



Freedom to Play

What is violin technique?

Goetz Richter, Sydney Conservatorium



Technique of “construction”

- ▶ The modern understanding of technique as an instrumental process involved in “making” or construction
- ▶ What is the product in music - what is the process in musical performance?
- ▶ **What is music?** an activity? An art? A collection of works? A way of life? Something we do? Something we make? Is there a difference?
- ▶ **Aristotle’s** distinction between doing and making
- ▶ “The class of things that admit of variation includes both things made and actions done. But **making** (*poiesis*) is different from **doing** (*praxis*) ..making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing the end cannot be other than the act itself; **doing well** (*eupraxia*) is in itself the end” (NE VI, 4)

Technique in “doing”

Making

The end of an activity is in the production -> eg. building a house.

Music can be seen to be a “making” -> after all we say, we “make” music, we speak about musical works, musical structures, compositions, we treat music and performances as “products” that are tradeable, Musicians earn money through “works”, etc.

Doing

The end of an activity is in the activity itself. As soon as the activity ceases the end disappears. -> eg. walking, sleeping, A. even cites “playing the harp..”

Music can be seen to be a “doing” -> musical presence is dependent on performance of some kind, when the performance stops, the music stops. “Form” in music is problematic as music is “temporal form”, ie. no concrete form at all. Music is “ephemeral”

In “doing” technique is “*eupraxia*” or doing well. Technique is inherent in doing - doing is technique (*techne*)

Doing is temporal & intentional

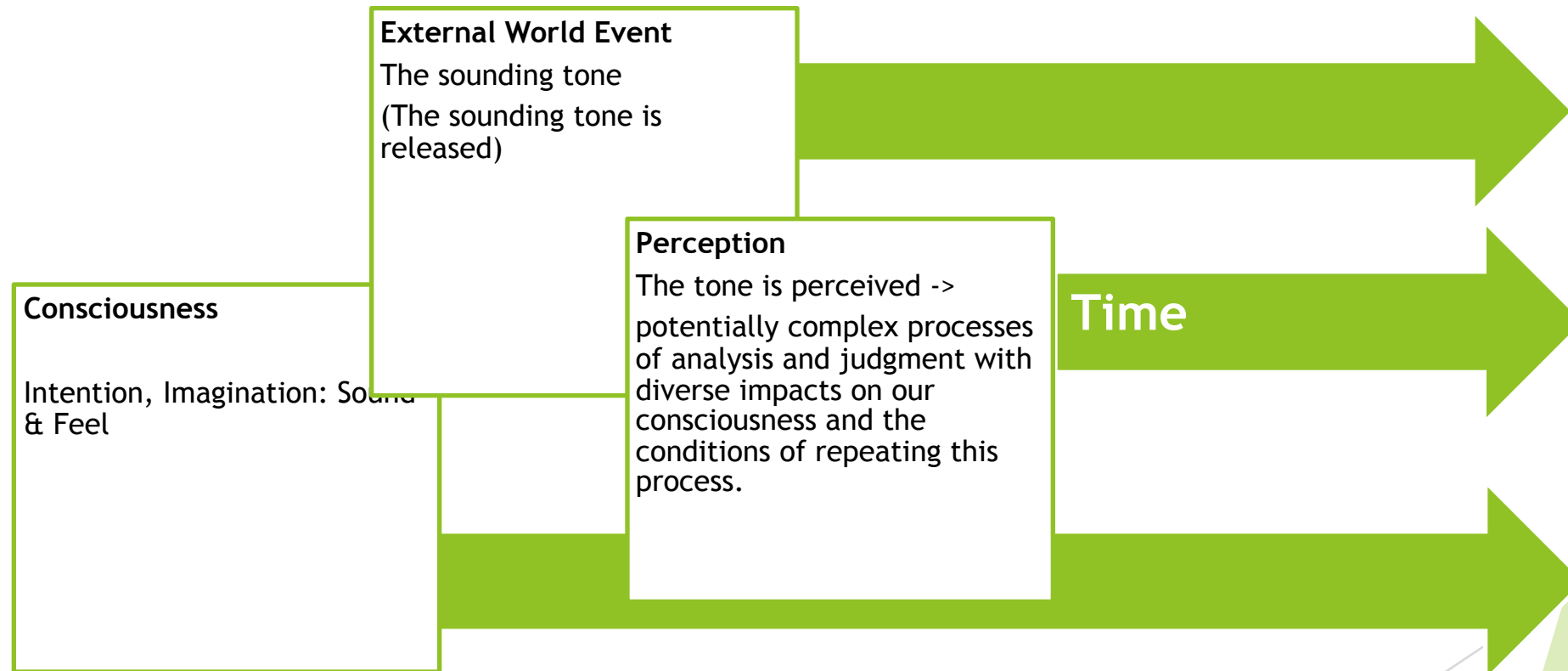
▶ Temporal

- ▶ flow,
- ▶ attention needs to be renewed,
- ▶ encounter with particulars (there are no generic musical ideas)

▶ Intentional

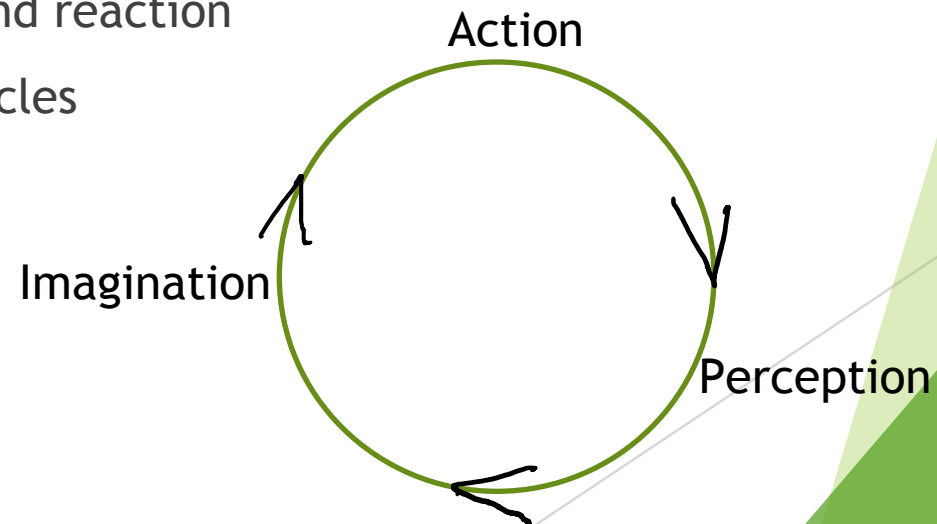
- ▶ importance of conscious and sustained activity of the imagination
- ▶ Organisation of mind
- ▶ Importance of attention (need to activate, direct and condition our attention)

Schematic analysis of the phenomenon of performance (ontology)



What are the implications for Method?

- ▶ Principles and Methodologies refer to all stages of development (complexity is the only difference)
- ▶ Conditioning of mind (attention) and body (rhythm, relaxation) is primary (Basics)
- ▶ Fundamental role of imagination and attention (listening, mental practice)
- ▶ Contextualisation of role of perception and reaction
- ▶ Building sustainable, creative learning cycles



Music and Feeling

- ▶ Music is feeling
- ▶ Feeling is a psycho-physical reality (correlation: feeling crosses ontology -> importance of intuition)
- ▶ Technique is feeling -> concrete embodied particular
- ▶ Feeling is “imagined” or anticipated -> the difference between feeling (active) and sensation (receptive). We are “responsible” for our feeling -> fundamental importance of freedom of mind

Left and Right

- ▶ Violin playing is asymmetric -> Left and right have different functions (Capet)
- ▶ Temporal Organisation: left has temporal priority, material importance of the left.
- ▶ Expressive priority in the right (bow/ bow arm, hand is voice)

The Body & “Posture”

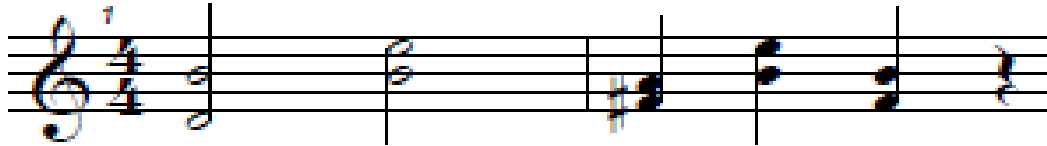
- ▶ Dynamic characteristics of “posture” (active concept of relaxation, importance of breathing)
- ▶ Posture is potentiality, attitude -> expectancy (receptive, leisured). Maintaining leisure in complexity, adversity, stressful situations
- ▶ Focus on posture allows arms/ hands to move -> indirect attention
- ▶ Balance of movement (human movement is always balanced: active and passive movement, recovery, rhythm) -> importance of set-up

Left: Material

- ▶ Balance of hand itself, finger angles and rhythmic finger movement
- ▶ Balance of arm into hand (shoulder, forearm, wrist and thumb joints)
- ▶ Independence of finger movement
- ▶ Tactile sensation -> mere sensation (intuition).
- ▶ Temporal priority
- ▶ Peripheral attention to left hand- direct sensation of “singing” (sensation of voice -> importance of singing as a draft of playing)
- ▶ The fundamental aim of left is **Freedom**

Intonation

Harmonic vs melodic intonation: The syntonic comma



The syntonic comma is the **difference between a just ($5/4$ or $80/64$) and a Pythagorean major third ($81/64$)**. It is the difference which describes our decision to play melodic major thirds wider while playing them narrower in the harmonic context. This difference is also relevant to minor thirds and, of course, by implication to major and minor sixths.

Intonation as a symptom...

Intonation is a reflection of referencing -> establishing referencing signposts

Correcting intonation occurs at the level of

- (a) intentionality (attention)
- (b) interference (eliminating)

Methods to improve intonation/ pitch: audiation, miming, referencing, re-scoring, building listening ahead

Eliminating physical obstacles/ interference (silent rehearsal) -> left hand obstacles (independence, instability of hand or finger angle)

Methodological Consequences (Basics)

- ▶ Working on posture, balance is an ongoing process (maintenance) and remains fundamental (dynamic view)
- ▶ All technical practice needs attention -> short periods of work (5-10 min) on topic (Wronski).
- ▶ Technical practice can (and should be) conducted with- and without equipment.
- ▶ Movement is “found” (not constructed) -> subjective integrity of the performer
- ▶ Fundamental topics to cover attentional and physical conditioning

Topics Left - Independence

Independence Exercises

“Geminiani” Exercise. Vertical (lift, trill), horizontal (chromatic), Vertico-horizontal (String Crossing), More Complex, eg Dounis, but also Schradieck, Sevcik, etc Flesch, “Basic Studies”:

I A.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

I B.

Musical notation for section I B, consisting of two staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. It contains a sequence of eighth notes with fingerings 1 and 1, followed by a measure with a 2/4 time signature and fingerings 2 and 2. The second staff continues with eighth notes and rests, including a triplet of eighth notes with fingerings 3 and 4, and a final measure with a 1/4 note and a flat.

I C.

Musical notation for section I C, consisting of two staves. Both staves feature a series of repeated rhythmic patterns, primarily consisting of eighth notes followed by rests, with some measures containing triplets of eighth notes. The notation is consistent across both staves, indicating a parallel or identical part.

Topics Left - Dexterity

- ▶ Finger movement. Attention to -> balance, anticipation, rhythm
- ▶ Practice without bow.

Beginning with the open string.

To be practiced as written and also in groups of two measures connected together.

With bow and slured

The image shows a musical score for a violin exercise. It consists of three staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The first staff begins with an asterisk and the instruction 'With bow and slured'. The music is a sequence of eighth-note patterns, starting on the open string (G) and moving up stepwise. The first staff contains 10 measures, the second 10 measures, and the third 10 measures. Each measure is divided into two eighth notes. The exercise is designed for finger dexterity practice, focusing on balance, anticipation, and rhythm.

Topics Left - Shifting

- ▶ Anticipation practice. (single, passage work)
- ▶ Silent practice (audiation, visualisation... although it is not visual... rather: presencing...)
- ▶ **Shifting:** Anticipation needs to be clear, movement of arm is “released” (stages of shifting: conception/ concrete intention -> “balancing”/relaxation -> release of action (receptive, non-active))

b

Changes between 1st and 4th Positions

The image shows two staves of musical notation in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first staff is marked with a circled 'I' and contains eight measures of music. Each measure features a sequence of notes with fingerings indicated by numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. The notes are connected by slurs, and some measures include repeat signs. The second staff contains eight measures of music, also with fingerings and slurs. The notation is designed to illustrate the physical and mental aspects of shifting between the first and fourth positions on the violin.

Topics Left - other

- ▶ Double Stopping
- ▶ Vibrato Exercises (movement of arm, hand, finger) - freedom through balance (loosening exercises). Instantiation of inspiration and “en-thusiasm” (*en-theos*)
- ▶ Position playing

Right: Voice - form & expression

- ▶ Bow hand as voice (Capet: soul)
- ▶ Feeling for contact (tactile, hand), intensity and dynamic (movement)
- ▶ Articulation (bow hand equivalent to speech articulation).
- ▶ The important role of "consonation" (articulation) for expression. (Polyphony)
- ▶ Artistic aims imply that voice needs to be genuine, authentic, individual, original. -> no functional movements in bow (the boundaries of "exercises" in bow)
- ▶ The fundamental aim of the right is individual, personal life or "play"

Topics: Right

- ▶ Bow Hand flexibility -> Galamian's Rotational Exercises (pivot, finger movement)
- ▶ Contact Exercises (Portato stroke)
- ▶ Bow Speed Exercise
- ▶ Strokes (with characterisation)
- ▶ All bow movement is characteristic and meaningful (no functional movements). Bow movement is sustained by active attention/ feeling.
- ▶ Tone Exercises (Sustained bows)

Bow hand & bow hand set up

- ▶ Finger placement on bow stick
- ▶ The role of the fingers (active -> variously active -> passive) -> Capet's "antennae"
- ▶ Fingers in various strokes -> Capet & Galamian's concept of "springs"

Capet, "Technique Supérieure de l'archet" Placement and roles of fingers on the bow stick (independence of fingers)

"These exercises will lead to independent control of the fingers on the stick which will be preferable, in our opinion, to the simple control of the entire hand exerting all its weight on the bow *in a single direction* and preventing the profoundly artistic sensitivity of *touch* from revealing itself for the good of the Art. Our fingers must literally be *antennae* to allow us to penetrate this mysterious world where few beings occupy the periphery and which has Beauty at its centre...Let us not forget that the *left hand* represents only the materials and that the *right hand* holds the secret which can assemble them, with the goal of constructing the temple of beauty" (TSA, 13)

Who was Lucien Capet?



- ▶ 1873-1928
- ▶ Studies with Jean-Pierre Maurin
- ▶ 1896-99 concertmaster of the Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux
- ▶ Capet Quartet (founded in 1904, renowned for its interpretation of Beethoven) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tk8c7RWig3I>
- ▶ “... My connection with Lucien Capet began in Brussels in 1928 when I attended a string quartet concert given by the Capet String Quartet that was the greatest string quartet concert I heard in my lifetime. The program was all Beethoven: Op.18, no. 1; Op. 59, no. 2, and Op. 131. It has never been duplicated in all of these years...” (Joseph Gingold)
- ▶ Teacher in Bordeaux (students: Jascha Brodsky, Ivan Galamian)
- ▶ Co-founder of the Institut Moderne du Violon (with Suzanne Chaigneau) 1924

Technique Superieure....

The thorough study of anything necessarily requires two primordial qualities: *attention and reflection...*

We are completely walled-in by an excessive pride which blockades us with some extremely limited knowledge and prevents us from discovering the truths which are beyond ourselves. We will succeed in breaking down this frightful wall by developing the two aforementioned qualities, because it hides from us that which is most beautiful, and consequently all which could allow a human being to become the beneficent Artist, the interpreter of the highest thoughts. Our dignity will grow in proportion to our destruction of this pride and we will find it beyond ourselves.

The true role of the Artist is to identify himself with Beauty and not to violently attract- by mediocre means- the attention of his contemporaries; and it must be said that the ascent toward the light of superior things is infinite, that is to say that we will never have any consciousness of having attained the Goal, since at the moment of our complete identification with Beauty we will lose consciousness of our individuality in becoming Beauty itself; the ideal should thus grow in proportion as we perfect ourselves, otherwise the descent is rapid and everything must begin again. (Capet, TSA, 72)

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Galamian

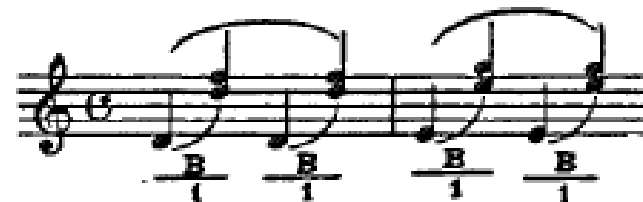
Galamian: “motions of the fingers as such”... (Galamian, 48/49)

- ▶ **Vertical** (raise & lower the bow vertically)
- ▶ **Horizontal** (horizontal stroke motion) (“one must pay particular attention to the thumb in this motion to see that it is active in the straightening and recurving process”)
- ▶ **Horizontal turning (pivoting)** (“...point of the bow [...] to swing in a horizontal arc..”)
- ▶ **Vertical turning (Pivoting)** (“...rotate vertically so that the point of the bow describes a perpendicular arc around the tip of the thumb as the center. When the bow is held in the air horizontally, the vertical rotation can be achieved by alternatively pressing and releasing the fourth finger.”)
- ▶ **Lengthwise axis-rotation** (“..rolling the bow between thumb and fingers ... [the bow] rotate[s] around its own lengthwise axis ...”)

Vertical finger Movement (Capet)

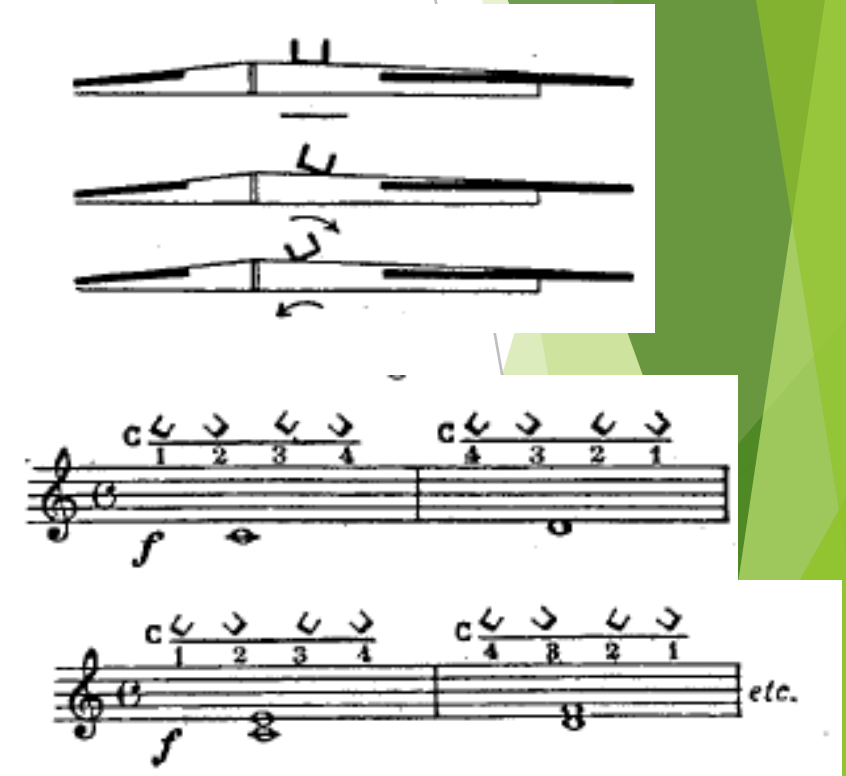
“These finger gymnastics make it possible to achieve [both] the *horizontal* movement of the bow - penetration of the hair into the strings - powerful and flexible bow strokes, and the *vertical* movement, lightness of the bow, *Barriolage*, and string crossings.

(Exercises in legato and détaché)



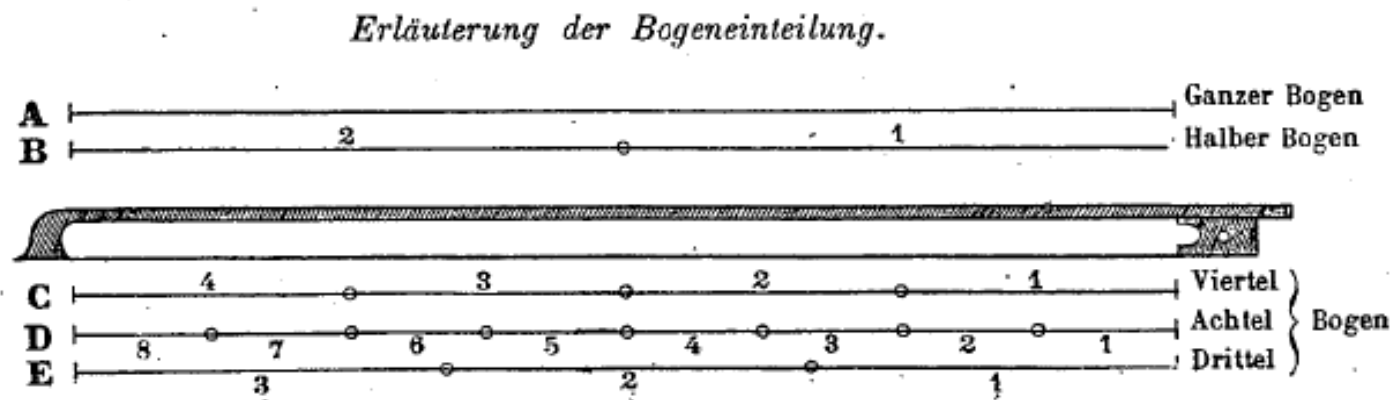
Roulé

“In order to obtain a resonant and flexible quality of sound, it is not enough that the bow press the string; it must penetrate it, so that it possesses it. For that it is necessary to add to the vertical pressure - which is due to the resilience of the stick on the hair- a sort of horizontal flexibility which increases the sensitivity of this pressure. We must require of each finger of the right hand an infinitely more subtle control than the simple pressure of the entire hand ... one must have at one’s disposal as complete a musical palette as possible, in order to obtain the greatest variety of interpretation, all the while preserving, it is understood, general Harmony, which is Unity in Diversity... **Because the bow is the soul of the violin its possibilities should become for all purposes unlimited.** (TSA, 28/29)



II Bow distribution & Co-ordination

- ▶ Bowing and bow -> direct reflection of singing/ expressive intention.
- ▶ Bow movement needs to be intentionally directed (not random) and coordinated
- ▶ More sound -> more bow (French School, Flesch)
- ▶ Capet: even distributions



Tempo/ character

- ▶ Tempo and character determine the nature of articulation/ legato

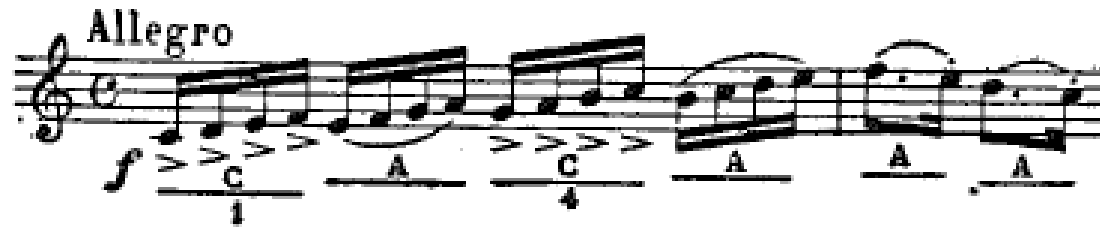


Bsp. A.



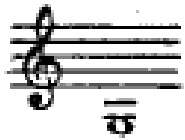
Bsp. B.

- ▶ Nuanced Detache (energy, decisiveness, characterisation)



Bsp. A.

VI Contact point exercises & oscillations of contact point



Contact point oscillation exercises

123 *Très lent* *ausgehaltene Töne*

124 *Très lent*

127 *Très lent*

128 *Très lent* DIE GLEICHE ÜBUNG NOCH LANGSAMER

Balance of the bow in Double Stops (son filé)

“The [vibrato] abused by the majority of violinists, is what most often closes the door to superior aspirations and prevents us from realizing sublime realities, by plunging us into the domain of an inferior illusion. The absence of left hand vibrato requires such purity of technique, such accuracy (of intonation), such noble quality of sound, that to avoid having to surmount these difficulties one wraps the vibrato of the left hand like a cloak, around an aesthetic that is deformed and absolutely imperfect. It is thus necessary to practice intonation without vibrating - under threat of having only very limited control - as well as beauty of sound. Son filé on double stops, without left hand vibrato, will allow us most efficiently to control all our imperfections of sound. One will be able to regulate the penetration of the hair into the strings while taking note of the different Oscillations (changes of string level) according to the intervals that we are about to interpret.. It is well understood that in a **forte** dynamic this meticulous practice will have only relative benefit, as all that will thus transpire is noise. But when it comes to performing a piano passage, it is then that we are able to see the many flaws in our instrumental aesthetic which were hidden by our vibrato and by our effervescent dynamic. (TSA, 37)

Son Filé

Très lent

137 *pp* 1 2 3 4 D 5 6 7 8 etc.

138 1 2 3 4 D 5 6 7 8

VII Further Tone Exercises

- ▶ Portato (inflexion of bow stick)



Bsp. 1.



Bsp. 2.



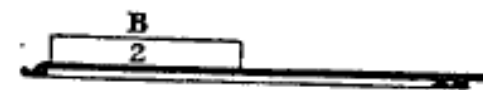
Bsp. 3.



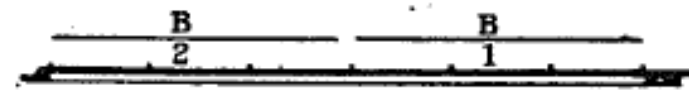
Bsp. 4.



Bsp. 1. — Bogenteil : B₂.

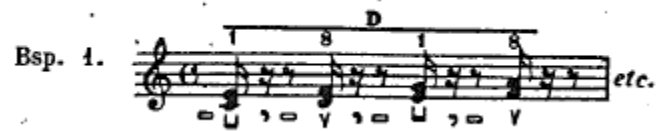


Bsp. 2. — Bogenteil A₁ od. B₂.



Bow control

- ▶ Articulation (“grasp”) of the string followed by rapid movement



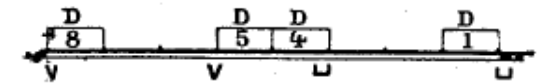
- ▶ Also (cf. Dounis)



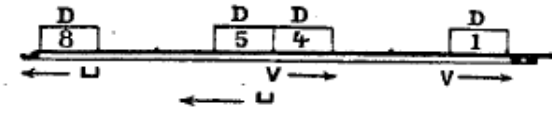
- ▶ Also



Bsp. A.



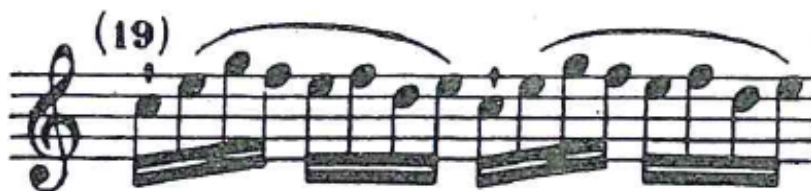
Bsp. 3.



Bsp. 4.

Contact point & Bow speed

- ▶ Uneven Bow Speed



- ▶ Contact Point Variation

Rhythmic Movement
during long bows



Nuance (Baillot)

“Nuances, as they are understood today in relation to music, are the different degrees of softness or loudness through which can pass one or more sounds in a note, a melody, a passage, or an entire piece...There is, moreover, one simple way to increase the effect of nuances and contrasts. This is to accustom the ear to soft sounds by making softness and lightness the basis of one’s playing and the paramount principle of one’s performance. In this way, if the ears of the listener are also trained, the nuance captures the soul much better, in return for this restraint, the performer then had that much more power to move the spirit.”
(Baillot, AoV, 254-56)

Sense and feeling

“In this instance we are dealing with Detache and Legato, which in our view present two equally powerful but in their expression two entirely different elements, like water and earth, fluid and solid elements.... And thus can the combination of two entirely contrasting elements lead to marvellous reflections in our mind. In the same way as we can distinguish in our art water and earth it also contains fire and air. A work has its mood, its atmosphere which combines with the deepest expression, its fire. The mutual penetration of these elements creates a vibrant and living work in the deepest depth of the sensuous world. I say sensuous because at this stage only means are considered which are perceived through sense perception. If this perception is deepened it arrives at cognition which allows the world of feeling to illuminate the sensuous world like sunlight the stained glass of a church.” (Capet, TSA, 38)

Methodological Consequences for the Learning Process (Practice & Preparation)

- ▶ Preparation starts in the separation of left and right.
- ▶ Left hand alone to establish freedom and autonomy
- ▶ Bow Form (tone, nuance, articulation, intensity, dynamic and characterisation (open strings)
- ▶ Co-ordinated playing: (i) Slow or (ii) co-ordination practice -> stop patterns (anticipation)
- ▶ Mental practice (practice without equipment or miming) to clarify active, temporal idea of movement, rhythm, feeling and tone.

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