. Starting phrases on an upbow also lightens up a jig.

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