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978-0-521-62555-5 - The Early Violin and Viola: A Practical Guide

Robin Stowell

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## The Early Violin and Viola: A Practical Guide

This practical guide is intended for all violinists and viola players who wish to give – or merely to understand and appreciate – historically aware performances of early music for their instruments. It comprises discussion of the literature, history and repertory of the violin and viola, the myriad relevant primary sources and their interpretation, and the various aspects of style and technique that combine to make up well-grounded, period performances. It also considers various related instruments, contains practical advice on the acquisition of appropriate instruments, and offers suggestions for further reading and investigation. Many of the principles outlined are put into practice in case studies of six works composed from about 1700 to 1900, the core period which forms this series' principal (though not exclusive) focus. Music by Corelli, Bach, Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms is examined with a view to recreating performances as faithful as possible to the composer's original intention.

ROBIN STOWELL is a Professor of Music at Cardiff University of Wales and a professional violinist who has written extensively on stringed instruments and the conventions of performing early music. He is author of *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1985) and *Beethoven: Violin Concerto* (Cambridge, 1988) in the series Cambridge Music Handbooks. He is also editor of *Performing Beethoven* (Cambridge, 1994), *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin* (Cambridge, 1992), *The Cambridge Companion to the Cello* (Cambridge, 1999) and co-author of *The Historical Performance of Music: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1999).

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GENERAL EDITORS: Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell

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Acknowledgements for kind permission to reproduce illustrations are due to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Figs. 3.2 and 3.4) and America’s Shrine to Music Museum, University of South Dakota, Vermillion (Fig. 8.1)

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## Preface

This handbook is intended for all devotees of the violin and viola who are interested in historical performance, whether as period-instrument players or performers on modern instruments, as professional musicians, students or enthusiastic amateurs, as discerning concert-goers, or as avid listeners to recordings. It aims to survey and offer some solutions to the numerous problems posed by the performer's desire to recreate a performance as close and as faithful as possible to the composer's original conception. This desire is by no means of recent origin; Johann Mattheson, for example, wrote (1739):

The greatest difficulty associated with the performance of someone else's work is probably the fact that keen discernment is necessary in order to understand the real sense and meaning of unfamiliar thoughts. For those who have never discovered how the composer himself wished to have the work performed will hardly be able to play it well. Indeed, he will often rob the thing of its true vigour and grace, so much so, in fact, that the composer, should he himself be among the listeners, would find it difficult to recognise his own work.<sup>1</sup>

This handbook thus aims to introduce readers to the principal issues that require comprehension and 'keen discernment' in contemplating historical performance on the violin and viola. It surveys the most significant source materials, examines the issues of performance practice, technique and style which combine to forge well-grounded period interpretations and demonstrates how these may be applied to six case studies from a cross-section of the repertory. Recommendations for further reading and investigation form an important part of the volume's purpose, and guidance is also offered on many other relevant aspects, ranging from details of organology and repertory to advice on the acquisition of appropriate instruments, bows and other accessories.

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One particular desire is to encourage readers to give due consideration to the specific aspects that make period performance different; for this involves much more than merely employing original or reproduction instruments and bows and following rules defined in treatises. Geminiani exhorted ‘the Performer, who is ambitious to inspire his Audience, to be first inspired himself; which he cannot fail to be if he chuses [*sic*] a Work of Genius, if he makes himself thoroughly acquainted with all its Beauties; and if while his Imagination is warm and glowing he pours the same exalted Spirit into his own Performance’.<sup>2</sup> Then, as now, performers were admired for what they as individuals brought to the music by giving ‘life’ to the notes through artistry, taste, intelligence and musical imagination and by understanding and applying the largely unwritten conventions through which musical communication was realised. While historical performance will always involve conjecture and inspiration and, above all, instinct and imagination, we can go some way towards achieving its goals through systematic experiment, research and educated guesswork based on artistic intuition and experience gained within parameters defined by historical study.

This practical guide is part of a series, of which the parent volume *The Historical Performance of Music: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1999), co-authored by the present writer with Colin Lawson, has already explored the more general, large-scale musical and practical issues. In keeping with the historical scope of the series, the period c.1700–c.1900 has provided the main focus for the textual discussion and case studies. But the seventeenth-century violin and viola repertory will not be neglected, for this provided the seedbed for the development of playing techniques well into the nineteenth century.

A book of this nature perforce has benefited from the work and influence of many others, most of whom are acknowledged in the endnotes and select bibliography. Perhaps the predominant influence in my academic career has been the late Peter le Huray, who stimulated my interest in performance practice, while my practical experience in period performance has benefited from the inspiration of musicians such as Sigiswald Kuijken, Jaap Schröder, Christopher Hogwood and many colleagues in the Academy of Ancient Music. Various travel grants from the Department of Music, Cardiff University facilitated my research, but I am also indebted to Clive Brown, Adrian Eales and Nicholas Maxted Jones for the loan of various source mate-

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rials in their possession and to the staff of numerous libraries, especially Mrs. Gill Jones and her staff at Cardiff University Music Library, for their generous and ever-willing assistance. I am grateful, too, to Ian Cheverton and Howard Cheetham, who dealt respectively with the reproduction of the musical examples and photographic illustrations, and to Colin Lawson, who read the text at various stages and offered many valuable suggestions. Finally, I owe debts of gratitude to my knowledgeable copy editor, to my wife Jane, for her tireless support and encouragement over many years, and to Penny Souster and her staff at Cambridge University Press for their patience and expertise in piloting this book into print.

Pitch registers are indicated as follows:

middle C just below the treble stave appears as  $c^1$ , with each successive octave higher indicated as  $c^2$ ,  $c^3$ ,  $c^4$  etc. and the octave below as  $c$ .

Fingerings are indicated in the usual manner, with  $o$  denoting an open string, 1 the index finger, 2 the middle finger and so on.

Reference is made to individual movements and specific bars of cited works thus: i/23–6 indicates first movement, bars 23–6; iv/91 denotes fourth movement, bar 91. In cases where the movement under discussion is clearly evident, bar numbers are indicated  $b$ . or  $bb$ . as appropriate.