



UNIVERSITY OF  
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## ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

### **Approaches to practising standard repertoire**

In place of the main work, do piece specific exercises improve practice effectiveness and productivity, and prevent the piece from becoming overplayed and tired?

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## **ABSTRACT**

Musicians preparing for auditions have to practice a limited repertoire of standard pieces, and it is very easy for the pieces to become stale. This thesis examines practice methodologies and established study books in order to produce a set of new studies aimed specifically at the Sibelius Violin Concerto. The aim was to create a method for practising the essential features of the piece without actually playing it, so that the concerto will sound fresh when the time comes to perform it in an audition. This process has led to an evaluation of my practice methods, and the studies are now an invaluable part of daily warm up.

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## **Introduction**

### Reasons for choosing this topic

When applying for jobs in orchestras there is a very small amount of repertoire to work on in order to be prepared for auditions. However practising the same things over and over can become monotonous and the piece suffers, affecting performance and therefore potential work opportunities.

To try and combat this I have chosen to create a series of new studies or exercises using motifs from standard audition repertoire (in this instance the Sibelius violin concerto) so that when practising, rather than playing the piece over and over, the studies will be used to practice the piece indirectly. This will help to keep my practice fresh and different, and engaged with what I am working on, rather than letting it get dull and my time becoming less productive.

I am going to examine how these studies change my practice and what effects (positive or negative) they have on my concentration, effectiveness, improvement and motivation. I am interested mainly in practice improvement, rather than overall improvement of the Sibelius itself.

My audience for this thesis will consist of other musicians, so the style of writing and research will be appropriate for that and not stray too far from the final end goal, which is performing better when auditioning.

### Purpose and Methods

The aim of my thesis is to create a book of studies specifically designed to aid practice of the Sibelius Violin Concerto. Through this study book I will then be able to improve my practice methods and technique, improving my overall ability to play the concerto. I will conduct my research by analysing current practice methods, studying etudes and looking closely at areas of my own playing that need improvement. Once I have composed the studies I will use them in my practice and through recordings and my practice diary I will determine if they are a useful practice tool.

### Practice Problems

I am currently struggling with a number of aspects of the Sibelius violin concerto. One of those is focus: because I know the piece well, I find it hard to concentrate practice effectively. Another is that I have reached a certain level with it overall and I need to improve almost every aspect, but I am having trouble working out how to do that effectively.

I know that I need to improve my consistency and I need to feel comfortable with all position changes, complicated articulated sections and the fast virtuosic sections. I also want to work on intonation and ensure that I am always in the centre of the note, providing a clean and clear sound.

### Future needs

During the next few years I will be undertaking orchestral auditions. I will therefore have to keep playing the Sibelius for the foreseeable future. In order to keep the piece up to a high standard I need a way to ensure the piece is fresh but constantly improving.

## Jean Sibelius and Violin Studies

### Sibelius and the Concerto

Jean Sibelius was born 8<sup>th</sup> December 1865 in Finland. At the age of nine he began piano lessons, even though he had a greater interest in the violin. When he was 15 he began to concentrate on studying the violin with Gustav Levander, a highly respected Finnish violin teacher. However in his early twenties he realised that he had started learning too late to become a professional. He composed music from the age of ten and in his teenage years wrote a lot of chamber music. He studied music in Helsinki, mainly composition, although frequently played the violin. However, he did not compose his violin concerto, until 1903. It was first performed in 1904 by Victor Nováček, but Sibelius was not happy and revised it, the biggest changes being the removal of much of the virtuoso material from the solo part, and the deletion of the second cadenza in the first movement.<sup>1</sup> There were also large cuts in the finale and many other changes across the three movements.<sup>2</sup> The definitive form was first performed in Berlin in 1905 with Richard Strauss conducting.<sup>3</sup>

The violin concerto is one of Sibelius' most popular works. It is enjoyable to experience both as a performer and as an audience member. However critics have said (especially around the time of composition) that it is far from being one of his 'greatest' works. The author Robert Layton says that the opening theme is 'heaven-sent' but the rest of the concerto, even in the lyrical beautiful passages, fails to live up to that.<sup>4</sup> Violinist Joseph Joachim considered it 'awful and boring' and advised students not to spend their money on 'that kind of score'.<sup>5</sup> Karl Flodin, a writer for the *Helsingfors-Posten* said that the concerto was a technical overload with overwhelming difficulties for the soloist drawing the whole composition to an average level.<sup>6</sup> Even after the revision he still said that the concerto was too complicated and laden with too many technical and rhythmic difficulties.<sup>7</sup> There were however critics that enjoyed the work, such as Evert Katila, a Finnish journalist, who said the concerto was on par with those of Brahms, Bruch and Tchaikovsky.<sup>8</sup>

### The Evolution of the Study

The composer of some of the earliest violin studies was the distinguished violinist Pierre Rode, born on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1774 and trained by Viotti. He performed and toured as a soloist and in the early 1800s wrote his 24 Caprices for violin, which are still played today.<sup>9</sup> This is due in part to the need to have exact intonation and coordination of both hands in order to play them, essential for a good technical grounding.<sup>10</sup> Looking in more detail at the individual caprices you can see how Rode composed them in order to practice a specific technique and to make them enjoyable to play. The studies often address a number of technical issues at a time: for example number three<sup>11</sup> focusses on string

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<sup>1</sup>Erkki Salmenhaara, *Jean Sibelius Violin Concerto*, (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel GmbH, 1996), pg 27.

<sup>2</sup>Salmenhaara, *Jean Sibelius Violin Concerto*, pg 35.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Layton, *Sibelius*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1965), pg 13.

<sup>4</sup>Layton, *Sibelius*, pg 103.

<sup>5</sup>Salmenhaara, *Jean Sibelius Violin Concerto*, pg 9.

<sup>6</sup>Salmenhaara, *Jean Sibelius Violin Concerto*, pg19.

<sup>7</sup>Salmenhaara, *Jean Sibelius Violin Concerto*, pg 24.

<sup>8</sup>Salmenhaara, *Jean Sibelius Violin Concerto*, pg 20.

<sup>9</sup>Theo Baker, *Rode – Twenty-four caprices for the violin, edited by Berkley (introduction)*, (Milwaukee: G.Schirmer, INC., 1943), pg ii.

<sup>10</sup>Harold Berkley, *Rode – Twenty-four caprices for the violin, edited by Berkley (preface)*, (Milwaukee: G.Schirmer, INC., 1943), pg iii.

<sup>11</sup>Pierre Rode, *Rode – Twenty-four caprices for the violin, edited by Berkley*, (Milwaukee: G.Schirmer, INC., 1943), pg 6.

crossings while playing legato, and second position (which is an often neglected position by violinists), and number 11<sup>12</sup> looks at accurate fast fingers, detaché and legato bowing, and switching between a legato and brilliant tone. Rode composes each of his studies as an individual piece, and generally they follow a certain tonal and rhythmic pattern, modulating through keys in order to build dexterity and provide interest for the player. For this reason they are occasionally used as short concert pieces.

Otakar Ševčík was a Czech violinist and influential teacher born in 1852. The books derived from his teaching methods are used regularly today. His studies cover everything from the basic intonation, to vibrato and double stopping. In his Opus 3 (a book on bow technique), Ševčík takes a 24 bar variation and repeats the chord pattern over and over again in each variation, but with a change of bowing and bow technique. For example in Variation 2 is just 24 bars of spiccato quavers, following the theme's chord pattern.<sup>13</sup> Occasionally he adds more than one technique into the variation, for example in Variation 26 he uses a combination of slurs and slurred spiccato.<sup>14</sup> Then, for variations 39<sup>15</sup> and 40<sup>16</sup> he has two sets of chords (three and four notes) and has a further set of variants for each in order to practice string crossings, ricochet, and slurs.

Rodolphe Kreutzer was one of the founders of the French violin school. He was an accomplished violinist and as well as playing for Napoleon and Louis XVIII he was principal violin of the Paris Opera and Theatre-Italien.<sup>17</sup> In 1796 he composed the 42 Etudes for solo violin. These studies are still used by many violin students today as essential material in their education. They cover a very broad range of techniques and styles, allowing the player to work on almost all aspects of their playing. The book starts with arpeggiated and chord based excerpts<sup>18</sup>, to trills<sup>19</sup>, and double stops<sup>20</sup>. All throughout these excerpts there are many variations in bowing and articulation. While these studies are not as musically interesting as Rode, they are very thorough and do help to develop a solid technical foundation.

### Examining existing piece specific studies

Alongside his many technical study books, Ševčík wrote a series of concert studies, his opus 17-21. In his preface he writes that you have to be analytical in order to succeed and by working out the technical aspects to perfection you can then easily bring your own interpretation.<sup>21</sup> He wrote one for each of the violin concertos by Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky and Brahms.

I want to examine one of them in more detail, and have chosen the Mendelssohn, the concerto I know the best of the three.

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<sup>12</sup>Rode, *Rode – Twenty-four caprices for the violin*, edited by Berkley, pg 22.

<sup>13</sup>Otakar Ševčík, *Opus Three – 40 variations*, (Great Britain: Bosworth & Company Ltd, 1892), pg 4.

<sup>14</sup>Ševčík, *Opus Three – 40 variations*, pg 16.

<sup>15</sup>Ševčík, *Opus Three – 40 variations*, pg 26.

<sup>16</sup>Ševčík, *Opus Three – 40 variations*, pg 27.

<sup>17</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica entry for 'Rodolphe Kreutzer'

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rodolphe-Kreutzer>

<sup>18</sup>Rodolphe Kreutzer, *Etudes*, (London: Edition Peters, 1796), pg 17.

<sup>19</sup>Kreutzer, *Etudes*, pg 30.

<sup>20</sup>Kreutzer, *Etudes*, pg 59.

<sup>21</sup>Otakar Ševčík, *Opus Twenty-one – F. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy: Konzert in E-Moll*, (Czech Republic: Universal Edition, 1931), pg 3.

Ševčík begins by splitting the piece into sections of approximately twenty bars and creates two sets of exercises per section, stating that the sections of the actual concerto may only be played when each study is mastered.<sup>22</sup> The first set of exercises focusses purely on the intervals, shifts and intonation, using very simple rhythms allowing total focus to be on the pitch. He moves methodically through the shifts in the passage, using transition fingers where needed, and also dynamics to mimic the phrasing.<sup>23</sup> The second set of exercises are more motif based, introducing articulation and rhythm to add context to the work done in the previous exercise.<sup>24</sup> His own rhythmic motifs are created in order to practice the feeling of the piece without having to play all the notes and allow the player to really focus on the sound they are creating.<sup>25</sup>

Ševčík also takes whole sections of scalar semiquavers and presents it with a number of different bowing patterns in order to make sure everything is even and rhythmically regular.<sup>26</sup> In some of the passages where the intervals unusual and intonation is difficult Ševčík adds in double stops in order to perfect intonation.<sup>27</sup>

Interspersed between all of these are studies of nuance where ideas of phrasal direction are given in a number of different ways in order to provide the player with new inspiration and allow them to become versatile in how to play each section once they have mastered the notes.<sup>28</sup>

In the studies certain difficult techniques are isolated, such as long runs of trills, and exercises are used to build strength in that skill.<sup>29</sup>

Overall I think these studies are very thorough and give you a good grounding for learning the piece. I hope I can take inspiration from these but I would also like to include exercises that take into account the background harmony and separate the bow and fingers completely so as to isolate certain passages.

### Examining practice techniques

There are many different opinions on how to practice effectively, but overall each player has to find out what suits them. Some of the techniques I've come across include:

- Warming up – Like an athlete it is much better to spend time warming up properly (on something like scales or studies) then just jumping straight in to trying to play your virtuosic piece.<sup>30</sup> Otherwise your first section of practice won't be fully effective and you may accidentally develop bad and unwanted habits.

- Practice in small chunks: By isolating each small passage and improving focussing on the more difficult passages you won't waste time by playing the whole piece through.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ševčík, *Opus Twenty-one – F. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy: Konzert in E-Moll*, pg 5.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid pg 5.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid pg 5.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid pg 7.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid pg 8.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid pg 10.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid pg 15.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid pg 26.

<sup>30</sup>Classic FM website '10 tips to help you practice more effectively', Last modified March 15<sup>th</sup> 2017.

<http://www.classicfm.com/lifestyle/wellbeing/musician-practice-tips/>

<sup>31</sup>Taken from 'My Favourite Practice Techniques' by Julie Tebbs. Last modified March 2004.

<http://shop.theviolincase.com/pages/March-2004.html>



- Don't always play the correct rhythm – Changing the bowing, or the rhythm can train the fingers to know exactly where they are going. Making the rhythms swung, changing the groupings or adding a dactylic rhythm will be a mental challenge as well as training the fingers, enabling you to perform the passage better.<sup>32</sup>

- Always do something – It's far better to do a small focussed practice than hours of mindless practice, meaning that even if you only have a very short space to practice in a day, you can still do something productive.<sup>33</sup>

- Set realistic goals – Go into each practice session with a clear (but not too big) goal and spend your time really focussed on that, rather than just playing aimlessly.<sup>34</sup>

- Record yourself – Regularly record yourself, and by listening back you will be able to hear far more than you would when just playing something through.<sup>35</sup>

## **My Current Personal Practice**

### Current practice techniques

The way I organise my practice generally stays the same from day to day. Every evening I plan the next day's practice in my journal, detailing what I am going to do in each hour, and then making notes if I have a specific goal or task I need to complete (See Appendix 1). Then, during my practice, I look at what I have assigned to the hour and work on that, sometimes from start to finish, other times focussing on a certain passage or technical section I am finding difficult.

By practising in this way I do not waste time during my designated practice hours working out what should have priority and I can concentrate on improving my playing.

The problems occur when I have to work on standard orchestral audition repertoire that I have been playing for a number of years. I often struggle to know exactly what to work on and the temptation to play them through and just 'see what happens' often takes over. Consequently I end up skipping over the little sections that could do with focus and the rate of improvement slows dramatically.

Also when I am particularly busy and I have to fit in practice at the end of the day (when I am the least productive) the quality of my practice declines and often I do not get anything useful done as I am both tired and uninspired.

My new studies are intended to change the way I think about practice and make me develop new ways to work on my pieces and excerpts as well as aiding me when I have to practice when I am tired or rushed.

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<sup>32</sup>Taken from 'My Favourite Practice Techniques' by Julie Tebbs. Last modified March 2004.  
<http://shop.theviolincase.com/pages/March-2004.html>

<sup>33</sup>Taken from 'My Favourite Practice Techniques' by Julie Tebbs. Last modified March 2004.  
<http://shop.theviolincase.com/pages/March-2004.html>

<sup>34</sup>Classic FM website '10 tips to help you practice more effectively', Last modified March 15<sup>th</sup> 2017.  
<http://www.classicfm.com/lifestyle/wellbeing/musician-practice-tips/>

<sup>35</sup>Classic FM website '10 tips to help you practice more effectively', Last modified March 15<sup>th</sup> 2017.  
<http://www.classicfm.com/lifestyle/wellbeing/musician-practice-tips/>



## Current studies used

In my current practice I use a number of studies, including Ševčík Opus 3, Rode 24 Caprices for violin and Kreutzer 42 Etudes. Depending on how much time I have, I dedicate time to working on individual studies in order to focus on technique.

One Ševčík study that I regularly use in the Opus 3 is Variation 40.<sup>36</sup> I enjoy warming up with this study as it gently wakes up both the left and the right hand. Generally the way I use this study is by selecting one of the bowing variations to focus on that day and start by playing through the chord sequence slowly using a metronome (often far slower than marked) to ensure that I know exactly where my left hand fingers are going and how I want to move my right arm. I try and focus on each movement carefully while concentrating on intonation. I then gradually increase the tempo to the metronome marking all the while focussing on what my left fingers and my bowing arm are doing. If there are any obvious passages that need intonation work I will isolate those and go between the two chord positions in order to achieve a smooth transition. Then, the following day I will move onto the next variation repeating the same process again.

With Rode I choose one study and work at it for a week or two, until I have learnt it properly. In the introduction to my volume of studies there are comments on what each study is working on which provide helpful guidance when you are starting an etude.<sup>37</sup> The first study in the book works on multiple techniques. The exercise opens with a cantabile section, before continuing the rest of the movement in a moderato section.<sup>38</sup> The notes for caprice number one state that the cantabile introduction is a study in 'tone-shading' and there is advice on how to approach this (first with just bow speed, and then moving onto thinking about contact point and bow pressure alongside this).<sup>39</sup> Rode continues by saying that the moderato should be played with a "fiery Martelé" and the dynamics should be expressed using only bow length.

When I begin work on a study like this I start by splitting it up into small sections of two or three lines and play through the first section slowly focussing on intonation and bow distribution, trying to keep all the articulation. Once I have got that section at a certain speed I will increase the metronome a little and repeat the process again. The next day I will move onto the next section in the piece and do the same. Once I have reached the end and can play the piece at a moderate speed (but still under tempo) I will go back to the beginning and repeat the whole process with slightly larger segments until the entire piece is at the marked tempo with good intonation, correct articulation and musical phrasing. For example the first caprice starts slowly so, as it states in the introduction, I will focus on dynamics, phrasing and articulation using the bow to emphasise all of this.<sup>40</sup> Once I get to the Moderato section I will begin practising it slowly, making sure all of the shifts and jumps are in tune before speeding it up gradually, making the martelé stroke is clean and crisp.

When practising Kreutzer 42 etudes I use a similar method to the Rode studies. I will work on one study for a week or two, getting it up to a high standard, with the ability to play it proficiently all the way through at the indicated tempo. One of the etudes that I have

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<sup>36</sup>Ševčík, *Opus 3 – 40 Variations*, pg 27.

<sup>37</sup>Berkley, *Rode – Twenty-four caprices for the violin*, edited by Berkley , pg iv.

<sup>38</sup>Rode, *Rode – Twenty-four caprices for the violin*, edited by Berkley , pg 2.

<sup>39</sup>Berkely, *Rode – Twenty-four caprices for the violin*, edited by Berkley , pg iv.

<sup>40</sup>Rode, *Rode – Twenty-four caprices for the violin*, edited by Berkley , pg 2.

worked on is Etude 18 which combines a huge number of techniques into one study.<sup>41</sup> I start by splitting the piece into sections of two or three lines long. As there are so many things to work on in this study, I then carefully look through the section for the day and play it very slowly, breaking everything down, and taking out any bowings that don't work at that speed. In this particular study I will be dismantling the trills too. For example in bar two<sup>42</sup> I break down the grace note, dotted quaver trill and semiquaver into seven equal notes, and in bar five<sup>43</sup> I break down the grace note, dotted crochet and two semiquavers into sixteen equal notes. I play through all of this slowly with a metronome, focussing on the bow strokes (such as the heavy Martelé in bar 1 or the smooth slurs at letter W), arm levels as well as intonation and finger dexterity. Once the slow speed is mastered I then gradually increase the tempo. Each day I learn a new section, breaking it down and then building it back up until I have learnt the whole study, slightly under tempo. I then go back to the start and work through the whole piece, getting it up to the correct speed and ensuring all intonation and phrasing is correct. Once I get it to 'performance' level, I will move onto the next study in the book and repeat the same process.

While these etudes are helpful for my general practice, they aren't always specific to the piece I want to concentrate on. As well as this, there are a number of things that I don't like about each book.

The Ševčík studies have a very clear pattern and they are easy to engage with and really work with the particular technique. When designing mine I am going to take inspiration from the simplicity of these and ensure that there are not too many techniques involved, allowing my mind to focus.

Although the Rode studies are fun to practice and pleasing to play as pieces I want to design purely functional studies that require little interpretation from the player so all focus is on the technique.

The Kreutzer studies are similar to those of Rode in that they are 'piece like' but are slightly less fun to play in my opinion. However each one has a very specific technical goal and makes sure every angle is covered. I like the way these studies transition through the keys and I am hoping to use that technique to add a little more variety into my studies.

## **My new studies**

### What aspects of my playing do I want to work on in my studies?

Having played the Sibelius violin concerto for over a year I have reached a certain level of proficiency and have therefore started to develop a picture of what needs improvement.

These include:

- intonation in the chordal passages, leaps and double stops
- phrase direction
- focus on the harmony and orchestral parts
- clear semiquaver passages

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<sup>41</sup>Kreutzer, *Etudes*, pg 28

<sup>42</sup>ibid pg 28

<sup>43</sup>ibid pg 28

- knowing where the chord progressions are going and expressing resolutions and suspensions
- better bow speed, arm level and string crossing control
- focussed and varied vibrato
- bigger dynamic contrast
- no tension in the body
- posture and stance

### How to approach composing the studies

To research how to create my studies, I looked at my regular books (Kreutzer, Ševčík, Rode) to find their similarities, and how different techniques were worked on. I compared and contrasted a few different studies and then went on to begin to create my own.

### Developing the Exercises

When composing the studies, I have a number of things to consider in each passage:

- technical difficulties (left hand, bowing, coordination etc.)
- danger spots
- expression
- the orchestral parts

To start developing the exercises I annotated a score of the violin part of the Sibelius concerto with things that I find difficult in each section (See Appendix 2). I then took each technical difficulty and tried to develop a study around that point, meaning each section of the concerto has 3-4 studies. Here is one example of how I developed and wrote a study for one of the more difficult passages.

Bars 33-49 are difficult due to them being fast and virtuosic, but they have to be exactly in tempo with very clear left hand articulation due to all the slurs. Therefore one of the things I wanted to work on in this passage was the scalic runs and finger articulation and dexterity. Therefore I took all of the scalic semiquaver runs and put them together to make a study that runs continually with none of the minims or crotchets (See Appendix 3). I also made sure that all of the complicated rhythms were in there. Then I created a table with different metronome markings so that the work on the passage starts slowly, gradually speeding up the tempo, ticking each tempo off to keep track. I then added a further layer of different slur combinations (as the study is written without any bowings) in order to ensure the left hand positions and intervals are really well known. So for each tempo separate bows, then 2,3,4 and 5 notes to a bow are practised.

The style of my studies has not changed much during the course of this project. From many years of playing, I know what works for me in the practice room. Also, when breaking the piece down into small sections, there are certain ways that I practice (such as practising intonation by solely focussing on the notes and the relationships they have to each other, and ignoring the rhythm) and so that was the natural way to write each exercise.

The only thing that changed in terms of the construction of the study was that I stopped putting in fingerings as they weren't always correct and didn't line up with what I would play in the concerto. This was partly a problem that arose from writing away from the violin and resulted in the change in my writing process. When I first started writing my studies I

did so in the evenings on my laptop using the software Sibelius. Although doing a small amount every day was productive, the process of writing was difficult as I had to visualise how everything would feel, and often took far longer as I wrestled with the software. I would find problems weeks later with bowings and fingerings when I tested the studies and have to go back and change things. Therefore I changed tack and started writing my studies out by hand in a manuscript book, alongside practising the concerto (See Appendix 4). This technique was more effective as I could directly write exercises based on what I was struggling with. It was then a far easier job to copy them into the Sibelius software in order to include them in my book.

### The studies

The following section consists of examples from the studies I created focussing on the techniques, presenting the study itself, where it comes from in the piece, a recording of the study and then comments on the effectiveness of the study:

## Intonation

### *Intonation and shifts*

Play each bar slowly, not in any set rhythm, really focussing on the tuning and shifts. Start out with audible shifts and gradually make them less visible. Only move onto the next bar when you are satisfied with the one you are currently playing.

The image shows a musical score for an intonation exercise in 3/2 time, consisting of three staves of music. The first staff starts with a double bar line and a shift marker 'II' followed by a dotted line. The notes are: G4 (finger 2), A4 (finger 3), B4 (finger 3), C5 (finger 1), D5 (finger 1), E5 (finger 1), F5 (finger 1), G5 (finger 1), A5 (finger 1), B5 (finger 1), C6 (finger 1), D6 (finger 1), E6 (finger 1), F6 (finger 1), G6 (finger 1), A6 (finger 1), B6 (finger 1), C7 (finger 1). The second staff starts with a double bar line and a shift marker 'II' followed by a dotted line. The notes are: G5 (finger 3), A5 (finger 3), B5 (finger 1), C6 (finger 1), D6 (finger 2), E6 (finger 1), F6 (finger 1), G6 (finger 1), A6 (finger 1), B6 (finger 1), C7 (finger 1), D7 (finger 1), E7 (finger 1), F7 (finger 1), G7 (finger 1), A7 (finger 1), B7 (finger 1), C8 (finger 1). The third staff starts with a double bar line and a shift marker 'II' followed by a dotted line. The notes are: G7 (finger 3), A7 (finger 1), B7 (finger 2), C8 (finger 2), D8 (finger 2), E8 (finger 3), F8 (finger 3), G8 (finger 3), A8 (finger 3), B8 (finger 1), C9 (finger 4), D9 (finger 3), E9 (finger 3), F9 (finger 3), G9 (finger 3), A9 (finger 1), B9 (finger 2), C10 (finger 1), D10 (finger 1), E10 (finger 1), F10 (finger 1), G10 (finger 1), A10 (finger 1), B10 (finger 1), C11 (finger 3), D11 (finger 2), E11 (finger 2).

*Example 1 - Intonation and shifting exercise taken from the opening bars*

This study applies to the opening passage of the piece which needs to have centred intonation and sound like one effortless smooth line. I designed this study by taking every note change and writing it down in crotchets with the fingering I would use when playing the piece. I then went back through it and removed any duplicate note changes or shifts in order to make it more efficient.

I enjoyed working on this study. The fact that it is divided into small one bar sections makes it manageable and allows you to focus on the intonation and hand position. I used this technique throughout the other studies as it works well (See Audio example 1).

## Shifting

### *Shifting*

Spend time going between each note, not moving on until you are completely secure.

The image shows a musical score for a shifting exercise. It consists of two staves in 4/4 time. The first staff contains a sequence of notes with the following fingering: 3, 2, 3(III), 2, 3, 2, 4(II), 1, 4, 1, 4, 1, 4, and sim. The second staff starts with a '5' and contains a sequence of notes, including some with double sharps, representing the same sequence of notes shifted up an octave. The exercise is designed to practice shifting and hand position changes.

*Example 2 - Shifting exercise taken from bars 71-75*

The purpose of this section is to practice the shifts and hand position changes in the semiquaver passage just before the second subject begins.

This passage is particularly problematic as it has to sound virtuosic, while still remaining neat and in tune, especially on the final high D. The hand has to move in 'blocks' for the first few groups of semiquavers, and once the octaves are reached then the whole arm, wrist and hand are involved in keeping a good frame to ensure perfect intonation as you get higher up the neck. I wrote this passage by first taking out all of the shifts and hand position changes and isolating the note that is shifted to. Then I wrote these notes out as simple crotchets, but using the same fingering as in the concerto, ensuring continuity.

Practising the movements between notes helps to improve intonation and trains the hand to map the fingerboard, creating muscle memory which will ensure accurate shifting at faster tempi (See Audio example 2).

The simple layout of this study makes it easily accessible and quick to dip in to, even if you only have a few moments to practice. It also works generally on intonation and will improve tuning overall. I enjoy using this one as a warm up, as it not only warms up my left hand, but also gets my ears listening closely, right from the start of my practice.



## Finger articulation

### *Finger Dexterity and Strength*

Use the following passage to teach your fingers exactly where to go, and use the different rhythms so that when you get back to normal semiquavers you are completely secure.

Three staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff is marked with a '1' and contains a sequence of eighth notes with various accidentals. The second staff is marked with a '3' and contains a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff is marked with a '5' and contains a sequence of eighth notes, ending with a half note G.

(Bowing Patterns and Rhythms – use these at a variety of tempi)

Six staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time, showing various bowing patterns and rhythms. The staves are numbered 1 through 11. The patterns include eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, with some staves featuring slurs and accents.

*Example 3 - Left hand articulation exercise taken from bars 53-58*

This section is from the beginning of the first Cadenza in bars 53-59. The difficulty of this passage is getting up and down the G string with no audible shifts, and hammering down your fingers when you get into the higher positions.



To write this study I started by copying out the original passage from the music. As it is made up from groups of semiquavers rising and falling as the sequence increased each time, it wasn't difficult to then create a variety of bowings and rhythms to go with it.

The purpose of the different rhythms is to train the fingers to know exactly where they are going. Dotted rhythms are particularly useful because whichever finger is on the semiquaver will have to move far faster than the finger on the dotted quaver, and when practised forwards and backwards (as shown in the above exercise) the fingers will ultimately be able to move faster and with greater accuracy.

The addition of different bowings is to train the fingers to 'hammer' down, and not rely on articulation from the bow. Also, having unusual groupings (such as 5 or 6 semiquavers) trains the fingers to work independently from the brain (which will be focussed on the bowing) meaning they will be more confident when performing this passage in the concerto.

I like practising like this because it is logical. I can work on intonation and finger articulation simultaneously, but not be overwhelmed by having to think about anything else. There are also very clear sections to practice (the different rhythms) meaning that even if you only have five minutes you can still work on it a little (See Audio example 3).

## Bow Control

*Bow control*  
Use this passage to work on the string crossings, aiming for a clean and clear sound. Focus on the dynamics.

1  
cresc. poco a poco

4

7  
ff

10

Example 4 - Bow control exercise taken from bars 59-70

This passage works on the bow control in the first cadenza in bars 59-70. The difficulty with the bowing in this passage is due to the string crossings, making it difficult to achieve a clean and clear sound.

To begin writing this passage I decided that the best way to focus on bowings was to eliminate any difficulty in the left hand, so I only used open strings. I then wrote out the passage using the four open strings, but keeping all the bowing, articulation and dynamics the same.

When I practice this I start at a slower tempo and follow all the articulation exactly, trying to use the same amounts of bow I would use when playing it at speed. I then gradually increase the tempo and keep focussing on creating a pure and clear sound, with all four strings ringing (See Audio example 4).

This study is useful for a few things. It forces the player to focus on arm levels and string crossings, which help overall in violin technique. It also turns the focus to the sound quality being produced meaning that when the left hand fingers are added back in all of the notes of the broken chord ring.

## Orchestral

### *Connection with the orchestra/piano*

This is the first violin orchestral part. In order to get a sense of the flow of the music, play this passage while singing or humming the solo violin melody. Think about how the almost stationary harmony affects what you will be playing.

The image shows a musical score for the first violin part of the opening of a concerto. It consists of six staves of music, each starting with a measure number: 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, and 20. The music is written in G major (one flat) and 4/4 time. The first five staves (measures 1-17) feature a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The sixth staff (measures 18-20) shows a change in the melodic line, with a sharp sign appearing above the notes in the final measure.

*Example 5 - The orchestral/piano upper voice from the opening of the concerto*

The purpose of this study is to build familiarity with the orchestral part, meaning that when playing it with piano (or orchestra) there is no doubt about how much freedom there is rhythmically. The difficulty with the start of this concerto is that if just playing the violin line, it feels like it should be free and rubato. Whereas actually the orchestra has a repeating pattern of oscillating quavers, and therefore the opening needs to be played expressively but exactly in time. I wrote this study by taking the violin line from the orchestral score, and simply copying it out.

To get the full use out of this passage I first practised it as I would any of the other studies, focussing on intonation and harmony (making note of when it changed) and ensuring all of the notes were even. Once I could do this I introduced the melody of the concerto by singing it over the top (changing octaves when my vocal range couldn't stretch that far), thinking about phrasing and how the melody fitted with the accompaniment. I would then switch, and play the melody and sing the accompaniment. As I practised in this way, I discovered that my phrasing of the melody evolved as the harmony underneath influenced the high points in the phrase. There was also a section where I was originally playing with a much harsher tone, but when paired with the accompaniment it jarred, and so I kept the sound calm, but added a more menacing quality instead.

## Rhythm

### *Rhythm*

The first thing to be aware of when practising or learning this passage is that there has to be a clean definition between triplet quavers, semiquavers, semiquaver quintuplets and semiquaver sextuplets. The best way to practice them is through vocalisation using work syllables to stand for each note.

Bars 41-42

ta-ti – vi-o-lin – se-mi-qua-ver – se-mi-qua-ver – se-mi-qua-ver – hip-po-pot-a-mus – se-mi-qua-ver  
– hip-po-pot-a-mus

Bar 46

se-mi-qua-ver - se-mi-qua-ver – hig-gl-di-pig-gl-di - hig-gl-di-pig-gl-di

*Example 6 - Spoken rhythm exercises derived from rhythms taken from bars 33-49*

Not all of the studies I have written involve the violin, as I think that sometimes practising away from the instrument can be very useful. The purpose of the above study is to be completely accurate with the rhythm in this scalar run passage. However sometimes the transitions between the triplet quavers, semiquavers, semiquaver quintuplets and semiquaver sextuplets can be hard to hear when you are concentrating on the notes and the bowing at the same time.

I developed this study using the 'chant' technique I use to help my pupils work out rhythms by themselves, by putting words to the groups of notes. So two quavers become 'ta-ti', triplet quavers become 'vi-o-lin', four semiquavers become 'se-mi-qua-ver', five semiquavers become 'hip-po-pot-a-mus' and six semiquavers become 'hig-gl-di-pig-gl-di'. I then wrote out the most difficult rhythmic passages as words with each beat clearly indicated.

To practice this passage I put a metronome on and say the words for the rhythm in time, making sure the first syllable of each group lands on the 'tick' of the metronome. As I become more used to how the rhythm goes I speed up the metronome gradually. Once I have the rhythm fully mastered I will start to clap the rhythm instead of saying the words, and then once that step is mastered I'll move onto playing the rhythm on open strings, before finally adding the notes and articulation back in (See Audio example 5).

I find this study and this method of practising particularly helpful as it gives a good grounding for the passage and gets the rhythmic structure ingrained in my brain, meaning that the passage overall is far more stable.

## Larger Studies

(See Appendix 5)

I have also written a larger study to focus on that includes all of the semiquaver passages from the concerto. This allows you to concentrate solely on finger dexterity and intonation and keep the fast difficult passages at a high standard.

I developed this study by taking all of the scalar and chordal semiquaver passages and writing them out, with a few additional joining notes to make the melodic lines meet. I have deliberately omitted all the bowing as, like the previous finger dexterity study, I would use a similar varying set of bowings, in order to achieve complete freedom and comfort in the left hand.

I practice this study by first of all starting at a very slow tempo, and with a metronome working through the whole piece making sure the intonation is correct and the fingers know exactly where to go. I then gradually speed up the tempo, still concentrating on intonation and finger clarity. Once the tempo is fast enough I start to add in different types of bowings, such as groups of two, three or four slurs, making sure that there is no decrease in quality of intonation or finger articulation.

This is a useful study because it provides a very clear and easy way to work solely on the virtuosic fast passages. It is also a study that I can return to over and over again and work on not only the concerto, but general finger articulation and intonation.

In my 'study book' I have arranged the studies chronologically (there are many more, the above are only a sample), working through the movement as the book goes on. However at the back there is an index indicating where all of the studies on similar techniques occur.



## Conclusions

The outcome I was expecting was that I'd write and develop the entire book of studies and then start to regularly use them in my practice, especially in daily warm up sessions. However the process of writing the studies themselves changed my practice technique. Because I was giving a lot of attention to the way I practice a single section of music, it made me think more about everything I was playing, thus resulting in more effective practice all round. My general quality of practice has gone up significantly. I still use the studies as warm ups however, alongside scales and whichever other etude I happen to be working on that day, and the difference in my playing of the Sibelius has improved as well. As I pick up the concerto at various points throughout the year (usually for auditions or an exam) I have noticed that my playing isn't as 'rusty' as it used to be and I can very quickly get the concerto back up to 'performance standard' rather than taking about a month, like I did before.

I have also discovered that analysis is an incredibly useful practice technique. By breaking down the piece into it's individual technical elements I developed a far greater understanding of the work than I otherwise would have done with standard practice. This is something I am going to take forward into everything I am learning as it not only improves practice efficiency, but also means that the improvements in my playing tend to be longer lasting.

Another thing that is also improving is my general technique. Now, again thanks to developing the studies I am thinking more carefully about the technical aspect of playing in everything I do. and therefore by concentrating more on what is needed my general technique has also improved at a faster rate.

I am also able to easily link repertoire and technical improvement, rather than working on them as if they were two separate things (which they aren't, as musicality and technical playing should come hand in hand).

The creation and use of these studies has also helped in auditions. Due to the technical nature of many of my studies I feel a lot more confident playing the piece in a pressured situation. This is because I have a far more solid technical grounding in the piece and even if I get nervous, my fingers are now far better trained to keep going, rather than stumbling over a passage. I feel far better prepared and in the run up to an audition I no longer play the piece obsessively over and over again, something which I had a tendency to do in order to 'check I could still do it'. Instead I can choose a study and really focus in on it, which will help my nerves, my overall technique and the playing of the concerto.

I intend to create a few more sets of studies (for example the Mozart concerto in A) and I will definitely change my writing technique. I will write in closer conjunction with my instrument from the start and link the playing and writing. This will mean the studies are more useful and I will know immediately what works and what does not without needing an extended trial period.

Overall the studies have been a great aid to me. They haven't replaced my practice of the concerto, but instead they compliment it and even when I'm not 'working' on the piece they maintain its standard. They complement my general practice as well, allowing me to start every day focussing on technique, whilst still contributing to my overall audition development allowing me to use other studies to focus on specific aspects of my playing.

## Where next?

Following on from this I want to continue to use the studies and see what further benefits they provide me with. I will also go back through the book and make notes if there are any that after a certain period of time don't serve me as well as they used to, and work out why, and what could be done to change that. I would also like to create additional studies to focus on the mechanical aspects of playing the violin, such as arm relaxation, contact point, arm weight and finger and wrist flexibility.

As I continue to prepare for auditions I will continue down this path of analytical practice. It will help me to be more focussed and efficient, as well as saving me hours of 'playing things through' in the practice room.

I want to take the studies for the Sibelius violin concerto a step further and trial them thoroughly over the summer, making sure they are all as efficient as they can be and provide a useful purpose. After that I am considering publishing them either as an electronic book, or on a blog.

I also intend to write studies for my other pieces of standard audition repertoire such as the Mozart Violin Concerto in A, and common excerpts like Don Juan or Tchaikovsky Nutcracker Overture. Doing this I think will continue to improve my practice and general playing and evolve the way that I think about practising these pieces that I have played for years.



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## **Submitted Recordings**

*Audio Example 1* - Example of how I practice and use the intonation and shifting exercise in the opening bars of the piece (Example 1, page 13)

*Audio Example 2* – Example of how I practice and use the shifting exercise taken from bars 71-75 (Example 2, page 14)

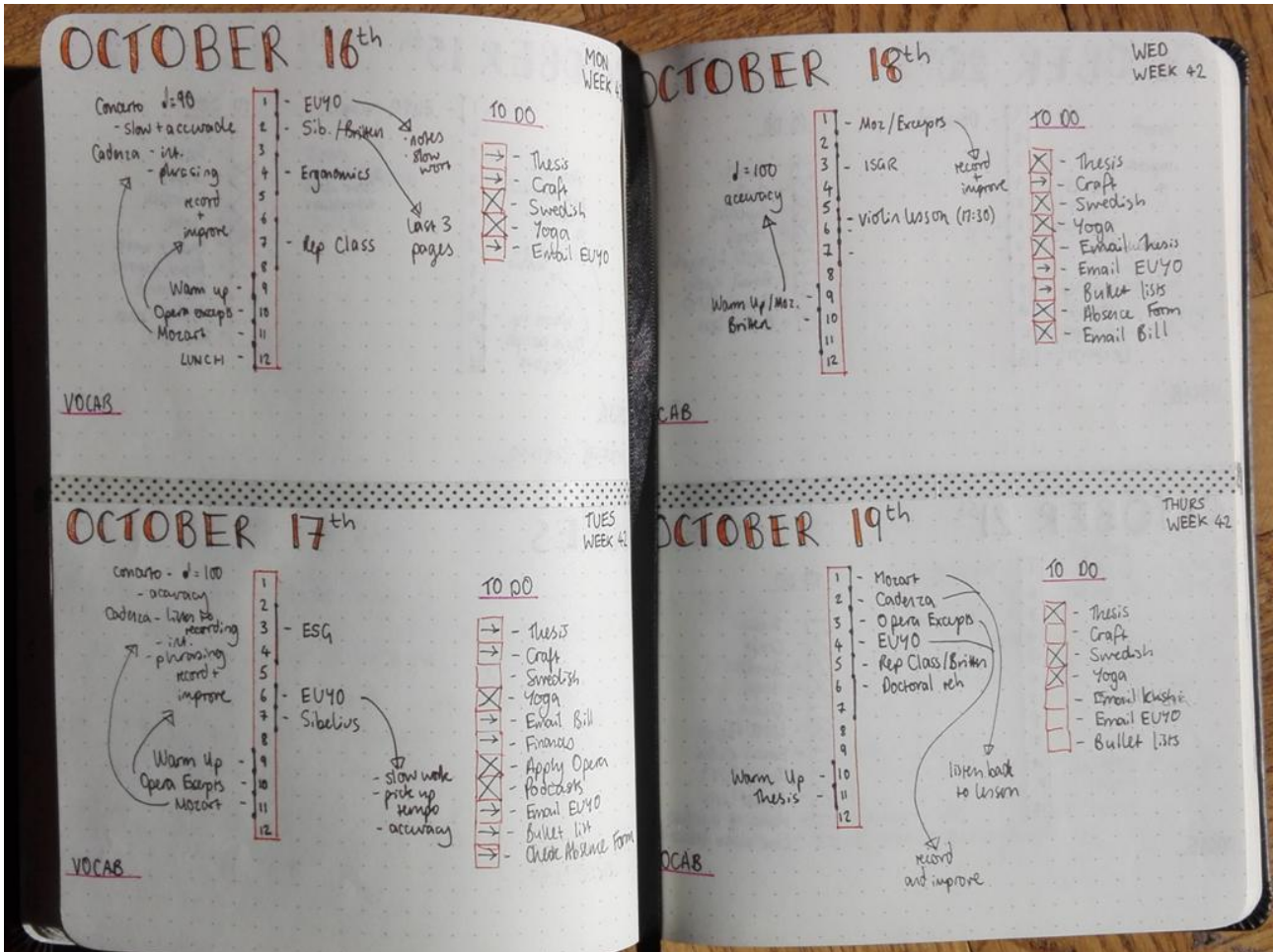
*Audio Example 3* – Example of how I practice and use the left hand articulation exercise taken from bars 53-58 (Example 3, page 15)

*Audio Example 4* – Example of how I practice and use the bow control exercise taken from bars 59-70 (Example 4, page 17)

*Audio Example 5* – Example of how I practice and use the spoken rhythm exercises derived from bars 33-49 (Example 6, page 19)

# Appendix

## Appendix 1



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# Violinkonzert

d-Moll

Solo-Violine Franz von Vecsey gewidmet

## I

Jean Sibelius, Op. 47

Allegro moderato  $\text{♩} = 88$

1. Viol.

*mf dolce ed espressivo*

*cresc.*

*dim. - poco*

*p subito*

*più f*

*a piacere*

*crescendo molto*

*a tempo*

*veloce*

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### Appendix 3

60 bpm	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100	105	110	115	120	125	130	135	140

Also, at each speed practice with the following bowings:

- Separate bows
- Slurred, 2 to a bow
- Slurred, 3 to a bow
- Slurred, 4 to a bow
- Slurred, 5 to a bow

The image shows a musical score for violin practice, consisting of four staves of music in 4/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The first staff contains two measures of eighth-note triplets, each marked with a '3'. The second staff contains two measures of eighth-note triplets, each marked with a '3'. The third staff contains two measures of eighth-note quintuplets, each marked with a '5'. The fourth staff contains two measures of eighth-note sextuplets, each marked with a '6'. The music is written in a standard treble clef with a key signature of one flat.



Appendix 4

Handwritten musical score for Appendix 4, consisting of two pages of music. The left page includes:

- harmonic slide**: A musical exercise with notes and slurs, accompanied by the instruction: "\* Practice with + without slurs".
- march**: A section titled "march - practice gradually increasing tempo." featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- imitation**: A section with the instruction "be up" and a complex rhythmic exercise.

The right page includes:

- low count + dynamic**: A musical exercise with notes and slurs.
- arpeggio**: A section with the instruction "\* Slapping and plucking solo like to get psychopaths rhythm" and a rhythmic exercise.
- bars 107 - 115**: A section with the instruction "A note by note drawing the first focusing on intonation and vibrato" and a rhythmic exercise.
- changing sounds**: A section with the instruction "PIECE BY PIECE" and a rhythmic exercise.

Appendix 5

Please see separate file: Grace Buttler Larger Study