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**Integrating technique and interpretation in
high-level violin playing and teaching: an
intercultural exploration**

Jia ZHANG

Thesis submitted in partial completion of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Music

Guildhall School of Music and Drama
City University
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Abstract

This study seeks to develop a greater understanding of approaches to integrating technique and interpretation at the highest level of violin playing in the classical tradition, by reflecting on my professional practice as a violinist and violin teacher in the broader context of violin pedagogy both in China and in the West. It comprises three components: a thesis, a video-recorded final recital of works by Debussy, Strauss and Wieniawski, and video recordings of repertoire by Bach, Schubert, Brahms, Ernst and Milstein.

The motivating factor behind this study is that the separation of technique and interpretation is seen as a common approach in many teaching environments, particularly in the context of violin training in China where the focus is put on technical perfection. This pedagogical approach has had significant results in training young people; however, evidence suggests that the lack of connection between the development of musicality and technical training inherent in this exclusively technique-driven approach to violin pedagogy may have a built-in limit to what can be achieved. Therefore, my project aims to investigate ways to develop high-level instrumental technique alongside individual musical development to establish the foundations for a deep engagement with style and interpretation, and to develop a more integrated approach for students.

The investigation is conducted through a variety of approaches. My practice-led research examines the technical and interpretive issues involved in preparing specific repertoire for performance, prioritising techniques of expressivity such as tone quality, tone colour, choices of bowings and fingerings, breathing and vibrato; conducting interviews/observations and taking lessons with a group of world-renowned violin professors; and documenting my reflections on the lessons and my own practice sessions.

My research confirms that adopting a more integrated approach to technique and expression results in a richer and wider range of interpretive possibilities. The findings also provide a new perspective on fundamental questions surrounding the balance between technical and musical issues in a later stage of musical development. The purpose of developing this approach is to seek a rich qualitative understanding from which to extrapolate broader principles and approaches that could then inform high-level violin teaching in China and assist students in their further development.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Rationale

Technique and interpretation in violin playing are essential components of performance at the highest levels. Interpretation is defined in the *New Grove Dictionary* as ‘the rendering of a musical composition, according to the interpreter’s conception of the author’s idea’ (Davies and Sadie, 2001: 497), and technique, as Ivan Galamian states, is the tool to serve ‘artistic interpretation’ (Galamian, 1962: 6). Pedagogues and writers of pedagogical materials acknowledge the importance of both technical expertise and musical interpretation (Auer, 1921; Flesch, 1923; Galamian, 1962). However, several pieces of evidence suggest that technique and interpretation can easily become separated, as, for example, in violin treatises that were written by pedagogues in the twentieth century, such as Carl Flesch, Galamian, etc. More often than not, a pedagogue, either in a teaching situation or writing about teaching, will separate out technique from interpretation (Yampolsky, 1967; Gerle, 1983; Fischer, 2004; Yang, 2005; Ricci, 2007; Zhang, 2009; Ding, 2012). This is perhaps because almost every violin tutor agrees that violinists cannot express themselves properly on the violin without technical competence (Auer, 1921; Flesch, 1923; Galamian, 1962; Yang, 2005; Ricci, 2007). It seems more efficient and scientific to consider one aspect at a time, for instance building technical facility at the outset. This separation is evident in some of the established traditions of violin teaching, such as the Soviet School – one of the most important twentieth-century violin traditions, where basic technical training needs to be completed in preparatory music schools, and polishing starts at senior colleges (Schwarz, 1983: 456). Current studies (Masin, 2012) also consider the two elements separately and place great importance on technical issues.

Little systematic research into these issues within high-level violin teaching has been undertaken, however, and there is interesting anecdotal evidence of the potentially negative results of separating out technique and expressiveness. For instance, the jury members of the Queen Elisabeth Competition criticised the Soviet prizewinners, whose ‘technique had taken the place of spirituality, which made no difference between playing a Mozart concerto and a Kreutzer study’ (Schwarz, 1983: 457). As well as there being a clear difference between the function of a study and the artistic aims of a concerto, there is here an unspoken implication that Mozart is of higher musical value than Kreutzer. While both may be studied from a purely technical point of view – as indeed can any repertoire – there is a dimension to Mozart’s concerto that is missing from Kreutzer’s studies that may be described as ‘spiritual’. This suggests that Mozart is capable of creating more than just admiration

for the performer's technique in a listener, and perhaps even more than an emotional or intellectual response. This may be expressed as something closer to the numinous, or the mystical, or the transcendental – a heightened response; in other words, one that is out of the ordinary or beyond the everyday. Kawabata (2018) states that in the current classical music culture, the value of the emotional and expressive aspects of performance has been neglected because the pressure to achieve technical perfection is at the expense of musical expression:

‘what has been sacrificed is arguably the potential of performing styles to evolve or even change and the potential of participants in this culture to do the same... In our present-day classical music culture, professional musicians are supposed to play the right notes, to give “note-perfect” performances resembling remastered studio recordings’ (Kawabata, 2018).

In the context of violin teaching in China, this happens to an extreme degree, where there is intense separation of technical development from musicianship. Chinese violin pedagogy is focused on technical perfection and efficiency, and relies on a certain type of pedagogical approach – having adopted established Russian training methods. From the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China had close political and social ties with Soviet Russia, and music education in China was also deeply influenced by the Russian system (Qian, 2001). This particular pedagogical approach has shown significant results in training young violinists, especially for students under the age of twenty. Both Yang (2009) and Wagner (2015) indicate that the general standard of violin playing in China has improved tremendously in recent years and that many young violinists have gained recognition in the international competitions: ‘Asian musicians are very successful in international competitions, and are appearing as soloists in prestigious concert halls’ (Yang, 2009). In particular, the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, as Kahn and Waking (2007) report, has become part of ‘China's huge export machine churning out musical virtuosos’. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that students' progress often slows down after achieving a certain level of playing or reaching a certain age. According to violin virtuoso Nigel Kennedy, this is due to the fact that violin pedagogy puts too much focus on technique. Kennedy accuses music college teachers of producing a ‘factory line’ of violinists: ‘in being made to focus too heavily on technique and the pursuit of perfection, gifted musicians have become so terrified of playing a wrong note that individuality is being stifled’ (Alberge, 2016). Similarly, Flesch stresses that up to a certain level, excessive mechanical practice would cause harm to imagination, suggesting that progress would grind to a halt because of this repetitive action (Flesch, 1930: 136). Again, this implies the need to balance technique and musical expression in performance. The downside of this training approach seems that those students, technically proficient as they may be, often have a technique that far outstrips their expressive capabilities and find it challenging to balance technique and musical expression in performance.

It is worth attempting to explain the relation between the terms mechanics, technique, expression and interpretation of violin playing more closely. If the mechanics of violin playing is defined as the training of the body – in particular the muscles of the hands and the fingers – to perform a range of actions that will be used to play the instrument, then technique is the application of those actions to playing the instrument itself, an infinite refinement of those actions. The term ‘expression’ is ‘applied to those elements of a musical performance that depend on personal response and that vary between different interpretations’ (Baker et al., 2001: 463); further, interpretation is a unique relationship between the music and the performer, which is in turn dependent on the technical ability of the player and their expressive imagination. For some players, technical weakness may be the limiting factor in their interpretations; for others, they may not be able to find effective expressive means to convey their musical thoughts. In this regard, violinists at the highest levels must integrate technical mastery with interpretation and expression in performance.

In order better to understand the violin training situation in China’s leading conservatories, it is helpful to look into sociologist Wagner’s (2015) observations on the journey of young violinists who are training for a career as international soloists, the ‘soloist education’,¹ as there are similarities in the general teaching approach as well as the training environment. Wagner’s observations took place in France, Germany and Poland. Her Eastern European origin gave her a particular access to ‘a mainly Russian network of violin teachers’, and their students who were ‘seriously engaged in the soloist education were usually from Eastern Europe’ (Wagner, 2015: 5-6). The study, taken from the point of view of a music teacher and parent of a young violinist, reveals that the world of the violin soloist is complex and often cruel, and addresses various factors such as high-pressured competitions and complex social networks. According to Wagner, in 1999, two-thirds of students in Dorothy DeLay’s studio were from Japan, South Korea and China, and the majority of Juilliard students, violinists and pianists in particular, are from the Far East, most of whom want to make a solo career. This phenomenon can be found in China’s leading music conservatories, the Central Conservatory and the Shanghai Conservatory, in which many young students set the goal of becoming soloists. In reality however, only very few individuals complete the soloist education, and those who do become professional soloists at international levels are exceptions (Wagner, 2015: 3).

Compared with regular conservatory courses, the environment of the soloist education is extremely competitive. The training process is similar to the training of elite athletes – ‘the race for privileged

¹ Wagner considers the soloist education as a ‘career path’ that ‘the individual must go through to achieve a professional position’ (Wagner, 2015: 4).

positions starts at the earliest stages of education' (Wagner, 2016: 197). For example, children, by the age of six or seven, are already devoted to intense training, practising several hours per day (p. 198). One year's training activities for young soloists usually includes participating in at least one international competition, attending masterclasses and music festivals, and giving a number of concerts or recitals (Wagner, 2015: 4). Participating in competitions is a key element of the soloist education that distinguishes itself from normal instrumental courses (p. 148). Based on Wagner's observations, there is a tendency in current violin competitions that all competitors prioritise technical perfection in order to maximise their chances of becoming prizewinners:

'It is difficult in a competition. It is not always the art that is compensated, because tastes vary. Someone who plays perfectly – whom we cannot distinguish from the others – is perfect. He/she gets first place... Perfection is foremost [for] technical perfection' (p. 182).

This tendency is not restricted to competitions. For example, as many young Chinese violinists aim to succeed in competitions, the culture of technical correctness in violin playing and teaching also pervades China's leading music conservatories. There are musically talented and technically advanced young violinists in China, as young as nine or ten years of age, who are able to perform music at very high levels of technical ability and proficiency. As a juror member of the violin entrance auditions at the Central Conservatory of Music, I have heard many talented young violinists who master the Tchaikovsky Concerto or Paganini Caprices at the age of nine or ten, and are often more advanced than senior college candidates. Some of these students win international competitions at a young age, including the Menuhin International Competition and the Lublin Wieniawski Competition for young violinists (aged under twenty-two in both cases). Statistics show that among the most prestigious international violin competitions, China has produced twenty-seven prizewinners in the Menuhin Competition (six students studying abroad). By contrast, only five prizewinners in the senior Tchaikovsky Competition (three studying abroad) and three prizewinners in the Queen Elisabeth Competition (two studying abroad) were from China. This illustrates that while Chinese violinists have positive results in winning major competitions for young violinists (aged under twenty-two), it appears to be more difficult for Chinese students to succeed in senior competitions such as the Tchaikovsky Competition (for those aged under thirty-two). These statistics are echoed in Kennedy's perception that 'Quite often I hear [musicians] sound amazing when they're teenagers and then they're coming out playing on a less original level when they're 21' (Alberge, 2016). This resonates in the context of violin playing in China where many promising young students struggle to make progress after reaching a certain level, as, for instance, they are no longer able to succeed in senior competitions, e.g. the Indianapolis, Wieniawski, Montreal, Tchaikovsky and Queen Elisabeth competitions, or win auditions for concert engagements. More often than not, these soloist-students

as Wagner (2015) identifies, become violin teachers or orchestral players, and occasionally, they are offered to perform a solo concert.

Moreover, several studies highlight an imbalance between technical and musical development in instrumental teaching in China. For instance, Reimer (1989) points to the idea that the general teaching of music in China considers music-making as an outcome of skills that are essentially physical; however, this skill-based approach to music teaching and learning places little importance on the development of students' aesthetic insights and individual imagination that is fundamental in Western concepts of music education (p. 70). In addition, Huang and Thibodeaux (2016) report that Chinese instrumental teachers usually disregard composers' historical backgrounds, styles and associated issues of historically informed performance practice in teaching; and as a result, most Chinese students, as Zhang (2016) indicates, display high levels of technical showmanship but the level of musicality is relatively low (p. 114). These studies suggest that the Chinese pedagogical approach often isolates the practical from the intellectual; while the training is systematic and disciplined, it does not relate to musical knowledge outside the immediate performance sphere (Petersen, 2017: 239). On the other hand, Masin (2012) argues that the use of a technique-driven approach is not confined to Chinese violin pedagogy, as, for instance, the Suzuki method has also become technically oriented (Akutsu, 2019). Rather, the technical focus for violinists is a worldwide issue that 'largely because of China's historical and cultural position, is especially evident there' (Masin, 2012: 13).

One possible explanation may be related to Chinese cultural contexts, where the motivation for music learning is not influenced by intrinsic motivation, such as love of music for itself, seeing it as a leisure activity, or educational/social value to feed into other subjects (transferable skills); rather, learning music in China is mainly driven by external factors, such as entering a university and making a living, due to the competitive environment (Wang and Cui, 2004; Zhang, 2016). This is reflected in violin playing and learning, where winning a competition, getting a teaching job in a conservatory or making a solo career is of primary importance (Wang and Cui, 2004; Comeau et al., 2014; Zhang, 2016; Huang and Thibodeaux, 2016; Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks, 2017). Given that the emphasis in current violin playing is put on technical accuracy due to the increase in the importance of competitions (Wen, 1992), it appears more important and practical to achieve technical mastery first, for instance by possessing fast fingers and impeccable intonation. Another reason could be that interpretation is harder to codify than technique in teaching, where there is no exclusively 'correct' interpretation in performance (Davies and Sadie, 2001). This implies that interpretation contains a strong subjective element, which as Galamian explains is influenced by taste, style and fashion (Galamian, 1962: 4),

while according to Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks (2017) the Chinese teaching/learning tradition relies on giving and receiving definite answers. This might explain why Chinese violin teachers pay more attention to building physical skills than considering interpretation.

In this context, as a Chinese violinist and tutor in China's leading conservatory, it therefore seems necessary for me to look into possibilities for guiding students more effectively in their further development. I plan to investigate ways to develop a more integrated balance between the technical and musical elements of violin playing, in a way that would also fit into the overall cultural aims of Chinese society: achieving the highest professional standards of playing, and adequately equipping those violin students who aim to be professional soloists.

My own experience

Wagner's (2015) study illustrates the exhausting process of the soloist education, where young violinists start to receive rigorous training from early childhood, taking at least eighteen years to complete. The training environment of an aspiring soloist resonates strongly with my own learning and teaching journey in China. I started to learn the violin at the age of four. Like many children in China, it was my parents' decision that I should learn a musical instrument and they chose the violin for me. My parents only wanted me to take the violin as a hobby in the beginning of my learning process, but their principle is that anything I learn needs to be studied properly and up to a certain level and standard. From the age of six, I practised for three to four hours a day after school, increasing those hours of practice in the holidays. My parents attended all my lessons, taking notes, and they observed my practice sessions and corrected things that my teacher had pointed out in the lessons. My daily practice was well structured, starting with open strings and following up with an hour on finger exercises, an hour on scales, an hour on studies, and finally an hour playing pieces. After almost four years of hard work, I received the third prize in the national violin competition at the age of eight, and my teacher suggested that I should consider auditioning for the Junior College of the Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM) – the most competitive music school in China. It took me nine months to prepare my audition programme and my practice time increased to six hours a day. This was a painful experience for me as I had to practise the same pieces repeatedly for a long period, which was especially difficult and monotonous at such a young age.

My training at the junior college of the CCOM was very systematic and disciplined, with left-hand precision, purity of intonation and neatness of execution being my main tasks. My teachers believed that technical mastery is the fundamental basis of violin playing. In order to overcome these technical

issues, I used to spend three or four hours a day practising scales and exercises, and all pieces needed to be practised with clinical attention to detail. My tutor at the CCOM, who is regarded as one of the most esteemed and strict professors, was very demanding. I was often greeted with anger and sarcasm whenever I failed to achieve the expected standards and results. For example, he used to finish the lesson after five minutes if he heard three intonation flaws; some other times he would spend the whole lesson correcting my intonation on a few bars of music.

I managed to build a solid foundation after years of strict training; however, I faced a number of challenges when I first came to study in the UK as an undergraduate at the age of eighteen. For instance, I was struggling to grasp stylistic aspects, and was losing control when playing with musical involvement. In addition, the repertoire that I learned in China was rather limited. Besides studies, caprices, virtuosic pieces and concertos, I had hardly touched any of the recital pieces by composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev – works which are considered as essential violin repertoire in countries outside China. Thus, on arrival in the UK I spent much more time working on sonatas than concertos or caprices, and my focus was shifted to foster a broader understanding of music and to develop my perception of interpretive technique such as tone quality and tone colours, different types of vibrato and stylistic issues.

Now that I am teaching at the CCOM, I have noticed that Chinese violin pedagogy continues its training tradition, where Chinese violin tutors find ways in pedagogical methods to solve technical problems efficiently, and consequently many Chinese students in music institutes possess a highly developed left-hand technique. On the other hand, from my own teaching experience, most students neglect the connection between the mechanical and the expressive and as a result, their technique often fails to serve musical purposes. I believe this is the main reason why many Chinese students fail to progress after reaching a certain level, and also might explain why many fail to get through to the final round of senior international competitions, in which violinists must display their advanced technical abilities along with musicality at the highest level. In addition, it is important to note that despite having spent a decade in the UK from the age of eighteen, my earlier formative experiences were so ingrained that the idea of letting go of the ‘technique first’ approach is not one that I can easily discard, especially now I am teaching in an environment where ‘technique first’ is still the general rule, and there may be suspicion of a different approach. In particular, one may believe one thing intellectually but be unable fully to accept it psychologically, which takes much time and effort to unpack. In this context, I intended to investigate ways to develop a more integrated balance between technical and musical elements of violin playing that could then be applied to learning different styles of repertoire and to assisting students in China.

Research aims

My practice-led study seeks to develop a clearer understanding of ways to integrate the most effective pedagogical practices of technique and interpretation in order to attain the highest standards of violin playing in the Western classical tradition. Through my research, by investigating an integrated approach to playing and teaching, I am aiming to develop a framework for the integration of both mechanical and expressive techniques toward musical interpretation. My study deals specifically with the content of violin pedagogy – that is, acquiring knowledge of violin-playing skills at the highest levels, which is distinct from studies that tend to be interdisciplinary, for instance the psychological study of instrumental teaching from the perspectives of teacher-student behaviour, teaching and practising strategies (Gholson, 1998; Duke and Simons, 2006; Maynard, 2006; Creech and Hallam, 2010; Upitis et al., 2017; Roesler, 2017; Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks, 2017). My methodology includes focusing on a set of repertoire which incorporates varied styles and techniques of both mechanics and expressivity; observing masterclasses, taking lessons and conducting interviews with a group of world-renowned violin professors; and documenting my reflections on the lessons and my own practice sessions. It is not my intention to invent a new violin teaching method, but I hope that the results of this study may act as a bridge between mechanical training and the development of musicality that could be applied to learning varied styles of violin repertoire, and to nurturing students in their further development.

I have also included self-reflective studies that aim to clarify my own approach to integrating technique and musical ideas in the interpretation of my selected repertoire and provide a model for the integration of pedagogical practice referred to above. By connecting techniques of expressivity specific to violin playing, such as tone quality, bowings, fingerings and vibrato, with general aspects, such as phrasing and relevant performance practices, my intention is to discover specific ways to link the development of musicality and technical training. This will inform my own performance and teaching. I hope that it will also contribute to current and future studies of violin playing and teaching at the highest levels, and will benefit other practitioners in the field.

Research questions – the following questions will be discussed throughout my research.

As many promising Chinese students do not manage to develop beyond a certain level of technical expertise, and fail to fulfill their early promise, music educators in leading Chinese conservatories need to consider a number of questions:

In what ways can high-level instrumental technique be developed alongside individual artistic and professional development to establish the foundations for a deep engagement with style and interpretation?

- a. Can musicality be fully developed within a technique-led learning process?
- b. Is there a built-in limit to what can be achieved using an exclusively technique-driven approach to violin pedagogy?
- c. How far can technique and style/interpretation be taught separately?
- d. In what ways might it be possible to develop a more integrated violin-teaching approach for students?

Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. In **Chapter 1**, I provide an overview of the study that consists of a rationale, my personal background, the research aims and objectives, and the research question that prompted and shaped this study. **Chapter 2** offers a detailed analysis of the context and background to the study, where I use Illeris' learning theory to analyse China's violin learning/teaching culture. **Chapter 3** is a review of related literature on the topic, discussing key historical treatises as well as anecdotal accounts and transcripts of masterclasses that confirm or challenge the separation of technique and interpretation. **Chapter 4** outlines the methods I chose for the study, integrating self-reflective practice based on the selected repertoire with the observation of masterclasses/lessons and interviews with the research participants, as well as using a thematic analysis to interpret data. This chapter also includes a section on ethics. **Chapter 5** is my interview and observation analysis, in which I include a description of the teaching methods used by the research participants. **Chapter 6** discusses how I personally perceive these research participants' teaching approaches as a teacher and a performer. **Chapter 7** offers detailed information about my learning journey in relation to the research aims, and discusses how I use these observations and interviews in my own performance preparation. Through my research reflections, this chapter provides an analysis of approaches to practising and learning a set of canonical violin works in preparing my recordings and doctoral recital. **Chapter 8** engages in a discussion of the insights and knowledge gained from interviews and observations, as well as my progress as a performer. **Chapter 9** reverts to the issues introduced at the outset, discusses some of them in the light of my research findings, notes various limitations and makes suggestions regarding further study. My submission also includes video recordings of the works listed in Appendix II.

Chapter 2

Background to the learning culture and violin teaching in China

In trying to explain China's violin learning/teaching culture in which I grew up, I find it useful to turn to learning theory, allowing me to analyse a situation that is very familiar to me with an outside eye. Illeris' learning theory has resonance² with my work because of its broad scope, dealing with both internal and external learning processes. Illeris argues that learning is three-dimensional: the content dimension, covering knowledge, understanding and skill; the incentive dimension, covering motivation, emotion and volition; and the interaction dimension, covering action, communication and cooperation (Illeris, 2007: 25-27). He also integrates the three dimensions into one whole:

‘As to the process of learning, I see it as an entity which unites a cognitive, an emotional and a social dimension into one whole. It combines a direct or mediated interaction between the individual and its material and social environment with an internal psychological process of acquisition. Thus, learning always includes both an individual and a social element, the latter always reflecting current societal conditions, so that the learning result has the character of an individual phenomenon which is always socially and societally marked.’ (Illeris, 2007: 253)

My study concentrates on the content dimension, but it is extremely important to understand the interplay between the three dimensions because the interaction (environment) and incentive (motivation) dimensions affect and determine the nature of the content dimension (in this case, Chinese violin pedagogy) that takes place. Therefore, I shall use Illeris' framework for understanding learning in order to analyse the unique characteristics of the general approaches to learning in China and, more specifically, violin pedagogy in Chinese music conservatories: a) the interaction dimension – the overall learning culture in China; b) the incentive dimension – motivation; and c) the content dimension – the Chinese violin pedagogical approach.

Based on my experience, there are three important reasons for the improvement in the performance standards of Chinese violinists so quickly in the last decades: the competitive environment – the interaction dimension, consistent application – the incentive dimension, and systematic training methods – the content dimension.

² Robin Nelson (2013) argues in his book on *Practice as Research in the Arts* that it is enough for a theory to ‘have resonance’ (p. 78) – it does not have to have a mathematical logic to it, because that is not the nature of artistic work (p. 157).

The teaching and learning environment in China

This section sets the focus on the teaching/learning environment in China and the interaction between individuals and their environment. Illeris points out that social and societal conditions influence the nature of learning that takes place, and that learning also reflects social and societal conditions (Illeris, 2007: 96-123). The general learning environment in China determines the nature and the possibilities of learning. For example, different Chinese universities have different requirements regarding the instruments that students should play; some cater only for Western musical instruments, and some only for Chinese instruments. The options available inevitably influence the long-term learning of students (Zhang, 2016: 117).

There have been fundamental changes and reforms in Chinese music education since 1977 (Yeh, 2001: 28).³ The Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing initiated the Standard Grade Examinations in Music in 1993, and the Chinese Musicians' Association has also held graded music exams for amateurs. Thereafter the government encouraged increasing numbers of Chinese children to learn an instrument. The Standard Grade Examinations are closely related to the entrance exams of general schools and universities, where the exams can play a significant part in enhancing a student's application for schools and universities. For instance, students who pass the graded art exam may be awarded additional points to enable them to meet the entrance requirements of middle schools and universities (Zhang, 2016: 117).

As the population of China totals one-fifth of the world's population, it follows that Chinese society is aspirational and extremely competitive, causing intense pressure within the musical environment, especially in music education. Many children strive to reach the top of the profession as solo performers. This pressure is also apparent in the content dimension – the approach to teaching the technique of playing the violin – and the interaction dimension – how learning the violin fits into the overall cultural aims of Chinese society. The learning process in modern Chinese society is focused on a goal-directed form (Illeris, 2007: 59). As every violin student wants to achieve maximum results in the minimum time, efficiency is highly valued in Chinese violin learning/teaching culture, and accordingly, the pedagogical approach prioritises efficiency. This results in using an exclusively technique-driven approach to violin teaching because accomplishment in technique is measurable, whereas musicianship is more subjective.

³ The document on the reform of the educational structure can be seen in the pamphlet on *Music Learning and Development*: 'Education in moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic issues is geared toward the modernisation of socialism and the building of a socialist country with uniquely Chinese characteristics' (Yeh, 2001: 28).

In 1977 and 1978, the two key music institutes in China, the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, began holding entrance auditions again.⁴ Thousands of applicants auditioned for these two conservatories in the years following the recommencement of education after the Cultural Revolution (Yeh, 2001: 33). As the most coveted conservatories, these two institutions have the advantage of having better resources and better government funding than any others in China (Yeh, 2001: 33). Admission to these conservatories is for only the most highly qualified students, and thousands of applicants from all over the country compete for only a few dozen places: ‘conservatories are bulging – nearly 200,000 students try auditions for top conservatories every year’ (Kahn and Waking, 2007). The recruitment process is in three competitive stages: the first two rounds are for principal study, and the third round is for academic study.

The chart below shows the 2018 audition repertoire of four music institutes:

2018 Audition Repertoire			
The Central Conservatory of Music, Primary School (aged nine or ten)	The Juilliard School, Undergraduate level	The Central Conservatory of Music, Undergraduate level	The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Undergraduate level
One scale including all arpeggios and double stops from the Carl Flesch or Galamian scale system	A slow and fast movement from a 19th-, 20th- or 21st-century concerto	One scale including all arpeggios and double stops from the Carl Flesch or Galamian scale system	The first movement from a concerto in the standard repertory with cadenza where appropriate
Two studies, preferably by Paganini and Wieniawski	One Paganini Caprice	One Paganini Caprice	One study by Kreutzer (No. 26 onward) or Rode or Fiorillo, or a more difficult study at the discretion of the candidate

⁴ During the ten-year Cultural Revolution, teachers and students were sent to remote rural areas and education stopped (Ye, 1993: 209).

2018 Audition Repertoire			
First or third movement from a major concerto from the Romantic period onward by composers, e.g. Sibelius, Tchaikovsky	Two contrasting movements from an unaccompanied Bach sonata or partita	The first movement of a sonata by Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, etc	One contrasting piece of the candidate's own choice
One piece of the candidate's own choice (preferably a virtuosic work)	One brilliant concert piece. If the concerto was composed before 1960, this work must be post-1960	First movement or third movement of a concerto from the Romantic period	
		One movement from a Bach sonata or a partita	
		One virtuosic work	

The entrance audition repertoire of the junior college of the Central Conservatory is as demanding as that of Juilliard (with the addition of scales), which matches the requirements of an international competition. This reflects not only the overall level of students that the school is seeking to recruit but also the value placed on the technique of incoming students. With such challenging programmes, students normally spend one to two years in preparation. Great importance is placed on displaying an efficient and secure technique, and students work to high standards of precision. This is due to the competitive environment, in which no one can afford to reveal any technical errors, such as intonation issues, in entrance auditions.

The high standard of violin playing is a function of the competitive environment. Large numbers of applicants competing for fewer than thirty places have made the entrance auditions extremely competitive and consequently the standard of playing has improved enormously. The broader Chinese learning culture values efficiency, and the violin training system in China also prioritises efficiency, concentrating on achieving high standards of precision. Based on the above analysis, learning motivation seems to be mostly driven by factors such as working toward auditions and competitions.

Learning attitudes of students

According to Illeris, the incentive dimension of learning concerns the use of mental energy: the motivation, emotion and volition that drives learning. In the acquisition process of learning there is close interaction between the content and the incentive dimensions, so that the mental energy always influences the content dimension (Illeris, 2007: 26).

Writing from a European perspective, Illeris points out that pressure can cause motivation problems (Illeris, 2007: 93). In contrast, however, Chinese students are often motivated by pressure. In general, competition in learning and teaching, as Matthews (2014) reports, is prevalent across the entire education system in modern Chinese society:

‘One of the most prevalent themes for... parents and teachers is fear of Asia – particularly China, Korea, Japan and Singapore – because of their world-leading test scores... the Chinese – and those other countries above – do better in part because they value schooling more, train their teachers more carefully and are more likely to believe that any children can learn if they work at it... But the experts often don’t mention the mindless, rote, competitive streak in Asian education systems that would horrify us if it were imported here.’

The pressure that makes people undertake highly specialised training (as required for a professional career in music) often comes from the need for survival. Rather than the pursuit of artistic goals, the main purpose of learning music therefore tends to be to secure a better standard of living.

Academic achievement or school success is regarded as Chinese students’ ‘most important pursuit’ (Comeau et al., 2014). For example, students might have no interest in playing the violin, but they need a music certificate to enter a prestigious university (Zhang, 2016: 118). This is because universities have been given more and more power over who they recruit as students, and many schools are willing to admit artistically gifted and accomplished students to help boost their image in music and art events organised by universities (Wang and Cui, 2004). These special skilled students therefore have a better chance of entering prestigious universities, because their artistic skills count as part of their entrance-exam scores.

Comeau et al. (2014) indicate that Chinese students have a strong work ethic and practise for nearly twice as long as North American Caucasians. Both Chinese students and parents value putting effort into learning and believe that musical ability requires hard work rather than inborn talent. Wagner (2015: 122-123) also reports that many renowned violin professors prefer to teach students from Japan, Korea and China because these students are hardworking and afford great respect to their

teachers. Both studies reveal that Chinese students are highly self-motivated and driven, and motivation issues, such as not practising or resistance to learning, do not seem to be a problem for them; naturally, the learning process is productive.

Since 1980, the Chinese have won hundreds of prizes in important international music competitions. Furthermore, there is currently a trend in China where musicians are elevated to the status of role models and even icons. Comeau et al. (2014) note that successful musicians, such as pianist Lang Lang, are highly regarded in China, and they are treated in much the same way as pop stars are treated in North America; therefore, Chinese parents refer to Lang Lang as a role model to motivate their children to play an instrument. These musicians are also highly sought after in the international music market, which provides them with opportunities to work and live elsewhere in the world. In this regard, perhaps the reason that Chinese students choose to learn the piano is because of the incentive provided by identification with successful musicians (Comeau et al., 2014).

The learning attitude of students may be seen as the need for external reward, gaining social approval and/or avoiding failure or a combination of these. According to Susan Hallam, this kind of motivation can be categorised in psychological terms mainly as extrinsic motivation:

‘the task is performed because of the value or importance attached to its outcome, e.g. passing a music examination, getting a place at music college, receiving public adulation. Need for achievement is based on two complementary facets, the motive to achieve success, which enhances the ego, and the motive to avoid failure, which involves the fear of losing face’ (Hallam, 1998: 92).

Chinese students are often driven by the goals of getting into a good conservatory, finding a job and making a living. Some advanced Chinese students are also motivated by the need for achievement, receiving scholarships, winning competitions and getting social recognition. However, the motivation to avoid failure is the most common form in the early stages of learning for the majority of Chinese students. For example, students are told off or threatened with extra practice time whenever they fail to achieve the expected standards and results. Drawing on my own experience working with Chinese violin students, I have noticed that some students start to appreciate music and enjoy practising when they achieve a certain level of playing.⁵ Their motivation thus has switched to intrinsic motivation where ‘students undertake a task because they are interested in the task or activity itself. They learn to play a musical instrument and practise simply because they enjoy it’ (Hallam, 1998: 92).

⁵ To my knowledge, there is no study available on the subject of those who begin to play the violin with extrinsic motivation in China but eventually do it intrinsically.

Although psychological aspects of violin learning and teaching are beyond the scope of this study, it has become clear to me that pressure has a considerable psychological impact on both violin teachers and students in China. Unlike Illeris' link between pressure and motivation, pressure in the Chinese learning/teaching environment affects the content of violin teaching rather than motivation. All learning is carried out under pressure in modern Chinese society. That students are required to work extremely hard to avoid failure or to make a successful career determines the way in which violin teaching is carried out in China.

Chinese violin teaching approaches

The content dimension of learning concerns the quantifiable elements of learning, specific skills and knowledge (Illeris, 2007: 51). The general teaching and learning approach in China (the content) primarily involves explicitly passing information from teacher to student, dealing specifically with facts, with what can be measured. In the context of a one-to-one violin teaching environment in China, the teacher is seen as crucial to a student's success. As Wagner notes, 'the superiority of a virtuoso training site was entirely linked to the teacher in residence' (2015: 23). The overall environment and motivation play a decisive role in forming an exclusively technique-driven approach to violin pedagogy. This approach prioritises the training of mechanical ability, especially of the muscles of the left hand and the fingers, by a system of learning numerous scales, exercises and etudes to perform a range of actions that will be used to play the instrument, which has immediate beneficial effects on students' performing ability – cleaner intonation, greater flexibility and fluency, and better economy of movement. On the other hand, compared with the infinite refinement of those actions discussed above, interpretive aspect of techniques – means to express musical intentions such as tone quality and tone colour – are considered subordinate to the training of mechanics in the general teaching in China. This particular technique-driven approach is reflected in published Chinese violin pedagogical books written by conservatory professors, including *Professor Lin's Teaching Essentials* (2005) by Yang (I will discuss this treatise in the next chapter), Liu's *The New Concept of Violin Playing* (2006), Zhang's *Conversations with Prof. Zhang* (2009) and Ding's *Ding Zhi-Nuo's Violin Teaching Essentials* (2012), all of which go into meticulous detail about the mechanics and physical aspects of violin technique, concentrating on the detailed execution of the movements needed to implement vibrato, finger exercises, shifts and the various bow strokes.

While the teaching approach (content) is deeply influenced by the learning environment and motivation, another reason for putting little emphasis on interpretation in teaching seems to be that the majority of Chinese violin teachers feel little sense of ownership. For example, one of the most

distinguished Chinese violin professors, Lin, acknowledges the limitations of this technique-driven approach but is unable to provide a solution: ‘We do not have the advantages of learning Western music due to a different cultural background. What we can do as teachers is to build a solid technical foundation for students, and then they can develop their musicality when studying in Western countries’ (Ling, 2009). Rather than finding ways to balance the two aspects in teaching, his solution is to encourage students to study abroad for their further development. This suggests that Lin feels less confident in teaching interpretation.

Cultural differences dictate that it is difficult for Chinese musicians to get a sense of the performance conventions of Western classical music. Both Ford (2020) and Yang (2007) indicate that Western classical music emphasises the language of the composer, and the performer is considered as a reproducer of the authorial text rather than the originating producer; in this context, the understanding of the work and its composer in the classical field is seen as an important factor in evaluating a performer. This, however, makes Asian musicians’ participation feel unnatural and more challenging (Ford, 2020; Yang, 2007), because they have to try to integrate themselves into the Western musical tradition and assimilate its deepest meanings, rather than impose their own cultural preconceptions onto the Western musical canon (Yoshihara, 2007). For instance, when starting to learn Western classical music, Chinese people do not have the music in their ears or any kind of cultural background or experience to understand the music. Consequently, as Reimer (1989) reports, Chinese teachers usually use a skill-based approach to violin teaching. This approach is in notable contrast to other kinds of pedagogy used in Western countries, for instance Kodály-derived systems (such as Szilvay’s Colourstrings) which insist on years of ear training using familiar folk songs before starting to learn an instrument at the age of six or seven. Therefore, in order to comprehend and interpret Western music satisfactorily, Chinese violinists require much more time to study composers’ historical backgrounds, stylistic context and historically informed performance practice.

Chinese violin teaching/learning types

This section considers two particular Chinese approaches to violin learning/teaching that have great influence on learning outcomes. Illeris identifies four types of learning; cumulative, assimilative, accommodative and transformative, which ‘lead to learning of different kinds and with different application and transfer potentials’ (Illeris, 2007: 49):

- cumulative learning (also called mechanical learning) is characterised by inflexibility, as mental processes do not necessarily relate to the environment or personal meaning (Illeris, 2007: 38);

- assimilative learning, or additional learning, involves acquiring new knowledge by means of an assimilative extension (Illeris, 2007: 40);
- accommodative learning, or transcendent learning, concerns the whole or partial restructuring of already established mental schemes (Illeris, 2007: 41); and
- transformative learning is something one only becomes engaged in when faced by a situation or challenge exceeding what one can manage on one's existing personal basis, but which one unavoidably must win over in order to get further (Illeris, 2007: 45).

Most Chinese violinists seem to engage in the cumulative and assimilative types of learning. The cumulative type is used for mechanical technical training, such as finger exercises and shift movements; according to Watkins et al. (1991: 21-34), Asian learners rely on this type of teaching, known as 'rote learning'. Assimilative learning is used for general teaching, which is characterised by steady progress. The use of cumulative learning (mechanical learning) in violin training, especially in the early stages, is absolutely necessary, including practising open strings, finger exercises, scales and studies. In particular, this type of learning is very useful when some movements need to be remembered, as for instance, learning to shift from one position to the other, but there is little in cumulative learning in relation to expressivity or artistic considerations. Assimilative learning shows a stable progressive development in which learning is stabilised, constructed and integrated, enabling students to take on an advanced level of the same subject, from practising the Kreutzer studies to the Paganini Caprices, from playing single-note scales to double-stopping scales, etc. Illeris states that all learning is built up assimilatively and teaching is arranged with a specific syllabus, but the disadvantage of this type of learning is the inability to integrate learning into a practical context (Illeris, 2007: 40). For example, as Illeris reports (p. 40), students do not automatically apply their mathematical knowledge to physics.

This situation is often seen in violin learning/teaching in China. In terms of musical style, students often find it difficult to make any connections between what they have learned in music history or theory and its practical application in violin playing. The reason seems to be that music history or theory cannot teach the affective side of performance. For example, knowing the date of birth and death of Brahms does not tell one how to perform a Brahms violin sonata. It could be seen that there is a difference between 'knowing what' and 'knowing how'. In this context, the academic, theoretical and abstract sides of musical education fail to connect with the technical, practical aspects of learning an instrument. This is perhaps why Huang and Thibodeaux report that Chinese students lack even a

basic knowledge of Western repertoire and the range of possible performance practices (Huang and Thibodeaux, 2016: 29).

To sum up, the violin teaching situation in China is very much based on the concept of goal-directed learning, and therefore Chinese violinists mainly make use of cumulative and assimilative types of learning. The traditional content dimension of learning regarding knowledge and skills has been the main focus, and in the incentive dimension internal energy is mainly driven by societal pressure. This particular approach to teaching has given many Chinese students the benefit of solid technical foundations and has raised the standard of individual playing to a very high level of technical ability and proficiency. However, this does not seem enough for Chinese students to sustain their playing at the highest level as performers because there is an imbalance between technical and musical development in teaching/learning, which suggests that some aspects of violin teaching, such as developing expressivity and ranges of performance practices, can be enhanced. Based on the above analysis, violinists who are trained in China's leading conservatories have no tolerance for technical flaws and have very sharp ears to pick up tuning and rhythmical issues; on the other hand, these Chinese violinists who perform at very high levels of technical ability often seem unable to identify the nuances of musical colours. This suggests that besides mechanical technique, Chinese violin teachers and students should also concentrate in parallel upon expressivity, i.e. tone quality, tone colour, dynamic ranges, fingerings, bowings, portamento and vibrato. Moreover, it seems to me that there is an inherent link that is emerging between expressivity and intrinsic motivation. For instance, if students were better equipped with expressive tools, they would gain more ability to be in touch with the purpose of music; and consequently, rather than being driven by external factors such as competition or social recognition, they would have better motivation from an internal place to develop further their performance skills and musicality. Therefore, it is important to consider how to combine these two aspects into violin teaching, with the aim of achieving the highest international standards of violin playing.

Chapter 3

Literature review

Research into high-level violin teaching and playing is a relatively neglected field and there are only a few studies on the subject, by Masin (2012), Knapik (2014) and Wagner (2015); in particular, no prior studies have examined approaches to connecting the technical with the expressive in high-level violin playing and teaching. There are, however, a handful of interdisciplinary studies that investigate instrumental teaching in higher education from the perspective of music psychology, such as teacher–student behaviour, instructional methods and practising strategies (Gholson, 1998; Duke and Simons, 2006; Maynard, 2006; Creech and Hallam, 2010; Upitis et al., 2017; Roesler, 2017; Mio, 2017; Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks, 2017; Petersen, 2017). Another recent study, conducted by Wagner (2015), offers specific social and psychological insights about the process that talented young violinists take in order to achieve their goal of becoming soloists, revealing the path of a soloist’s education.

However, none of these studies investigates the actual content of violin pedagogy. Several studies acknowledge a gap between research and practice, where there is usually a lapse in communication between researchers and practitioners (McIntyre, 2005; Mallonee et al., 2006; Vanderlinde and Braak, 2009). For this reason research articles that consider music psychology and sociology tend not to be read by violin performers and teachers as these articles usually come from particular angles that violinists find too generalised – perhaps too challenging. This is reflected in various pedagogical sources (Auer, 1921; Flesch, 1923 and 1930; Galamian, 1962; Yampolsky, 1967; Szigeti, 1969; Gerle, 1983; Menuhin, 1971 and 1986; Fischer, 2004; Yang, 2005; Ricci, 1988 and 2007; Ding, 2012), where pedagogues and performers always focus on the content of violin playing/teaching, dealing particularly with performance skills.

In addition to research articles, there are a number of important texts that do consider pedagogical approaches to various performance issues at the most advanced levels of violin playing, which are written by world-renowned violin pedagogues and violinists in the twentieth century, including Leopold Auer, Carl Flesch, Yehudi Menuhin and Galamian. Although these pedagogical treatises are generally understood to be manuals of violin playing and teaching approaches (Knapik, 2014: 190), there is a strong oral tradition present in violin pedagogy, where violin teachers and performers value the practical teaching of the violin over using these pedagogical texts as a reference to continue the tradition of violin playing and teaching. For example, many of today’s finest violinists, as Masin

(2012: 77-80) notes, have not written about their approach; more specifically, contemporary renowned teachers such as Shmuel Ashkenasi, Zakhar Bron, Ana Chumachenco, Boris Kuschner and Igor Ozim, have not published treatises concerning their methods so far. According to Galamian (1962), this is due to the fact that no printed teaching method can replace a live teacher–student relationship, because ‘the very best that a teacher can give to a student is the individualised, unique approach’ (foreword). Furthermore, the contents of these violin tutor books, as Knapik (2014) states, especially those written by Auer and Flesch, lack practicality and clarity, and the approach of these texts is not explorative: ‘early twentieth-century writers overtly promote the delivering of self as more important than merely physical execution... their content and approach overlap in many regards with the other major genre of performance texts in the twentieth century: autobiography/biography’ (p. 189). In this regard, pedagogical treatises and modern research articles may be best viewed as a supplement to the ‘live’ teacher–student relationship rather than as a substitute or replacement.

This chapter focuses on the key treatises as well as anecdotal accounts and transcripts of masterclasses by violin pedagogues and performers of the Western classical tradition dating from the early twentieth century. I will first discuss pedagogical approaches that separate technique and interpretation, and then those that integrate the two components. I have chosen the key treatises written by Auer, Flesch and Galamian because their teaching as well as their publications were the most influential and commonly used in the twentieth century to teach the violin in the Western classical music tradition around the world (Eales, 1992: 92; Shock, 2014). I have also chosen a number of treatises written by celebrated violinists, e.g. Menuhin, Szigeti and Ricci. While their treatises may not be as influential as those of Flesch or Galamian, these violinists write about performance issues based on their own playing experiences as performers, which provides a range of perspectives on violin playing. In addition to treatises and transcripts of masterclasses (as a supplement to the textbook), I have included descriptions of Dorothy DeLay’s teaching approach. Although DeLay did not write any pedagogical treatises herself, her pupils (e.g. Simon Fischer), who are deeply influenced by her, have documented her methods in titled publications. Given that the current performance trend places importance on acquiring an accurate sense of the composer’s style (Cotik, 2013; Wen, 1992: 90), I will consider the sources on historically informed performance. Moreover, there are online teaching materials available, e.g. video recordings of masterclasses, to trace current teachers’ approaches to teaching specific works, as, for example, the video recordings of Zakhar Bron’s masterclasses; however, a video of a masterclass can only give a snapshot of a pedagogue working with one particular student on one particular piece, rather than a systematic approach to technique and/or interpretation. Further, Masin (2012) acknowledges the limitations of these video recordings as they cannot fully illustrate teachers’ teaching principles as well as their general approaches to technical execution and musical

interpretation: ‘a young student, or one who is not familiar with the principles of the Russian School of violin playing, might not have the skills required to know how to apply information as taught in one piece to another’ (Masin, 2012: 78). For this reason I will not consider current online teaching sources in this chapter.

Pedagogical writings that separate out technique and interpretation

I have discovered that although pedagogues/performers provide a variety of pedagogical approaches to technical and interpretive issues, the approach to the integration of technique and interpretation as a whole is rarely addressed in their pedagogical writings. As I will demonstrate below, these pedagogical sources reveal approaches that often consider technique and musical interpretation as two separate issues.

1.1 Flesch and Galamian

The Art of Violin Playing by Carl Flesch along with Ivan Galamian’s *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (1962) are considered as the authoritative texts (Eales, 1992: 92) among current pedagogical practice. Most recent teaching trends are adaptations of the pedagogical foundations set by these former master teachers. For instance, the Flesch or Galamian scale systems are the fundamental scale studies of contemporary violin pedagogy around the world. It is noticeable that both masters share a similar view of the relationship between technical training and development of musicality. Both advocate building a technical basis first, and then devoting time to the purely artistic side of playing after sorting out all mechanical issues.

Carl Flesch (1873-1944) was born in Hungary and made his name as one of the twentieth century’s leading pedagogues (Wen, 1992: 84). Among his pupils were Ivry Gitlis, Ida Haendel, Josef Hassid, Ginette Neveu, Max Rostal and Henryk Szeryng, all of whom achieved considerable fame as both performers and pedagogues. Flesch is of the opinion that a high standard of playing can be achieved through scientific training and not simply genius (Flesch, 1923: 4), and it has since been demonstrated by many generations of violin teachers that technique can be taught to a relatively high level to many students, even to those who do not necessarily have an innate talent for music. The best example of this, as Schwarz and Campbell indicate, is Carl Flesch himself: ‘he was not a “born” violinist but developed through constant analysis and self-criticism. This diagnostic ability made Flesch into one of the greatest teachers of our time: he approached technical and musical problems in a rational way’ (Schwarz and Campbell, 2001: 939). His teaching method forms the basis of modern violin playing

(Schwarz and Campbell, 2001). The aspects Flesch believes to be teachable include intonation, technical proficiency, listening skills and tone quality, and the goal of technical training is to 'produce all notes cleanly, with beautiful tone quality, with the required dynamics, and in the correct rhythm' (Flesch, 1923: 1).

The Art of Violin Playing deals thoroughly with all aspects of technical and interpretive issues over two complex volumes: *Technique in General and Applied Technique* (1923) and *Artistic Realisation and Instruction* (1930). Flesch clearly divides violin playing into two categories, with the first category divided further into two stages, focusing on technique, and the second category on interpretation. The first volume outlines how each component of technique is to be accomplished, including body posture, intonation, vibrato and shifts, as well as bow hold, bow control and various bowing techniques. He reiterates that upon achieving technical mastery, one will be able to play the violin with automatic execution: 'The more subconsciously the necessary motions are executed, the more secure the technique' (1923: 81). It is obvious that his teaching approach addresses mechanical control first, and only then, after every aspect of technical mastery is achieved, is the artistic side of violin playing considered.

In the second volume, Flesch provides indications of how teachers should help students to develop musical consciousness and cultivate personal temperament. For instance, whatever the natural temperament of the student, teachers should develop the opposite temperament of the student in practice (1930: 145). Flesch indicates that the most promising way of developing musical consciousness 'lies in cultivation of chamber music as the technical ability, rhythmic feeling and pleasure in playing are raised to a new level' (p. 145); and in order to develop one's artistic understanding to the point of independent artistic activity, students should play chamber music under proper guidance at least twice a week. In addition to playing chamber music, Flesch stresses the importance of connecting the academic, theoretical and abstract side of musical education with the technical, practical side of playing the violin. For example, the structure and phrasing should be analysed before taking up a work. This reveals that Flesch considers technical training and artistic education to be equally important in a later stage of teaching/learning.

Furthermore, Flesch gives specific directions on how to divide practice time and repertoire. In a four-hour practice period, the first hour should be devoted to technique in general (in a system of scales and studies), an hour and a half to technical study of the repertoire, and an hour and a half exclusively to playing repertoire (Flesch, 1923: 107). Again, Flesch's practising procedure separates out technique and interpretation, which is very disciplined and systematic, step by step, from general to

more specific, and from the technical to the expressive: for instance, practising scales and highlighting the technically challenging areas of the music in the beginning of the practice session and considering interpretation and musical expression toward the end.

The other pillar of twentieth-century violin playing, Ivan Galamian (1903-1981), a long-time Juilliard professor, has taught many successful concert artists, including Itzhak Perlman, Michael Rabin, Kyung Wha Chung and Pinchas Zukerman, and distinguished violin professors – Dorothy DeLay, Miriam Fried, Nam Yun Kim, Ida Kavafian and Donald Weilerstein. Galamian's book *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* concentrates on practical matters such as technical training and practising, and goes into great detail on the mechanics of violin technique, writing less about interpretation. This is perhaps because Galamian, like Auer, does not think interpretation can be taught 'directly': 'Interpretation, in its best artistic sense, cannot be taught directly, because only a personal, creative approach is truly artistic... It is therefore a great mistake for a teacher to impose his own interpretation upon all of his students' (pp. 7-8); consequently he places more emphasis on technique in this book.

Compared with Auer and Flesch, Galamian has a slightly different view of the relationship between technical training and the development of musicality. He considers total technical control to be the absolute value in violin playing and interpretation as the relative and changeable value, because interpretation contains a strong subjective element, and this subjective element is influenced by taste, style and fashion (Galamian, 1962: 4). Therefore, he indicates that these two aspects need to be taught in different phases, building technical foundations in the early years and developing musicality at a later stage: 'There is no age limit for the development of musicianship, but early youth is the time when technique grows fastest' (1962: 107). Galamian gives very systematic and specific instructions on all technical aspects and emphasises the physical movements used in the execution of vibrato, shifts and various bowing techniques.

One important contribution of Galamian's book is the chapter on practice, in which he states that the most important aspect in teaching is to teach students the technique of good practice; particularly, 'efficiency' is defined as the prime factor: 'There is nothing more precious to an instrumentalist than the ability to work efficiently – to know how to accomplish the maximum in beneficial results while using the minimum of time to do so' (p. 93). In order to achieve 'efficiency', mental preparation, the critical ear (objective listening) and slow tempo practising are the key elements in practice (p. 99). This reveals that Galamian's teaching approach has also influenced many Chinese tutors, as almost every Chinese violin tutor stresses the importance of efficiency and slow practice.

In addition, Galamian's approach to teaching interpretation is also practical and efficient. For example, when teaching tone colours, he divides tone production into two main types: bow speed and bow pressure. It is interesting that he explains this interpretive matter from a technical point of view, which is clear and effective, and sets a certain standard in sound production; however, he avoids further discussion about how much bow pressure or bow speed is appropriate for a particular style. Unlike Flesch, who offers explicit instructions on the performance of particular pieces, such as Bach's Chaconne, Mendelssohn's Concerto Op. 64 and a variety of sonatas and solo works, there is an absence of discussion of canonical repertoire and relevant performance practice in this text. Galamian reports that approaches to interpretation, e.g. bow usage and articulation, are highly controversial and that there is no conclusive answer to these issues (p. 4). This is probably the reason why he places more emphasis on technique over interpretation, and avoids engaging in a detailed discussion of interpretive issues in the book.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that violin pedagogical writings, as discussed earlier, have their own limitations and therefore cannot fully illuminate pedagogues' teaching approaches in actual teaching activities. In this context, it is unclear whether the face-to-face teaching of both pedagogues (Flesch and Galamian) reflects the separation of technique and interpretation, and also, there is no literature by their students that indicates what their approaches were like in lessons.

1.2 Yampolsky and Menuhin

Other texts that separate out technique and interpretation include Soviet violinist Izrail Markovich Yampolsky's *The Principles of Violin Fingering* (1967) and Yehudi Menuhin's *Life Class* (1986). Compared with Flesch and Galamian's thorough analyses, Yampolsky and Menuhin focus on one specific aspect of performance. Menuhin emphasises relaxation and body suppleness, whereas Yampolsky concentrates on fingering.

Yampolsky (1905-1976), a student and nephew of the eminent Soviet violin teacher Abram Ilich Yampolsky (1890-1956), graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in 1930 and later became a distinguished musicologist (Lankovsky, 2016: 11). *The Principles of Violin Fingering* analyses various principles of fingerings from technical and musical perspectives, where he offers disciplined methods for technical training first, and then deals with the expressivity of fingerings from the artistic side, such as the use of portamento. From the technical point of view, this particular method allows violinists to play with confidence and with minimum effort, and from the artistic side, his fingering

principles enrich the expressiveness of performances (Yampolsky, 1967, foreword). For instance, as many violinists face challenges in awkward and difficult passages, Yampolsky supplements different types of fingering patterns for training in order to develop the technical skills of the left hand, including the use of the normally neglected even-numbered positions (2nd, 4th) and the contracted position – half position (Yampolsky, 1967: 118).

Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999) is regarded as one of the most significant artists of the twentieth century (Anderson et al., 2001). Menuhin's approach to developing technical facility is unique. Compared with other violin pedagogues, he offers specific insights into body movements and relaxation. *Life Class* (1986) introduces a collection of exercises for body movements and breathing to develop a better balance between the body and the instrument. Based on the yogic principle of equilibrium, Menuhin's approach focuses on developing the utmost sensitivity to the subtlety of movements in order to play the instrument with minimal effort. While most pedagogues write about physical control and execution, Menuhin works from an angle of making one's body become aware of itself and of its internal harmony. Menuhin believes that each part of the body moves best when it moves in harmony with other bones, muscles and limbs. Rather than trying to control both hands and body, Menuhin seeks to free the whole body through body movements: 'the principle is grasped not intellectually but through sensation, through becoming aware of the subtle checks and balances which, when properly understood, permit ease of technique' (p. 2). His approach to technique through body awareness echoes recent research by Dora et al. (2019), which demonstrates the positive effects of somatic approaches on instrumental sound.

Menuhin also devotes a small portion in his *Life Class* to the discussion of musical interpretation, in which he briefly shares his thoughts on style and how he understands composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, Debussy, Bartók, etc.; however, Menuhin does not explain how to combine the essence of the work (the composers' intentions) with its realisation on the violin, and it is not always easy to understand what he is trying to deliver as he speaks in such abstract terms. For instance, he indicates that 'there is little that is personal in playing Beethoven; and there is no affectation and hypocrisy in Mozart' (Menuhin, 1986: 78-79).

I was able to gain a better understanding of Menuhin's principles and approaches when observing C's masterclasses.⁶ As a pupil of Menuhin, C's playing style and teaching approach are deeply influenced by his teacher. C also deals with relaxation and body movements, but more importantly, emphasis is

⁶ C is one of the research participants for my project, and I shall discuss C's approach to teaching and playing in more detail in chapters 5 and 6.

placed on how to produce a singing tone and achieve a wider range of tone colours through breathing, natural movement and physical relaxation. Through the insights from C, I came to understand that Menuhin's approach does consider the integration of technique and interpretation in practical teaching; however, there is a marked absence of discussion in the treatise of particular approaches to connecting technical tools with musical expression. This seems to resonate with Auer's view that interpretive issues are difficult to articulate in words (Auer, 1921).

1.3 DeLay

Distinguished professor Dorothy DeLay (1917-2002), teacher of many world-leading violinists, including Itzhak Perlman, Nigel Kennedy, Gil Shaham, Shlomo Mintz, Cho-Liang Lin, Midori and Sarah Chang, is the first woman – and the first American-born violinist – to be regarded as a master violin teacher in the tradition of Galamian and Auer (Kozinn, 2002). DeLay herself has not published any work on violin playing or teaching to indicate her pedagogical approach, but Simon Fischer's *Basics* (1997) and *Practice* (2004), as well as a few articles by her other pupils, give us a glimpse into her teaching methods. As such, the influence of DeLay can be seen in Fischer's focus on detailed analysis of technique. Violinist Piet Koornhof, quoted in an anonymous article in *The Strad* (2019), summarises three areas upon which DeLay focuses: intonation, sound production and phrasing: 'Her approach is to isolate the weakest of the three areas, break it down into its most basic components, and then make students progressively aware of small details, working slowly.' This suggests that DeLay focused on developing students' perception and awareness.

DeLay also makes practice schedules for her students, whose guidance is similar to that of Flesch: typically, the first hour of their practice schedule on exercises for the left hand and on various bow strokes; the second hour for scales, arpeggios and tricky passages; the third for etudes or Paganini; the fourth for concerto work; and the fifth for Bach or recital repertoire (Niles, 2017: 36-44). Based on this schedule, it reveals that DeLay is of the opinion that basic technique should be considered individually, and a considerable length of time is needed to build technical facility in practice. Also, DeLay's practising schedule seems specifically designed for advanced students who want to pursue a solo career, as the wide range of repertoire, as well as different genres of music (concertos, solo Bach, virtuosic repertoire and recital repertoire, e.g. sonatas), demand a very high level of advanced performance.

Written approaches that focus on technique

2.1 Masin

The recent study by Masin (2012) deals solely with violin technique through analysing a range of violin teachers. Masin considers various technical approaches taken by current violin pedagogues, i.e. Ozim, Bron and Kuschnir, and suggests that schools of violin teaching have become less distinct because of cultural transnationality.

2.2 Gerle and Ricci

Other texts on the same subject include *The Art of Practicing the Violin* (1983) by Robert Gerle and *Ricci on Glissando* (2007) and *Left-hand Violin Technique* (1988) by Ruggiero Ricci. Hungarian violinist Gerle considers various issues regarding how to practise various mechanical techniques in the left hand and the bow arm, how to improve practice quality and how to practise more efficiently. Ruggiero Ricci (1918-2012) is known for performances and recordings of the works of Paganini, and has made four recordings of the complete 24 Caprices, Op. 1, by Paganini (Smith, 2012). Ricci's focus on the development of virtuosic technique is reflected in his two treatises. By introducing various sets of exercises to enhance finger flexibility and strength, e.g. the uses of pizzicati, glissandi and awkward fingering patterns, the two treatises demonstrate a unique approach to playing the most technically challenging music with relative ease. Both are typical examples of concentration on the development of one particular aspect of violin playing. Compared with Flesch and Galamian's technical training methods, e.g. scale systems, these two treatises are only suitable for those most technically advanced violinists aiming to develop a virtuosic technique.

2.3 Yaoji Lin

I now turn to major influences in Chinese violin pedagogy. *Professor Lin's Teaching Essentials* by Yang (2005) is considered as the core textbook in China, which not only summarises Yaoji Lin's teaching concepts but also reflects the pedagogical focus on violin playing in China. Lin (1937-2009) is regarded as one of the greatest violin pedagogues in China, whose students have won nearly forty prizes in international competitions since the 1980s and two of whom performed and recorded the 24 Paganini Caprices at the age of thirteen and fifteen. With such achievements, he is much revered as a violin pedagogue and inevitably all Chinese violin teachers tend to follow in his path.

A pupil of Yuri Yankelevich, Lin was deeply influenced by the Russian School; however, his methodology does not simply follow this approach. The principles of his teaching method can be

summed up as follows: the relation between movement and being still, the relation between time and space, the relation between change and stability, the relation between tension and relaxation, and the relation between the individual character and general character. For instance, discussing tension and relaxation, most students tend unconsciously to tighten the body in order to play with greater intensity or play through technically difficult passages; the results, however, are normally the opposite of what students try to achieve (Yang, 2005: 128). According to Lin, the purpose of relaxation, therefore, is for saving energy and using the strength of the body more effectively. This suggests that Lin's teaching method enables the integration of dialectics with practical application. Lin also considers that practice should have three stages: first, discovering the problem; second, analysing the problem; and finally, solving the problem. For instance, students usually attempt to disguise their problems in practice, such as picking a fast tempo to hide the intonation flaws. This shows that Lin focuses on analysing and solving common issues in practice techniques.

In addition to Yang's text, a transcript of one of Lin's masterclasses⁷ illustrates Lin's approaches to teaching specific pieces. The masterclass took place in the Central Conservatory of Music on 16 October 1996, in which four students from the junior college played for him. The programme included the third movement of the Sibelius Concerto, the first movement of the Paganini Concerto No. 1, the Paganini Caprice No. 4, and Bach's B minor Partita. Lin used a technique-led approach, which efficiently solved a number of technical problems. For instance, a student played the Paganini Caprice No. 4, which is an extremely difficult study for the left hand since there are a large number of double stops in awkward and stretching positions. Lin stopped the student after the first few lines:

‘Although this is one of the most difficult caprices, you must know how to use your technical tools wisely. What was it that made you play out of tune? The problem is that you don't prepare your fingers in advance. You should always measure the positions in your mind every time before putting your finger down, knowing exactly where you shift to’ (Huang, 1996).

In order for the student to get a sense of the big intervals, Lin spent the whole lesson tackling two particular shifts, for example, by letting the student try to feel the notes and distance before putting the bow on the string. At the end of the lesson, the student was able to feel the distance and location of the shifts, and this led to better intonation and technical security. When working on the third movement of the Sibelius Concerto, Lin focused on vibrato:

⁷ By Huang (1996), a violin tutor at the junior college of the Central Conservatory of Music who recorded this particular masterclass and transcribed it into text.

‘The main issue is that you are all tensed up when playing the opening. Like most students, you have too much tension in your vibrato. The left hand should only “vibrate” (tightening the muscle) at the starting point, and relax yet continue (inertial vibrato) afterwards, just like a fanning motion, which is a natural and relaxing movement’ (Huang, 1996).

Again, Lin concentrated only on the first few lines of the piece, but the student’s playing was completely transformed by the end of the lesson, with a solid sound and a more relaxed left hand.

This illustrates that Lin’s teaching approach to technique is very systematic and the outcomes are extraordinary. He gives specific insights into all technical aspects, carefully dealing with every single note. Interestingly, it is evident that Lin is influenced by Galamian’s teaching method as there are similarities between Lin’s pedagogical approach and that of Galamian, both of which place importance on efficiency in practice as well as mental preparation for technical execution. While Galamian indicates that ‘there is nothing more precious to an instrumentalist than the ability to work efficiently’ (1962: 93), Lin advises students not to repeat their mistakes in practice: ‘Most students don’t practise properly. They like playing rather than practising. They try to play loud and fast, but not listen to what they actually sound like. This way of practising makes them constantly repeat their mistakes which is wasting time and is even worse than not practising’ (Yang, 2005: 40-41). Regarding mental preparation for technical execution, Galamian believes that the mind should always anticipate the physical action and then send the command for its execution; this is reflected in Lin’s teaching, which also stresses the importance of gaining physical control through the mind: ‘Make your hands automated, and everything is controlled by your mind’ (Yang, 2005).

However, Lin rarely comments on interpretive issues in the masterclass, in terms of phrasing, tone colour, dynamics and tempo fluctuation. When teaching Bach’s B minor Partita, rather than offering instructions on rhythmic character (dance movements), voicing, melodic line and articulation, Lin concentrates on technical execution and physical tension, such as smooth bow changes and string crossing, as well as relaxation in the bow arm (Huang, 1996). In contrary to C’s masterclass which illuminates Menuhin’s approaches to using technical tools, e.g. breathing and body movement, to serve musical purposes in practical teaching, the most revealing fact that comes from reviewing Lin’s masterclass transcript is that it demonstrates the exclusively technical focus in Lin’s actual practice of teaching.

Treatises that connect technique and interpretation

3.1 Auer

Leopold Auer (1845-1930) is regarded as one of the most influential violin pedagogues of the twentieth century (Stowell, 1992: 228), who has trained many great violin virtuosos, including Mischa Elman, Jascha Heifetz, Nathan Milstein, Efrem Zimbalist and Kathleen Parlow: ‘Auer and his students put Russian violin playing on the map and made the world aware of a new approach to violin playing’ (Schwarz, 1983: 414). Auer seems to try to connect the technical with the expressive, but the connection is rather vague. *Violin Playing As I Teach It* (Auer, 1921) deals in a very general way with some technical points, but as a whole the emphasis is on developing the violinist’s musical personality. Knapik (2014) reveals a conflict between practicalities and ideals that exist in this treatise as Auer struggles to discuss practical issues in actual performing situations. Auer avoids the detailed instruction of technique and interpretation; particularly, his discussion of technique cannot compare either to the breadth or depth of the technical analyses in the writings of Flesch and Galamian. This is possibly because there were a number of existing violin treatises written about physical technique, including by Baillot (1835), de Bériot (1858) and Spohr (1832). The other reason seems to be that he rarely deals with technical issues in actual teaching as his teaching assistants always ‘prepare students for him’ (Martens, 1919: 10). It also seems that Auer prefers to teach interpretation through demonstration, as he believes that some of the interpretive matters, such as phrasing, are subjective and hard to articulate in words. This echoes Schippers’ view that, to a large extent, expression is taught implicitly (Schippers, 2010: 71). In addition, Auer reveals in an interview that he has no fixed teaching method as each student has their own personal qualities in regard to tone and interpretation: ‘The one great point I lay stress on is never to kill [the] individuality of my various pupils... I always have made an individual study of each pupil and given each pupil individual treatment’ (Martens, 1919: 10). This appears to foreshadow Galamian’s later statement that writing texts cannot replace practical teaching due to each student’s individuality. However, Knapik shows great disapproval of Auer’s folding of ‘dynamics, rhythms, and metrical considerations into the superior category of tone rather than unpacking each aspect of performance issues’ (2014: 175). From a pedagogical point of view, Auer’s book presents a big picture of what the ultimate goal of violin playing is, but offers little discussion of how this can be achieved. In other words, his approach is suitable only for accomplished violinists who already possess a high level of performance skills, by having already gained great mechanical control and considerable musical understanding.

3.2 Szigeti

Szigeti on the Violin (1969) by Joseph Szigeti is the only treatise that deals in particular with musical interpretation. Joseph Szigeti (1892-1973), a pupil of the renowned pedagogue Jenő Hubay, is recognised ‘as a violinist of paramount importance, whose playing combines a virtuoso technique with a penetrating intellect’ (Wen, 1992: 86). It is interesting to note that he avoids engaging in a discussion of technical issues, which suggests that he might not want to separate technique from interpretation: ‘One of the most distinct differences between Szigeti’s treatise and that of others is exactly that – the musicality of his approach to everything he teaches’ (Masin, 2012: 74). Like Yampolsky, Szigeti also concentrates on the choices of fingerings, but his emphasis is on expressive fingering. He includes more than 300 musical examples to illustrate his own rendition of violin works spanning from Bach to Bartók, and criticises some of the fingering prescriptions offered by great violinists including Joachim, Auer and Flesch. This reflects the changing tastes and styles of violin playing from earlier generations into the mid-twentieth century. Although Szigeti delivers a very strong message on his personal tastes, the book barely mentions his pedagogical approach. Masin (2012: 75) claims that Szigeti’s treatise has ‘no systematic progression of thought as should be found in a method’, as, for instance, there is no discussion of technical basis, such as intonation.

3.3 Neuhaus

The other example of connecting technique and interpretation can be found in the piano pedagogical book *The Art of Piano Playing* (Neuhaus, 1973) written by legendary piano teacher Heinrich Neuhaus. Neuhaus (1888-1964) taught at the Moscow Conservatory and has produced some of the greatest pianists of the twentieth century, including Emil Gilels, Sviatoslav Richter, Nina Svetlanova, Alexei Lubimov and Radu Lupu. The book offers practical recommendations and analysis of different aspects of piano performance and teaching. It is interesting to look into parallel fields and compare different approaches across piano and violin playing. Neuhaus offers specific insights into the integration of the technical and the expressive in his teaching. In contrast to Flesch and Galamian’s teaching principles, Neuhaus insists that musical development should be considered before technical training, and he disagrees with the idea of separating elements of technique: ‘It is so difficult to draw a distinction between work at technique and work at music’ (Neuhaus, 1973: 3). Instead, Neuhaus places great emphasis on tone, and stresses that ‘work on tone is work on technique and work on technique is work on tone’ (Neuhaus, 1973: 79). It can be seen that he teaches from a point of developing sound as a route to musical expression, such as achieving a singing quality and a wide range of tone colours.

Historically informed performance practice

Studies by musicologists Robin Stowell, Clive Brown and David Milsom deal in particular with historical performance practice, in which they reveal that the sound and style from earlier practice is different from what is generally assumed in modern practice. An important contribution of these studies is that they provide a historical basis for artistic decision-making. Given that there has been an interest in recent years ‘in the “authentic” performance of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early nineteenth-century music’ (Wen, 1992: 90), the need for violinists to be aware of historical context and historical performance practices in the current playing trend has become increasingly important. These studies offer a detailed analysis and give hints on historically informed performance practices found in early editions of violin scores, written sources and recordings, which help students to make informed decisions: for example, how to begin and end a trill in a piece by a specific composer, how to employ different bowing styles in response to various articulation markings, as well as how much flexibility with the tempo and where the use of portamenti would be appropriate for particular composers. Stowell’s *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (1985) investigates a number of authoritative violin treatises of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as Spohr (1832) and Baillot (1835). This provides a historical guide to violin teaching methods, technique and performance practice from 1760 to 1840 regarding the development of the violin and bow, posture, shifting, vibrato, fingering and bowing, tone production, expression, improvised ornamentation and other aspects. Brown’s study *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (1999) looks into a number of issues of performance practice for the period, and focuses on notation and what composers’ intentions might be. He carefully examines articulation markings and slurs in early written sources and violin scores edited by the nineteenth-century violinists Ferdinand David and Joseph Joachim, and tries to reveal how composers might have expected their music to be performed. David Milsom (2003) deals with performing style in the German and Franco-Belgian schools of violin playing between 1850 and 1900 by examining selected violin treatises together with a number of early recordings performed by famous artists. While reviewing these two violin schools’ approaches to the uses of expressive devices in performance, he reflects on the conflicting relationship between actual practice and written theory.

Summary

The sources that I have reviewed above, including treatises, anecdotal evidence and transcripts of masterclasses, show that the most common way of teaching is to separate technique and interpretation. It can be seen that the violin teaching tradition considers technique and interpretation from the violinistic point of view, and in the majority of cases addresses them separately. Although the treatises mentioned above were published almost 100 years apart, the violin teaching tradition has changed little since the 1920s.

One reason for this may be that interpretation is too complex to codify in writing. As interpretation contains strong subjective and personal elements, there is no absolute aesthetic standard for musical interpretation in violin playing and teaching. Individual interpretations of the same piece of music can vary from one another. According to Auer, ‘there is no one definitely established way of playing a given work by a master, for there is no absolute standard of beauty by which the presentation of a violinistic artwork can be judged’ (Auer, 1921: 61). Naturally, there are usually a variety of personal opinions held by performers and teachers on the performance of the music. For instance, Szigeti (1969) openly criticises Flesch’s choices of fingering in his treatise. While there is no absolutely ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ interpretation in performance, a number of pedagogues claim that many interpretive issues, such as phrasing, cannot be explicitly explained or articulated in words. This is evident in both Auer and Galamian’s pedagogical texts (Auer, 1921; Galamian, 1962). It seems that the only possible way to write about approaches to interpretive issues is through a personal lens. For example, the two treatises that offer detailed analyses and explicit instructions on interpretive issues are written by Flesch (1930) and Szigeti (1969). In order to demonstrate how they interpret particular pieces, both writers include numerous musical examples and make specific suggestions on the choices of fingerings and bowings. Although their prescribed fingerings and bowings clearly illustrate their personal aesthetic understanding of the music, such approaches are criticised by Galamian, who opposes the idea of imposing one’s own interpretation upon students, and argues that teachers should avoid making specific suggestions for interpretation (Galamian, 1962: 7-8). This suggests that as each violinist is a unique individual, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the teaching of interpretation.

More importantly, given that all composers have their unique characteristics and styles, there are no absolute standardised approaches to the teaching of interpretation regarding phrasing, tempo rubato, portamento, dynamics and articulation. It seems apparent that the discussion of interpretation is closely related to particular styles or historical contexts, as, for instance, the question of whether a piece of music, i.e. a Bach violin sonata, should be played precisely in a historical style or whether

the style should be adapted to fit current performance trends. Pedagogues including Flesch and Galamian often stress the importance of staying true to the intention of the composer, and advise that one should study each composer's historical background and stylistic context when developing an interpretation and comprehension of the music. Consequently, the appropriateness of specific phrasing, articulation and the uses of rubato, vibrato and portamento in a particular style must be taken into consideration. Therefore, it is impossible to standardise musical interpretation in violin playing/teaching; rather, one must consider the musical context and approach for each piece interpretively on a case-by-case basis. On this basis, it is unrealistic for violin pedagogues to cover every aspect of interpretive issues in their pedagogical writings.

By contrast, technique seems easier to convey through pedagogical writing than interpretation, where most pedagogues provide direct access to information about physical execution in their treatises, for instance, by outlining how each step of technical training is to be achieved and how each component of technique can be accomplished. In the actual training process, however, much time is needed to develop technical mastery. Progress is not always straightforward, and requires considerable analysis and detailed training. Another contributing factor could be, as Wen reports, that the emphasis in current violin playing has shifted from expressing one's personality to accuracy, due to the growth of the recording industry and the increase in the number and importance of competitions (Wen, 1992: 90), which seems to suggest that there is an increased focus on technique over interpretation. This might explain why the majority of violin treatises devote so much space to the discussion of technique in order to solve various practical issues. In contrast to this approach, Stowell and Brown concentrate on the process of investigating performance practice, with an aim of helping violinists to understand composers' original intentions. However, there is little detailed discussion of the repertoire that I am going to investigate in my study. Thus, my study seeks to bridge this gap by addressing through practice what the written literature cannot address – the development of a more integrated approach to performance pedagogy.

I intend to focus on a set of repertoire which incorporates varied styles and different techniques, in order to explore the relationship between technique and interpretation. My aim is to discover the possibilities of combining the essence of the work (composers' intentions) with its realisation on the violin through building technical components such as tone quality, tone colour, bowings, fingerings (portamento) and vibrato, that all then function in a musical setting. By doing this, I will create a pedagogical model that integrates the technical and expressive with the knowledge of relevant performance practices into a holistic approach.

Chapter 4

Methodology

In order to address my research question ‘In what ways can high-level instrumental technique be developed alongside individual artistic and professional development to establish the foundations for a deep engagement with style and interpretation?’, I used a multi-method approach, including 1) practice-led research, i.e. preparing a set of focused repertoire for recordings and performance; 2) reflection on my own practices; and 3) observations and interviews of expert teachers. In my research process, I learned eight canonical violin pieces with the aim of developing a more integrated approach, during which I documented my practice reflections; my observations and interviews with seven expert violin teachers allowed me to gather pieces of information as creative resources for my own exploration.

Practice-led research

Candy (2006) indicates that practice-led research is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge about practice or develops knowledge within practice. While the results of practice-led research can be described in text form, practice itself is considered as an integral part of both the research process and the presentation of findings. Accordingly, my reflections indicate how I developed a better integration of interpretation and technique through my preparation of works for performance.

My research is therefore presented in both theoretical form – a written thesis – and practical form – five recorded performances and a live recital. Throughout the research process, theory and practice were in dialogue. The ideas and thoughts generated by theoretical investigations, i.e. examining treatises and transcripts, were then integrated into practical experiments to verify and further refine them, for instance by examining what I learned and discovered in lessons and my own practice; I experimented with new ideas of developing my own technique and interpretation for performance, and I integrated technical difficulties with the musical outcome in learning different repertoire. The continuing interaction between the theoretical and the practical suggested new avenues for theoretical exploration regarding what specific approaches could enhance personal expressiveness and how particular information could be integrated into my own teaching, especially of young people in China. I considered performance as a process of discovery through examining and reflecting upon my own

practice as a performer in order to gain deeper understanding of my technique and musicality, for instance by looking at issues such as bow control, tone quality and tone colour.

Phenomenological approach

A qualitative research approach was proposed for this practice-led study, including semi-structured interviews, self-reflection and a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach involves exploring and analysing the meaning of the life experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2003), and focuses on subjective experiences and awareness (Holmes and Holmes, 2013). Given that the experience of the performer/teacher is essential to the creation of music performance, it suggests the need to place emphasis on investigating the subjective world of the performer/teacher. As I intended to gather materials and information about teaching/playing approaches used by the expert teachers to develop my awareness and skills in evolving my own teaching and playing, it was important for me to develop an in-depth understanding of how these expert teachers teach specific pieces and how they deal with particular performance issues in detail, as well as their general teaching approaches to musical interpretation and technical execution. In this context, understanding the human experiences of the expert teachers' conceptualisations regarding their approaches to violin playing and teaching reflect aspects of phenomenology. Further, this approach has been shown to be effective in music performance research (Holmes and Holmes, 2013).

My investigation involved observing masterclasses and taking lessons with a group of well-established violin professors. All lessons and observations took place in a number of violin masterclass series, including the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) String Masterclasses in the UK and the Central Conservatory String Masterclasses in Beijing, as well as the masterclasses that were held in Florian Leonard's music shop in London. The participants in this study are seven well-established violin professors from different music conservatories (including my supervisor), with a range of different educational backgrounds, chosen using the following criteria: 1) they have extensive experience working with advanced violinists and string players; 2) they have served as jury members for international competitions and 3) have trained international prizewinners; or 4) they give regular concerts and recitals; and 5) they have collaborated with many accomplished musicians, e.g. pianists, violists, cellists, etc. The participants were recruited through my knowledge of each faculty and I invited faculty tutors according to the criteria that I explained above. The masterclasses and lessons illuminated these expert teachers' teaching/playing approaches and revealed their views on various performance issues. I made my own observational notes for each lesson and masterclass I attended to clarify the methods used by them, noting the insights and knowledge gained.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews were also arranged to clarify teaching principles and approaches to high-level violin playing. Qualitative interviews or so-called semi-structured interviews seemed more natural in the one-to-one setting where:

‘The relationship between the researcher and the participant is not strictly scripted... the more important questions in a qualitative interview will be open- rather than closed-ended questions... the researcher tries to have participants use their own words, not those predefined by the researcher, to discuss topics.’ (Yin, 2011: 135)

The interviews were informal and open-ended, and carried out in a conversational style. The semi-structured and conversational interview style, as Holmes and Holmes indicate, is the most natural medium of communication, as it ‘gives both structure and flexibility and allows a depth of response that can reflect the multi-layered thought processes that necessarily precede action’ (Holmes and Holmes, 2013). The interviews were conducted between June and November 2019. All interviews lasted no more than one hour. I initially prepared five main questions, which are all unstructured, including:

1. What specific approaches and training methods do you use?
2. What approaches to training technique do you like to use?
3. How would you describe your approaches to teaching interpretation?
4. How far do you believe that technique and style/interpretation should be separated in practice?
5. How do your approaches change according to the repertoire you are teaching?

I used these as a basis for more focused sub-questions, e.g. relating to the teaching of specific repertoire, or further prompts, such as: ‘What do you do when things aren’t working? How do you integrate the technical difficulties with the musical outcome?’

All interviews were recorded and the data were used to inform my research into my own subjective processes of preparing specific repertoire for performance. However, as these expert teachers have a very busy schedule, it was difficult to arrange a time for an interview with every teacher. There were two participants whom I was unable to interview after the masterclasses. In addition, one interview recording had poor audio quality, and could not be transcribed. Therefore, four interviews were used for data analysis, and the other three expert teachers’ teaching approaches were analysed based on their masterclass observation materials. I was able to get a range of information in these semi-

structured interviews, where all four participants shared their knowledge and experiences in violin playing and teaching.

Masterclass observations

While these interviews provided opportunities for me to ask follow-up questions to clarify teaching approaches, observing masterclasses allowed me to see these teachers in teaching action. I observed five participants' masterclasses, three of whom were also my interviewees (although one participant's interview material could not be transcribed). I also played for two participants in their masterclasses. Watching and playing in the masterclasses enabled me closely to observe 1) how these teachers deal with a specific performance issue with a particular student; 2) how they use demonstrations to clarify further their interpretive intentions and technical executions; 3) how they apply their teaching concepts shared in the interviews in the actual practice of teaching; and 4) whether they can teach in similar ways that they talked about in the interviews.

Data analysis procedure

A thematic analysis⁸ was used to interpret the data; more specifically, an interpretive phenomenological analysis seemed appropriate for my practice-led project, as it seeks to explore in detail how the participants make sense of their world (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Connected with the phenomenological approach, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) also emphasises an individual personal perception, which helps to recognise the researcher's contribution to the extraction of meaning. IPA does not begin with coding; rather, it places emphasis on the interpretive process of generating and clustering key themes. I therefore went through the following steps to analyse the data: 1) reading the transcript and noting down potentially interesting areas; 2) revisiting the transcript and searching for themes; 3) extracting common themes from the participants; 4) using key themes to shape my analysis and organise subordinate themes; and 5) refining all themes (including subordinate themes) in relation to the research questions, and preparing the final document for my thesis.

⁸ Thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting pattern (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79).

Reflective process

This study was strongly associated with the examination of my own performance from a performer's perspective. I used a reflective process to prepare a focused set of repertoire for my doctoral recital and recordings, as this particular approach aims to review practitioners' actions and the knowledge that informs them (Aggett, 2010). The concepts of reflective practice, as Watts (2019) states, are widely utilised to describe processes of attention to practice, learning and the examination of experience and context. The use of reflective practice is aimed at problem solving, building understanding from and about practice situations, the use of self, and for improving and learning from practice. Documenting my learning process through reflective notes was an effective research tool to investigate ways to enhance my own performance as well as refine my approach to blending technique and interpretation, as it involved a process of self-consciousness and self-criticism. Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks (2017) highlight the different speeds at which students adopt reflective practice in rehearsal and performance, and indicate that music students need to develop skills in (and of) reflection in order to develop their self-regulating capabilities for practice and performance. In order to refine my own approach to integrating technique and interpretation, I documented the process of my practice sessions extensively, reflecting upon what I achieved and what was challenging, why this happened, what I learned from this and what I would do differently the next day. In addition, reflecting also provided an opportunity to assess the employability of particular approaches used by the expert teachers as well as my own discoveries, and gauge my own responses toward them.

Choice of repertoire

As my aim was to document the process of refining my practice, in line with my exploration of the integration of technique and expression in performance and teaching, I studied eight pieces from the core canonical virtuosic repertoire for my doctoral recordings and recital. These pieces are among those often required in the first and second rounds of international competitions.⁹ They represent a wide variety of styles, demand the highest level of advanced performance and require a masterful combination of virtuoso technique and expressivity. The following works were chosen for my doctoral recital:

1. Strauss, Sonata for Violin and Piano in E flat major, Op. 18 (1887-1888): this is considered as

⁹ Ernst's *The Last Rose of Summer* is a compulsory piece in the first round of the 2021 Shanghai Stern International Competition and the 2022 Sibelius International Competition. *Paganiniana* is required in the first round of the 2022 Indianapolis International Competition, and Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy is required in the first round of the 2022 Wieniawski International Competition. The Brahms, Debussy and Strauss sonatas, the Schubert Fantasy and Bach's sonatas and partitas are standard repertoire for all competitions (e.g. the Queen Elisabeth Competition, the Tchaikovsky Competition, etc.).

Strauss' last 'classical' piece (Goto, 2002), but its harmonic language and heroic melodic writing foreshadow his symphonic poems (Tsai, 2010; Bromberger, 2016). The two instruments are densely written, and the melodic lines interweave, creating a symphonic texture. The key of E flat major anticipates the heroic writing of *Ein Heldenleben*, and the energy of the first movement is also found in *Don Juan*, Op. 20, which followed soon after the Sonata. The second movement picks up on the style of Lieder writing that Strauss had been developing from his Op. 10 songs, and the melody-and-accompaniment texture anticipates songs such as 'Du, meines Herzens Krönelein' and, in the central section, the more intricate writing of 'Meinem Kinde'. The Finale looks back to his early Cello Sonata and ahead to the scherzando mood of *Till Eulenspiegel*; thus the work as a whole is poised on the brink of Strauss' early maturity. Even though it is a sonata, it is almost as if the two instruments are playing a double concerto (Goto, 2002). This work is my favourite sonata in the entire violin repertoire. As discussed in the first chapter, I only played a limited number of sonatas while in China, and creating an expressive performance was hardly taken into consideration in the learning process; rather, importance was placed on enhancing technical accuracy in practice sessions. Therefore, during the research process, I sought to shift my focus from dealing with intonation precision to building expressive tools, learning to use technical devices to serve musical purposes. In order to achieve a wide range of tone colours that reflect both concerto-like bravura and a more intimate song-like style, I focused on expanding expressivity through building interpretive techniques, such as developing bow technique, tone quality and vibrato. Further, I spent much time experimenting with different types of portamenti for the sake of creating a variety of subtle effects, ranging from connecting the sound between two notes in a way that echoes a singer's technique to placing special emotional weight on particular intervals.

2. Debussy, Sonata for Violin and Piano in G minor, L. 140 (1916): this presents a unique balance of sweetness, fire, humour and nostalgia (Goto, 2004). As one of six projected sonatas, of which only three were completed, the Violin Sonata was written at a time when Debussy was trying to capture something of the spirit of French music that he heard in the eighteenth-century clavecinists, Rameau and Couperin in particular. He also returned in both the violin and cello sonatas to some of the imagery he had been inspired by in his early songs, in particular that found in the poetry of Banville and Verlaine which took the *commedia dell'arte* as its starting point. The second movement of the Violin Sonata picks up on the mood of early songs, such as 'Pantomime', 'Pierrot' and 'Fantôches'. Unlike sonatas from earlier periods, or other sonatas of Debussy's time, the two instruments do not accompany each other per se; rather, one instrument leads with a pulling energy against the countermelody or motif of the other (Goto, 2004). Although this sonata is less technically demanding in the left hand, one of the challenges of the

piece as a whole is to convey a range of characters without any text to illuminate them. I focused on developing my bow expressions, notably changes of bow speed and bow contact point, in response to the tone colouration in the music.

3. Wieniawski, *Fantaisie brillante sur des motifs de l'opéra Faust de Gounod*, Op. 20: based on themes from Gounod's opera *Faust*, this was composed in 1865. The fantasia genre was particularly popular among nineteenth-century composer-performers. The opening is based on the opening scene in Faust's study combined with motifs from Marguerite's Roi de Thulé scene. Then there is a reference to the introduction to Valentin's aria combined with Siebel's 'Faites-lui mes aveux'. Méphistophélès' 'Veau d'Or' (in $\frac{6}{8}$ and A minor) is followed by 'Laisse-moi contempler ton visage' and other themes from the end of the third act; the Fantasy concludes with the Valse from Act 2. Wieniawski creates more than just a succession of themes; he combines them into a musical tapestry in a way that echoes some of Liszt's piano transcriptions. The violin part is very rich and varied. Alongside cantabile fragments of lyrical character, it contains several lengthy virtuoso passages, varied figurations, also in high positions and double stops, including long staccato sections performed in a single bow stroke (so characteristic of Wieniawski), polyphonic playing, chords, leaps and numerous harmonics. Because of its significant length and technical difficulties, the Faust Fantasy is not often performed in concerts (Chechlińska, 2020), but it has become a popular choice for competition candidates. Although I have played many virtuosic works, I tried to approach this piece from a different perspective, looking into the interpretive aspects of expressiveness rather than technical neatness. In particular, I intended to achieve a balanced interpretation that combines rich lyrical melodies with technical virtuosity by exploring different types of portamenti, re-adjusting the positioning of the left hand and arm movement, and developing a free and loose vibrato for a rich and singing tone.

The other five works were chosen for my doctoral recordings, and are also standard repertoire for major international competitions and represent varying stylistic periods. Therefore, they each require different technical tools to respond to composers' musical languages:

1. Bach, D minor Partita, movements III and IV (Sarabande and Gigue): in 1720 Johann Sebastian Bach made a fair copy of six works – three sonatas and three partitas – he had composed for unaccompanied violin. The partitas are three very different works that all purport to be in the French Suite style. Each of these sets of works is in fact in the form that Bach derived from the basic group of dances, standardised by the seventeenth century as the French Suite: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue (Cruft, 2013). I sought to bring knowledge of historically informed performance practices to the performance, making interpretive decisions based on

stylistic context. For instance, I listened to the recordings of Bach's solo sonatas and partitas played by Rachel Podger and my supervisor, both of whom played on the original set-ups for the Baroque period, e.g. the use of the Baroque bow and gut strings, no chin rest, and tuning to A415 Hz, as well as Isabella Faust's live performances of Bach's E major Concerto and G minor Sonata (who also uses a Baroque bow and Baroque tuning), observing their phrasing styles and bow usages. Despite the fact that I played on a modern bow, I tried to capture the nature of the Baroque bow by placing importance on developing phrasing techniques, notably the building and releasing of the sound toward the end of bow and using a more rounded arpeggiated approach to executing chords in the Sarabande, and varying on/off strokes in the fast movement.

2. Heinrich Wilhelm Ernst, *Introduction, Theme and Variations on 'The Last Rose of Summer'* for solo violin: this is regarded as one of the most demanding pieces ever written for the instrument (Rowe, 2008: 250). Joachim considers Ernst as 'the greatest violinist, who towered above others' (Rowe, 2008: 1). The Six Polyphonic Studies are considered as Ernst's most important compositions, as they clearly reflect 'the virtuoso genre', the genre that Ernst had dedicated his whole career to (Wilczkowski, 2011: 50), and in particular, the very last of his etudes – *The Last Rose of Summer* – is his best-known work today (Rowe, 2008; Wilczkowski, 2011), containing several modified techniques for playing polyphonically, such as left-hand pizzicato or harmonics. However, like Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy, this work is not often performed or heard in public compared with other virtuosic pieces such as the *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* by Saint-Saëns, the *Carmen Fantasy* and *Zigeunerweisen* by Sarasate or *Tzigane* by Ravel, because most violinists are overwhelmed by its great technical difficulties. Auer, on the other hand, often asks his students to learn Ernst's works as they help violinists to build the most advanced violin technique of the left hand (Rowe, 2008: 145; Auer, 1921). Given that this piece is so technically demanding, I sought to investigate whether it was possible to adopt an integrated approach for learning this particular genre of music or whether I must separate the two aspects and focus on mechanical techniques in the learning process.
3. Schubert, Fantasy for Violin and Piano in C major, D. 934: composed in December 1827, this consists of four interconnected movements – Andante molto, Allegretto (*all'ongarese*), Andantino (a theme and three variations on the song 'Sei mir gegrüsst') and Allegro (a march). The sonata is also extremely demanding (for both violinist and pianist) because of its technical awkwardness, e.g. the use of exceedingly long slurs and repetitions of uncomfortable fingering patterns and stretches, but it is distinct from the virtuosity of the work by Ernst, whose technical writing for the violin is based on the experience of playing the violin himself. Composed in December 1827, the work was poorly received at the premiere on 20 January 1828, during which 'a fair number of the audience walked out before the end' (Wollenberg, 2011: 247). The negative

impact on its reception could be due to its excessive technical demands, especially for the violin (Gal, 1970: 147; McCreless, 1997: 206). A number of violinists, such as August Wilhelmj, Carl Flesch and Boris Schwarz, have questioned its playability. Both Flesch and Schwarz point out the arpeggios in the final movements are ‘virtually unplayable’, and Wilhelmj simplifies the ‘Sei mir gegrüsst’ variations in the third movement from Ab major to A major in his own edition (Flesch, 1966: 276; McCreless, 1997: 206-207). Therefore, I intended to find ways to integrate technical challenges with musical outcomes, for instance by developing bow control (e.g. long slurred bowing and bow articulation), adjusting the positioning of the left hand, and choosing appropriate fingerings for both technical (intonation security) and musical (singing quality) purposes. In addition to developing performance skills, I also looked into the stylistic context and relevant performance practices to make my interpretive decisions, including examining the meanings of Schubert’s bowing indications and notation markings, as well as the appropriateness of the tempo rubato in Schubert’s musical language.

4. Brahms, Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major, Op. 100: this was written in 1886, when Brahms spent the summer at his favourite retreat at Lake Thun, near Interlaken in Switzerland. The A major Sonata is probably the most lyrical of Brahms’ three sonatas for violin and piano (Goto, 2003). Again, I tried to develop a number of techniques to connect with the characteristics of the music. According to Brown et al. (2015: 13), the creation of a perfect legato lay at the heart of the mid- to late nineteenth-century German approach to bowing; therefore, I was seeking to produce a rich sound and seamlessly connected phrases in cantabile passages by enhancing basic bowing technique to connect bow strokes smoothly and adopting body movements and breathing to ease unnecessary pressure in the sound.
5. Nathan Milstein, *Paganiniana*: written by the legendary violinist Milstein,¹⁰ this is ‘a wild melange of violinistic stunts’ based on the famous 24th Caprice by Paganini (Schonberg, 1992). Like Ernst’s *The Last Rose of Summer*, *Paganiniana* also belongs to the virtuosic genre. I was particularly interested in taking the technical execution to an artistic level, considering how to show off the virtuosic qualities in the music and how to achieve a greater variety of musical effects, as for instance, discovering ways to make a greater dynamic range in fast arpeggios and chord progression passages, and use left-hand tremolos as accompaniment to support the melodic lines and highlight harmonic tension.

¹⁰ Nathan Milstein (1903-1992), a Russian-born violin virtuoso, ranked with Jascha Heifetz and Fritz Kreisler as one who set all-time standards. Milstein particularly excelled in virtuosic works, as for instance the Paganini Caprices, Wieniawski’s *Tarantelle* and his own composition, *Paganiniana* (Schonberg, 1992).

Performance and recordings

I enclosed five self-recorded performances as part of my final submission, which illustrated my own performing decisions and approaches (e.g. fingering, tempo fluctuation, articulation, vibrato and bow usage) during the learning process. Originally, I was planning to give a live performance as my final recital in Milton Court in July 2021, directly before my viva voce examination; however, because of the current pandemic, I was unable to travel to London. Therefore, I video recorded my final recital in the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, in which I performed the Debussy Sonata, L. 140, the Strauss Sonata, Op. 18, and Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy. This recorded final recital is part of my research outcomes. The performance demonstrates how I integrated the technical and the expressive with knowledge of relevant performance practices into my own approach to performing these works after the whole research journey.

Ethical considerations

I confirm that I have followed the Guildhall School of Music and Drama's standard procedures of obtaining ethical clearance and have gained approval before commencing the lesson and interview process with the research participants. Written consent was obtained from the participants prior to interviews and lessons. The participants were given information sheets and consent forms and were provided with a verbal overview immediately prior to the lessons or interviews to ensure all details of the project had been understood. An example of the consent form is included in the appendix.

Although I used an IPA to data analysis, I was only interested in the subjective experiences of the participants that concerned violin playing and teaching. As a violin teacher and performer, my aim was to use the data I gathered to get a range of strategies for my own exploration in my practice-led research. I was not concerned with their personal experiences of interpersonal dynamics in the context of lessons. Given that my study deals particularly with approaches to high-level violin playing/teaching, all interview questions were related to my central question on approaches to integrating technique and interpretation, and I did not make overall judgments about how the participants teach or compare them as teachers.

I paid utmost attention to ensuring anonymity of the participants: a) any information that could identify any of the participants, e.g. names, places, dates, ages, etc., was redacted; b) all participants were anonymised in the write-up with a chosen pseudonym; c) all participants were informed that

they were free to withdraw from the process at any point and without giving a reason;¹¹ d) all information provided by the participants was stored on my personal computer and was password-protected; e) all data will be deleted once my thesis has been approved.

¹¹ These participants did not read the scripts because all of them are very busy, and some data materials were collected from public access, i.e. masterclasses and music festivals.

Chapter 5

Data analysis

This chapter concerns the lessons and masterclasses that I observed and the interviews that I conducted with a group of expert teachers during the data collection period. Here, I show how these teachers worked with their students on specific pieces, besides outlining their general teaching approaches to musical interpretation and technical execution. This allows me to highlight individualities and commonalities between these expert teachers in relation to my research questions. I have divided this chapter into three sections, the first concerning how they balance technical and interpretive aspects in teaching, the other two considering how they deal with particular performance aspects, including tone production and fingering.

I focused specifically on the teachers outside China in my data collection in order to gather information about a range of strategies, knowledge and performance skills that could inform my own playing and then be applied to my teaching in China. Therefore, the study of these expert teachers' teaching and playing is an important part of my learning process.

The relationship between interpretation and technique

This section deals with general teaching principles and approaches with an emphasis on exploring the relationship between the development of musicianship and technical ability. As so many pedagogues have agreed, the purpose of technical mastery is to serve musical ideas, but technique cannot be learned without proper discipline (Flesch, 1923; Galamian, 1962; Gerle, 1983; Schwarz, 1983; Fischer, 2004; Yang, 2005). It has also been argued that technical limitations may also result in psychological, and thus expressive, burdens (Masin, 2012). Therefore, I intended to investigate how these expert teachers balance the two elements in their teaching.

Given that the way music is taught and learned is linked to the specific music tradition and its cultural contexts (Schippers, 2010: 61), one's teaching principles and playing styles are similarly connected to those contexts. The various violin-playing traditions from which the violinists I interviewed and observed come are clearly illustrated in their teaching and playing:

- B and D came from the Russian School of violin playing and studied with Oistrakh;
- F studied with Neaman, a pupil of Flesch;
- A studied with both Heifetz and Galamian;

- E studied at The Juilliard School and in Germany; and
- C and G went to The Yehudi Menuhin School (a branch of the European-developed tradition), and C studied with Menuhin himself.

With a range of distinctive learning backgrounds and playing traditions, there is usually a variety of approaches to a specific topic of violin playing.

According to C, one's teaching principle and playing style are mostly passed down from earlier generations, as violinists are all influenced by teachers with whom they come into contact.¹² This is evident in C's playing style and teaching principles, where Menuhin's unique teaching/playing philosophy is reflected in C's general approach to teaching and playing. C considers 'singing tone, expression, wide ranging colours and love of music and the violin' to be the fundamental elements in violin playing and teaching, and the development of technical skill should aim for the same goal. '[If] we try to sing as singers, [it] might come across with sensitivity and humanity so technique needs to be developed from that angle. It is appropriate to fit into the music and not the technique,' he says. This clearly reveals his opinion on the relationship between the musical and the technical, where music should not be overshadowed by technical display. To achieve this, C focuses on developing a 'friendly' technique with an emphasis on ease, looseness, breath control and natural movement. He believes that the body and the violin are a whole and each part mirrors itself; therefore, establishing a friendly technique helps violinists to reach a happy and satisfying medium. For example, if breathing is free and both hands are loose, the sound will be too; the physical relaxation is mirrored by an equivalent relaxation in sound. Consequently, if the body is blocked and both hands are stiff, it affects the sound because physical stiffness and tension will pass through the whole body and result in a forced sound. C's teaching/playing principle is to combine breathing and (horizontal) body movements with an aim to develop a singing quality in the sound and to play in a more relaxed manner. His instruction is that one should always check if tensions from the body are all fully minimised (including both hands, neck, shoulders, elbows and knees), as well as monitoring whether breathing and the swing of the body are in harmony. Moreover, C aims to build an optimistic mindset for students, for instance by encouraging them to create a positive mental attitude to performance:

'The best guide is to always imagine the composer sitting in the room or concert hall listening to us, helping and encouraging us to convey the music...'

¹² C's interview on 2 July 2019.

C uses a coherent approach to the development of playing skills and mindset. Rather than concentrating solely on efficiency and accuracy, importance is placed on establishing a more natural and easier way of playing the violin while developing a positive mindset.

A's teaching is deeply influenced by his teacher Galamian. Like his teacher, A is of the opinion that technical problems should be solved first as technical imperfection obstructs the realisation of musical expression on the violin, which is the opposite of Menuhin and C's teaching philosophy.¹³ For example, when spotting specific technical issues in masterclasses and lessons, instead of continuing working on the piece he often stops students immediately and spends time fixing the technical problem. A excels at diagnosing technical problems and analysing the causes of these issues, such as why the problem is formed and in what ways unhealthy habits can be corrected. This analytical approach, as Schippers indicates, can be described as an 'atomistic' approach, where 'the musical challenge is divided into easily digestible partial challenges' (Schippers, 2010: 81). It can be seen that efficiency lies at the core of A's teaching principles, where he concentrates on solving one particular issue at a time.

Even within a single tradition of violin playing, there is a variety of principles and approaches to the general teaching of technique and interpretation, as for instance, with D and B. Both have studied in the Russian School of violin playing and have taken lessons with the legendary David Oistrakh, but more often than not, they appear to hold opposing ideas. B usually uses an interpretation-based approach through demonstrations, whereas D applies a technique-led approach to teaching musical expression. The belief in efficiency and effectiveness is clearly reflected in D's teaching, where each performance aspect is taught with clinical attention to detail.¹⁴ While a number of pedagogues, including Auer and Galamian, argue that teaching interpretation is less tangible than teaching mechanical techniques as interpretation is hard to codify, it is fascinating that D is able to provide explicit instructions on interpretation. He uses an analytical approach to tackling both technical and interpretive issues, which is more like teaching mathematical formulae. For example, when teaching interpretation, importance is placed on the precision of execution, where he asks students to measure accurately how much bow pressure and speed is needed for the first note, and how much bow should be saved for the second note in a single bow stroke for achieving an effective *crescendo*. Rather than encouraging students to feel the music and play with musical/emotional involvement, D focuses on practical application, where each note and every movement must be carefully planned in advance and executed with precision. In other words, his teaching is prescriptive and technique-based, even when

¹³ Observational notes: A's masterclass at the Royal Northern College of Music, 19 March 2019.

¹⁴ Observational notes: D's masterclass at Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, 10 Dec 2019.

providing solutions to particular interpretive issues, for instance by prescribing how to make an effective *crescendo* through technical tools; however, he does not question the appropriateness of the *crescendo* in a particular style. Compared with D's approach, **B** prefers to give metaphorical suggestions on interpretive issues, regarding tone colour and expressivity.¹⁵ Instead of offering specific and precise comments on how much finger pressure one should use, B's instructions are more abstract: 'Übergang zum Paradies... like silver, like dream...' Students are usually responsive and open to metaphors as it gives them more freedom to search for the sound they imagined. When imagination is combined with the appropriate technical tool, the imagined sound will emerge. In addition to the use of metaphor, B uses (as Schippers defines it) an implicit approach to teaching interpretation,¹⁶ which is mainly through the extensive use of demonstrations, where students imitate the examples played by their teachers. It appears to be an effective way for B to convey his intentions. Demonstration is also a common approach in Chinese violin teaching. Evidence suggests that there is a tendency in Chinese culture for students to learn via imitation more than by the insights that arise from broad musicianship (Reimer, 1989; Huang and Thibodeaux, 2016). The reason for this could be that interpretation and style cannot be fully verbalised, and it can be difficult to articulate or rationalise what is correct or incorrect. It can therefore seem more efficient for students to learn through replication, whether of their teacher's playing or a recording.

Both F and E have studied and worked in different cultural contexts but hold similar views on the training of technical and musical aspects. Both state that technique should not be separated from musical expression in teaching, and technique is simply a way of facilitating a performance. In practice, however, **F** admits that it is very difficult to combine learning new repertoire with solving students' technical problems, e.g. fixing bow hold and hand shape, at the same time, especially when working within the exacting pressures and demands of the technique-oriented conservatory curriculum:

'Problems with [the] system here is such that we are confronted straight away. You know, [the] first exam at school is [a] mid-year exam, which is just [a] technical exam. You have to play scales, double stops, studies and so on, but people never played the scales in their lives. It's very difficult to get them ready for it. The bad habits they have are very deeply rooted in their techniques... even if you spend hours and hours working on some technical aspects, when you have to actually manage it and play [a] difficult piece, you completely forget about it. You just get back to what you have been doing before. So that's difficult. It would be very good to have a period of one year before they start the

¹⁵ Observational notes: B's masterclass at Florian's music shop, 21 June 2019.

¹⁶ Implicit approach: Schippers confirms that to a large extent, expression is taught implicitly, from traditionally prescribed traits to highly personal expressions (Schippers, 2010: 71).

course. We could just work on technique, on things which need to be addressed without [the] pressure on exams...'¹⁷

Like his predecessor, Flesch, F deals with mechanical control first; any technical issue left unsolved would otherwise distract from or obscure the musical performance, and must therefore be addressed and practised. On the other hand, he claims his true passion lies in teaching interpretation and style:

‘We sometimes get people who were very well taught and they have no problems whatsoever. And then it’s a very different work and very enjoyable, because then you actually talk about music mostly.’

Again, this reveals that F is of the opinion that the artistic side of violin playing can only be considered after a solid technical foundation is built. Moreover, this strongly resonates with Illeris’ learning theory (Illeris, 2007), where F’s teaching approach is determined by the school curriculum (the learning/teaching environment). The interplay of the content dimension and the interaction dimension is clear, where the teaching approach needs to fit into the overall societal aims. As the priority is to pass the exam, F has to adapt teaching to meet the school requirements.

E also agrees that technical challenges need to be addressed and rigorous training in technique cannot be neglected, but she indicates that musical purpose needs to be recognised first and foremost and perceived as the ultimate goal. E believes that ‘the fundamental elements of technical training, i.e. the basic set-up for a natural and flexible control of both violin- and bow-hold, accuracy in intonation, development of tonal projection, efficient and controlled coordination, all serve as essential tools in order to perform and convey more convincingly the musical ideas and expression of the compositions in all their varied styles’.¹⁸ This reveals that the development of musical expression for E forms the central purpose and meaning in playing the violin. In the meantime, she points out that many technical challenges need to be followed up methodically in lessons, as many students have not learned how to practise effectively: ‘If there are problems, I will often spend much of the lesson on tackling these issues.’ In order to balance technical and musical elements in lessons, she always includes some work on musical ideas and interpretation rather than limiting an entire lesson to technical training. In addition, E uses a distinctive approach to the teaching of different repertoire, where she focuses on understanding a composer’s intention and bringing knowledge of relevant performance practice into her teaching. She states, ‘I try to approach each style with respect for the “language of the composer” according to performance practice of their time... This for me offers the great wealth of artistic opportunity which makes both performing and teaching the violin so exciting.’ In contrast to F, her

¹⁷ F’s interview, 5 July 2019.

¹⁸ E’s interview, 5 Aug 2019.

teaching/playing approach (the content dimension) is deeply influenced by her passion for music and teaching (the incentive dimension). The ‘intrinsic’ motivation determines how she approaches playing and teaching – that is, integrating the more abstract side of education with various technical tools – and this makes her teaching/playing experience enjoyable and satisfying.

With the exception of G, who has little experience of the international competition circuit, all the other teachers I interviewed are either international competition adjudicators, prizewinners themselves or have trained competition prizewinners. ‘I’m not necessarily a competition type teacher... I’m developing a solid technique [for students], but not in a sort of athletic sense,’ G clarifies.¹⁹ It is particularly interesting that G is the only teacher who does not object to the idea of separating technique from interpretation: ‘It [the two elements in teaching] can be separated.’ She also uses an analytical approach to training techniques, for instance by using a series of etudes ranging from Mazas to Paganini and Wieniawski:

‘For example, to do with string crossing from Mazas, something that a 10-year-old would do, to think about how we do this. And then at the same time I would also give them Paganini’s second Caprice which is very sophisticated, difficult string crossing. But also to think about the basic string crossing, how to think about it, how to do it, how to work on it, and then taking that into Paganini.’

Compared with other teachers, G deals with more basic techniques, such as intonation and string crossing, and focuses less on the core canonical repertoire for major international violin competitions. But her teaching is very systematic, where importance is placed on helping students to identify the problem, such as analysing the causes of a problem and what they need to do to solve it at every point.

Summary

Through my interviews and observations of masterclasses and lessons, it is hard to find examples of where technique and interpretation are separated in a pure form, but the polarisation of the two is obvious. For example, data suggest that A and G tend to identify and isolate technical problems, whereas C and B employ a more integrated approach to developing sound quality and a greater range of colours. While each teacher has their unique teaching voice and distinct approach within their playing tradition, violin performance is usually taught assimilatively, by extending the existing knowledge and skills of a particular playing tradition. For example, as discussed in the third chapter, Prof. Lin’s teaching has influenced generations of Chinese violinists and most Chinese violin teachers tend to adopt his training method. ‘In every art form... you can’t help being influenced by your

¹⁹ G’s interview, 25 June 2019.

mentors and heroes', Pierre Bensaid indicates (Hancock, 2020). The degree to which a technical-led or a musical-led approach is used by these teachers often correlates with their playing tradition and cultural context. Both C and A are influenced by their teachers, and both have been handing down the most important qualities of their playing tradition. A uses a technical-led approach with an emphasis on efficiency by isolating one particular technical problem at a time and is of the opinion that musical expression must not be interrupted by technical deficiencies. On the contrary, C adopts more of a musical-led approach to pursuing a natural way of playing and prioritises tone production and wide-ranging colours. F acknowledges that the two elements should be connected in teaching, but that a solid foundation of basic technique must be built first, which echoes the principle of his predecessor, Flesch.

Tone production

The following two sections will concern two particular playing aspects, tone production and fingering, in which I shall outline the differences of opinions as well as discussing the commonalities of approaches to these performance issues. Most teachers would agree that a high quality of tone production is the key to good playing. Menuhin states that, comparing the piano to the violin, he has bypassed choosing the piano, as the sound of the piano is made through technical means; for the violin, it allows him to feel that he is projecting his own voice rather than the piano's 'voice ready-made' (Menuhin, 1986: 8). However, developing an artistic tone on the violin needs extreme lengths of time. This is due to the fact that the violin, as a string instrument, does not have a pre-existing tone quality. Even an elementary tone on the instrument requires a certain level of mastery (Masin, 2012). Accordingly, many distinguished pedagogues, including Galamian, Gerle, Fischer, Ashkenasi, Chumachenco and Krebbers, often concentrate on the mechanics of bow technique and set a certain standard in sound production (Flesch, 1923; Galamian, 1962; Gerle, 1983; Fischer, 2004; Masin, 2012). As previously discussed, this resonates with the Chinese training approach, which emphasises clear and effective technical craft such as how to produce a clean and focused sound. This is also evident in some of the participants' teaching, for instance D and A, who usually approach this interpretive matter of tone from a technical point of view. By contrast, some other participants, i.e. B and C, consider tone quality as well as tone colour as the most fundamental components of violin playing, and both of whom approach the subject of tone production from the very start of the masterclasses. According to piano pedagogue Neuhaus, 'work on tone is work on technique and work on technique is work on tone' (Neuhaus, 1973: 3). This is reflected in B's and C's teaching, where every aspect of performance they dealt with in masterclasses serves one specific purpose – that is, tone quality and tone colour.

B's approach is focused on both left and right hands, for instance, the uses of various bow techniques and vibrato, as well as the balance of the two hands. As the sounding of the tone comes directly from bow strokes, he deals specifically with students' ability to master bow control from the very beginning of the lesson, including changes of bow pressure and speed, bow distribution, as well as changes of contact point (B masterclass, 21 June 2019):

'Use less bow but with more bow contact... (demonstration)... You tend to rush when your bow is out of control... (demonstration)... Divide your bow (wisely)...'²⁰

Although it is quite difficult for violinists to achieve a particularly beautiful tone when learning a piece at the initial stage, as they have also to deal with intonation and rhythmic exactness, B prioritises sound quality from the very beginning of the learning process. For example, even when students have just started learning a new piece, B asks students to envisage the sound they want:

'Hear it [before playing]! [There should be] much intensity in the sound (demonstration) – So even bow speed, sustaining [the sound towards the tip] (demonstration). Connect every note (demonstration)... The last note [of the fast running passage] must connect to the long note...'²¹

B indicates that finding the right balance between bow control and vibrato enables the player to expand the ranges of dynamic and colour:

'More [finger] pressure [after this G-string scale] but light bow (demonstration)... *crescendo* in the left hand (demonstration), especially the last few notes (demonstration)... [faster and narrower] vibrato, yeah!'²²

Therefore, vibrato, finger pressure, articulation and clarity of the left hand all affect sound quality and colour.

In addition, he does not allow students to play any piece of music with segmented phrases:

'You must not play any accents – it's a long line (demonstration)... legato!'²³

B constantly talks about legato playing, not only in the left hand (vibrato) but also the right hand. He focuses on making connections between bow changes, shifts and string crossings. The seamless

²⁰ The student was playing the third movement of Brahms' Sonata in D minor, Op. 108.

²¹ The student was playing Chausson's *Poème*.

²² Ditto.

²³ Ditto.

changing of the bow at the heel and tip, especially in slow passages, can be achieved through sustained bows:

‘You must connect every note... between bow changes (demonstration)... [and] must not stop the vibrato even during shifting...’²⁴

B always pays extra attention to the note before the most expressive note or the highest note of the phrase, where he stresses that the important note is prepared by the note before, through the development of vibrato, bow speed and bow pressure; therefore, the last two notes need to be seamlessly connected with a clear musical direction.

In short, B believes that every aspect of violin playing should be connected, i.e. between each note, every bow change and shift. Although B never explains this in so many words, the realisation of a true legato has become rather clear through his own demonstrations, which requires a set of technical tools, including a smooth and sustaining sound from every part of the bow, smooth bow change and shifting, and continuous vibrato. This seems to be the reason that his school of violin playing is distinctive from many others.

Compared with B, C approaches this question from a unique perspective. In order to achieve a singing quality and a wide range of tone colours, he looks beyond bow techniques and vibrato and places great emphasis on developing a natural way of playing the violin through breathing, movement and looseness. For example, C believes breathing can help violinists to make an open and free tone (C masterclass, 2 Nov 2017):

‘When you need the sound, you try harder. When you press in, so in this case it collapses very very fast... Don’t! Just let it go, just follow... (demonstration)... Sorry, one thing, would you try just from the octave one more time? Would you pump in twice as much air? And also, because afterwards is [the] G string (demonstration)... it’s got positive enough output (demonstration)... That’s very draining, make sure you don’t suffer, breathe twice and see! – the sound releases more.’²⁵

C indicates that breathing plays an essential role in developing a singing and open tone without forcing the sound. Through breathing, particularly breathing out, it enables the violinist to release physical tension, which consequently prevents one from squashing the sound.

²⁴ The student was playing the second movement of Brahms’ Violin Sonata in D minor, Op. 108.

²⁵ The student was playing the first movement of Brahms’ Violin Sonata in A major, Op. 100.

Besides a focus on breathing, C states that too much bow pressure would result in the sound becoming squashed. The louder and more exciting the music gets, the more players have a tendency to press the bow and force the sound, as well as place more pressure in the fingers of left hand:

‘Make sure you really take in air (demonstration)... Don’t just tighten [up], it is not very easily done because it is unviolinistic to do this (demonstration)... You cannot play it bigger in a certain amount, so what’s left for you is to release it even more.’²⁶

C suggests that rather than pressing the sound into the violin, one should aim to draw the tone out of it. Therefore, doing the opposite seems more apt: the louder or more intensely one needs to play, the less pressure (more freedom to resonate and sing) there should be on the string.

Like B, C has a similar viewpoint of how to make a true legato and advocates making connections between the notes. He states that violinists often play a portato or cut a particular note short, which is not due to artistic interpretation but is for the sake of achieving an inaudible shift. The left hand tries to avoid slides and naturally the bow helps to articulate the notes by playing a portato:

‘For the last few notes of the slurred bow, play them extra long (demonstration)... because you tend to cut them short before the last note, and you break the line. We don’t want to hear any gap between these last notes (demonstration)... One last thing, don’t accent on the last note. You actually lose the excitement when attacking it.’²⁷

In regard to looseness of the body, C has a unique way of making students aware of the role of body movements. In particular, for those who have stiff hands and arms, C encourages students to feel that the upper body is an extension of the bow, by gently swinging the waist sideways:

‘Drive [move your upper body] to the left. It’s easier to move the bow (demonstration)... First time the pressure is just a little bit too hard for the up-bow *crescendo* to sing. You tend to squash it and that’s the danger (demonstration)... So deliberately use the natural swing to soften your body.’²⁸

C believes that a natural, open tone and singing quality comes with suppleness and flexibility in the arms and body; through breathing and natural body movements one can play with relative ease as the body and hands obtain suppleness and flexibility, and this leads to a more resonant and open tone, as well as achieving the wide range of tone colours one desires.

²⁶ Ditto.

²⁷ The student was playing the first movement of the Mendelssohn Concerto, Op. 64.

²⁸ Ditto.

Although B and C have different principles in approaching quality of tone, it is obvious that they both consider tone production and tone colour to be the most important elements of violin playing, as they spent the majority of the lesson time working on this particular subject. In contrast to B and C, A usually prioritises technical elements such as intonation and rhythmic exactness, coordination of both hands, and movements for vibrato and the bow arm at the start of his lesson with students. For instance, he is very picky about left-hand precision, such as intonation errors, and he always offers detailed analysis of what causes the issue (A masterclass, 19 Mar 2019):

‘You play out of tune here, because your left hand is too tense, which affected intonation. You see, the mechanical stuff is very important here. You are too tense to move around the fingerboard.’²⁹

While it illustrates that this is what A considers the most appropriate thing to work on in this situation with this particular student, it reveals that he prefers to isolate the technical issue and tackle it separately.

When it comes to tone quality and tone colour, A gives very practical advice on how to play with a bigger and more powerful sound. To achieve this, he concentrates on two areas: 1) body posture, where he suggests that the body should lean toward the left side, and 2) arm level (particularly for the G string, where the bow arm should rise higher than a normal G-string arm level). Furthermore, he places importance on bow distribution as he believes bow division is closely linked with musical line and phrasing:

‘You need to learn how to allocate the bow wisely. For example, if you use half of the bow to play B5 then you leave yourself no room to develop the following scale and it is almost impossible to do the *crescendo*. In this case, it’s necessary to figure out how much bow is needed.’³⁰

A’s approach can be understood as a problem-solving process, where he first identifies the issue and then offers solution to the question. There is no doubt that his teaching tactics are very efficient; however, it seems to me that execution of technical craft often disconnects with tonal expressivity. Similarly, G also deals with technical factors, but emphasises the more basic practical application regarding how the bow contact point affects the sound, how the string crossing is working, what the bow arm is doing and what the wrist is doing, thus separating tone production from its expressiveness and colour range (G interview, 25 June 2019):

²⁹ The student was playing Ysaÿe’s Sonata No. 5.

³⁰ The student was playing Schubert’s B minor Rondo.

‘...so really isolating the problem. If a note [of the sound] isn’t focused... why was it? Was the bow too far away from the bridge or something else [caused the problem]?’

By contrast, **D** also uses a technique-led approach to the teaching of tone production, but importance is placed on achieving various musical effects through the training of technical components. Compared with other expert teachers, **D** goes into far greater detail in analysing the execution of each technical component. For example, he is of the opinion that each note must speak, and his approach to this is articulating each note from the bow; for example, he articulates slurred bows by pronouncing each individual note within one bow by gently articulating every note from the bow arm, which sounds like some sort of portato as opposed to legato. His teaching is more detailed than other teachers because he breaks every technical aspect into smaller units (**D** masterclass, 10 Dec 2019):

‘Every note must speak. Use your bow to speak [articulate], like this (demonstration), but we mustn’t hear it [the separation]. So it is not just [a mass of continued] sound...’³¹

For the detaché bowing style, **D** asks students to make a slight *diminuendo* at the end of each bow stroke while keeping a vibrato going so that each note sounds articulated and clear:

‘Vibrato on every short note (demonstration)... Slight *diminuendo* at the end [of the bow], like speaking.’³²

Rather than seeking for a singing/lyrical quality, **D** seems to consider legato as an approach to shaping phrases (*diminuendo* at the end of each bow), which is very different from **B**’s and **C**’s understanding of legato (that is, a smooth sound and real connection between notes); moreover, his uses of portati in slurred bows could be understood as his personal style.

D repeatedly stresses the importance of distributing the bow wisely and varying bow speed, as, like **A**, he believes that appropriate bow distribution and bow speed, along with continuous vibrato, constitute a good sound. For instance, in order to achieve a dramatic effect, the bow needs to have some differentiation in speeds, even within a single bow stroke:

‘If you just play fast [the same pace throughout the bow stroke], there is no drama [to the note]...’³³

³¹ The violinist was playing the first movement of Beethoven’s Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96.

³² The student was playing the third movement of Franck’s Violin Sonata in A major.

³³ Ditto.

His suggestion is that this single bow stroke should contain three different bow speeds, starting with an ‘attack’ (fast bow speed) at the beginning of the note, slowing down after its beginning and speeding up again in the second half of the bow toward the end for the *crescendo* effect.

D’s teaching concept seems to suggest that rather than spontaneously responding to different emotions, every bow stroke should be carefully calculated and planned in advance in order to achieve a variety of expressions. He enters the most detailed and practical instructions on how to use technical tools to achieve these effects, where he often breaks down one single bow stroke into a number of small units. More importantly, his teaching style is technique-oriented and he excels at using technical terms to explain interpretive issues. One example of his approach can be found in his views on bow distribution, where he states that, for an effective *crescendo*, one must plan out how much bow should be used at the beginning and how much of it is left to play the last two notes of the slur.

E approaches the subject from a different perspective, in which importance is placed on how to express composers’ musical languages through the instrument. Rather than dealing exclusively with practical application, she focuses on scholarly, theoretical and abstract aspects (E class, 1 July 2017):

‘This is good violin playing, but we need to take the composer’s language into consideration. What does the composer want to say here? What does he try to express? And then we need to carefully consider which part of the bow, how much bow and what types of bow strokes you should employ, in order to bring out the character and underline the harmony...’³⁴

This suggests that mastering the instrument is merely the means to the musical goal. According to E, one must look into the composer’s intention and historical background, and then make informed decisions:

‘It requires a different bow technique to play this work. The style of this period indicates that there is certain lightness in the tone. The sound naturally releases at the end of the bow since the two ends are very light, so your playing at the moment is too accented and heavy...’³⁵

This reveals that E focuses on incorporating knowledge of period style and its implications for the interpretation into her teaching, which requires students to understand the stylistic context and relevant performance practice issues as well as concerning themselves with technique.

³⁴ The student was playing Bach’s Sonata for Solo Violin in G minor, Adagio.

³⁵ Ditto.

Vibrato

According to Auer, ‘vibrato is primarily a means used to heighten effect, to embellish and beautify a singing passage or tone’ (Auer, 1921: 22). He considers vibrato as an essential element of tone production and tone colour. Auer’s principle is also reflected in these expert teachers’ teaching, where most of them hardly offer technical suggestions when discussing this expressive component; instead, they give guidance on interpretations. It is interesting to learn that although vibrato is purely a left-hand technique, these expert teachers usually deal with both left and right hands. For instance, as previously discussed, **B** believes that beautiful sound production and tone colour is achieved through a balanced effort of both hands. If tone production goes hand in hand with varying speeds of vibrato, one can produce many different colours. Therefore, he often concentrates on the speed of the vibrato and the intensity of the bow on the string (B masterclass, 21 June 2019):

‘Molto molto vibrato! (demonstration)... Molto...’³⁶

B does not give much verbal explanation, but his demonstrations clearly illustrate that the speed of vibrato must match the bowing. In order to increase the intensity in the sound, one must use more bow pressure alongside a faster vibrato. This implies that the synchronisation of vibrato and bow contact has a great effect on tone colour. However, he also indicates that the speed of vibrato does not always synchronise with the bow contact (intensity). For example, when playing a *diminuendo*, the right hand needs to lessen the bow pressure, but the vibrato does not necessarily become quieter. On the contrary, vibrato can be more active and faster:

‘Less here [bow pressure] and molto [faster] vibrato.’³⁷

In this particular moment, although the volume of sound is reduced by employing a light bow, the excitement of the music is still kept by a fast vibrato.

C also agrees that the balance between the two hands is important for sound production, but he believes the bow leads the left hand in vibrato, and vibrato is subordinate to the bow. Naturally, he encourages students to concentrate on the bow instead of vibrato itself (C masterclass, 2 July 2018):

‘I like you to think less about your vibrato and concentrate more on the right side... sometimes let it be hidden, like you are almost not doing it (demonstration). Actually the more you vibrate the harder to keep the bow stay [slow]... Feel the vibrato action, smaller! Think of it as shimmering rather than

³⁶ The student was playing the last movement of Brahms’ Violin Sonata in D minor.

³⁷ The student was playing Chausson’s *Poème*.

vibrating (demonstration), so almost not doing it, shimmering... Also it is less disturbing to the bow!’³⁸

In addition, he is of the opinion that vibrato should always be guided by the musical line, and the understanding of the music and its musical character governs choices of vibrato, i.e. a greater speed or less width of vibrato. Therefore, he asks students to investigate how much vibrato is needed to give a more expressive quality to a phrase:

‘Start off with less [vibrato]. See! It naturally sounds warmer. Sometimes you could almost do it with holding it inside rather than showing lots of vibrato (demonstration)... So keep your vibrato indecisive, and see what colour comes out at the end, what [range of vibrato] makes more sense for where you are in the passage (demonstration)... and if it is in the character of the writing.’³⁹

Like his approach to tone production and bow control, C indicates that the left hand should be very relaxed while playing vibrato. He repeatedly advises students not to over-vibrate as it causes tension in the left hand, resulting in rigid vibrato. Rigid vibrato has a side effect on sound quality because it blocks the resonance of the tone, as well as leading to a diminished range of tone colour. Therefore he suggests considering vibrato as a loosening motion, without any stiffness or gripping of the violin:

‘Think of it like this (demonstration). With less vibrato, half the width, twice as slow, you will be less tired, and then... you can focus and enjoy the colours more rather than letting that get in the way (demonstration)... This allows you more choices. If you need a slightly greater speed or greater width of the vibrato, it is available to you. Actually, it sounds nervous enough even if that half the width half the speed. And also it gives a little greater purity (demonstration). If you [your fingers] start pressing (demonstration), you lose the colour quickly. That is going to sound louder whether you like it or not. But you can sound blocked, if you’re even slightly pressing...’⁴⁰

In contrast to C’s approach to vibrato, **D** considers it as a primary element of tone production. Although the majority of violinists employ a continuous vibrato, as it is the standard approach in current performance practice, D really emphasises the effect of the continuity of vibrato on the quality of tone production (D masterclass, 9 Dec 2019):

‘Don’t stop your vibrato [after the long note], also vibrato on the grace notes (demonstration)... Don’t delay it – your vibrato is late.’⁴¹

³⁸ The student was playing Schubert’s Fantasy in C major.

³⁹ Ditto.

⁴⁰ Ditto.

⁴¹ The student was playing the third movement of Franck’s Violin Sonata in A major.

Unlike C, who advises students not to use vibrato excessively, D encourages students to employ this expressive tool as much as possible, not only on short notes but also at the beginning of trills:

‘Vibrato before [starting] the trill (demonstration)... And use a little bit of attack alongside vibrato (demonstration), for the dramatic effect.’⁴²

E is also of the opinion that vibrato has great effect on tone colour, and she pays utmost attention to exploring different types of vibrato, for instance by playing the same passage using different vibratos to create more layers of tone colour – brilliant, sensuous or sweet. Naturally, she focuses on varying vibrato to achieve different colourations (E class, 1 July 2017):

‘Here we need a sweeter vibrato to create a tender colour. After the passionate and resplendent passage, your vibrato remains rapid and narrow, which produced an intense and agitated sound. Can you change into a relatively slow and wide vibrato to make the tone sound sweeter?’⁴³

E advocates that vibrato must synchronise with the musical expression, which suggests that one must vary the speeds and widths of vibrato in response to musical character and emotional content. When a wide range of vibrato is available, one will produce more layers of colours.

A is the only exception and he focuses on the mechanical side of vibrato, dealing particularly with the execution of the actual movement, where he isolates this technical component from tone production, separating out vibrato and bow control (A masterclass, 19 Mar 2019):

‘Your vibrato is too narrow and fast. You should practise vibrato as a separate exercise. Start to learn it from scratch, doing exercises, which takes a few months. Practise the piece without vibrato for the time being. Do not add vibrato to the piece until you know how to do it.’⁴⁴

It seems that A considers mechanical control to be a prerequisite for musical expression in violin playing, which explains the reason why he prioritises the mechanical side of technique, and separates out technical training and musical considerations in his teaching.

Summary

Comparison of the various approaches to tone production and colour used by these distinguished pedagogues and violinists reveals obvious differences in their opinions and principles. For example,

⁴² Ditto.

⁴³ The student was playing Schubert’s Fantasy in C major.

⁴⁴ The student was playing Schubert’s B minor Rondo.

E emphasises the relationship between musical characters and different types of vibrato; A on the other hand deals particularly with the mechanical side of the issues, such as how to use vibrato properly. Another detail on which their principles and opinions appears to differ is where A and G separate out technical elements and the development of tone colour, whereas B and C focus specifically on developing singing quality and a range of tone colour, and talk less about mechanical issues. It is particularly interesting that D gives the most specific technical instructions on expressive tone production, where he approaches this interpretive issue from a purely technical point of view, in terms of bow distribution, bow speed and pressure, as well as how the bow should match vibrato; in the meantime, his intention to achieve a greater musical effect by means of these technical tools is very clear.

Shifting/Portamento

Fingering, comprising technical shifts and musical shifts (portamento), is perhaps one of the most debatable questions among the left-hand techniques in violin playing, as it illustrates one's technical ability as well as personal taste (Auer, 1921; Flesch, 1923; Yampolsky, 1967). According to Flesch and Yampolsky, the choice of fingering determines the precision and fluency of performance, as well as musical expression (Flesch, 1923; Yampolsky, 1967: 19). For Yampolsky, the choice of fingering should allow violinists to play with minimum effort; from the artistic side, it enables them to enrich the expressiveness of performances, for example by employing portamenti and glissandi (Yampolsky, 1967). Fingering choices, however, seems to be a sensitive subject, as each violinist's choice is individual and personal. In particular, many concert soloists and teachers hold different views on the general use of portamenti⁴⁵ (Auer, 1921: 63-64; Flesch, 1923; Yampolsky, 1967; Ricci, 2007; Masin, 2012). The use of portamento was common practice in the nineteenth century, while violinists and pedagogues in the twentieth century (e.g. Flesch, Galamian) deplore its overuse, preferring cleaner articulation (Stowell, 2001), with portamento used far more sparingly and in a much more limited range of repertoire. The changing tastes and styles of violin playing, particularly the use of portamento, is also reflected in general violin teaching in China, as well as in some of the expert teachers' teaching that I observed, where a cleaner and more articulated sound is preferred, and the focus is often on neatness of execution in shifting. The reason for this seems to be that the recording process has thoroughly changed the way in which we play and listen to music, as the experience of unlimited re-hearing made precision and accuracy vastly important (Musgrave and Sherman, 2003).

⁴⁵ According to Stowell, 'in instrumental music the term portamento generally denotes an expressive effect – an emotional connection between two notes... It gradually gained regular acceptance as an expressive colouring in string playing during the late eighteenth century' (Stowell, 2001: 182-183).

Emphasis in current violin playing has therefore shifted from expressing one's personality to accuracy. As previously discussed, this is reflected in the emphasis placed on technical consistency and accuracy by teachers and competition juries – sometimes at the expense of personal expression (Wen, 1992: 90; Wagner, 2015: 182; Alberge, 2016; Kawabata, 2018).

D's choice of fingering clearly represents his expressive intentions. He is generally opposed to the idea of employing glissando; instead, he deals with technical shifting with an emphasis on how to produce a clean shift. This is similar to the training approach with which I was brought up. His suggestion for playing a shift, especially a long-distance shift, is to make a *diminuendo* on the actual slide to avoid the glissando sounding laboured. This applies to both slurred and separate bows. For example, for separate bows (i.e. down and up bows), start the sliding motion at the end of the down bow while making a *diminuendo*, and as one changes the bow from down to up (the bowing is interchangeable), the shifting process should be completed; and for shifting in a slurred bow, the *decrescendo* takes place between the two notes within one bow so that the shift will not produce a smeary sound. Thus, rather than embellishing the interval, D finds ways to reduce the slide in an attempt to achieve a cleaner sound.

Similarly, **A** also advocates the use of clean shifts and concentrates on finding ways to reduce the shifting sound. One of his approaches to this is to employ finger extensions. For example, when playing a D5 and an A5 on the A string, one can start the D5 in the 3rd position with the index finger, and stretch the third finger to reach the A5 in the 5th position without bringing out the sliding sound. Therefore, instead of shifting up to the 5th position, the finger extension avoids frequent changes of positions and practically eliminates the sliding sound. This approach, however, may not be suitable for every violinist, especially those who have smaller hands, because the standard positions of the fingers of the left hand are compromised. Both A's and D's approaches are very effective as they explicitly explain the practical application of shifting; however, it seems that they weaken a very expressive function of shifting – that is, the use of portamento.

By contrast, **C** promotes a vastly different opinion and places particular importance on the choices of fingering and musical shifting, spending much time examining various fingerings and portamenti. His personal playing style can be identified from others by his uses of portamenti. He combines a range of varied portamenti to achieve a seamless legato as well as special musical effects. C believes the choice of fingerings is closely connected with tone quality and tone colour; in particular, the use of different fingerings leads to different effects on the tone quality and colour of the same phrase. He employs some unusual fingerings and portamenti at specific moments in the music, which truly

reveals his individual style. For example, in bars 69 and 70 in the first movement of Brahms' A major sonata, the common fingerings of this phrase is that the long notes D $\sharp$ 5 and C5 are played on the A string, but C chooses an ascending shift (portamento) on the C5 for the sake of highlighting the change of colour,⁴⁶ which creates an unexpected and magical effect.

Example 1. Brahms, Sonata in A major, Op. 100, first movement, bars 68-71.



Moreover, C usually varies his use of portamento in an attempt to convey his musical ideas, for instance by varying the speed and timing of the slide. His unique approach to sliding, which he often uses in downward glissandi in a fairly slow motion, gives a particular expressiveness to the sound, where he seems to imitate a singer's approach to emphasising the descending intervals. One example of this type of this portamento can be found in bar 76 in the second movement of Brahms' Concerto, where he performs a slow downward slide between D7 and Bb6, thereby producing a vulnerable colour and a crying effect in the music.

Example 2. Brahms, Concerto in D major, Op. 77, second movement, bars 75-77.



Further, it is interesting that C never forces students to copy his fingerings, especially for the artistic use of fingerings (portamenti), but he occasionally gives fingering suggestions for technical reasons, particularly in places involving shifting and intonation challenges. This suggests that C encourages students to develop their own individual style.

Similarly, one of **B**'s fingering traits is to make the phrases sound more cantabile and legato, and preserve the uniformity of the timbre by playing most of each phrase on one string, particularly in a melodic phrase. Naturally, by employing such fingerings, he frequently uses portamento in thematic melodies to heighten the musical effects, such as embellishing a specific interval and emphasising the tone. His rendition of the beginning of the Sibelius Concerto is an example of this principle, where he chooses to stay on the A string and shift up to the 6th position, whereas other violinists generally

⁴⁶ I have adopted this particular fingering, which I used at 02'02" in my video recording of the Brahms Sonata.

choose to stay in the 3rd position without shifting. This demonstrates that B intends to highlight the dissonant interval (an augmented fourth) in order to increase the intensity of the music.

Example 3. Sibelius, Concerto in D minor, Op. 47, first movement, bars 14-17.



For teaching purposes, however, B always asks students to photocopy his parts for fingering and bowing indications before the learning process begins, whereas C gives students freedom to make their own fingering decisions. This seems contrary to B's teaching principles, one of which, as Song reports, involves developing students' self-learning ability (Song, 2019).

E believes that the choice of fingering should be based entirely on the composer's musical language; one should therefore examine the historical background of a work before making fingering decisions. For example, she notes that the Brahms sonatas require a very high level of expressivity and one should employ all possible expressive tools in response to their Romantic expression, including portamento; however, it seems inappropriate to use portamento in Bach's partitas, as glissando interrupts rhythmic features of the dance movements. She constantly places importance on choosing the right type of slides for interpreting different music. When playing Brahms' sonatas, for example, E investigates the performance habits of Brahms' colleague Joachim, in an attempt to get a feeling for the sound and phrasing that Brahms might have wanted. By studying the performance context, rather than employing the modern style of fingering, she adopts nineteenth-century methods of fingering. Her most common form of slide is carried out between notes with a third or larger interval, and she mainly employs a German shift as opposed to a French shift because she thinks the uses of a French shift (especially an ascending shift) seem to be out of character. The use of portamento therefore can only be effective when used in the proper way, at the right moment. E always connects the choice of fingering and the use of portamento with a work's historical context.

F notes that he always devotes much time to the choice of fingering. He is of the opinion that fingering in itself is not just a question of travel around the fingerboard, but also it is very much about how to express the music in the best possible way:

'Because I first try to get the feel of the piece. I always choose my fingering in order to make [a] certain phrase, certain colour and certain shape. Sometimes it means the fingering is much more complicated than it could be. It could be much simpler, but sometimes I choose [a] much more

difficult one... [technically] I try to feel more comfortable here before I can actually start shaping the piece of music as I would like to. But first thing, as I say, I try to get [a] feel of the whole thing. So when I approach fingering, I know already what I want to express.'

F's fingering decisions prioritise the interpretive aspect of expressiveness regardless of whether his choices increase the technical difficulty of the left hand. Moreover, he also spends much time with students working and trying to pick the right fingerings for the students from both technical and musical viewpoints:

'I mean I [have] got students with all sorts of shapes and forms. I've got some people who have very small hands and you have to know how to approach fingering. For small hands, because you can't stretch, some people are very much oriented into shifting. I personally like doing a lot of extensions. Of course you can't avoid shifting, but I do a lot of extensions in order to keep... the contour of the melody very clear, which extensions will allow you. But you have to be careful who you're dealing with and what is going to be suitable for everyone. So I spend a lot of time [on fingerings] with students and with myself when I prepare new pieces. Because I think it can be very expressive in itself.'

Rather than adopting B's approach and prescribing fingerings, F clearly helps his students to find their own fingerings, as he believes that the choice of fingering should be based on one's individual ability. It is also noticeable that when choosing fingerings for himself, F prioritises expressivity, without having to consider technical difficulty; however, when it comes to teaching, he pays great attention to technical playability and practicality. This seems to suggest that musical expression can be easily compromised without technical mastery.

Summary

Many violinists would agree that technical shifting focuses on the change of position of the left hand for the sake of technical convenience (Flesch, 1923; Galamian, 1962; Yampolsky, 1967), whereas the choice of fingering, particularly the use of portamento, belongs to the field of aesthetics and represents the individual taste of the performer (Galamian, 1962; Yampolsky, 1967: 121), which suggests that there is no absolute aesthetic standard for musical interpretation. When shifting technique is used in various musical situations as an expressive device, the style of shifting appears to be contentious. For instance, to what extent should portamento be used as a means of achieving expressivity in violin playing? A slide, quicker or slower depending on one's personal taste, leads to different colours of sound in the same phrase. This is perhaps the reason why no pedagogical research is available to indicate exactly when to employ musical shifts.

By observing and interviewing these expert teachers, I have observed that one of the most distinctive differences between them is in the way in which they shift on the violin (both technically and musically): specifically, the questions of where they decide to shift and how they want to shift. For example, F, D and A prefer a cleaner and more articulated sound, where they employ finger extensions, as well as *diminuendi* and portati, to avoid the sliding sound; their approach to fingering choice reflects the current trend of shifting (Galamian, 1962; Stowell, 2001; Masin, 2012). In order to achieve clean shifting, both A and D prioritise the mechanical side of technique by emphasising the execution of the shifting motion, including how to make the physical motion of gliding the fingers from one note to another sound clean, without a smeary sound. However, clean shifting sometimes seems to be disconnected from the music itself, as legato and cantabile qualities are missing in the left hand. Aaron Rosand, quoted in an anonymous article in *The Strad*, states: ‘Portamento... can bring a piece to life... Without it we might as well computerise our interpretations’ (*The Strad*, 2017). In contrast to their approach, C combines various types of portamento in response to different musical characters, such as varying speeds of the shift, which reveals the specific characteristics of his individual style; B on the other hand uses this expressive tool to heighten the legato and singing effects of the music. E’s fingering decisions are closely linked with knowledge of relevant performance practices, where importance is placed on acknowledging what specific portamento should be employed for a special moment and which type of glissando has been traditionally restricted in performance practice. It is noticeable that although C, E and B hold different opinions on the choices of fingering and portamento, they promote the use of portamento and their decisions always appear to serve the artistic side of performance. In addition, although F himself likes a clean sound, he does not restrain students from making use of shifts and portamenti. This illuminates that portamento as a playing style is therefore connected to interpretation, suggesting that the choices of fingering for either clean shifts or portamenti should relate to one’s artistic decision, and, in the broadest sense, technique is at the service of interpretive choice.

Chapter 6

Discussion: My perception

While the previous chapter provided a detailed analysis of each expert teacher's general teaching principles and more specific approaches in order to establish a greater understanding of their individualities and commonalities in relation to my research question, this chapter will discuss how I personally perceive the approaches used by these violin professors as a performer and a teacher, with regard to their viewpoints on expression, tone quality and their integration of technique and interpretation. I will ask: which particular approaches that differ from Chinese teaching approaches might benefit Chinese students for their further development? To what extent will these teaching approaches influence students' confidence? And to what extent will internal motivation drive students to reach their learning goals?

The relationship between interpretation and technique

Contrary to arguments by Masin (2012) that distinct schools of violin teaching no longer exist, my research findings suggest that national differences are still obvious. As I reflect on the interviews and the observational notes of the masterclasses, I have come to understand that despite the fact that almost every teacher uses a technique-led approach to teaching, each has a distinct teaching voice and holds vastly differing opinions on various performance issues. Their different approaches demonstrate that there is more than one answer to a single performance issue and that such answers vary considerably from player to player. This suggests that violinists can draw on elements of these participants' approaches to address various performance issues, such as using specific bow techniques (i.e. bow speed and pressure, bow distribution), body movements to achieve a singing tone and employing varied vibrato to produce more layers of tone colour, as well as choosing specific fingering or portamento to embellish a particular note or phrase. In addition to the individualities, commonalities are shared between these playing/teaching traditions. More often than not, these teachers concentrate on a small-scale, localised interpretation at the micro-level of phrasing rather than the macro-level of the whole structure of the work. Further, the teaching style of most teachers is very exclusive when it comes to fingering, bowing, portamento, timing and phrasing. While it is generally agreed that there are no hard rules for interpretive issues, there are parameters that one has to work within. Most of these teachers have strong beliefs in how each work should be approached, where they give specific instructions on how a bow stroke should be executed, which fingering should be chosen for a particular moment and how much rubato is appropriate. For instance, B, A and D

always prescribe fingerings and bowings for their students to indicate exactly how each phrase should be shaped.

The main difference between the majority of the teachers that I observed and interviewed and Chinese violin teachers is that most of these expert teachers deal with technical issues for musical ends. By contrast, many Chinese violin tutors usually focus solely on mechanical techniques, such as intonation exactness and finger strength and agility, without referring to musical expression. While technique and interpretation are considered as separate entities, there is sometimes a more dynamic – and less binary – interplay between the two aspects in these expert teachers' teaching. More specifically, the approaches used by some of the expert teachers (e.g. B, C, D, E and F) attempt to raise students' holistic awareness, where there is an inherent connection between breathing, feeling, timbre and tone colour, with many individual technical components embodied over time. Their teaching thus combines the training of mechanical and expressive/interpretive techniques.

Tone production

All these expert teachers offer technical suggestions for tone production and tone colour, but their emphases are rather different. As discussed above, several teachers, e.g. B, C, E and D, try to connect the technical components (i.e. bow control and vibrato) with interpretation. Other teachers tend to solve technical problems more effectively by separating the two elements. For instance, both A and G emphasise accuracy of intonation and neatness of execution, including the actual movement of string crossing and vibrato, which echoes the Chinese training approach. However, mechanical techniques such as intonation and finger agility seem to be disconnected from the actual quality of sound. Although all music-making is supported by technical craft, many pedagogues, including Auer, Neuhaus and some of the teachers I observed/interviewed, claim that a high quality of tone production is the most essential element in violin playing (Auer, 1921; Neuhaus, 1973). This is not to say that mechanical technique is unimportant to professional performance. Accuracy has become absolutely vital in current violin playing because of the increase in the number of competitions (Wen, 1992; Kawabata, 2018); in particular, intonation and finger clarity issues are great hurdles that need to be overcome on a daily basis. On the other hand, B argues that a disregard for the development of sound quality would have fatal consequences for one's future career as a musician: 'most teachers make a mistake of inculcating the idea of doing numerous finger exercises in students at a very young age... Why can't students make any progress over the years? Because they can't tell what is good [sound] and what is bad [sound], they have no desire to make a better sound' (Song, 2019). This suggests that the neglect of the development of tone quality in training may be the limiting factor of a student's

progress. Although there may be additional reasons for this, it is clear to me from my own experience as a student, and through observing other Chinese violin teachers, that this is the main thing that is overlooked in Chinese violin pedagogy. In addition to left-hand training, Chinese violin teaching would be well advised to pay far more attention to the pursuit of a beautiful tone from the beginning of the teaching process. Further, Masin (2012) indicates that the tone, as heard in the inner ear, is realised in each violinist's own way; in this context, the development of tone quality and tone colour is a journey of exploring one's personal voice, which is among the qualities that differentiates oneself from others. It requires years and years of ear training, searching for different shading and nuances, and in the meantime, one needs to build various technical tools in order to achieve the sound and colours that one has imagined in the ear. As Masin states, it is not just a matter of practice but also one of cultivation (Masin, 2012).

Fingering and portamento

Differences in these expert teachers' approaches to the choice of fingering and the use of portamento are also striking. The data suggest that some of their teaching often involves two strategies. First, instructions concentrate on technical craft, where the tendency to seek purity in the sound goes together with the mechanical aspect of shifting. Students often avoid the use of portamento because it might be considered in bad taste; instead, they aim to achieve what they think of as a clean sound. This resonates strongly with the teaching/playing situation in China. For example, both teachers and students prioritise the technical side of shifting, focusing on ways to produce a clean shift and eliminate the 'smeary' sound, but often neglect its expressive functions.

The other strategy involves demonstration and fingering prescription. The pedagogical practice of following a teacher's direction regarding decisions about the choice of fingering and the use of portamento appears to be the most commonly used teaching strategy when it comes to interpretive issues, notably what types of portamento are appropriate or how portamento can embellish a particular phrase. A number of distinguished pedagogues argue that interpretive issues, including portamento, timing and rubato, cannot be taught directly given their highly personalised nature (Auer, 1921; Galamian, 1962). Demonstration seems to be an effective way for the teaching of interpretation, such as fingering/shifting, where these expert teachers offer a vivid picture, providing a sounding model for students to imitate (for example, by understanding the process of the shifting execution, including how they shift and how much time they take for a special slide). Both Auer and Flesch indicate that teachers who give demonstrations normally have more effective results than those who give purely verbal explanations (Auer, 1921: 7; Flesch, 1930: 129). For example, Auer (1921) notes

that his teacher, Joachim, only gives demonstrations and that these are more convincing than the spoken words. However, such an approach has been opposed by Galamian, as there is then a tendency for teachers to impose their own interpretations upon students: ‘One that is derived, second-hand, from the teacher cannot come under the heading of genuinely creative art’ (Galamian, 1962: 8). Additionally, the danger of emulating a sound from listening to a demonstration played by the teacher, as Reimer identifies (1989), is that by imitating the sound with only a vague conception of how the sound is produced, students will not be able to grasp fully a composer’s musical intention. Ruth Waterman, quoted in an anonymous article in *The Strad*, holds a similar view, saying: ‘Observation is essential, but not all. It is difficult to understand a minuet as opposed to a mazurka or a tango without any knowledge of the movements of these dances... It’s unlikely we can begin to respond to the C major Fugue in Bach’s third Sonata without understanding the significance of the chorale on which it is based. Sometimes we need to seek out information that may shed light on the matter in hand’ (*The Strad*, 2011: 27).

In addition to giving demonstrations, prescribing fingerings is also seen as an efficient approach, as it enables students to read their teachers’ musical intentions promptly. For instance, pedagogues like B insist on prescribing fingerings for students. However, fixed prescribed fingerings might not be suitable for everyone, because students all have different sizes and shapes of hand; more importantly, using the same set of fixed fingerings for all students, as anecdotal evidence (quoted in an anonymous article in *The Strad*) suggests, may result in a greater similarity of playing style and a tendency to discourage students from finding their own personal style: ‘they acquiesce, as a class, in the more or less machine-made process of education. Beware of exacting an emotional duplicate of the performance’ (*The Strad*, 2015). This is perhaps the reason why Galamian (1962) advises teachers to stop prescribing fingerings for advanced students, and C, F and E support Galamian’s opinion that students, particularly in the later stage of learning, ought to make their own fingering choices and explore their own personal styles.

Based on the above analysis, it is clear that giving fingering guidance with regard to the style and period of the work in question plays an important role in finding one’s unique style; similarly, choices regarding portamento, referencing how renowned violin teachers and performers interpret the music, is a crucial part of the learning process that lays a foundation for the development of one’s musicality. Therefore, it is a teacher’s duty systematically to facilitate students in developing their personal styles; in the meantime, it is necessary to encourage students to explore varied fingering (portamento) styles, as these will eventually guide them to find their own portamento styles. Through the process of learning the distinctive portamento styles of expert teachers and performers and experimenting with

a variety of portamenti for special musical moments in the piece, students' musical tastes will be increasingly refined. Furthermore, as fashion and approval for the use of a particular portamento have evolved in the history of violin performance (Galamian, 1962; Yampolsky, 1967; Szigeti, 1969), decisions on the choice of fingering as well as the use of complex portamento are similarly based on the knowledge of relevant performance practices. With greater informed choices of shifting styles, students would feel more confident to make fingering decisions, and when they trust their musical tastes they are ready to make their own individual decisions on the choice of fingerings.

Technical competence and self-confidence

Given that the demands on and the expectations for young violinists are rising year by year, teachers inevitably set very high performance standards for students, notably in intonation accuracy, neatness of execution and mastery of the violin and bow. This is reflected in these expert teachers' teaching, most of them stressing the importance of technical training in fundamental elements, where technical challenges such as unhelpful habits must be addressed with specific targeted solutions, and a lack of accuracy in intonation needs methodical practice to overcome. Further, teachers including E and G believe that confidence is built on technical accomplishments. For instance, E states that she regularly works on technique in lessons in order to develop students' confidence. Masin's study also reports that although technical skills take years of extensive practice to acquire, technical incompetence leads to psychological hindrance (Masin, 2012), such as lacking self-confidence in one's ability and suffering from stage fright. Both imply that through the systematic training of technique one will gradually build technical abilities and then gain confidence. In contrast to their opinions, C believes that a positive yet demanding approach is more effective for students' overall development. Interestingly, C is the only teacher who rarely criticises the lack of accuracy in intonation (despite the fact that he is an international prizewinner and has an active solo career) and indicates that overcriticising a lack of accurate intonation or clean execution is not necessarily helpful to enhance performance standards: 'no one wants to play out of tune. It is easy to tell students off for playing out of tune, but what matters most is how you help them to get closer next time' (C's interview, 2 July 2019). This explains why C focuses on the development of tonal projection, shading and colour and physical looseness instead of criticising lack of technical precision; more importantly, it suggests that the teaching approach to improving technical accuracy is through students' fear of receiving negative criticism rather than offering knowledge of violin-playing skills. However, G holds an opposing opinion, where she argues that it is the teacher's duty to raise students' awareness because they do not possess a critical ear: 'if something's out of tune, it's not just that it's out of tune. What was out of tune? Which note? Was it sharp or flat? Often people don't know' (G's interview, 25 June 2019).

From my own experience in preparing for performances as well as helping students to prepare for their exams, there is a close interplay between one's technical competence, e.g. precision in intonation and execution, and self-confidence. Given that the act of interpretation must be delivered by one's technical skills (Masin, 2012), numerous technical elements have a significant impact on interpretation. In this regard, technical development is indispensable, as violin performance is dependent upon technique. Violinists are generally more confident when they can fully trust their technical abilities regardless of whether this trust is conscious or unconscious. For instance, my own experience during the process of learning Ernst's *The Last Rose of Summer* was that I was unable to enjoy the music before acquiring mechanical control, such as finger flexibility and strength, and technical incompetence resulted in anxiety and frustration in my daily practice (I will discuss this particular learning journey in the next chapter). On the other hand, many students, particularly Chinese students who have been focusing on developing their left-hand technique to almost inhuman levels of perfection, often have psychological burdens relating to this skill and find themselves terrified of making mistakes with the left hand. For example, when sliding from a low position into a really high position when the two notes are far apart, the chances of missing the correct intonation of the top note are considerably high; therefore, there is a tendency among violinists to jump to the high note, where the shift is executed with too much physical tension due to the fear of missing the note. This fear contributes to clutter in the mind and often results in missing hitting the high note because of the stiffness of the left hand. This phenomenon can also be found in relation to tempos. In a moment of stress, such as when playing a fast passage, especially involving continuous shifting and awkward fingering patterns, one begins to speed up the fine motor movements and, as a result, one bungles a few notes or a sequence as the speed becomes much faster than the tempo one usually takes. The reason for this seems to be that paying too much attention to technical precision and clarity leads to psychological barriers. 'Don't let it grow in your mind to be the problem, because the only thing or the aim you have is the technique. But... that is not the main thing,' says F⁴⁷. This suggests that if one only focuses on technical craft itself, it becomes a problem. In other words, technical issues can resolve themselves when the focus is taken away from them due to the body and mind being more relaxed. Further, interpretive choices, such as the use of rubato, can sometimes help to make technical issues more easily playable. Rather than isolating the mechanics, one can approach the piece from a different perspective and shift the emphasis to musical expression, and technical issues might be solved on their own when working on interpretation. For instance, based on my experience of learning

⁴⁷ F's interview, 5 July 2019.

The Last Rose of Summer, some technically unplayable passages were made possible by the use of a subtle rubato, or a natural shaping of the phrase.

The other fascinating factor is that while other professors concentrate specifically on the content of violin teaching/playing, C pays attention to mindset: ‘I will go as far as to say the mindset of the violinist is critical as we need to be able to produce all the emotions and colours even when the [composer’s] writing is awkward and unviolinistic’ (C’s interview, 2 July 2019). This seems to suggest that one should build an optimistic mindset in response to various situations, including different styles and genres of music as well as technical difficulties. Although this study does not deal with the psychology of music performance, pedagogues such as Auer, Flesch and Ashkenasi note that the state of one’s mind in violin playing is extremely important (Auer, 1921; Flesch, 1930; Masin, 2012). In particular, Ashkenasi stresses that students would perform better as a whole if they felt easier and more comfortable psychologically (Masin, 2012: 34). A calm and positive mindset would help students not only to relax, but also to make a more open and freer sound and to enjoy the performance. For example, during technically challenging passages, coordination and control of both hands can be greatly aided by a calm mind.

Along these lines, it seems particularly important to find ways to help Chinese violin students, especially the ones who want to pursue a solo career and compete frequently in major international competitions, to maintain a positive mindset in performances and competitions as well as in the learning process. As previously discussed, due to the competitive learning environment, all learning is carried out under pressure in modern Chinese society, where the teaching style is generally strict and tough and students have to work extremely hard to avoid failure; consequently, negative feelings such as insecurity and lacking self-confidence exist throughout the learning process. The pressure, however, would sometimes affect students’ performance standards on stage even when they are fully prepared, because they cannot overcome fear at that very moment. Therefore, building up confidence under pressure should be taken into consideration, for instance through exploring how to set up a more positive and friendly learning atmosphere for students while remaining strictly focused on the learning goals.

Self-exploration and intrinsic motivation

Several teachers, including E, C, F and G, encourage students to develop their independent thinking, where they ask questions about how students are making decisions on, for example, fingering, bowing, dynamics and phrasing in lessons. Rather than telling students what to do, they try to involve

students in the process of developing an interpretation of a piece, and encourage them to find their own solutions to the problems they encounter in a piece. ‘I feel this is increasingly important as they move towards graduating and working on their own,’ says E⁴⁸. It can be seen that they intend to use an indirect teaching approach, where students are not necessarily being told exactly what to do and how to do it; they make suggestions, but it is largely left to students to discover the underlying teaching aim. The purpose of avoiding prescriptive teaching is to allow students to learn to teach themselves, and to give them confidence in their own thinking, interpretation and problem-solving skills. In contrast to their approach, learning processes in modern Chinese society are very much controlled by teachers, who have absolute authority (Wagner, 2015), and the common teaching approach is that teachers give indications and students unquestioningly absorb the information that is given. For example, Chinese violin teachers provide explicit and systematic instructions on techniques and the teaching style is often strict and tough; accordingly, students generally rely on receiving direct answers from teachers rather than self-exploration (Zhang, 2016; Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks, 2017). The positive influence of this unique learning/training approach is that disciplined and systematic training makes learning more efficient to a certain degree, as teachers can closely monitor students and instruct how they should work and how much time they need to spend practising. However, their involvement in the acquisition process might also have a potentially negative influence over time. According to Esslin-Peard, there is a unique teacher–pupil relationship in China, where teachers do all the thinking and reflection work for students in the learning process (Esslin-Peard and Shorrocks, 2017), which reveals that this particular teaching approach leaves little room for independent learning and thinking. This is also reflected in high-level violin teaching and learning in China. For example, developing an individual interpretation and comprehension of the music or finding one’s personal voice is more of a journey of self-exploration, which cannot be taught efficiently as there is no absolutely ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ interpretation. In this regard, it is up to students to seek for these less definite answers. However, it can be challenging for Chinese students to self-explore these abstract aspects as the majority of them are used to getting explicit information directly from their teachers. From my teaching experience in China, some students, even some advanced ones, do not know how they should approach the music without instruction. According to Illeris, what is learned today also relates to attitudes, understanding, insight and general cultural orientation (Illeris, 2007: 243). Flesch states that ‘art teachers can help students to think independently and to recognise their artistic personality’ (Flesch, 1930: 129-130). Based on this argument, an effective pedagogical approach encompasses knowledge and skill and fosters the development of student independence, cooperation and flexibility. It seems to me that this might be one of the reasons why many talented

⁴⁸ E’s interview, 5 Aug 2019.

Chinese students with highly developed technical abilities struggle to develop beyond a certain level of playing.

In addition to the lack of independent thinking, another contributing factor for this could be that students may not have the desire to drive themselves to develop independent thinking as well as a personal playing style. Schippers indicates that students are more likely to involve themselves in the learning process if they are truly interested in the subject itself (Schippers, 2010). Directly related to this is 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' learning motivation. In the context of teaching and learning in China, learning motivation seems mostly to be driven by external factors. As discussed in the second chapter, the initial purpose of learning to play an instrument for many Chinese students is to enter a prestigious university rather than self-motivation (Zhang, 2016: 114). This reveals that learning for many Chinese students is mainly driven by direct or indirect reward, which means that one has to do something one is not directly interested in, in order to achieve something one really wants (Illeris, 2007: 32). This also shows that the enjoyment and love of playing/learning the violin is subordinated to external factors. However, when it comes to developing one's individual understanding of music and playing style, learning motivation needs to come from students themselves. When the 'right' answer to a particular question is no longer available, only students who are interested in the music itself would engage deeply with the question and persist in the learning process. Sometimes, the process of learning takes a great deal of mental effort if one faces a challenging situation, especially a situation or challenge exceeding what one can manage on one's existing personal basis (Illeris, 2007). For example, when learning a piece in different social contexts where the emphasis and approaches are completely different, one has to change perspectives and partially restructure one's playing concept and technical skills. Students who really want to make a change would overcome challenges through the process of self-exploration by seeking answers and internalising different approaches, evolving one step at a time; it is the intrinsic motivation that drives students to go beyond their limitations and develop an individual understanding and comprehension of music. This is probably the reason why C considers 'love of music and the violin' to be a prerequisite for playing/learning the violin.

Chapter 7

Reflections on practising

This chapter deals with my own performance preparation for my doctoral recital and recordings through my reflections on practice, in which I shall engage in a discussion of how I develop an understanding of combining technique with interpretation into violin playing as a performer. This will include a) how I reflect on my own practising sessions, and how I experiment with new ideas; b) what I have discovered from drawing on semi-structured interviews and lesson/masterclass observations, and what particular approaches I think were helpful to enhance my performance; and c) how I internalise different approaches to violin playing.

Carl Flesch indicates that the teacher should try out experimental ideas on themselves (Flesch, 1930). Therefore, I experimented with different approaches based on information gleaned from a range of sources – written and observed – and sought ways of integrating ideas that I may previously have considered in isolation, my aim always being to push the boundaries of my practice. By focusing on a set of pieces in the hope that, from developing a more integrated approach, I would refine my own performance. During the research process, I focused on learning and practising eight pieces from the core canonical virtuosic repertoire, by Bach, Schubert, Ernst, Brahms, Wieniawski, Strauss, Debussy and Milstein. As discussed in the methodology chapter, these works, which represent a wide variety of styles and require a combination of virtuoso techniques and expressivity, are among those often required in the first and second rounds of international competitions. Naturally, they require very different approaches to bow control, vibrato, left-hand technique, tone production and tone colour.

Throughout the learning process, I reflected upon my practice sessions i.e. on my thoughts, experiences and experiments, which had a very positive effect on my practice. By engaging in self-reflection, I was able to analyse my own playing, detect my strengths and weaknesses, and take necessary steps to find solutions to these weaker aspects. Not only did self-reflection help me to find ways to enhance my performance skills, by describing the progress of each session, its setbacks and discoveries, the various strategies I adopted and my plans for the following day's work, but it also encouraged critical thinking and raised self-awareness, because I took time to review my reflective notes and listen to recordings of my work, sought new perspectives and asked new questions. In addition, my reflections also focused on absorbing information from the masterclasses and interviews that I conducted, regarding the insights and knowledge I gained, and particular aspects that were helpful. More specifically, through analysing these expert teachers' pedagogical approaches to

musical interpretation and technical executions, I adopted a number of tactics which I think were helpful for refining my playing, for instance, learning to expand my expressivity by building various expressive tools, such as using breathing and natural body movements to produce a free and open tone and developing bow techniques to achieve a wider range of tone colours, as well as examining notation markings in the scores and bringing knowledge of relevant performance practices to make informed decisions about interpretation, and seeking to internalise these approaches into my own performance. I concentrated on:

- (i) developing a greater range of expressivity;
- (ii) investigating how to integrate the technical difficulties with the musical outcome; and
- (iii) deciding when the use of these various expressive devices is appropriate.

Developing expressive tools

When addressing the first question, I dealt with three particular aspects, the first focusing on building a wider range of interpretive and expressive techniques, including developing bow techniques, tone production and tone colours; the second on finding a better balance between expressivity and physical relaxation with an aim to express myself fully without losing coordination; and the third on developing a more efficient approach to practising for integrating technique and interpretation in preparing repertoire for performance.

Bow technique

Developing a wider range of bowing techniques played an important role in expanding my expressivity in the learning process. According to Huang and Thibodeaux, ‘sound was a crucial problem for most Chinese students as they barely listened for a singing tone’ (Huang and Thibodeaux, 2016: 30). This resonates with my own learning experience in China. As Chinese violin pedagogues often concentrate on the mechanics of bow technique and approach the interpretive matter of tone and colour from a technical point of view, my bow training in China concentrated on neatness of execution and clear and effective technical craft, and set a certain standard in sound production to produce a clean and solid tone, which means that the tone quality needs to be clear (neither scratchy nor fluffy) and the tone volume should project well. I followed the instructions and trusted that by doing this correctly the sound would also be correct. Naturally, I was able to produce a clean and solid sound; however, there was always a lack in the range of tonal colours to express different emotions. The reason for this seemed to be that my training approach appeared to be disconnected from tone colours and expressiveness. Further, while I was required to focus on technical consistency

in practising, little attention was paid to listening to subtle changes in the tone; as a result, I had no awareness of the subtle shadings and nuances in the sound. For instance, when interpreting the dynamic marking *forte*, my bow played consistently loud, but I did not realise that there needed to be a more nuanced interpretation for this marking. Therefore, striving for a fine tone and bow expression were major challenges in learning these canonical works.

For instance, when learning the Strauss Sonata, I was concentrating on incorporating different combinations of bow techniques to interpret the music. Given that the Strauss Sonata reflected Strauss' growing interest in his expressive use of tone colours (Goto, 2002; Tsai, 2010; Bromberger, 2016), the music requires a complex and nuanced level of expressivity. Although a legato bowing dominates the first movement, Strauss uses sudden changes of dynamics frequently throughout the movement to create dramatic effects. Therefore, it requires an excellent bow technique to respond to a variety of expressive markings. However, it was initially impossible for me to perform with the appropriate dynamic expression because I lacked the ability to produce a wide enough range of tone colours. I wrote in my reflective notes (26 June 2018):

The dynamic is marked *piano* in bar 84 and it quickly changes to *mezzo forte* in the next bar. I have been trying out several ways to achieve this, for example with changes of fingerings, bow speed and bow pressure, as well as the changes in the contact point of the bow. How can I make the *crescendo* more effective without running out of bow before the *crescendo*? Is it mostly to do with bow distribution?

Example 4. Strauss, Sonata in E flat major, Op. 18, first movement, bars 84-87.⁴⁹



It was only after recently observing B's and D's masterclasses that I found a more effective way to create this dramatic effect, where I combined B's and D's approaches to achieve this:

Borrowing the idea from D, make a *subito piano* right after a slight attack on the *mezzo forte* D4 for the sake of saving for a greater *crescendo*; and taking the idea from B, pay extra attention to the last 3 demisemiquavers of the down bow and make sure the bow change is seamless. The bow speed of these three notes should be the same as the up bow. The bow pressure and bow speed must be well-balanced within the *crescendo*. (Reflective note, 25 Feb 2020)

⁴⁹ See my final recital recording of the Strauss Sonata (first movement) at 03'16".

I also took the concept of ‘less is more’ from C when working on the climax of the first movement, a passage where I always tended to force the sound and kill the resonance due to emotional excitement. On 26 June 2018 I wrote:

Example 5. Strauss, Sonata in E flat major, Op. 18, first movement, bars 266-288.⁵⁰

To solve this, I tried to adjust the balance between bow pressure and bow speed, as well as practising the bow connectivity. As C suggested, the less pressure one applies, the more resonance there will be. I spent much time practising legato bowing, beginning with a slow bow and sustaining toward the tip without forcing the sound.

⁵⁰ See my final recital recording of the Strauss Sonata (first movement) between 10'17" and 11'07".

It was particularly challenging to control the bow in the Schubert Fantasy, where some of the bowings are almost technically unplayable because Schubert's writing for the violin often appears to be unviolinistic, notably his use of long slurs.⁵¹ When executing these successive long slurs, the ability to control the bow to maintain a smooth legato effect is of primary importance. As a singing quality is a key feature in the Fantasy (Cotik, 2013), I specifically worked on combining the mechanical side of bow techniques with the interpretive aspect of the lyrical quality; however, my bow arm often failed to support my musical intentions.

According to A,⁵² bow distribution in Schubert's music is crucial because the bowing indications are normally awkward for violinists. For instance, the long slurs that are written in the opening section are in a very slow tempo and the dynamic range is between *piano* and *pianissimo*, which makes the bow strokes become even more uncomfortable. As the bow speed is extremely slow, it is very difficult to keep the bow moving smoothly in the correct tempo while developing a singing legato line. Therefore, I focused on the smooth control of the bow in an attempt to play these legato phrases well. I wrote in my reflective notes (20 April 2019):

Example 6. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 5-10.



The first long slur⁵³ is problematic. Although I only use half of the bow to execute the first bar, there is no room left to develop the line for the second half of the slur. My sound is suffering and I can barely breathe. How can I improve this? How can I slow down my bow speed?

To achieve this, importance was placed on how to allocate my bow wisely and how to slow down my bow speed. I found C's suggestions on practising with an extra slow tempo particularly helpful:

I have been practising extra slow bows by adding a few beats in a single bow stroke and playing in an extra slow tempo, which seems to work pretty well. When bringing back to a normal tempo, I feel

⁵¹ Cotik: 'Schubert seems to seek for the ideal of the lyrical quality but took no account of playability, in which he applies successive long slurs in the work which are longer than what it is possible to play on a single stroke of the bow. This gesture however is not common to execute on the violin, as the length of phrases exceeded the bow stroke capacity' (Cotik: 2013).

⁵² Observational notes: A's masterclass at the RNCM, 20 March 2019.

⁵³ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 00'25".

much easier and more comfortable now, as my bow moves smoothly towards the heel. (Reflective note, 25 April 2019)

I then looked into the singing quality and expressiveness of sound required for the phrase, which implies that the bow speed and bow pressure should be varied in this single bow stroke. In my reflective notes (1 June 2019), I wrote:

I realise that in order to develop a long singing line, I need to save even more bow at the tip, and I can then gradually add a little bit of arm weight and move the bow toward the heel to produce a *crescendo* effect.

In addition, as several teachers suggested making colour changes through the use of vibrato, it was important for me to vary the vibrato in response to the changes of colours and harmonies in these successive long slurs:

I decide not to use any vibrato for the first half of the bow, delivering a serene sound, and gradually increase to a very narrow vibrato when harmony becomes intensified – the dissonant chord that is introduced in bar 6. In this way, I can better highlight the subtle change of colour and harmony. In the meantime, vibrato should match the bow pressure and bow speed. If the vibrato is too wide in a slow bow, the bow is likely to bounce and the bow speed tends to go fast. (Reflective note, 6 June 2019)

Interpreting Bach's Sarabande in D minor required a different set of bow techniques. Emphasis was placed on highlighting the dance characteristics in response to Bach's musical language. Being trained in China, I was taught how to handle the piece from the violinistic and technical point of view, for instance, learning how to make the chords sound rich and sustained, where all three or four notes of chords were notated to be played together. This is an important yet challenging bow technique in violin playing, as the natural way of executing a triple stop is to spread the chord upward. In order to play all three notes together, I was taught to press the middle string for the two other strings to speak at the same time. It can be seen that the teaching approach focused on the execution of the chord, and there was little discussion of musical considerations. When I started to work with my supervisor, Prof. E, in the UK, my focus was gradually shifted toward period style and its implications for, for example, phrasing, harmonic changes and rhythmic characters. Instead of considering how to execute each note technically correctly, the concentration was focused on integrating technique with the knowledge of relevant performance practice.

Although I do not play on the original set-ups for the Baroque period, I set out to respect the fundamental differences between the modern bow and the Baroque bow but not the limitations of the heaviness of the modern bow. According to E, 'some knowledge of the Baroque bow is also helpful

in phrasing techniques, as these bows were much lighter and had a differing natural articulation, which enabled a more variable on/off stroke, and a more resonant arpeggiated approach to chordal passages'.⁵⁴ Given that the nature of the Baroque bow indicates a certain lightness in the tone, where the sound naturally releases at the end of bow since the two ends are very light, I was seeking a pure and resonant sound when executing these chords. However, it was not easy to achieve this on a modern bow as both ends of the bow are much heavier.⁵⁵ For instance, it was often the case that I produced unwanted accents. I wrote in my reflective notes (20 Oct 2017):

It is very easy to bring out accents during bow changes, which results in a scratchy sound. I try to avoid this by lifting the bow, but it breaks the line...

On 22 October 2017, I wrote:

I try to employ a fluent bow stroke to reduce the accent, however, the problem with a faster bow speed is that the string crossing sounds very messy as I tend to touch the neighbouring strings. How can I improve this?

Example 7. Bach, Partita in D minor, BWV 1004, Sarabande, bars 1-4.



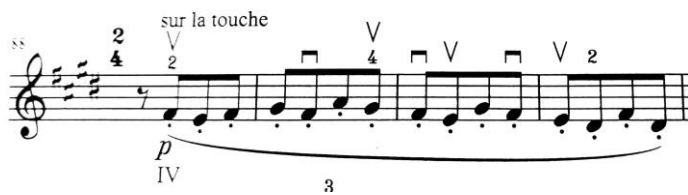
After experimenting with different ideas, I found a solution to the issue. My approach to practising these chords was to play each chord in *piano* and *forte* motion, starting *piano* at the heel, and gradually *crescendo* to *forte* in the middle of the bow, and then gradually *decrescendo* to *piano* at the tip. This enabled me to reduce the accents at the heel and make the chords sound more rounded as the bow pressure released toward the tip. As the set-up of the modern bow is very different from the instruments of Bach's time, the tonal approach of earlier period instruments made possible with a lighter bow is an important factor to consider.

I also explored the ways in which the change of the bow contact point along with appropriate bow speed would create a unique sound effect. When learning Debussy's Sonata, I made some bold experiments in order to achieve the widest possible colour range:

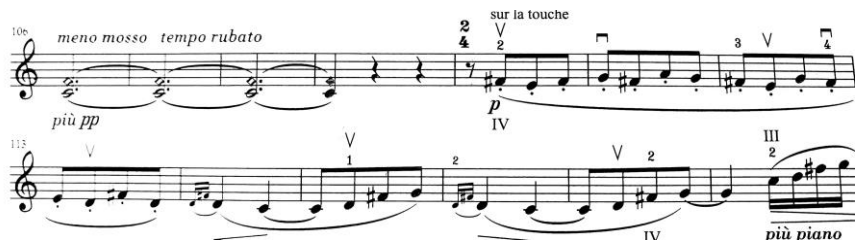
⁵⁴ E's interview, 5 Aug 2019.

⁵⁵ See my video recording of Bach's Sarabande in D minor at 00'02".

Example 8. Debussy, Sonata in G minor, L. 140, first movement, bars 88-91.⁵⁶



Example 9. Debussy, Sonata in G minor, L. 140, first movement, bars 106-118.⁵⁷



In bars 88-91 and 110-113, I really want to make my violin sound like a woodwind instrument. Like every concert violinist (I have watched many concert violinists performing this piece), I place my bow near the fingerboard, but it is not the ‘right’ sound as I imagine/hear in my mind (The dynamic is appropriately quiet, but the sound is still too close to a violin sound). I realise that it is not enough to just copy other violinists’ approaches. I need to try something new myself and expand my bow expressions. (Reflective note, 1 Nov 2019)

On 12 November 2019, I wrote:

I have been experimenting with different bow contact points and bow speeds, and I have come to understand that the change of the bow contact point plays a decisive role in creating this special tone colour. Rather than placing my bow near the fingerboard, I now move my bow over the fingerboard, and this small adjustment makes a huge difference to the sound. Also, I notice that the bow speed and vibrato must change to reflect the change of bow contact point – I use a fairly fast bow speed (mainly in the upper half of the bow), senza vibrato. It is important to constantly measure the balance between the use of vibrato and bow speed, and the bow contact point. For example, using too much bow or vibrato would interfere with the execution of the bow strokes on the fingerboard. When all three components work in harmony, I am able to produce my desired sound, which is like a kind of woodwind instrument.

Developing bow expression and a wider range of tone colour was a gradual process, during which I tried to adopt a variety of bow techniques to interpret different musical expressions. My approach to

⁵⁶ See my final recital recording of the Debussy Sonata (first movement) at 01’52”.

⁵⁷ See my final recital recording of the Debussy Sonata (first movement) at 02’18”.

this usually involved two steps: first, envisaging the sound in my mind, and then experimenting with different bow expressions until the music sounded exactly as I had imagined it, for instance, by interpreting different dynamic marks and deciding how to show the differences between a *forte-piano* and a *sforzando*, one with an accent and the other without it; how to express these markings differently; and deciding what type of expressive techniques I should apply. I did not always have enough technical tools to serve musical purposes. For example, I could only produce two layers of sound at the beginning, *forte* and *piano*, omitting other subtle changes of tone. To enable this, I started by working on bow control involving different bow usages, bow speeds, arm pressure and bow strokes. More importantly, this learning process required me to work in a self-critical manner, training my ear to truly listen to different shadings and nuances. It became clearer to me that the cultivation of an artistic tone lies in the development of musical consciousness, where high sensitivity and awareness of tone quality and tone colour, mechanical control, rhythmic and musical feeling as well as pleasure in playing help to raise the overall playing standard to a new level.

Correlation between tone quality and the positioning of the left hand

While the majority of the expert teachers, including B, D, G and E, believed that bow control and vibrato determined tone quality and tone colour, I became aware that the positioning of the left hand, e.g. the shape of the left hand and the angle of the fingers, the wrist and the arm itself, had a strong impact on the general sound production. In particular, the positioning of the left hand in the upper part of the fingerboard played an important role in achieving a free and singing tone. In order to expand my expressivity in the sound, I re-examined the shape of my left hand in the upper positions of the fingerboard, particularly when playing lyrical and climactic passages, and through experimenting by re-positioning my thumb, arm and the whole hand, I came to realise that the position of the left hand (e.g. a lower, neutral or higher position) in turn determined the movement of the hand and arm in vibrato and shifting, which consequently affected the sound production.

In my own case, a higher position of the left hand enabled me to produce a freer and more singing tone when playing lyrical passages in the upper positions. For example, in Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy between bars 60 and 67, I repositioned my left hand by bringing my arm around (a horizontal movement) and rising the wrist above the violin, and this slight adjustment allowed the fingers to retain their natural shape over the G string. My left hand gained more freedom for both vibrato and shifting in the upper positions, which led to a freer and richer tone.

Example 10. Wieniawski, Faust Fantasy, Op. 20, bars 60-73.⁵⁸



However, when I first started learning this work, it was impossible to use much vibrato in this passage as my hand was in a relatively low position, where the palm was placed against the bout of the violin. I wrote in my reflective notes (20 Sep 2019):

There is too much tension in the left hand to produce a warm vibrato (relatively wide but not too slow) in response to this beautiful melody. I cannot vibrate properly in the high positions and there are a number of issues to consider. First, my palm stays too close to the bout, which restricts my movement. Second, in order to avoid touching the bout, I have to move my wrist away from the bout to initiate the vibrato, but this leads to another unwanted result: with the wrist being forced to flex excessively in the opposite direction, my vibrato becomes very narrow and fast, which produces a nervous sound. Third, I tend to stretch my fingers on the G string, and this hand shape (with unbent third and fourth fingers) causes excessive finger pressure on the string. How should I improve this? What shall I do to free my left hand?

I came to understand that the cause of these problems was due to the fact that the positioning of my left hand was too low. This provided little freedom for the fingers as they were too far away from the fingerboard, and the movements of the left hand, including vibrato, were restricted by the bout of the violin. Therefore, it was necessary for me to reposition my left hand in the upper part of the fingerboard, preventing my palm from pressing against the body of the violin. I started by working on the arm movement:

I have noticed that the body of the violin has restricted my movements (vibrato), so I need to ensure that my entire hand (including the wrist) stays above the bout. To free my movements, I have been focusing on the arm movement – swinging the entire arm toward the chest before the starting note A4 (in bar 60) on the G string. When the movement is coordinated, the left shoulder makes a supportive motion inward (to the right), and the swing of the arm allows the wrist to lift slightly above the bout. I always practise this horizontal movement several times at the beginning of the practice session, sometimes without the bow. When the palm is above the bout, there is much more freedom in the left hand, and it is less tiring without having to pull back my wrist excessively. With a higher position of

⁵⁸ See my final recital recording of Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy between 03'27" and 03'55".

the hand, my fingers are automatically brought closer to the fingerboard. Naturally, my vibrato becomes looser as the finger pressure is reduced, which leads to a richer and warmer sound. (Reflective note, 28 Sep 2019)

I also discovered that the positioning of the thumb was closely connected with sound quality and the smoothness of the shifts. As I sought to strengthen the lyrical quality in bars 60-67, I found it useful to consider my thumb as a central point of support for the entire duration of the passage in the high positions. In my reflective notes from 5 October 2019:

In this G-string passage, I have been focusing on finding ways to minimise the movement and soften my hand. In particular, when executing the descending shift in bar 65, the actual shift is made only with the wrist, and the thumb serves as a kind of a pivot point which does not move together with the wrist but remains on the same spot. This not only provides more elasticity for my left hand, but also enhances the singing quality of the phrase.

However, in some instances the thumb must move along with the arm rather than staying underneath the neck of the violin. More specifically, it was of great help to bring my thumb out and transfer it to the side of the fingerboard when shifting from the middle to very high positions, for example at the end of the Faust Fantasy in bars 537-545 where the fast arpeggios reach A7 – the highest note of the entire piece:

Example 11. Wieniawski, Faust Fantasy, Op. 20, bars 535-546.⁵⁹



I have tried different thumb positions for the arpeggio sequences in the finale, including a) leaving the thumb behind the neck, b) bringing the thumb onto the bout, and c) transferring the thumb to the side of the fingerboard. Although my usual position is putting the thumb under the neck, this particular passage needs a higher position of the hand as the notes are extremely high. Transferring the thumb to the side of the fingerboard brings the hand and the fingers closer to the fingerboard, which virtually eliminates excessive tension in the wrist (e.g. curving in the opposite direction), as well as in the

⁵⁹ See my final recital recording of Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy at 17'37".

fingers (e.g. unnecessary finger pressure from stretching). Now I can play this fast passage up to tempo with relative ease; more importantly, I am able to vibrate on the top note, and this produces a more resonant and brilliant tone. (Reflective note, 10 Oct 2019)

A higher positioning of the left hand was also of benefit to awkward fingering patterns, such as those found in chord sequences and finger extensions. For instance, I employed finger extensions rather than shifting in bar 391 in the A flat major variation of Schubert's C major Fantasy, playing notes outside the position by stretching the third and fourth fingers up for the sake of establishing a more secure hand position with respect to intonation.

Example 12. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 389-391.



When placing the fingers in different positions (while retaining the same placement of the hand), the notes lying in other positions were reached with the help of a higher positioning of the hand. Rather than purely extending the third and fourth fingers, the arm and wrist played an essential role in the movement, both of which leaning in the direction of the extended fingers. This allowed the third and fourth fingers to come close to the intended positions. Further, a higher positioning of the left hand ensured a free and mellow sound in the upper position as it provided a more comfortable condition for the third and fourth fingers, whereas a lower positioning of the left hand often resulted in a forced and squeezed tone because the overstretched fingers usually created excessive pressure. An example of this can be found in my recording of Schubert's C major Fantasy, in which the vibrato of the top note C7 (the first time)⁶⁰ sounded sweet and loose; however, the width of the vibrato in the repeat⁶¹ was too narrow, resulting in a slightly nervous and squeezed sound. The reason for this was that, although both times were in tune, the positioning of the left hand in the first time was a fraction higher; as a result, the hand and fingers gained more freedom to highlight the top note with a more relaxed vibrato.

⁶⁰ See my video recording of Schubert's C major Fantasy at 11'48".

⁶¹ See my video recording of Schubert's C major Fantasy at 12'15".

I also chose a number of finger extensions between big intervals in thematic and cantabile passages in Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy and the Brahms and Strauss sonatas. The purpose of this was to extend interpretive possibilities and avoid excessive uses of portamento. Unlike the finger extensions discussed above, where the arpeggio patterns were considered as broken chords and the hand and fingers remained practically in the same place, this type of finger extension consisted of stretching the finger until reaching the required note and then bringing the rest of the hand into the new position. I became aware that the positioning of the left hand was of primary importance when executing this type of extension, as both intonation and tone quality, to a certain extent, were dependent upon how the left hand was positioned. For example:

Example 13. Wieniawski, Faust Fantasy, Op. 20, bars 271-277.⁶²



In bar 276 of the Faust Fantasy, I want the sound of the slide to be avoided for the top note, D7, as I have used many portamenti in the Andante, but it is not easy to make the extension sound free and effortless. I have realised that the preparation is essential for this finger extension. The hand while still in the initial position already assumes the shape of the hand in the new position, by bringing the arm around and placing the thumb beneath the neck. The preparation (the change in the shape of the hand) enables the extended finger to reach the required note easily; at the same time, other fingers as well as the whole hand follow the extended finger and arrive in the new position. Without unnecessary stretching and finger pressure, intonation precision as well as the singing quality of the top note can be achieved in a relaxed manner. (Reflective note, 10 Oct 2019)

The analysis above illustrates that the positioning of the left hand significantly influenced the general sound quality, especially in the high positions on the fingerboard. In addition to bow control, producing a free and singing tone required the maximum degree of freedom when moving the left hand, and this was largely determined by the positioning of the hand, including the positions of the thumb, the wrist and the arm. An uncomfortable hand position would negatively affect the quality of sound as it created unwanted tension in the fingers and wrist. Through the process of experimentation, it became clear to me that the positioning of the left hand should not be static; rather, it should be considered dynamic in response to the variety of musical tasks. Certain passages, particularly those

⁶² See my final recital recording of Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy at 11'27".

involving the G string and the upper positions, may require the positioning of the left hand to change and re-adjust. Although the question of a higher or lower position may depend on specific individual situations, it was important to examine how the positioning of the hand could accommodate all necessary movements to produce the desired sound.

Balance between musical expressivity and physical relaxation

Although one of my main tasks was to strengthen my expressivity, when I played with musical involvement, overexcitement often caused technical insecurity. It was therefore important for me to investigate ways to play without physical limitations. I concentrated on exploring a better balance between musical expressivity and technical ease, for instance by investigating how to produce a powerful sound with minimal effort.

During the process of learning Milstein's *Paganiniana*, I was deeply inspired by Milstein's recordings of the piece; his playing always sounds effortless, flawless and yet brilliant. I was specifically seeking to achieve a balanced performance that combines great intensity of expression with an effortless mechanism, through building expressive tools such as developing a singing and unforced tone, as well as investigating ways to lower physical tensions. My main difficulty was that I usually started to lose control or experience physical problems when playing with musical involvement, but the situation would not occur if I played mechanically. This was due to the fact that in my early training in China I was encouraged to isolate the technically challenging passages in practice, where a considerable amount of time was spent on correcting various mechanical issues. In particular, I was taught to practise objectively with an emphasis on enhancing technical precision, including intonation accuracy and shifting. Therefore, I developed a formula for playing in a relaxed manner with minimal musical involvement. It could be seen that there was an aspect missing in my practice. I neglected an important fact: that my muscles functioned in a different way when expressing emotions, and I never considered how my hands and body worked in response to musical emotions or expression. As a result, all my muscles had only learned how to relax in an emotionless situation, and when playing with musical involvement I tended to tense up my body, which led to technical inaccuracies:

There are chord sequences throughout the 3rd variation⁶³ and I want to achieve a majestic quality in the sound. As I often get carried away by its character, I tend to force the sound and use excessive vibrato. My intonation has also suffered due to my physical tension. But when focusing on physical relaxation, I lose the musical intensity as I immediately switch off my emotions. How can I enable body relaxation and musical expression at the same time? (Reflective note, 28 Dec 2017)

⁶³ See my video recording of *Paganiniana* between 01'33" and 02'18".

Example 14. Milstein, *Paganiniana*, Variation 3, bars 66-97.



By observing the masterclass of C, who encouraged students to employ body movement and breathing in performance, I realised that there was a disconnection between musical expression and physical looseness in my playing. Therefore, I started to adopt C's approach to practising, where I concentrated on reducing physical tension by adding some body movements and breathing. In my reflective notes of 11 January 2018, I wrote:

I notice that I usually freeze my body and hold my breath when facing technical difficulties or feeling excited by the music, such as highlighting a climax, i.e. making a *crescendo* or *ritardando*. This is particularly obvious in Variation 3,⁶⁴ where I want to make the descending arpeggios sound brilliant by doing a big *ritardando* and using much bow pressure on the arriving note. I can't move at all! With this amount of tension, my sound is pressed and dry. Rather than trying too hard (forcing the instrument), I should really focus on developing a singing tone. To enable this, I try to free my body by swinging my upper body sideways. In the meantime, I intentionally breathe out on the arriving note E7 so that I can give some air to the sound.

Moreover, the breathing and sideways movement really helped me to open up my sound in the Brahms Sonata in A. As the sonata contains extremely expressive melodies throughout the whole piece, more often than not I was overexcited by the richness and expressiveness of the music, which resulted in a forced sound and faulty intonation because I unintentionally stiffened my hands and held my breath. Therefore, I needed to loosen up my whole body to achieve a rich yet open tone:

I have been using tiny bit of body swing and breathing to ease my physical tension. For example, I decide to breathe out on two down bows of the octaves in bar 35,⁶⁵ which allows me feel the centre of gravity of the body.

⁶⁴ See my video recording of *Paganiniana* at 01'52''.

⁶⁵ See my video recording of the Brahms sonata, first movement between 00'54'' and 01'07''.

Example 15. Brahms, Sonata in A major, Op. 100, first movement, bars 30-44.



So I won't force the sound. Sideways movements also help me to breathe and free my body, but I must not move too much as it would interfere with my bow speed. It is absolutely necessary for the upper body to move back (horizontally) during the up bows. These slight movements and breathing make my sound freer and more resonant. (Reflective note, 5 Feb 2019)

Through my experiments with body movements and breathing, I came to understand that the body had to stay loose and neutral to produce a more resonant sound. When my breathing and the swing of my body were in harmony, I could play those technically challenging passages with relative ease, and intonation accuracy seemed to be more consistent; more importantly, I felt I could better express musical intentions as there was a wider range of colours to choose from without forcing the instrument. By contrast, when I forgot to breathe and swing sideways, I tended to freeze my entire body and squeeze the sound; consequently, rather than increasing the excitement of performance, the actual singing quality and colour range and the precision of technical execution were all affected by the physical stiffness. In other words, the less effort and pressure I put onto the instrument, the more resonance I gained in sound, and the better precision there was in the performance. When realising the importance of breath control and natural movements, rather than concentrating solely on the execution of both hands, I gradually shifted my focus to the following aspects: a) monitoring every part and every movement being relaxed and coordinated, b) keeping my body supple and flexible, and c) checking my breathing. Although further examination was needed regarding the balance between musical intensity and physical relaxation in terms of how much the sideways movement is appropriate for different music and where exactly the breathing should take place, the approach of combining breathing with body movements appeared to help me to develop a singing quality in the sound I produce and to play in a more relaxed manner.

Allowing technique to feel embodied

While building up my individual interpretive tools, I sought to develop my own approach to practising the integration of technique and interpretation and investigating how to apply an integrated approach in practice when learning a piece at an early stage. Given that practice is the process of getting closer to achieving musical goals, many pedagogues acknowledge the importance of practice in violin playing/learning and provide guidance on how one should construct practice efficiently (Flesch, 1923; Galamian, 1962; Yampolsky, 1967; Gerle, 1983; Fischer, 2004; Yang, 2005; Ricci, 1988 and 2007; Ding, 2012). Interestingly, my approach to practising had also prioritised efficiency, which focused on building technical skills; in particular, my teachers in China advised students to always stay objective during practice in order to solve technical problems effectively. However, this particular way of practising paid very little attention to developing interpretations, which seemed to suggest that placing emphasis on musical expression would result in long hours of ineffective practice. It thus pointed to the need for me to refine my own approach to practising by blending the two elements into my practice without affecting my efficiency.

I started by experimenting with different practising approaches in an attempt to connect mechanical technique and expressivity at an early stage of learning; however, it appeared to me that it was often more challenging to employ the integrated approach in learning virtuosic works in comparison to sonatas, as virtuosic works usually contain a greater variety of techniques, including fast chord sequences, double-stopped arpeggios, large leaps, and left-hand tremolo and pizzicato, all of which need to be addressed with specific targeted solutions. Therefore, I needed to explore particular strategies for practising in order to deal with both technical and musical issues simultaneously. For example, Variation 4⁶⁶ of *Paganiniana* exploits the use of left-hand tremolo, where a melody is played in one line with a left-hand tremolo occurring in another.

⁶⁶ See my video recording of *Paganiniana* between 02'18" and 04'18".

Example 16. Milstein, Paganiniana, Variation 4, bars 98-116.

IV 98 Lento
dolce
101
104 D
107 D
110
113 V

While the melodic line requires a legato singing tone, the constant tremolo for the left hand demands great agility and clarity of the fingers. I tried to focus on the interpretation, aiming to achieve the sound I envisaged, where the tremolos shimmer underneath the melody, but I inevitably paid much attention to mechanical issues, such as intonation accuracy and clean execution of the tremolos and shifts. In my reflective notes of 11 January 2018, I wrote:

In Variation 4, I must deal with both musical and technical issues, shaping the melodic line while keeping the trills (left-hand tremolo) even and clean. It has been very difficult for me to do so as my brain cannot process that much information at once. My intonation has become almost unbearable when focusing on the melody, and my trills always interfere with the melody because my fingers often start to touch neighbouring strings when stretching fingerings occur. How can I improve this? How do I change my approach?

I came to understand that I lacked the ability to multitask during practice as I was used to dealing with one particular problem at a time. This seemed to suggest the need to explore new practising approaches. For instance, to focus on the clarity of the left hand and the shape of the horizontal lines at the same time, I came up with a different idea to approach this variation, which involved three steps:

1) play the melodic line only and decide how I would like to phrase the melodic lines; 2) add the trills on the left hand without playing it out (from the bow); 3) combine the two parts together. Although

the second step is time-consuming, I think it is a quite useful way of practising, as I can really listen to the direction of the melodic lines, and at the same time I can also monitor whether the execution of the trills is neat, where the melody can easily be interrupted by the trills. (Reflective note, 31 Jan 2018)

I also experimented with different ideas for practising this variation; for example, I initially began with slow practice. Recommended by many violinists and violin teachers (Yang, 2005; Ding, 2012), slow practice is considered as the most intelligent way to practise because the slow tempo amplifies technical problems and allows the brain to process all the movements in advance. It was a very useful step to train myself to deal with multitasking in the initial stage, e.g. shifts, tone, intonation, bow control and trills, as it gave me sufficient time to prepare everything in advance:

In Variation 4, I manage to deal with intonation, finger clarity, bow distribution, as well as phrasing and horizontal line, all at once by practising slowly. The slow tempo enables me to calculate the distance of every shift, control the finger motions, as well as listen to the melodic and harmonic interchanges and shape the phrases. I have been doing slow practice for a week and I feel I have gained physical control in the slow tempo. (Reflective note, 18 Jan 2018)

However, I became aware that there was often a big gap between the slow tempo and original tempo in some of the variations, where both hands and muscles function differently in these two tempos, such as Variations 1,⁶⁷ 2,⁶⁸ 5⁶⁹ and 7.⁷⁰ My hands were completely out of control when attempting the original tempo:

It seems impossible to control my hands whenever I play up to speed. My hands are tightening up and I freeze my body... Rather than multitasking, I am unable to anticipate anything in advance. This has also affected the way I interpret the music, including the uses of rubato and vibrato. Although I feel excited, my accuracy is compromised. (Reflective note, 22 Jan 2018)

⁶⁷ See my video recording of *Paganiniana* between 00'27" and 00'59".

⁶⁸ See my video recording of *Paganiniana* between 01'00" and 01'32".

⁶⁹ See my video recording of *Paganiniana* between 04'20" and 05'24".

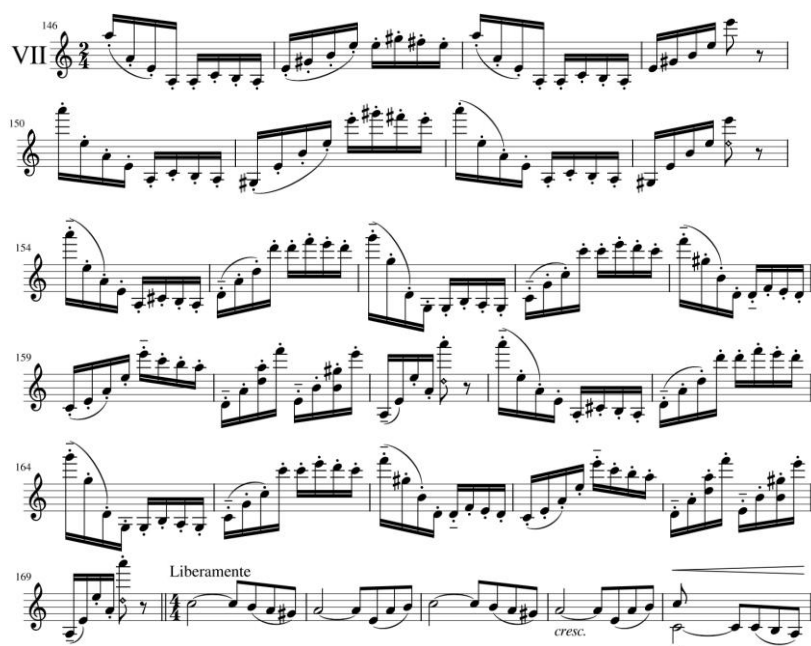
⁷⁰ See my video recording of *Paganiniana* between 06'17" and 06'40".

Example 17. Milstein, *Paganiniana*, Variation 1, bars 17-48.

Example 18. Milstein, *Paganiniana*, Variation 2, bars 49-64.

Example 19. Milstein, *Paganiniana*, Variation 5, bars 117-132.

Example 20. Milstein, Paganiniana, Variation 7, bars 146-169.



I then experimented with practising in different tempos, and it appeared to me that a medium tempo allowed me to handle multiple tasks:

Playing in the medium tempo in Variation 2 enables me to pay attention to the direction of the phrases, as well as monitor the finger clarity. More importantly, with sufficient time, I can play in a more relaxed manner. I think I should dedicate more time to ‘under-tempo practice’. (Reflective note, 4 Feb 2018)

I discovered that I could really benefit from under-tempo practice as it enabled me to multitask, tackling both technical and interpretive issues: first, practising under tempo (but not too slow) helped me to feel the natural flow of the work, including highlighting a particular phrase; second, it also ensured that there was sufficient time for mental preparation for technical difficulties, such as calculating bow distribution and anticipating big shifts.

Integrating technical difficulty with musical outcomes in practice

The second question explored the possibility of integrating technical difficulty with musical outcomes. As I intended to investigate whether the integrated approach was appropriate for learning all genres of music, I deliberately chose to learn one of the most technical challenging works ever written for the violin – *The Last Rose of Summer* by Ernst. However, the process of learning took a

great deal of mental effort. Due to the overwhelming technical challenges, I was unable to engage with my research aim in the early stage of the learning process; I encountered many setbacks, as the technical demands exceeded my personal abilities. It took me a whole year of extensive work, involving hours of correcting intonation, developing finger strength and flexibility, and figuring out possible fingerings for particular technical passages, before I could get through the piece and play all the notes. A⁷¹ indicates that *The Last Rose of Summer* is only for violinists who possess the highest levels of technical ability. Such technical demands made it practically impossible for me to pay attention to both technical and interpretive aspects at an early stage of learning; instead, I divided my learning into two stages: the first concentrating on solving technical problems and developing virtuosic techniques, and the second on finding enjoyment and bringing colours to the artistic side.

To overcome the numerous technical obstacles, such as left-hand pizzicato, double-stopped harmonics, extremely fast arpeggios, and shifts, I focused on the training and consolidation of my left-hand technique: 1) finger independence and strength, and 2) suppleness and flexibility of the fingers. I treated every obstacle as a puzzle, and in order to solve them, I adopted a mechanical approach, for example by repeatedly working at particular places. My strategy involved: 1) identifying and isolating the weakest places and dealing with these difficulties in a slow tempo; 2) if this approach did not work, I would try breaking the passage down into even smaller units and practising in an even slower tempo; 3) planning ahead to clarify my practice strategy for the next day.

I spent a significant amount of time and effort trying to develop my finger strength. The techniques written for this piece are the most developed of their kind, such as the extensive use of left-hand pizzicato,⁷² which makes the highest demands on the firmness and independence of the left-hand fingers. However, I lacked finger strength to master this advanced technique. I wrote in my reflective notes on 16 April 2018:

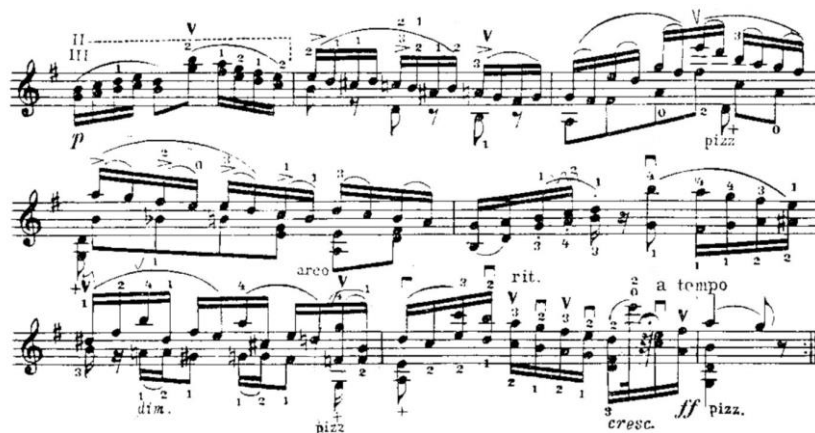
I have been following this practice routine for the past few weeks, during which I have spent 2 hours a day working specifically on the first and fourth variations. Today I try to run through the first variation, but my left hand is completely exhausted before the end. As a result, the tenths in bar 17 are too low as I am unable to extend my fourth finger. Also, the left-hand pizzicato sounds too weak – I can barely hear it myself. There is a big gap before the pizzicato, where I completely stop my bow. This is very frustrating! I have spent so much time practising these few bars, but my fingers are still too stiff and weak. A lot of finger work needs to be done! I think I should divide my time into 12

⁷¹ Observational notes: A's masterclass at the RNCM, 19 March 2019.

⁷² The use of left-hand pizzicato: left-hand pizzicato as an accompaniment to bowed notes where left-hand pizzicato accompanies the melody played by the bow, and left-hand pizzicato as melody accompanied by bowed notes where a melody is played in left-hand pizzicato and accompanied by bowed notes (Rowe, 2008).

small sessions tomorrow, 10 minutes per session. In this way, my fingers would not hurt so much. I shall continue to look into these issues tomorrow: finger firmness and tuning...

Example 21.⁷³ Ernst, *The Last Rose of Summer*, Variation 1, bars 13-20.



Although I tried to tackle technical problems by repeating very brief passages, I was often unable to make any progress and this caused me unavoidable distress at times:

I have spent an hour practising these three bars (17-19)⁷⁴ but it doesn't seem to get better! I have tried everything I can think of, for instance by putting the metronome on and practising in a very slow tempo over and over again. Playing with a metronome has helped me to keep the rhythm steady, but the accuracy remains inconsistent. In bar 18, the ninths are quite a constraint on their own, and adding the pizzicato makes my hand completely blocked... The main problem in this variation remains the same – weak third and fourth fingers. Also, my hand is aching because of these stretches!...

Example 22. Ernst, *The Last Rose of Summer*, Variation 1, bars 18-20.



I decide to take a short break immediately and try to get rid of these negative feelings. Before returning back to the piece, I spend 20 minutes on the first few bars of Paganini Caprice 12,

⁷³ See my video recording of *The Last Rose of Summer* between 03'06'' and 03'30''.

⁷⁴ See my video recording of *The Last Rose of Summer* at 03'15''.

Example 23. Paganini Caprice No. 12, bars 1-26.



in order to stretch my fingers and allow some movements in the arm. I also use the G major scale to practise pizzicato, focusing on the third finger. After these exercises, I start again and practise only at a slow tempo. (Reflective note, 3 May 2018)

Throughout the first six months of learning, I realised that one of the main technical obstacles for me was the lack of finger strength and firmness. My fingers were too weak to execute left-hand pizzicato in three-part harmony or awkward chord sequences; moreover, my left hand seemed to have poor stamina in the muscles as it was often exhausted after playing just one variation. This was rather surprising to me as my left hand had previously seemed to be my strength, and I was often praised for mastering virtuosic works by Paganini and Wieniawski. However, I struggled to meet the technical demands of *The Last Rose of Summer*, as it requires a higher level of technical ability for violinists. It was therefore necessary to gain mechanical tools before I could master the work.

To increase the stamina in my left hand, I started by working through scales, arpeggios and thirds in all keys, starting in lower positions and continuing into very high positions. I noticed that while a repeating short pattern might solve certain isolated problems, once the hand got tired, the accuracy disappeared. It was initially very tough for me to complete the whole cycle without a break in the middle because my hand started to ache after playing in six or seven keys. The purpose of going through these sequences, therefore, was to increase my stamina. Furthermore, I spent much time practising chord sequences for the improvement of weak fingers. I worked on tenths, ninths and fingering octaves, using excerpts from Paganini's Caprices and Ricci's scale system to expand and

strengthen the fingers. I also concentrated on developing the third and fourth fingers for better independence by practising left-hand pizzicato. These exercises were very important in developing my left-hand technique. Two months later, I began to execute some of the technically difficult passages with relative ease.

The other technical issue that needed to be addressed was finger flexibility, and I worked specifically on developing a sense of softness and looseness in the left hand between shifts. Given that the etude contains numerous fingering combinations, and such fingerings demand expansions as well as contractions of the left hand, I was facing great challenges in executing these awkward and unfamiliar fingering patterns. More often than not, scratchiness and mistuning started with the change of position. On 13 October 2018, I wrote:

Many problems such as intonation are caused by stiffness in shifting. As I often tend to jump between positions, I add a sliding (glissando) motion during changes of positions. So every shift is in slow motion, which allows me to really feel distances between these positions. Moreover, intonation was insecure during shifting and stretching. I decided not to play arpeggios and ricochet bowings, instead, I consider all demisemiquaver arpeggios as broken chords so that I could prepare my fingers in advance and stabilise my hand frame. In this way, I can anticipate my next movements as well as monitor intonation.

Example 24.⁷⁵ Ernst, *The Last Rose of Summer*, Variation 2, bars 1-41.

The image displays a musical score for Variation 2 of 'The Last Rose of Summer' by Ernst, covering bars 1 to 41. The score is written for violin and piano. It features complex fingering, including many slurs and ties, and dynamic markings such as p, f, and dim. The tempo is marked 'a tempo'. The score is presented in three systems, each with multiple staves. The first system starts with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The second system includes a 'pizz.' marking. The third system includes a 'pizz.' marking and a 'dim.' marking. The score is numbered 2224 at the bottom of the first system, 2224 at the bottom of the second system, and 2224 at the bottom of the third system.

⁷⁵ See my video recording of *The Last Rose of Summer* between 03'30" and 05'10".

In order to prevent sudden movements in shifting, I exaggerated the shifting motions by making the hand ‘crawl’ up and down between changes of positions. In my reflective notes of 2 December 2018, I wrote:

I have been practising these arpeggios as chord sequences for almost 3 weeks. I am very pleased that I finally made some progress! It is very helpful for me to think of these arpeggios as chords rather than single notes, simply because it makes my hand more efficient by decreasing unnecessary motion. In this rapid technical variation, I am able to keep my movements in the most economical way, therefore, it stabilises my hand frame and naturally my intonation seems to be more secure.

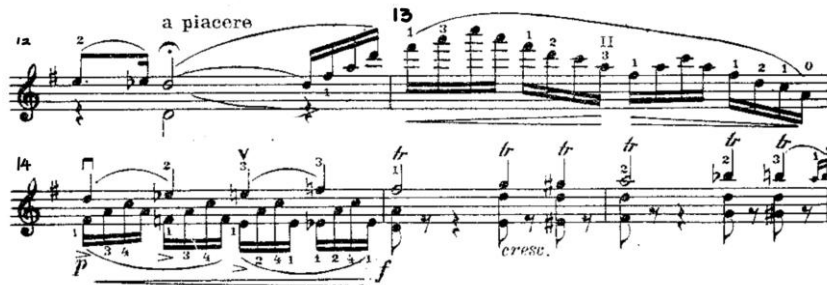
In the first stage of learning, rather than concerning myself with musical expression, I devoted a significant amount of time to the development of a virtuosic technique. To acquire these virtuoso techniques for the left hand, I experimented with different ideas and also employed a number of approaches: a) practising in different tempos, always starting in a slow tempo and gradually speeding up; b) using a metronome; c) isolating the weakest areas and working slowly; d) practising pizzicato and chord sequences to develop strength and independence of the fingers; e) playing scales, arpeggios and thirds in a full circle to build stamina in my muscles; f) using Paganini’s *Caprices*, notably Nos. 4, 8, 11 and 12, as a supplement to the finger stretches; g) slow motion shifting (sliding up and down the fingerboard) for the improvement of flexibility and suppleness (softness); h) minimising unnecessary hand movements and saving energy for better stability; i) preserving fingers and thinking of a whole fingering pattern instead of individual notes. It was crucial to work with patience and determination for the development of these advanced techniques, and a critical ear was also required constantly to make adjustments to intonation, rhythm and tone quality (an open and unforced sound). In addition, although I advocated using a medium tempo to practise when learning other virtuosic works, such as *Paganiniana*, learning this etude was an exception. Slow practice appeared to be the most efficient way for me to improve these advanced skills. The process was more like a gym workout, where I gradually built up my technical ability through practising slowly.

My focus switched to interpretive aspects in the second stage of the learning process. After fifteen months of extensive work on enhancing my technique, I finally decided to play the piece to my supervisor, E, as well as in C’s performance class on 2 March (which was my first semi-official performance). Surprisingly, both C and E made comments on interpretive matters, mainly regarding the timing and the melodic line. ‘This is one of the hardest works in the violin repertoire, so you’ve got to show off these virtuosic qualities to excellent effect,’ says C.

I realised that I was preoccupied with technical difficulties but paid no attention to the music. Following on from the experience of working on the piece with E and C, I started to look into possibilities for incorporating interpretive elements and technical issues into performance. I discovered that the use of rubato could occasionally help to solve technical difficulties:

In bar 14, I try to add vibrato on four melodic notes and make a *crescendo*, with an aim to underline the melody and phrasing. As I build up toward the end of the bar, there is a natural feeling of arrival – a small *ritardando*.⁷⁶ This small slowing down gives me more time for the left hand to extend the fourth finger. Whereas before I always got stuck in this big stretching double-stopping sequences when trying to play this in tempo. (Reflective note, 4 Mar 2019)

Example 25. Ernst, *The Last Rose of Summer*, Introduction, bars 12-16.



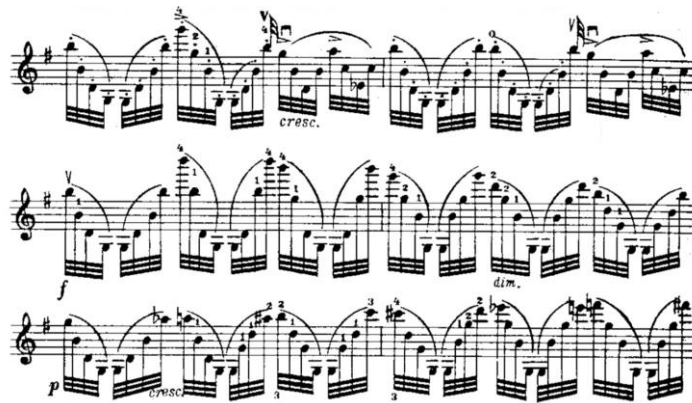
The other example of this could be found in the second variation, where the melody is hidden in the arpeggios with a springing bow. There was never enough time for me to change fingering patterns or bring my arm around the fingerboard in such a fast tempo. By making a slight *ritardando* (shaping the phrase) in one or two ‘corners’, I was finally able physically to breathe, and my left hand gained more freedom to execute these shifts and big jumps. On 10 March 2019, I wrote:

In bars 30 and 32 of the second variation,⁷⁷ the melody is retained on the top line, but here the chords are played in arpeggio. These arpeggios would be impossible to play without making a small *ritardando*. By taking a little bit of time on the top notes, the arpeggios can be played without compromising the intonation of the melody, and the small *ritardando* really highlights the big interval, which creates a lovely colour.

⁷⁶ See my video recording of *The Last Rose of Summer* at 00’51”.

⁷⁷ See my video recording of *The Last Rose of Summer* at 04’42”.

Example 26. Ernst, *The Last Rose of Summer*, Variation 2, bars 30-35.



I also noticed that my practice was more enjoyable when working on interpretive issues:

I have enjoyed the last 20 minutes of my practising, where I have discovered several sets of fingerings to achieve different tone colours. I don't think I have made immediate progress, but I feel good and refreshed when I am able to engage with the music itself, while solving technical issues requires a considerable amount of repetitions in practice. When thinking of phrasing instead of technical obstacles, my tone seems freer. (Reflective note, 20 Mar 2019)

Compared with the experiences of learning other major works, such as the Strauss Sonata, Brahms Sonata, *Paganiniana* and the Bach Partita, this learning journey had been particularly tortuous to me. When learning other canonical works, I was able to connect the technical with the interpretive from the beginning of the learning process. However, as the majority of the effects in *The Last Rose of Summer* lie in the mechanics, which make severe technical demands, I had to deal solely with technical difficulties in the initial stage of the learning process. It was important for me to approach each technical element through detailed analysis and with great patience and discipline during every practice session. In particular, patience was of primary importance in solving a technical problem and developing a specific technique. Given that an extreme length of time was needed to improve some of these virtuosic technique, frustration was inevitable when I failed to overcome an obstacle. Therefore, it was extremely important for me to get rid of negative feelings and stay calm and positive. I always found that my practice was more productive when I was patient and optimistic.

Moreover, mastering the notes was merely the end of the first part of the learning journey. Although progress was rarely straightforward, I still sought to deliver an exciting and expressive performance by combining virtuosic techniques with expressiveness. I placed emphasis on exploring a greater enjoyment of the colours and timing in the second stage of learning, for instance by underlining a hidden lyrical melody and taking time to highlight a phrase. Working with C and E provided me with particular insights into the integration of the technical difficulties and musical outcomes; both

encouraged me to use the creative mind as much as the practical one during practice, for instance by using expressivity to aid technical difficulties. An interesting discovery for me was that musical interpretation could help to solve certain technical difficulties. When focusing on shaping the musical phrases, the natural flow of the music and the use of a subtle rubato made some passages easier and more manageable because my left hand gained a fraction of extra time. On the other hand, I was able to pay more attention to interpretive issues and play with musical involvement when I trusted my physical/mechanical ability. After acquiring a few technical tools, e.g. finger strength and flexibility, I was better equipped to realise the musical elements. This demonstrated that achieving technical mastery was absolutely a prerequisite for playing this type of piece. It also goes some way to explaining the emphasis that many great violin pedagogues place on training technical ability first (Flesch, 1923; Galamian, 1962; Yampolsky, 1967; Gerle, 1983; Fischer, 2004; Yang, 2005; Ricci, 1988 and 2007).

When the use of expressive devices was appropriate

The third question examined when the use of expressive devices, i.e. bow techniques, vibrato, choices of fingering and bowing, and rubato, was appropriate. To address this question, I looked into a) incorporating knowledge of period style and its implications for interpretation in the performance, examining articulation and slur indications and tempo fluctuations, and b) the choice of fingering and portamento, especially when and how to employ portamento.

Historically informed performance practice

When addressing the question of historically informed performance practice, I intended to incorporate the composer's musical language and my own aesthetic understanding of the piece into my personal approach, through employing appropriate technical tools. During my own preparation process, I was influenced by my supervisor's approach to bringing knowledge of historically informed performance practice to the performance; she encouraged me to examine different editions of music scores, especially the early editions from the nineteenth century, with an attempt to understand the stylistic context better. As previously discussed, the current trend of violin playing in recent decades, as Wen reports, has shifted from expressing one's unique style to delivering an 'authentic' performance of the music (Wen, 1992: 90). Assistance with this can be found in Brown's and Milsom's studies, where interpretive decisions are based on pertinent knowledge of historical and stylistic contexts (Brown, 1999; Milsom, 2003). Brown states that the sound and style from early practice is substantially different from what modern practice generally assumes; therefore, it is essential to have a historical

basis for artistic decision-making as it will help violinists to understand composers' original intentions (Brown, 1999). However, Cotik argues that in reality most violinists, including teachers, professionals and students, make their personal decisions without studying the music in its precise historical context and, as a result, these decisions do not always conform to performance traditions (Cotik, 2013: 2). As discussed before, this is evident in the context of violin teaching/playing in China, where several studies criticise Chinese pedagogy for often disregarding composers' historical backgrounds and styles (Reimer, 1989: 70, Huang and Thibodeaux, 2016; Zhang, 2016). Parallels can be drawn with a few instances of the expert teachers' teaching, which prioritises performance skills rather than the historical context and knowledge of relevant performance practice. In contrast to this approach, F and E always bring knowledge of historically informed performance practice to their teaching, e.g. the difference between the set-up of the Baroque instrument itself and playing Bach on a modern instrument; knowledge from contemporary accounts of the Classical style, e.g. ornamentation; uses of portamento and vibrato. Therefore, when learning Schubert's Fantasy, I looked into the stylistic context and relevant performance practices to make informed decisions about interpretation, during which I concentrated on investigating what specific bowing indications and notation markings meant for Schubert, and how much flexibility of tempo was appropriate.

Bowing decisions – slurs

When choosing bowings for the Schubert Fantasy, rather than looking for playability I considered the performance practice of Schubert's time and sought to bring knowledge from contemporary accounts of the Classical style to make my decisions; for instance, by interpreting the long slurs in the opening phrase of the piece and deciding where I should join the slurs to create a longer line; where I can place a breath (change the bow) between phrases; and to what extent I should be faithful to Schubert's text. Schubert, as Cotik (2013) notes, does not seem to understand the capabilities of the instrument well enough to know how awkward it would be to play the opening phrase (slurs) as written. Both Montgomery and Sonnleithner⁷⁸ stress the importance of the lyrical quality of Schubert's music – 'Schubert stood on the side of lyricism in performance' (Montgomery, 2010: 276; Cotik, 2013) – which indicates that the long slurs should be kept at the beginning. However, Cotik argues that some slurs could be interpreted as expressive slurs that indicate the phrase if the slurs are too long to be executed properly in one bow (Cotik, 2013: 76). This suggests that violinists could change the bow within the long slur. After experimenting with several bowings, I decided to employ Schubert's original bowing (long slurs) as it seems to represent Schubert's musical thinking. Although it

⁷⁸ Leopold von Sonnleithner (1797-1873): a lawyer, a well-known personality of the Viennese classical music scene, and a friend of Schubert, Beethoven and Czerny (Cotik, 2013).

increases the difficulty of bow control, I sought to create a horizontal legato line rather than going for an easier version by using the bowing indications (changes of bow) in the Henle edition.⁷⁹

Example 27. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 1-10.



Accents and dots

Besides the use of long slurs, it is noticeable that the C major Fantasy contains many accent markings [>] that illustrate how Schubert wants the music to be phrased. Evidence points out that the stress markings might have different meanings. For instance, Sonnleithner states that Schubert's music never allows dramatic or violent expression (Montgomery, 2010), which suggests that many accents should not be executed with hard attacks, and Cotik also reports that some accents could be purely expressive in piano passages (Cotik, 2013: 102). Therefore, I needed to examine carefully the dynamic level and musical context when interpreting these accents, as it was impossible to standardise the interpretation of the accent signs. For example, in bars 53 and 54,⁸⁰ where the dynamic is *pianissimo* but Schubert puts accents on all four crochets, it seemed to be out of character to execute these accents with a hard attack.

Example 28. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 45-61.



I wrote in my reflective notes (11 June 2019):

I experiment with different parts of the bow to play these accents and I finally decide to use the tip as it produces a gentler and quieter sound in response to the *pianissimo* marking. Using vibrato to highlight the accents seems to work better than the bow in this place. Rather than attacking the string,

⁷⁹ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 00'26".

⁸⁰ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 03'47".

start the note on the string to avoid a hard accent, which gives a soft touch in the bow. This seems to suit the character better.

Occasionally, the accent, as Cotik (2013: 102) indicates, works as an agogic accent. This example can be found in the slow movement of the Fantasy in bars 363 and 365,⁸¹ where the accents are marked on the appoggiaturas, which gives an impression of prolonging the duration of the notes. Interpreting these accents required a different bow technique and vibrato:

Given that the theme is taken from Schubert's beloved song 'Sei mir gegrüsst', the accents should not be aggressive. To approach the accents, I emphasise the appoggiatura by using a slower and heavier bow with more vibrato and gradually releasing the bow pressure and vibrato after the appoggiatura. I should continue adjusting the balance between the bow and vibrato, in a way that would make the tone more expressive and beautiful. (Reflective note, 16 June 2019)

Example 29. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 362-366.



The same idea applied to the interpretation of the dot indications, where I concentrated on choosing appropriate interpretive and technical tools to interpret these dots in response to the musical context. For example, in the A flat major variation,⁸² semiquaver quadruplets and sextuplets are marked staccato. I employed off-the-string bow strokes but varied the lengths of the notes, playing the quadruplets longer than the usual off-the-string bow strokes for the sake of a more horizontal quality, and executing the sextuplets very short to give greater direction to the phrases.

Example 30. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 386-395.



⁸¹ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 09'30".

⁸² See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 11'37".

In addition to the staccato indication, Schubert also employs a number of accents to underline the theme, ‘Sei mir gegrüsst’. Again, rather than executing them as hard accents, I was seeking a horizontal and lyrical line by using a fraction more bow and vibrato to achieve a singing tone.

By contrast, I employed martelé bowing (where each bow stroke starts on the string) to interpret some of the dots in the second movement, such as in bars 272⁸³ and 285-300.⁸⁴ The reason for this was to achieve the desired articulation and firmness and brightness of sound. As the music increases in intensity, it seems to require greater energy and power in the sound. Martelé allows the bow to sustain the musical intensity and excitement effectively.

Example 31. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 270-275.



Example 32. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 285-300.



The purpose of carefully examining these indications for articulation markings and slurs was to try to grasp how the composer might have expected his music to be performed. This required me to study the score thoroughly.

Rubato

Rubato may be defined as the expressive alteration of rhythm, pulse or tempo, and is just one expressive device used in a variety of ways across a range of repertoire. As Hudson indicates (2001: 832-834), there are, broadly speaking, two types of rubato: in an earlier type the melody is played

⁸³ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 07'26".

⁸⁴ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 07'42".

more freely while the accompaniment maintains strict time; a later type involves rhythmic flexibility of the entire musical substance. Almost all violinists express different musical moods by slightly changing the tempo of the music (*rubato*), and each violinist interprets the rhythm of the *rubato* in a different way. I tended to rely on the use of *rubato* to place emphasis on the character of the music and its colours, as it seemed to be an effective approach to expressing different emotions and colours. On the other hand, the use of *rubato* could be quite challenging for ensemble playing, especially with dramatic fluctuations in tempo, as it would create a momentary dislocation in the rhythm. For example, when learning to play Strauss' Sonata, my pianist and I had very different ideas about how we wanted to use *rubato* in our interpretation. More often than not, we had to compromise on choices of *rubato* and timing. On 24 June 2018, I wrote:

There is an obvious disconnection between the violin and the piano in bars 90-98, where I want to create an agitated feeling by accelerating the speed, but my pianist plays the triplets more steadily. We both agree that there is a nervous feeling created by the triplets, but we feel the *rubato* in a different way. After trying out a few options, I have finally managed to convince my pianist to adjust to my tempo.

Example 33. Strauss, Sonata in E flat major, Op. 18, first movement, bars 89-99.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ See my final recital recording of the Strauss Sonata (first movement) between 03'27" and 03'48".

I also noticed that I tended to introduce expressive phrases by changing to a slower tempo in the sonata, but this made it quite difficult for my pianist to follow me. Rather than using the bow to make the phrase expressive and lyrical, I was slowing down the tempo to achieve the effect. On 5 July 2018, I wrote:

We have rehearsed these few bars several times for him to follow my tempo changes in bar 236. The other place is in bar 239, where I do a big *ritardando* at the end of the melodic line. My pianist, however, prefers to use a smaller range of tempo changes than me. I cannot back up my interpretation here because the music is marked *un poco*. My musical idea does not seem to make sense. More importantly, I think I must know how to change the mood and colour without speeding up or slowing down drastically – a technique I ought to develop.

Example 34. Strauss, Sonata in E flat major, Op. 18, first movement, bars 234-240.⁸⁶



According to Neuhaus, ‘the greater the pianist’s awareness of the rhythmic structure, the more freely, the more logically does he depart from it at times’ (Neuhaus, 1973: 32). It became clear to me that as I usually took extra time for the changes of colours, it affected the overall rhythmic structure, such as natural musical flow and pulse. Therefore, I started to work on expanding my bow expression and varying vibrato instead of making drastic tempo changes. On 12 July 2018, I wrote:

I have found a solution to the problem! To rapidly change the mood from agitated to calm, instead of speeding up or slowing down, I gradually release the bow pressure and decelerate the speed of the vibrato, which changes the mood of the music within one phrase. Apart from my vibrato needing more variety, my bow arm seems to start to produce more layers of tone colour.

⁸⁶ See my final recital recording of the Strauss Sonata (first movement) between 08’58” and 09’07”.

In contrast to playing the Strauss, it seems inappropriate to employ dramatic changes in tempos in Schubert's music. Sonnleithner reveals that Schubert keeps time strict, without arbitrary deviations in tempo (Montgomery, 2010: 276), which suggests that performers should play in strict tempo indications except in those few places where Schubert specifically marks a *ritardando* or *accelerando*. However, in a number of places it appeared to be more natural to follow its musical direction and phrase:

In bars 82 and 83,⁸⁷ where the phrase has a natural feeling of arrival, it feels natural to slightly pull the *crescendo* for the arrival of the phrase. In this way, I could really show the dynamic contrast between *forte* and *piano*. (Reflective note, 26 June 2019)

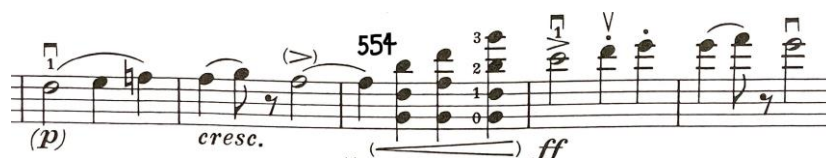
Example 35. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 78-87.



Some other places were technically unplayable without slightly pulling the tempo because physical breathing was needed, for instance bars 439 and 554. In my reflective notes of 26 June 2019, I wrote:

In bar 554,⁸⁸ there are three big chords with a huge build-up (*crescendo*) to reach the *fortissimo* in the next bar. Musically, it doesn't seem to make sense to keep time strict; and from a technical point of view, it is impossible to execute three awkward chords with a big shift strictly in tempo as I need to breathe before arriving into the C6. Therefore, I am taking a slight *ritardando* for both technical and musical reasons.

Example 36. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 552-556.

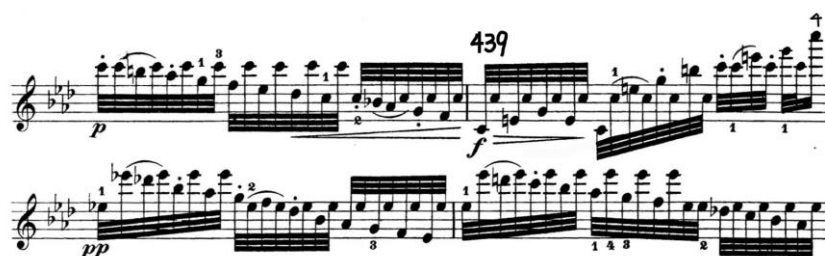


⁸⁷ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 04'12".

⁸⁸ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 22'21".

Another place is in bar 439⁸⁹ where there is an octave leap in the semiquaver C7, it requires a big shift for the left hand, but the left hand is not capable of doing this quickly in such a fast-moving passage.

Example 37. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 438-441.



During the preparation process of this work, I learned two factors regarding the use of rubato in Schubert's music. First, Schubert's music in general should be played flowingly without big fluctuations in tempo. Anything that disturbs the flow of the melody, as Cotik notes, would destroy the musical effect, as it is contrary to the composer's intention (Cotik, 2013). This suggested that rather than using rubato to highlight the character of the music and its colours, I must explore other expressive devices to achieve changes in colours and characters. Second, I became aware that a regular tempo could still allow a natural direction for the phrases, including slightly pushed and held-back *crescendi*, breathing and a natural shaping of the phrases. Therefore, I needed to enhance my awareness of the rhythmic structure, by constantly adjusting the balance between strict time and tempo fluctuations.

Fingering/Portamento

I paid utmost attention to the choice of fingering, with a focus on exploring when and how to employ portamento in the music so that the musical language of the composer would benefit from it. As previously discussed, all the expert teachers I interviewed and observed held different – and subjective – views about choosing fingerings and the general use of portamento, revealing their individual unconscious bias toward or against a particular style of playing. When I was a student in China I would avoid the use of portamento as my teachers would criticise me for producing a sound that was too 'smeary', and instead I would concentrate on a clean execution of the shift. Now I see that this approach seems disconnected from musical expression. During my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, when I engaged with European violin traditions, I realised that the choice of fingering and portamento was inseparable from tone colour. Now that I have learned through my data collection process how these expert teachers approach this subject, it became clearer to me that

⁸⁹ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 16'42".

particular choices of portamento and fingering could make the performance more compelling, because the use of portamento could embellish specific notes or moments, and the phrase would sound more legato and singing in a thematic melody. I was particularly influenced by B's and C's approaches to choices of fingering and the uses of portamento, which truly emphasised the singing quality in lyrical passages and distinguished their playing from others.

My choices of fingering and portamento were mainly based upon the expressive outcomes (except for *The Last Rose of Summer*). Rather than aiming for technical neatness, I tried to look into the interpretive aspects of the expressiveness and strength of sound required for specific passages. By observing B's teaching, I came to understand that a legato line is more easily achievable through sliding between intervals. For example, Strauss specialist Norman Del Mar noted that the violin line 'suggests a full body of strings' (Nixon, 2014: 17); the suggestion of a string orchestra implied that it was necessary to employ all possible expressive tools in response to the music's Romantic expression, including portamento. Given that the sonata contains broad melodic contours and singing lines, which seem to invite the use of portamento, I chose to slide for long-distance shifts as well as between notes with the interval of a second, to highlight particular intervals and melodic lines. When playing a melodic phrase in the first movement, for instance, I was looking for uniformity of timbre by sliding for long-distance shifts in order to remain for most of the phrase on one string. I wrote in my reflective notes on 17 June 2018:

Example 38. Strauss, Sonata in E flat major, Op. 18, first movement, bars 57-69.⁹⁰



Although the majority of violinists, including Heifetz, Midori, Chung and Tsai, choose to cross the strings and play the Bb5 on the E string in bar 65,⁹¹ which gives a more direct and brighter effect, I have noticed that remaining on the A string (shifting to 7th position) creates a more coherent sound colour and the slide makes the Bb5 sound more expressive.

⁹⁰ See my final recital recording of the Strauss Sonata (first movement) between 02'13" and 02'37".

⁹¹ I used this set of fingerings for my final recital.

I also sought to make a variety of portamento within one phrase. Thompson (2011) noted that Heifetz created unexpected effects by using different kinds of slides, but random or excessive use of slides, according to an anonymous article in *The Strad* (2020), was often criticised as bad taste. For instance, in the Andante of Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy, the rich melodic line requires a range of tone colour to realise its expressivity. On 24 January 2020, I wrote:

I would like to vary the slides between bars 254 and 270,⁹² as I slide eight times within these few bars and they all sound the same at the moment. I discovered that I could change the style of slide to the German shift (B-Portamento) in bar 258 and reserve the French shift (L-Portamento) for the special moment – bar 266. In this way, the change of colour sounds more effective as I can really emphasise the tone.

Example 39. Wieniawski, Faust Fantasy, Op. 20, bars 250-270.⁹³



After observing C's masterclass, I noticed that the speed and timing for sliding was a crucial element of the technique; therefore, I experimented with a slow downward portamento. By employing this type of glissando in the cantabile phrases, I was able to embellish the connecting passages:

In bar 39 of the second movement of the Strauss Sonata (where I employ two consecutive slides), I am trying to play a lingering glissando, in a fairly slow downward motion, giving a particular expressiveness to the sound. As I am inspired by C's use of this particular type of glissando, I have been trying to adopt this into my performance. The purpose was to replicate a singer's approach to highlighting the descending intervals. (Reflective note, 30 June 2020)

⁹² I used this set of fingerings for my final recital.

⁹³ See my final recital recording of Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy between 10'33" and 11'23".

Example 40. Strauss, Sonata in E flat major, Op. 18, second movement, bars 38-47.⁹⁴



In addition to melodic passages, I also employed portamento in fairly fast passages, an example of which can be found in the first movement of the Debussy Sonata:

In bars 34 and 36, where the majority of the violinists choose to stay in the 1st position for both repetitions of the sequences, I decide to shift onto the 4th position, and employ a portamento and a harmonic for the second time. The reason for this is to use these expressive tools in response to Debussy's tone colouration. I employ an ascending slide from the B $\flat$ 4 to the harmonic D5 for the sake of embellishing the interval, and the use of the harmonic rather than a stop-note has the effect of lightening the tone colour immediately. This small variation in fingering for the repetition is very effective. (Reflective note, 6 Nov 2019)

Example 41. Debussy, Sonata in G minor, L. 140, first movement, bars 30-42.⁹⁵



In some instances, however, it was practically impossible to ignore technical security in making fingering decisions, for example in Schubert's Fantasy, where I sought to find a balance between practical and expressive fingerings in a way that was both technically secure and musically expressive. Schubert's writing for the violin is extremely awkward and unviolinistic, which places great demands on left-hand technique. One of the greatest challenges is finding a fingering that can produce secure intonation. Although melodies often sound beautiful and simple, awkward interval patterns can make intonation extremely problematic. To improve intonation, I employed many finger extensions rather than quick and large shifts. The reason for this was that too many shifts and jumps would cause intonation inaccuracy (Yampolsky, 1967: 125). In my reflective notes of 28 April 2019, I wrote:

⁹⁴ See my final recital recording of the Strauss Sonata (second movement) at 02'36".

⁹⁵ See my final recital recording of the Debussy Sonata (first movement) at 00'42".

I have tried a set of new fingerings in bar 439 today, extending the fourth finger for an octave.⁹⁶ It is a big stretch but seems to work better. The demisemiquavers spanning two octaves are played within three beats. As the passage is very fast, the original fingerings involving fast and frequent shifts are not secure. By avoiding the big shift, I don't need to slow down the tempo drastically for reaching the top note and the tuning appears to be more secure.

Example 42. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bar 439.



I also looked into the relationship of the choices of fingerings and tone quality, as the use of different fingerings led to different tone qualities and colours in the same phrase:

In this long beautiful phrase, I want to change colours every two bars. To achieve this, rather than choosing the A string at the beginning, I start the phrase on the D string (bars 653-654)⁹⁷ for a more fragile tone, change to the A string for the *crescendo* (bars 655-656), and reach the E string for the climax of the phrase (bars 657-658). In this way, the build-up seems more effective – expressive yet draining – and a wider range of colours can be heard by exploring different strings. (Reflective note, 26 June 2019)

Example 43. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 653-658.



The process of exploring different fingerings concerns both technical and interpretive issues. For instance, the finale is triumphant and brilliant; however, it appeared to me that Schubert was probably thinking more in an idealistic than a violinistic way, as his writing, i.e. arpeggios, chords and tremolos, is unusual and extremely awkward to execute on the violin. For example, F⁹⁸ complains about the unplayability of bars 529-541,⁹⁹ and Flesch (1966: 276) has changed the notes of these arpeggios. I wrote in my reflective notes of 10 June 2019:

I have to move the left-hand fingers quickly to execute the broken chords between bars 529 and 541 where contractions and extensions in fingers are extensively involved. Fast and accurate shifting is

⁹⁶ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 16'42".

⁹⁷ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 24'49" and 25'10".

⁹⁸ F's interview, 5 July 2019.

⁹⁹ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy between 21'51" and 22'07".

therefore required, and to achieve this, I must stabilise my hand frame and keep minimal movements for this fast passage.

Example 44. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 529-548.



On 15 June 2019, I wrote:

In a fast passage like this (between bars 537 and 541), I decide to play all melodic notes on the G string. Clarity of sound and a consistent melodic line can be successfully achieved by staying on one string (shifting up to 7th position)¹⁰⁰ rather than coming down on the D string in bar 538.

Example 45. Schubert, Fantasy in C major, D. 934, bars 529-548.



Other fingerings are also possible, but in this particular passage, playing the melodic line on the same string can better identify the melody, as the G string produces a more resonant and deeper sound. In addition, bow arm and vibrato should support the melodic line by using a longer bow stroke and more vibrato on these melodic notes.

¹⁰⁰ See my video recording of the Schubert Fantasy at 22'01''.

During the process of making a fingering choice for this passage, I took into consideration both the practical aspects of getting the notes in tune and the interpretive aspects of highlighting the melodic line. From the technical point of view, my choice required the left hand to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate frequent shifts and awkward finger patterns, such as the uses of finger extensions and contractions, and from the interpretive viewpoint, I tried to balance vertical/harmonic and horizontal/melodic lines so that the melodic line could be heard clearly throughout the arpeggios.

Although my choices of fingering and uses of portamento needed further consideration from both practical and expressive perspectives, the process of exploring fingerings and portamenti allowed me to get a clearer idea of ways to interpret the music, regarding where and when to employ this expressive tool, such as highlighting a melodic line or emphasising a particular interval. It also helped me to develop my personal artistic approach, by exploring how I wanted to make use of the portamento and what particular type of portamento would achieve a greater effect for specific moments. On the other hand, given that accurate intonation is vital to professional performance, technical shifting is equally important. Through my experimentation with portamento my focus was shifted to achieving expressivity. I consequently spent less time on correcting intonation when changing positions, in contrast to my previous approach where accuracy had been my goal in shifting and my 'routine' practice used to involve detailed analysis of technical issues. In addition, I deliberately chose complicated fingerings for interpretive reasons, i.e. in the Strauss and Debussy sonatas, which required frequent shifts. This new approach resulted in intonation inaccuracy at times. This suggests that both threads needed to be continuously broadened and developed as they served a common purpose.

Chapter 8

Discussion: My progress as a performer

Completely different approaches are required for the historical period (Baroque, late Classical, Romantic, late Romantic) and genre of the repertoire (sonatas, solo works, virtuoso works) under study. Each work requires a range of skills, musical imagination and some insight into what the composer may have had in mind when creating it. When learning these pieces, I was seeking a balanced interpretation that combined composers' intentions with my personal artistic approach of developing expressivity through tone quality and tone colours, placing emphasis on the character of the music as well as allowing room for creativity. My written reflections, documenting my practice sessions, concentrated on how to realise the essence of the work (the composers' musical language) through experiments in sound. My reflections also allowed me to engage fully with my primary research aim to connect the technical with the expressive in my practice, performance and teaching. I built expressive techniques to interpret different works, notably 1) exploring bow techniques to interpret different dynamic and expressive markings; 2) re-adjusting the positioning of the left hand and employing a specific type of portamento to create a singing line; 3) minimising physical tensions to achieve a greater musical effect with less effort; and 4) approaching each style with respect for the 'language of the composer' according to the performance practice of their time, especially with a view to bowing and articulation indications and tempo fluctuations.

When learning *The Last Rose of Summer*, I was faced initially with numerous technical obstacles, including lack of finger strength, independence and flexibility, and I had to separate out mechanical development and musical considerations, building my mechanical equipment in the first stage of learning simply because I was incapable otherwise of mastering the notes. After extensive practice on improving my left-hand technique, the music seemed less demanding as I gradually gained greater facility. Although the process was challenging, it gave me a better understanding of how to strike a balance between mechanical and musical elements in preparing virtuosic pieces. This learning journey confirmed that mechanics are an important part of the interpretation journey: knowing how to and having the confidence to execute each passage and having the freedom to interpret the music. It was also helpful for me to switch my emphasis and consider the piece from a different perspective. I discovered that purely musical considerations could help me to solve certain technical issues, for instance by naturally shaping the phrases, which gave me sufficient time for long-distance shifting.

The observations and interviews that I conducted offered me specific insights into the performance of these major works; in particular, through analysing how these expert teachers deal with various

performance issues, I adopted a number of their approaches and sought to internalise them into my own performance, notably keeping my natural sway and breathing in harmony for producing an open and free tone, and using a variety of bow expressions and portamenti for achieving a greater range of expressivity. These findings and experiments all served as essential tools to help me to perform and convey the musical ideas and expression more effectively. For example, by reflecting upon B's and D's approaches to bow usage, I gained a greater understanding of how to use a variety of bow expressions, e.g. the combination of bow pressure and bow speed, and the uses of legato and articulation, to achieve a wider range of colour and power. Further, when expressing my musical ideas, C's approach helped me to adjust the balance between physical relaxation and musical expression. As my focus was to develop expressivity in my performance, I played with much musical involvement in the early stage of the research process; however, by doing so, I unconsciously created much physical tension, i.e. stiff fingers and rigid shiftings, which resulted in technical inaccuracy. By adding natural body swaying and breathing, I began to feel some physical freedom, and this led to more accurate intonation and allowed me to produce a more resonant and open tone in a more relaxed manner. More importantly, I began to discover my personal style, for instance with a choice of fingerings and portamenti that reflected my personal taste and preferences where the uses of different types of portamento enriched my expressive performing language. I also noticed that my practising was usually much more enjoyable and satisfying when keeping the creative and artistic focus central to my practice. In this context, I came to understand the need for a balance between technical mastery and creativity in the performance; in short, aiming to achieve a high standard of technical ability and proficiency should not limit one's musical instinct and expression, and neither should it suppress one's individuality in playing. Accordingly, the approach to training technique should not be used at the expense of one's personal expressiveness.

Moreover, the process of exploration gave me a clearer idea of what aspects I needed to improve, for instance looking at the music in a more abstract way and away from the limitations of the violin, and focusing on structure and harmonic changes. For example, I had initially considered the pieces from a violinistic point of view, even when learning sonatas, dealing specifically with both fingerings and bow usage without examining whether these expressive devices were being employed properly for the benefit of music conceived as a duo for violin and piano. As my study progressed, I became aware that although one of my main goals was to develop interpretive techniques, the purpose was ultimately to express the composer's musical language in the best possible way. This required me to integrate the technical and the expressive with knowledge of relevant performance practices into a holistic approach, for instance by studying the score (particularly the piano part) more carefully, regarding how to collaborate with the piano in terms of phrasing, articulation and the choices of tempo changes

and improvisational rubato. Besides technical tools and musical understanding, I also came to understand that playing expressively and making the whole performance more compelling seemed to depend a great deal on confidence and commitment. In this context, a positive mindset and self-motivation in violin playing and learning are as important as the performance skills discussed in this chapter.

Final recital and video recordings

The programme of my final recital is the Debussy Sonata in G minor, L. 140, the Strauss Sonata in E flat major, Op. 18 and Wieniawski's Faust Fantasy, Op. 20. The length of the programme is sixty minutes, which fits the requirements of a doctoral recital. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the live performance was cancelled; instead, I self-recorded my recital in the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing on 31 May 2021, using an iPhone X Max and a Shure MV88 microphone. This final recital is part of my research outcomes, and demonstrates my progress as a performer by developing a better integration of interpretation and technique after the whole research journey.

In addition to my DMus recital, my practice-led project includes my own video recordings of performing a set of repertoire as data. These recordings illustrate my own performing approaches and decisions discussed in this chapter, therefore they are not to be taken as definitive solutions to the challenges of incorporating techniques of expressivity, mechanics and interpretation into the performance of these canonical works. As these pieces were recorded during the ongoing learning process, they were not the outcome of the overall project. The programme of the recordings was as follows: Bach's D minor Sarabande and Gigue, the Brahms Sonata in A major, No. 2, Op. 100, the Schubert Fantasy in C major, D. 934, *Paganiniana* by Milstein and *The Last Rose of Summer* by Ernst. Each piece was self-recorded, either with a Zoom Q8 video camera (*Paganiniana* recorded in the RNCM's Carole Nash Recital Hall, on 25 November 2018; *The Last Rose of Summer* recorded in the RNCM's Studio 7, on 16 April 2019; the Brahms Sonata in A major, Op. 100, recorded in the RNCM's Concert Hall, on 7 July 2019) or with a Zoom Q2N video camera (the Schubert Fantasy in C major, D. 934, recorded in the Central Conservatory of Music (Beijing)'s 201 Recital Hall, on 23 November 2020; and Bach's D minor Sarabande and Gigue recorded in the Central Conservatory of Music's 401 Recital Hall, on 28 November 2020).

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Summary of my research findings and implications for future research

This DMus project addresses the research question ‘In what ways can high-level instrumental technique be developed alongside individual artistic and professional development to establish the foundations for a deep engagement with style and interpretation?’ Granted, similar questions may have been raised in different forms in music literature and practice. However, answers to this question based on systematic research enriched with practical experience are not available for music educators, instrumental performers and tutors. Motivated to search for answers to this question, I set out in this DMus project to investigate ways in which to incorporate technique and interpretation into violin performance through learning a group of pieces in the canonical violin repertoire. This research sought to bridge theory (the extant literature on violin playing and training) and practice (violinists’ experiential insights into violin performance) for a better understanding of the relationship between musical expression and mechanical technique in high-level violin playing and teaching.

In seeking answers to the research questions, I employed a practice-led approach characterised by ‘a plan – act – evaluate – reflect cycle’ (Cain, 2008: 284). This type of practice-led research values individual experiences, from observations and interviews to independent artistic engagement with the works. In my practice-led project, performance served as a means of exploration and discovery to help understand my own technique and musicality as a performer. Moreover, conducting research through practice enabled me to enter a state of self-investigation, which allowed for examining my own performance issues thoroughly and analysing how particular aspects can be enhanced, as well as exploring my playing styles and characteristics.

Drawing upon the essential components of practice-led research, my DMus involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a group of violin professors and concert soloists and observing their masterclasses, examining issues underlying the research question, setting up a practice plan and implementing interventions, monitoring the intended and unintended results of the interventions, and documenting my reflections on these consequences. My reflections throughout the course of the research helped me to review and identify less optimal aspects of my playing, and the observations and interviews also enabled me to crystallise particular elements and approaches to enhance my musical expressiveness. Thus, my reflections on my practice through this research process

illuminated my own development as a performer in achieving a more effective execution and a greater range of expressivity through building up interpretive techniques.

Given that no prior studies have examined approaches to connecting the technical with the expressive in high-level violin playing and teaching, my study has partially filled this gap in the literature by the findings from a more integrated approach. I focused on exploring the relationship between technique and interpretation and sought to combine the essence of the work (composers' intentions) with its realisation in violin playing through building technical components, such as tone quality, tone colour, bowings, fingerings (portamento) and vibrato, that all then functioned in a musical setting.

One of the main results of this DMus project is a recognition of the possibility of integrating mechanical technique and interpretation into the performance in the learning process, even at an initial stage of learning a piece of music. On the basis of my research experience, integrating musical expression and mechanical techniques with relevant knowledge of performance practice into a holistic approach resulted in a richer and wider range of interpretive possibilities. Adopting this holistic approach enhanced the range of my interpretive insights through building various technical tools. More importantly, this provides a new perspective on fundamental questions surrounding the balance between technical and musical issues in a later stage of musical development and how an individual performer can constructively engage with these two elements in daily practice. Thus, documenting reflections on daily practice is a useful tool for developing awareness and skills in evolving one's own practice. In effect, by looking back over each practice session and noting down what I did, I was able to analyse why I made certain choices and not others, what the problems were in particular sessions, how I tackled them at the time and reflected on them later, and what ideas I took from one session to the next. In addition to enhancing my performance skills, this reflective documentation technique/tool helped me gradually to develop a more considered approach to practising and learning, which is observable from my reflective notes included in Chapter 7. Moreover, this finding from my research highlights the ultimate importance of the development of one's musicality and suggests the need to analyse better ways of developing musical expression, in order to inform teaching practice in high-level violin performance, as musical expression takes time to develop, depending on physical and emotional maturity, and is challenging to convey to students.

Another result of this research is that I have learned eight major violin works that incorporate varied styles and different techniques, through the process of exploring the integrated approach to connecting the mechanical with the musical. While my preparation process was documented in a progressive manner, it also underlined the importance of personal effort in trying to achieve a

compelling performance. There is no magical way to reach the desired goals without hard work; as in every performing art, only strenuous practice and rigorous training may bring positive results. My efforts and accomplishments are presented in this written thesis as well as in the form of video recordings, in the hope that readers may better understand different stages of the learning process from both theoretical and practical perspectives. This project presents a journey which started with my trying to build up bow expressions and adopting ideas from the expert teachers, and developed to bringing knowledge of relevant performance practice to performance and finding my own personal style through the choice of fingering and portamento, all embodied in my recorded performances and in my practising reflections. Although some of the recorded performances may appear less satisfactory, I decided to include these less successful performances, as they would give readers a clear idea of how a practice-led action-research project progresses.

The third result is the experiential evidence of the effectiveness and value of practice-led research that enabled this study to be accomplished, providing also important empirical support for improving violin playing and learning. Attempting to internalise different approaches used by the expert teachers was sometimes challenging, especially for me as a performer/teacher emerging from a completely different teaching/learning culture and playing tradition in China. Once I managed to move past my original unconscious acceptance of an exclusive focus on technical precision and separate technique from interpretation in practice, I discovered there was a wider palette and range of possibilities for the development of my overall performance level. More specifically, the knowledge and understanding of different violin playing/teaching traditions opened a window into new musical possibilities for me, regarding how to apply particular technical tools to interpreting different styles of music. In the last four years of studying for this DMus, I encouraged myself not to be bound by my learning background and playing tradition and not to limit my musical imagination and creativity. Although it was challenging to acknowledge and deconstruct one's preconceptions about the relationship between the technical and the expressive that had been formed through learning in a different cultural context, the experience of completing this research project reinforced my belief that one can transform habitual or formed patterns of playing/practising in thinking as well as in the body. On this note, I value the process of my early training while advocating that it is not the only possible approach.

This research also highlights the importance of one's internal motivation in a later stage of learning to drive one's own development and reach one's desired goals. An expressive and compelling performance requires one to demonstrate the realisation of different emotions along with a colouristic, personal and sensual synthesis on the violin through various technical tools. To achieve this, one must

insist upon the cultivation of musical qualities besides technical mastery, such as musicality and individuality. These, however, cannot be taught directly; rather, they require one to engage deeply with questions and persist in the process of self-exploration. More specifically, one must be genuinely interested in the subject itself to want to search for answers. In the context of high-level violin playing/learning, students who are driven by internal motivation usually respond well to the challenge of mastering a difficult and complex subject simply because the motivation comes from one's own interest and passion, and is usually long-lasting and self-sustaining. This suggests that pedagogical effectiveness in violin playing/teaching, particularly at the highest levels, is largely dependent upon the internal motivation of the student.

Furthermore, this project points to the need for establishing a more positive learning environment. Although this may seem to be common sense, through my interview with C as well as the analysis of the overall learning/teaching environment in China, I became aware that students' mindsets and motivation may need parallel development to support the development of actual performance skills. A positive and nurturing environment is more likely to enable students to perform with confidence, and this in turn may benefit students' musical expressiveness and overall performance, as they can play without the fear of being criticised or rejected. One is very unlikely to play up to the expected level if one is under too much pressure. When teachers set a very high standard of performance for students, their teaching often becomes more demanding and they cannot divert attention from technical precision. However, this might put a great deal of pressure on students, who anticipate possible forthcoming criticism. Hence, there is a need to strike an ongoing balance between a demanding teaching approach and an encouraging teaching style, where students gradually build their playing skills and develop their musical personalities through a positive yet demanding teaching approach.

Due to the nature of practice-led research, some limitations in this research project need to be noted. First, the findings of the research cannot be generalised, due to the small sample size of the expert teachers who were interviewed and the investigation of a single violinist's daily practice. Second, there is a subjective perspective imbedded in the interpretive phenomenological analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews and observations, and the experiential, inductive inferences of the research reflections. While the findings may provide important guidance for violin playing and teaching, the specific learning and pedagogical approach may be dependent upon individual learning experience. Therefore, some caution is needed when interpreting the results, and the applicability of findings from this research may be further adapted and developed in order to achieve a more satisfactory outcome for both performers and teachers, especially where awareness, motor skills, a

critical ear and practice habits may be considered as more important priorities. From a broader perspective, the study illustrates that in the context of the one-to-one teaching setting, in which violin performance is usually taught by means of assimilative extensions and the teaching approaches can be exclusive, there is a need to go beyond the learn-as-taught approach; in particular, students are encouraged to develop independent thinking and take up challenges in their own practice, as for instance, developing one's personal expressiveness, identifying uniqueness in the tone, and finding individual personality in playing.

Despite its limitations, this research contributes to existing discourse on the relationship between technical training and musical expression, particularly for those who seek to explore such strategies within musicians at a later stage of their development. It is expected that from learning the repertoire myself in this research I will be able to apply the findings in my pedagogical practice. The findings from this research will particularly benefit those violin teachers and students who have carried their own primary focus on technique with them in discovering how to use a more integrated approach to enhance their overall performance skills and musicality. It is also hoped that this project will encourage others, particularly Chinese violin teachers and students who have been influenced by the idea of a 'technique first' approach, to consider alternative approaches to the development of technique and musicality.

Further studies that consider new approaches to the development of technique and musical expression could follow from the work of this thesis. This may include investigating in what ways interpretive issues and expressive skills can be taught more effectively and explicitly without limiting students' imagination and creativity, and how the teacher may influence the motivation of the student to strive for their best. Further investigations may also consider the subject from the perspectives of focusing specifically on chamber music and investigating teaching practice rather than performance.

Specific to the context of teaching and learning in China, future pedagogical research in the same vein as my work could shed light on how the development of musical expression can be embedded in young Chinese violinists rather than leaving it until later in a student's development, in what ways Chinese violin pedagogues can adopt a friendly and encouraging approach while retaining the challenge on the learning goals, and how Chinese students can build up confidence under pressure and find their identity.

Similarly, in a cross-cultural teaching and learning setting where there are often cultural differences in violin pedagogy and playing tradition, it would be beneficial to examine how violin pedagogues

adjust teaching approaches for intercultural interactions with students, for instance by changing their practices and adopting different goals.

Finally, I hope that the current research will contribute to a shift in the priorities given to violin pedagogy in China, and raise awareness in the West of the particular needs of Chinese students when they travel to the West for study.

Appendix I

Participant consent form

Research Title: Integrating technique and interpretation in high-level violin playing and teaching: an intercultural exploration

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

What I am doing:

I am a doctoral student at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and I would like to invite you to participate in my doctoral research project. I will be taking lessons and conducting brief interviews with a group of top-level violin professors and chamber musicians in order to:

- better understand how musicality can be developed with a technique-led learning process;
- develop a more integrated approach that can then be applied to learning different styles of repertoire.

I hope this study will contribute to current and future studies that investigate violin playing and teaching at the highest levels. Your participation will be of great benefit to my research.

What you need to know:

Before you decide whether you want to take part, please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

- It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.
- If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form.
- I will pay utmost attention to ensuring your anonymity. Any information that could identify you, e.g. names, places, dates, etc., will be redacted. All information provided by you will be stored in my personal computer and will be password-protected.
- Interviews will be recorded, subject to your permission. Recordings of interviews will be deleted upon transcription.
- You will see the typescript of your own interview to ensure your teaching approaches and thoughts are being properly represented.
- As I am taking lessons/interviews in the festival, I shall pay a standard tuition fee to the festival organization, which will cover the cost of lessons/interviews with you; therefore, I will not pay additional fees for lessons/interviews to you individually.

If you require more information you can contact the Guildhall School of Music and Drama using the details below for further advice and information:

[details of my supervisors and Head of Department]

Dr Biranda Ford, biranda.ford@gsmd.ac.uk

Professor Jacqueline Ross, jacqueline.ross@gsmd.ac.uk

Dr Preetha Narayanan, preetha.narayanan@gsmd.ac.uk

Dr Alex Mermikides, Doctoral Programme Leader, alex.mermikides@gsmd.ac.uk

My name and contact details: Jia ZHANG, jia.zhang@stu.gsmd.ac.uk

Statement by Participant

Date:

Name:

Principal Study/Department:

Email:

I am willing to participate in this research and I understand that the project will be carried out as described above. I realise that I can withdraw from the project at any time and that I do not have to give reasons for withdrawing. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction and have retained a copy of the above.

Signature:

Appendix II

Video recordings

Three pieces were self-recorded with a Zoom Q2N video camera:

1. Brahms, Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano, Op. 100, recorded in the RNCM's Concert Hall on 7 July 2019, total timing: 21'56";
2. Schubert, Fantasy in C major for Violin and Piano, D. 934, recorded in the CCOM's 201 Recital Hall on 23 November 2020, total timing: 26'07";
3. Bach, Partita in D minor, Sarabande and Gigue, recorded in the CCOM's 401 Recital Hall on 28 November 2020, total timing: 6'26".

Two virtuosic pieces were self-recorded with a Zoom Q8 video camera:

1. Milstein, *Paganiniana*, recorded in the RNCM's Carole Nash Recital Hall on 25 November 2018, total timing: 9'41";
2. Ernst, *The Last Rose of Summer*, recorded in the RNCM's Studio 7 on 16 April 2019, total timing: 10'39".

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