

Insights: Hollywood Strings Keyswitch Finger Positions

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / March 13, 2012

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[Hollywood Strings](#) Keyswitch Finger Positions feature offers composers something not available with any other library: the unique coloristic writing opportunity of actually playing full lines across positions 1-4 on the string instruments, or to select smaller areas to perform on a single string. The secret to maximizing this feature is in using Alexander Publishing's [String Positions Booklet](#).

Chart From The Hollywood Strings Manual

In the screen capture below you see all the pitches available in FP.

The image shows a musical notation chart with four staves, labeled FP 1, FP 2, FP 3, and FP 4. Above the staves, the instruments are labeled: Violins, String 1, String 2, String 3, and String 4. Each staff contains a sequence of notes, with some notes marked with a 'g' and a Roman numeral (I, II, III, IV) indicating finger positions. The notes are arranged in a way that shows the progression of pitches across the four strings and finger positions.

A few insights for those used to working with live strings. EastWest has labeled the lowest sounding string as String 1 and the highest sounding string as String 4. With live players, the highest string is always Roman Numeral I and the lowest is Roman Numeral IV.

That which are labeled with FP are, with live players, hand positions because the hand has to move down (or up) to play the pitches available within each position. Unless specifically marked by the composer, the string player does not slide their fingers from one note to the next. Rather, each finger is placed per pitch.

The First Position

Compare the pitches in the first position to those in the EastWest graphic.



Starting with A below middle C, these are the only pitches available in First Position. The two pitches shown before the double line are in the open position.

Notice that B above the treble clef is the highest pitch in First Position.

Looking back at the EastWest graphic, you see pitches well above the B. So what's up with that! Very simply, to give you the complete range of the violin, EastWest has added the additional pitches.

Fourth Position

The Fourth Position operates in a similar manner.



The lowest pitch is a C# and the highest is E above the treble clef. To provide the full range of here, the violin, pitches were added.

Application

Play the full range of the instrument after pressing each keyswitch and you'll hear that each position is a different sounding color.

Staying with our violin example, it's very common in coloristic orchestration to write Sul G, Sul D, etc. This means that all the pitches are played on that string which yields a greater intensity. The typical range is an octave starting with the open string and the hand moving closer to the bridge. To take advantage of Sul G, for example, you need Positions 1-4 which you have with Hollywood Strings. Using the *Strings Position Booklet* (which also shows the fretboard and a keyboard with the pitches available in each position) you can quickly work out which pitches are available in which position.

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