

Spring 2022

THE REST IS HISTORY

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THE REST IS HISTORY

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Aaron Kim

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to express sincere gratitude to my advisor James Bagwell for allowing me to pursue a more personal approach to my Senior Project and supporting me throughout the process. It has been very difficult with the very sudden changes that occurred in 2020 and you have been extremely generous in your guidance and patience as I continued to navigate my last semesters at Bard College. I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with you ever since I joined Chamber Singers.

Besides my academic advisor, I would also like to thank my violin teacher Kathryn Aldous for inspiring me to explore the endless repertoire of violin and discover music that I never knew existed until I started working on my Senior Project. We have worked on so much music together and it has been exciting, scary, and an absolute pleasure as we exposed my abilities on the violin.

I would also like to mention my good friend Lapyin Lee for pushing me to practice and being someone I could have conversations with about an incredible recording of the last concerto we listened to or about our practice sessions . Thank you for coming to the practice rooms with me in the middle of the night as we read through Dounis and Spohr together. You've helped me become a better musician.

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Introduction

The modernization of violin education and playing has concealed many of the early origins of violin technique. The shifting from an ensemble instrument to a soloistic instrument is important in understanding the significance of modern equipment being utilized in violin education. It is a lost art of the instrument that is misunderstood since it's not discussed as it once was. Specifically, the invention of chin rests around 1820 and shoulder rests as recently as 1993 gradually inserted itself into the twentieth century, and with these tools led to changes in left hand technique. It is not a question of whether or not one method is superior, but rather that there was so much development of violin technique before the shoulder rest - virtually every aspect of technique was developed without one - it should be presented as a supplement for more complete violin training.

The question of the shoulder rest is complicated because there are multiple justifications for its use. A circumstance that affected the influence of the shoulder rest is the increase in physical size and height of players. The dimensions of the violin are dated from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Because of the longer arms and necks of the current population, the awkwardness of playing the violin without a rest is understandable. It is striking to think about how many of the greatest violinists are not usually the tallest when compared to other musicians. This is further exacerbated by the fact that violin technique was continuously evolving. In the second half of the eighteenth century, violin repertoire became much more demanding with frequent use of movement ascending and descending the neck of the instrument. Musicians

looked for solutions to increase stability and comfort. Instead of using the left hand, they started hooking the instrument between the chin and collarbone or left shoulder which relieves the left hand for more complex movements along the fingerboard. Even before the chinrest, it was common to use a cloth or a pad to support the collarbone by placing it under a shirt or jacket. The chinrest fills the space between the chin and violin, with shoulder rests filling the space between the violin and collarbone.

It is through practice-based research that I was able to form and develop my thoughts about posture and left hand technique with the use of materials found in interviews and historical documents. This research is an important step to understand the perspective on how nineteenth-century violinists played when associated with distinct violinists or schools of thought. These insights of specific violinists and methods helped me better understand the philosophies associated with them. It's also necessary to consider that shoulder rests are still a relatively new invention, and with the definition of technical perfection becoming more rigorous in the recent century, stability in the left hand with no strain has intrinsic value. Violin technique has evolved rapidly within the last half of the twentieth century and in turn has created an obligation to stabilize the violin as much as possible.

It should not be asserted that one methodology or style is superior over another. Ivan Galamian states in his *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (1962) that there are three principles with violin playing, the first being the obsession with rigid rules and disregard for

naturalness which is a dangerous practice. They should be made for the good of the students rather than glorify them.

As in any other art, that which can be formulated is not a set of unyielding rules but rather a group of general principles that are broad enough to cover all cases, yet flexible enough to be applied to any particular case. The teacher must realize that every student is an individual with his own personality, his own characteristic physical and mental make-up, his approach to the instrument and music.

(Galamian 1)

The second is closely related to the first and that is the understanding of interdependence in the physical body. There is a natural pattern that the body follows and that every part has to correspond with each other for adjustments. It is a personal detail that can not be standardized.

The third principle is the attention for mental control over the commonly emphasized physical and mechanical aspects of the violin. It's necessary to be familiar with the relationship of mind to muscle, the ability to connect a mental command to a physical response. "The relationship of the instrument to the body, arms, and hands has to be one that will allow a comfortable and efficient execution of all playing movements. This is, in the last analysis, the main criterion for the 'rightness' of any bodily attitude or any muscular action in connection with violin playing" (Galamian 12).

With the deep history of the development of violin education and technique, the expansion of violin throughout Europe was effective in producing a substantial amount of philosophical ideas and approaches to the instrument. With a generation of violinists playing into the twenty-first century, there has been a growing interest in historically informed performances and also with the deep-rooted accounts of nineteenth and twentieth-century technique.

1: Lineages in Schools of Violin

The distinctions between the schools of violin isn't definite because of the expansive approaches that each of them bring. These schools can be thought of as a combination of two elements: technique or method, and the philosophy of making music which laid the foundations of violin for the turn of the twentieth century. It is useful to outline violin playing, traditions, and performance practice which needs to be contextualized since it's not always clear the distinctions of the schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Even though the greatest violinists had their distinct styles of playing, it's difficult to define them as if they directly followed the schools of instructions. An extraordinary example of this is Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840). He is popularly known as the virtuoso violinist of the nineteenth century with his flashy playing and distinct physical appearance on stage. Even though it wasn't medically documented, he was known to have Marfan Syndrome which made his fingers very long and thin allowing him to execute large leaps and contortions that healthy fingers couldn't do. His playing was more of a phenomenon rather than a contribution to the foundations of technique. The group of violinists before Paganini were also composers that had distinct styles with a larger scope of influence on the development of violin practice and performance. It is difficult and arbitrary to distinguish a single method as exceptional over others. Violin has become more cosmopolitan with the introduction of recording technology and accessible international travel making it trivial to define the scope or influence of a school. The

figure below has been collected from a book by David Milsom on the genealogy of violinists illustrated the core lineage to Giovanni Batista Viotti (1755-1824).

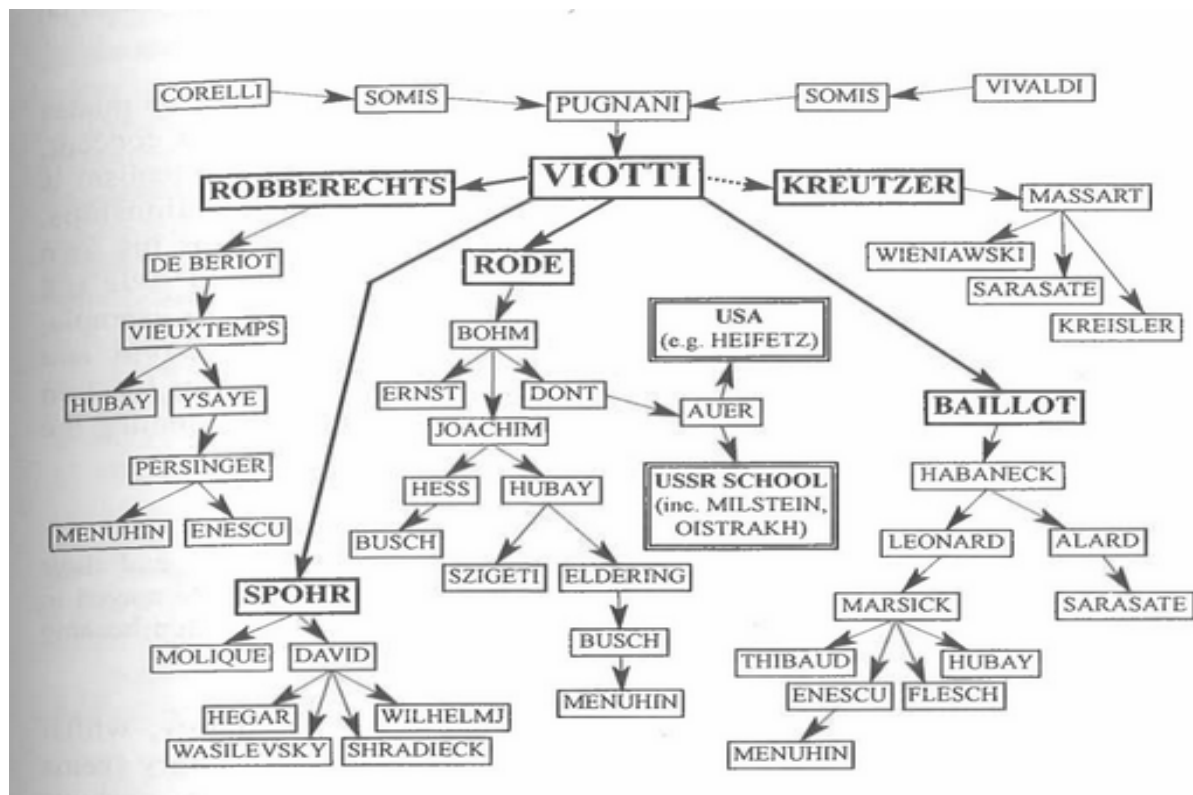


Fig. 1. Genealogy of violinists (Milsom 2003)

The Italian Violin School

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Italy dominated the European musical world.

The essence of violin technique was beginning to develop with composers such as Arcangelo

Corelli (1653-1713), Antonio Vivaldi (1675-1741), and Pietro Locatelli (1695-1764) changing violin performance into a soloistic instrument with the advancement of the sonata and concerto.

Instrumental music started to adopt polyphony over monophonic melodies. With the introduction of counterpoint from the Renaissance, stringed instruments advanced rapidly and instrumental forms progressed with technical invention and performance showing precedent. The need for form, texture, and technique was recognized by Corelli and his influence on Locatelli and Vivaldi is considerable. The Concerto Grosso shares elements with his five books of trios and sonatas and has withstood the test of time as the foundations for the art of playing the violin.

Antonio Vivaldi was inspired by the landscape paintings of Marco Ricci (1676-1729) and original sonnets that he wrote for them while he was composing his *The Four Seasons* which were part of a set of twelve concertos, *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione (The Test of Harmony and Invention 1725)*. His playing was reported to be exhilarating and virtuosic but more importantly, his approach towards creating a programmatic depiction of the four seasons and the technical innovations he used to change violin performance. He believed that the concerto can have a descriptive narrative of landscape and behavior, and with focus on the performer rather than the ensemble.

Pietro Locatelli was considered to be the greatest violinist in Italy at the time and was recognized for his virtuosity after he composed *L'Arte del Violino*, a technically demanding group of twelve violin concertos and twenty four caprices. Niccolò Paganini discovered

Locatelli's caprices and was inspired by them to write a more performance oriented opus by utilizing contemporary harmonies. One of the most clear and visual comparisons would be the openings of Locatelli's Opus 3, Caprice 7 and Paganini's Opus 1, Caprice 1. As seen in Figure 2 below, the E major to B major to E major chords are utilized in both of the Caprices' openings.

The image displays two musical excerpts. The top excerpt is titled "Locatelli: Opus 3, Capriccio 7, T. 1-4" and is marked "Violino solo". It is in E major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The music consists of a series of eighth-note patterns that resolve into a final chord. The bottom excerpt is titled "Paganini: Opus 1, Capriccio 1, T. 1-2" and is also marked "Violino solo". It is in E major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The music features a similar harmonic structure with eighth-note patterns leading to a final chord. Both excerpts illustrate the E major to B major to E major chord progression mentioned in the text.

Fig. 2 Openings of both Caprices (Brilliant Classics). 2021

The Italian violin school started to decline at the end of the eighteenth century due to the shift in music education towards native singers. The existence of written pedagogical materials was lacking, Bartolomeo Campagnoli (1751-1827) wrote the *New Method of Progressive Mechanics of Solo Violin Playing divided into 5 Parts and distributed in 132 Progressive Lessons for Two Violins and 118 Studies for One Violin Alone* (1824, translated from French) which is one of the few actually written out violin methods by the Italians. There was a reliance on the traditional master-to-pupil teaching in order to keep their methods a secret.

The French Violin School

Giovanni Battista Viotti linked the Corelli tradition to the nineteenth-century French violin school and is considered to be the most influential Italian violinist between Tartini and Paganini. He toured with his teacher, Gaetano Pugnani (1731-1798), to Switzerland, then Dresden, and to Berlin. Viotti traveled to Paris on his own after parting with Pugnani in 1781. He made his debut at the *Concert Spirituel* in March of 1782 and instantly became an established violinist that regularly performed for two years before entering into the service for Marie Antoinette at Versailles in January of 1784. As the leader of the Prince Rohan-Guéménée's orchestra and creating the Théâtre de Monsieur, his company was able to produce both Italian and French works and operas before he fled to London during the French Revolution. His time in Paris was the most influential period of his life. As seen in the genealogy tree from Figure 1, many notable violinists of the present day can be traced back to Viotti since he brought violin technique out of Italy.

Three of Viotti's most important students: Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766-1831), Pierre Baillot (1774-1813), and Pierre Rode (1774-1834), collectively wrote the *Méthode de violon (1803)* and became advocates for the French school of music, Paris Conservatoire in the nineteenth century. Viotti also invented the Tourte Bow for his approach to bowing (1785). It felt lighter, firmer, and more elastic than the older versions. The Viotti tradition was associated with an elegance and grace in bowing as well as brilliant left-technique.

The German Violin School

The German violin school was dominated by Louis Spohr (1784-1859). As a student of Franz Eck, he displayed French influence despite his German nationality. He especially admired the concertos of Pierre Rode and he included excerpts and comments on Rode's compositions in his *Grand Violin School (Violinschule 1852)*, which certainly tried to be comprehensive for teachers. With the exception of Beethoven's Violin Concerto and sonatas, Spohr's contribution to the solo musical literature of nineteenth-century Germany outshined that of the French violin school despite his direct influence from them.

Spohr was responsive as a performer to different styles, his *Violinschule* was not only inspired by the French violin school, but also derived from the styles of German Romantic Opera and also Italian operatic singing. An example of this would be his *Violin Concerto no. 8 in A minor, "In Form einer Gesangsszene"* (In Form of a Song Scene) with its recitative introduction, aria-like adagio, and explosive allegro which is conventional in an operatic setting.

Friedrich Rochlitz, the editor of the *Leipziger allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (1804) which is a German language periodical on musical events across different countries, stated,

He is altogether a different person when he plays, for example, Beethoven (his darling whom he handles exquisitely) or Mozart (his ideal) or Rode (whose grandiosity he knows so well how to assume, without any scratching and scraping

in producing the necessary volume of tone), or when he plays Viotti and galant composers: he is a different person because they are different persons. (Rodriguez 15)

Spohr also experimented with stringing, tuning and invented the chin-rest (*Geigenhalter, Grand Violin School*) around 1820. It was to be placed on top of the tailpiece with a recess carved in to prevent it from coming into contact with the violin. It was also slightly hollowed out to improve friction with the chin. Spohr was credited with inventing the original chin rest; it is interesting to see how it was centered on the violin rather than being to the left of the tailpiece like most chin rests seen today (Figure 3).

PLATE 1.

Fig. I.

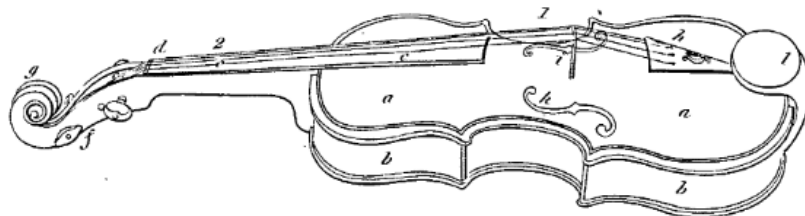
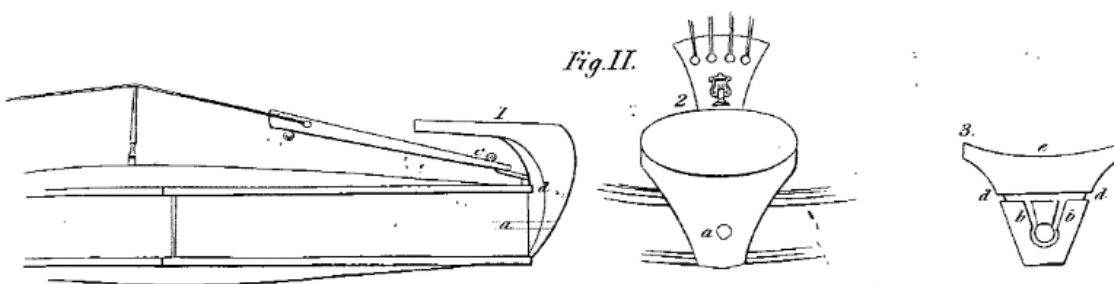


Fig. V.



Fig. II.

Fig. 3. *Geigenhalter* or chin rest in Fig. II (*Violinschule*). 1850

One of the most dominant pupils of Spohr is Ferdinand David (1810-1873). David was one of the first violinists to perform Bach's solo violin works and laid great emphasis on the works of the French masters (refer to [1.3](#)). A musician should be flexible in their execution of a style or period. Joseph Joachim (1831-1907) was also trained with the French violin school along with his German heritage while under David's and Mendelssohn's mentorship. Joachim was best described by Leopold Auer (1845-1930) who was well established by the end of the nineteenth century.

The Russian Violin School

Leopold Auer adhered to the teachings of Joseph Joachim but another significant influence on Auer was Jakob Dont (1815-1888) who in turn was taught by Joseph Böhm (1795-1876) who expanded the Viennese school. Auer replaced Henryk Wieniawski (1835-1880) as violin professor in 1868 at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in Russia where he taught until 1917 which was the time in which Auer established himself within the Russian violin school. Wieniawski was the first and sole violin professor of St. Petersburg Conservatory after renowned pianist Anton Rubinstein (1829-1894) pushed for the development of musical education and culture for native talents. Musical opportunities were limited in Russia so the initiative for a conservatory founded a new “Russian School of Music” that recognized its native community.

Many Russian violinists consider themselves disciples of Auer. He wasn't incredibly stringent on technique but instead cultivated individuality, he wanted each student to develop an artistic temperament suited for the student. In an interview with Auer that Frederick Martens conducted (*Violin Mastery: Talks With Master Violinists and Teachers; Comprising Interviews With Ysaye, Kreisler, Elman, Auer, Thibaud, Heifetz, Hartmann, Maud Powell and Others 1919*),

I have no method--unless you want to call purely natural lines of development, based on natural principles, a method--and so, of course, there is no secret about my teaching. The one great point I lay stress on in teaching is never to kill the individuality of my various pupils. Each pupil has his own inborn aptitudes, his

own personal qualities as regards tone and interpretation. I always have made an individual study of each pupil, and given each pupil individual treatment. And always, always I have encouraged them to develop freely in their own way as regards inspiration and ideals, so long as this was not contrary to [aesthetic] principles and those of my art. (Martens 1919)

Auer still incorporated many of Joachim's teachings and principles that are reflected off of the German violin school. There were also many other influences on Auer's Russian school: Pierre Rode taught Joseph Böhm who in turn taught Joachim and Jakob Dont, both of whom Auer was a pupil. Wieniawski who preceded Auer as violin professor of the conservatory has lineage to Kreutzer, accordingly showing affiliation with the German and Russian schools.

2: Notable Violinists

Many professional violinists have established themselves with their own distinct styles and interpretations. With the intricate interplay between the mental and physical aspects of playing violin and because of how cosmopolitan the instrument has become, it would be completely impractical to conclude that one's playing style is better than the other. Rather, it's more effective to consider their philosophies and reasonings for their comfort within the world of modern violin performance and practice. Through online media and interviews conducted by Laurie Niles, there's more insight into the conceptualization of violin performance by great masters of the current century.

Aaron Rosand

In an interview with Aaron Rosand (1927-2019) - he has studied with Leon Sametini who was a disciple of Eugene Ysaye (1858-1931), and also with Efrem Zimbalist (1889-1985) who was a student of Leopold Auer - conducted by Laurie Niles, he describes his teaching and playing philosophies and why he discourages the use of the shoulder rest, he briefly mentions the "Yehudi Menuhin Shoulder" rest but that it was never used by Menuhin himself. Rosand understands that every person has a different temperament or personality that needs to be approached differently, "I don't try to clone my students, they all play differently. I try to develop

their own personality in their playing. I let them more or less do their own thing and guide them when I think they're going off track" (Rosand 2014).

Laurie asks about his thoughts on shoulder rests. The greatest violinists do not use shoulder rests and that they have developed a beautiful and particularly personal sound because of this. The position of the left arm has a great effect on the sound and the violin sits on the collarbone, not the shoulder. The left arm should hang directly underneath the violin instead of the instrument sitting up in the air with the left hand floating across the neck without holding it. The shoulder rest points the elbow in the wrong direction which can negatively affect the angle of the fingers reducing the space that they need to roll on the strings and make vibrato difficult. The player isn't holding the violin so much as the shoulder rest is holding it. When observing pictures of some of the greatest violinists, their elbows are directly underneath the instrument. There is a more intimate connection with the violin since a balance is being established instead of a grip. The violin also becomes more centered and level making a stable setting for the bowing right arm and left hand. The violin should be sitting in front of the face, with the eyes and nose going right down the length of the fingerboard (See Figure 4).



Fig. 4. Rosand's face pointed directly down the length of the violin. NY Times 2019

Ray Chen

A disciple of Aaron Rosand when he was admitted to Curtis Institute of Music, Ray Chen's (1989) playing style is worth mentioning because of his particular utilization of the shoulder-rest. He is also anything but traditional because of his outreach to younger audiences in the modern world of communication and social media.

Ray Chen won the Yehudi Menuhin Violin Competition in 2008 and the Concours Reine Elisabeth (or Queen Elisabeth International Violin Competition) the following year, both without

the use of a shoulder rest. Some of the more popular videos of him playing are of Saint-Saëns *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* and Ysaÿe *Violin Sonata no. 6 "Manuel Quiroga"*.

He is not a noticeably tall violinist but what is striking is the way his hands shift on the fingerboard. His rather long fingers allow his thumb position to be pretty high, supporting the violin with the first joint from the tip across from the second finger giving lateral balance. When he shifts to higher positions, his thumb stays behind the body of the violin and under the fingerboard. The rest of his fingers stretch up the length of the fingerboard being supported by the base of his hand as it places itself above the body of the violin. This is very common with violinists who play without a shoulder rest since they need a way to support the violin from underneath and it's exceptionally easy for Ray Chen because of his longer fingers.

Laurie Niles has also conducted an interview with Ray Chen and asks how he feels about shoulder rests, "The intimacy of a tone. When you listen to the tone, you feel emotion more easily; you can hear it. Whereas with a shoulder rest, something about that angle and the fact that it's clamped on the sides, I don't know. The sound sounds really hollow" ("Interview with Ray Chen: Outreach Through Social Media"). He actually uses a shoulder rest that he designed himself. It's a flat piece of wood with a custom shape attached to the back of the instrument using a special glue that doesn't harm the varnish on the Stradivarius violin. He used to be an advocate for playing without the shoulder rest but he's using an unusual contraption now. It was a matter of his personal experience with the instrument.



Fig. 5. Facebook 2015 with custom shoulder rest and WQXR 2011 without

Itzhak Perlman

As a student of Ivan Galamian and Dorothy DeLay (1917-2002), Itzhak Perlman (1950) has had the benefits of learning the philosophies and techniques from them and has cemented himself as one of the greatest violinists at the turn of the twenty first century. With the Covid-19 pandemic moving many interactions to the virtual world, Perlman's opportunity with MasterClass to teach classes online has allowed him to break down and teach his techniques for violin practice and performance for millions of musicians.

To Perlman, the violin is a physical experience as it's potentially uncomfortable. He emphasizes breathing and posture in order to feel well grounded,

You know, sometimes we are not breathing, you know. And as a result, we feel all of a sudden that we're just out of breath, you know, when we-- that's not good.

The other thing is your posture, which we can talk about also, very, very important. You have to be grounded, well grounded. And a lot of players have different kind(s) of postures without them realizing it. (MasterClass 2015)

Being grounded also has connotations with keeping the violin level like a table. Perlman emphasizes that keeping the violin straight will allow the bow to use its natural weight and flexibility on the strings. He believes in holding the violin close to parallel to the ground and that the player is comfortable with their chin and shoulder within this position, “ because that's a very interesting problem to talk about what goes on the back of the violin and what kind of chin rest you use. A lot of people-- you know, a lot of the reason for comfort, it has to do with how it feels between here and there. And we all have-- we're all built differently.” (MasterClass 2015)



Fig. 6. Perlman, violin rotated more counterclockwise. BYU 2020

Anne-Sophie Mutter

Anne-Sophie Mutter has a remarkable discography by representing over 50 composers and more than 60 recordings within the last 40 years: Penderecki's *Metamorphosen* 1995, Andre Previn's *Violin Concerto* 2002, and Sofia Gubaidulina's *Violin Concerto in tempus praesens* 2007 which was written and dedicated for her. For Mutter, she appreciates the approach to contemporary music because of the fresh approach of innovation that she can bring and

opportunity to work closely with the composer. When compared to the 250 years of history and culture brought with repertoire like Bach, there's the burden of expectation.

Laurie Niles mentions that the forums on Violinist.com are involved with the discussion of shoulder rests. Mutter points out that she went through a period of several years experimenting with shoulder rests because she was struggling to find a comfortable method. When she started working with Herbert von Karajan, she discovered that her shoulder gave traction to the violin.

First of all, when I started at five and a half, I was still growing, and therefore I frequently changed shoulder rests... And then, when I started to play with Karajan, around that time, I discovered that playing without anything was actually the ideal solution... But there is no real rule one can apply, because it all depends on the neck length and the position of your shoulder. (Violinist.com)

There is no one rule that can apply to everyone and it depends on the position of the neck and shoulder of the person. The instrument has to remain without pressure from the chin and shoulder in a relaxed position.



Fig. 7. Mutter with sleeve down for friction on the shoulder. ClassicFM

Nathan Cole

For thirty years, Nathan Cole believed that he would play with a shoulder rest forever. While preparing for a concertmaster audition, Cole explored the natural movements of the thumb by referring to Galamian's *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* and removing the rest. He further noticed his friends and colleagues that played without shoulder rests and reflected on the technique of supporting the instrument exclusively with the left hand. Out of curiosity before a rehearsal with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, he left the shoulder rest in his case and then walked onto the stage to experiment with his technique.

Nathan Cole has been inspired by the playing styles of Aaron Rosand and Nathan Milstein. Having the violin in more in front instead of angled to the left promotes a better finger angle for a greater variety of shifts and vibrato. Also playing on the Stradivarius that Milstein owned, he wanted to do it justice and gave a successful recital playing Bach, Debussy, and Wieniawski. “I thought I’d play with a shoulder rest forever, so I suppose it would be just as likely to someday put it back on... For thirty years, I’ve had you pressed against me. I’m sorry to say that the joy is gone. But in recognition of your three decades of service, let’s keep our options open. There’s a spot for you here on this shelf: to be left until called for.” (“Why I ditched the shoulder rest after 30 years”)

3: My Experience Teaching Violin

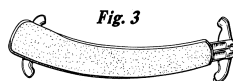
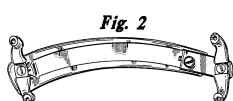
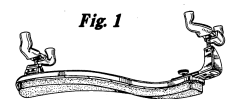
During the summer of 2021, I had the opportunity to teach an 11 year old student violinist. Their name is Zaina and they've had a little experience playing violin for their school orchestra. I reached out to the family to give formal violin lessons after I noticed the violin stand in the living room stacked with repertoire I remember playing at that age. I knew that this would be a chance to start developing my Senior Project during that summer. It was an enriching experience and I was able to touch on a lot of aspects of violin technique that I thought I understood only to expose that I sometimes struggled to actually conceptualize them to my pupil. After this point, I would have to find more illustrative ways to demonstrate and explain my perception of technique. It was not what I expected since teaching violin is in contrast to playing violin. This section is in conjunction with my SPROJ recital in which I illustrate in a lecture how I embraced playing violin without a shoulder rest, the reflection of educating myself on the subject, and how I propose to display violin technique from another perspective.

How to Play the Violin Without a Shoulder Rest

One of the misconceptions is that there's more tension because of the absence of the shoulder rest. Because of how common it is to play without one, the attitude towards shoulder rest has changed within the last 50 years. It's actually a relatively new invention with the very popular Joseph Kun model (Fig. 8) being patented as recently as 1993 and the original

conception (Fig. 9) seeming to have been invented by Vlado Kolitsch in 1936. However, Kolitsch's concept was overshadowed by the use of a cloth or pad because of its convenience and simplicity.

U.S. Patent Mar. 16, 1993 Sheet 1 of 2 Des. 334,019



U.S. Patent Mar. 16, 1993 Sheet 2 of 2 Des. 334,019

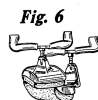
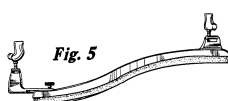
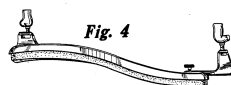
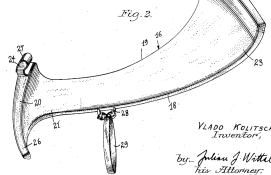
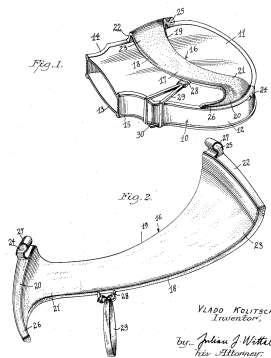


Fig. 8. Kun shoulder rest patent, 1993, pg. 2-3

Dec. 22, 1936. V. KOLITSCH 2,064,925
REMOVABLE SHOULDER REST FOR VIOLIN
Filed April 26, 1932



Vlado Kolitsch
Inventor.
Prof. Johann J. Nibel
his Attorney.

Fig. 9. Patent of Vlado Kolitsch easily removable shoulder rest, 1936

There are so many ways to hold the violin and it is based on my own observations, experience, and studying with my teacher where I found my own comfort with the instrument. Playing without a shoulder rest is a rather taboo subject among the current generation of violinists because of the misunderstanding of how the violin is actually held. The violin isn't actually held however, so much as balanced on the collarbone and left hand, these are the two initial points of contact. The chin comes down to hook onto the chin rest only with the natural weight of the head and to prevent the violin from being pulled away from the body. The eyes should be fixed onto the violin looking down the length of the fingerboard.

As for the left hand on the neck of the violin, it should be balanced between the ball of the left hand index finger, below the lower proximal phalanx and between the distal and proximal phalanx of the thumb and across from the middle finger for the most lateral balance. The violin should be turned counterclockwise to keep the violin more level with the ground which helps the balance of the instrument and the bow. There should be the feeling of the tailpiece being pulled towards the body and shoulder rests can detach the feeling of the full weight of the violin. Some violinists who have long necks and sloped shoulders may need to hold the violin up to meet their chins or Joseph Szigeti (1892-1973) who holds the violin at a downward angle to achieve the same effect. Violinists who have shorter necks and higher shoulders are more adapted to the shape of the violin so it could fit more snugly between the collarbone and chin. Whatever the physicality, the shoulders should remain down and the spine relatively straight. Violinists are also athletes that are keenly aware of their posture and comfort.

Why Do I Play Without a Shoulder Rest?

1. Freedom and mobility - A shoulder rest fixes the violin in one angle restricting dynamic adjustments to the instrument. Raising the violin up can solve many technical problems, the bow becomes more parallel to the bridge and it gets pulled into the sounding point. It should never be locked in one place but instead moving subtly and fluidly according to the motions of the body. You should be adjusting to the violin, not the shoulder rest. The body follows the violin so be sensitive to your posture.
2. Physical intimacy - The violin is an extension of the body and using a technique that keeps contact with the violin as much as possible is preferable. It will be more kinesthetic as it becomes a physical experience of being in tune with your body. You should be able to better feel the vibrations of the violin and gauge how it reacts more personally. This in turn will personalize the tone because the pressure of the fingers and bow on the strings won't be concealed by the fixed position of the shoulder rest.
3. Aesthetics - Since playing without a shoulder rest can improve posture, it will also be more visually appealing. There's something beautiful and exciting about seeing the violin itself being raised by the player. At orchestral concerts, I always found myself watching the violinists that played without shoulder rests and something about their physical appearance when they play is so fluid. I've always been curious about how they played which motivated me to expose my own technique in ways I couldn't before.

Finger patterns, 1st and 3rd Position

With the tuning arrangement of the violin strings being intervals of fifths - G, D, A, E - first and third position are the two most accessible points of contact on the violin because of their relativity to the open strings. There's a reason why so many pieces of music written for violin are in D major or G major because the hand frame and finger patterns are consistent in these key signatures making them physically comfortable to play in. First position is a neutral position since the violin is being supported by the left thumb and index finger. There should not be contact with the webbing that is present between the two and instead, sit and pivot with the elbow depending on which string is being played on.

Third position places the hand at a natural point. It's against the body of the instrument providing more support along with the thumb and index finger on a wider part of the fingerboard. Corelli states that the balance is perfect (Pincherle 1986) because of the structure of the violin, the thumb and palm are in a natural position that is comfortable like the first position. Beyond that point, it was redundant and risky. Corelli's Sonata for Violin and Bass, Opus V was written to premiere the violin's sonorous upper range, anything virtuosic would become dull after initial awe. It was often uncomfortable to play above third position so most composers avoided writing music with many ledger lines.

First position, starting on the G-string

- G major and G melodic minor starting from the open string, Bb major starting on the second finger on the G-string.
 - The third finger is an anchor on the C, G, D, and A when playing in these keys in first position. They're not modified in the key signatures of Bb major, G melodic minor, G major, and C major.
 - The first, second, and fourth fingers adjust for Bb, F#, or Eb respectively when playing a two octave scale from the G-string to the E-string.
 - G major sits the first and third fingers in the same spot across all four strings.
- C major is much more accessible in the third position.

Third position is relatively easy when compared to first position. The first finger is now on the anchor notes: C, G, D, A and there's a little more emphasis on the second finger which sits on the tonics of the strings when playing in third position. Starting on the G string, two octave scales in the keys of D major, D minor, and C major can comfortably be played.

- C major
 - Starting on C with the first finger on the G-string, a two octave C major scale can be played up to the E-string excluding the use of the fourth finger after reaching C, two ledger lines above the treble clef.
 - If a two octave C major scale were to be played in first position, it would require an extension of the 4th finger on the E-string.
- D major

- Starting with the second finger on D and playing two octaves from the G-string to the E-string.
 - The first finger anchors on G, D, and A. This excludes the C# on the G-string below the second finger
 - The second finger anchors on the tonics of each string: D, A, E, B
 - The third finger anchors on E, B, F#, and C#
- This is the tonic of G major, there is now the C# and F#.
- D melodic minor
 - Similar to D major but with F natural, C natural, and Bb.
 - On the ascending scale, the second finger will continue to sit on the tonics of the four strings but will then be adjusted for Bb on the E-string during the descending scale.
 - The first finger is not modified from G, D, and A. C# on G-string ignored.

Conclusion

My explanations of finger patterns come from my knowledge of the violin and also music theory. This is a development of my current experience and understanding of the instrument and is not intended to be used as introductory material on how to play the violin. I propose the use of scales and music theory within the process of teaching already well-seasoned violinists on playing the instrument without a shoulder rest. The reason why I bring up first and third position is because of its conjunction with balancing and supporting the violin. The violin is a very difficult instrument and the removal of a shoulder rest is a big adjustment for players; it will be as if you have to relearn the violin. I want to make the transition as easy as possible by dismissing the misconception that using a shoulder rest is the only option. It should be introduced as a supplement to the player rather than being defined as a standard.

I aim to have discussions on the topic of shoulder rests and its effects on technique and performance with other experienced violinists as this is something that isn't emphasized as much anymore. It is not a question of whether or not it is better to play with or without a shoulder rest. I believe that it is a fundamental aspect of the instrument that is commonly overlooked and needs to become relevant again. From my personal experience, it has completely changed the way I physically understand the violin and now I can genuinely appreciate how amazing of an invention the shoulder rest actually is. It is through my own practice and research of documents that I was able to evaluate the philosophies and concepts of violin technique before and after the modern shoulder rest. The foundations of nineteenth-century technique and philosophies in

violin playing up until the death of Yehudi Menuhin in 1999 was a different era of the instrument and I aim to arrive at a practical and therefore internalized appreciation of precisely those elements that seem so far removed from present-day.

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