**1. Introduction**

I discovered the violin at the age of seven when I went with my primary school to see an exhibit of Stradivaris (it was, I discovered much later, the famous Axelrod collection). As soon as I heard these incredible violins I was hooked. More than anything, it was the sound itself that fascinated me. I soon became obsessed with violinists such as Fritz Kreisler, Mischa Elman, and Jascha Heifetz - especially Heifetz’s early recordings of Sibleius, Tchaikovsky, and Glazunov Concertos (my favourite CD for many years). The apparently limitless variegation of nuance and colour, and the deep emotional fervour in this kind of playing fuelled my interest in what I would now call an ‘ideal violin sound’. In light of this concept, I have devoted myself to studying the practices and traditions from which this quality of sound developed. There seems to be a conventional acceptance that the technical level of violin playing has never been higher than it is today.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, how we conceive of violin sound, the nature of the ‘ideal sound’, and the technical means by which violinists produce this sound have changed dramatically over the last century.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This thesis was motivated in part by a desire to situate the evolution of these changes in the context of my own playing. I was drawn to Bartók’s violin works, and especially to his First Sonata for violin and piano (1921), because it was written at a time when violin playing was changing significantly. Bartók was immersed in a world where both the ‘old’ and ‘new’ traditions of violin playing impacted profoundly on his violinist-collaborators. Using Bartók’s First Violin Sonata as a point of focus, I consider broader questions of musical language, advanced learning, and something T.S. Eliot calls an artist’s ‘historical sense’ as they are involved in my engagement with musical tradition. I explore the sound-world in which Bartók operated and the key violinists with whom he worked. I explore the nature of advanced learning and examine my own engagement with three eminent violinists connected to the Hungarian tradition, and thus connected to Bartók’s collaborators. These one-to-one sessions provide a wealth of material through which I begin to see elements of a musical language taking shape. Over the course of my research, I recorded Bartók’s First Sonata four times. These recordings chart the changes in my performances over a four-year immersion in this particular musical dialect.

The guiding hypothesis of this research is that the ideal violin sound can be fruitfully pursued by consciously developing my own ‘historical sense’. I explore this hypothesis by focusing on Bartók’s First Violin Sonata for several reasons: (i) there is available evidence about the composition and earliest performances of this sonata; (ii) there is available evidence, including audio recordings, about the Hungarian violin playing tradition out of which the sonata emerged; (iii) there are authoritative living exponents of this tradition for me to consult, and these performers are linked to the earliest performers of this sonata; and (iv) this particular sonata is a substantive piece of music that merits an extended period of study. In short, there is a body of material available to make it possible for me to chart the technical and aesthetic development of my historical sense for it over a four year period.

The methodology is implicit in the expository order of this dissertation. The first four chapters of this thesis each focus on one element of the tradition: (i) the concept of tradition and how it applies to music and to performance; (ii) the impact of Bartók’s violinist-collaborators on his concept of string sound; (iii) the technical background and traditions associated with these violinist-collaborators; and (iv) the complex role of pedagogy in passing down elements of a distinct musical dialect. The fifth chapter of the thesis explores my own recordings of the work and reflects on the four-year process of engagement that this study details. This study primarily addresses the cultivation of *my* *own* ‘historical sense’ in relation to a particular musical language, and as such, a structural analysis of the music *itself* (Bartók’s First Sonata)is not relevant to my study and has not been included. Equally, as this is essentially a case study of my own learning process, I felt that adding more ‘controls’ in either the performances themselves or in the analyses of the performances would not accurately reflect my own experiences as a performing musician.

My immersion in the Hungarian tradition dates back to my undergraduate studies in Manchester. Before university my primary violin teacher was Atis Bankas (pupil of Semyon Snitkovsky in Moscow, who was a pupil and assistant to David Oistrakh). I was first exposed to the Hungarian tradition in 2005, when I joined the studio of Yair Kless (pupil of André Gertler, who studied with Jenő Hubay, and a pupil of Ivan Galamian). Then in 2009 I began studying with György Pauk (pupil of Ede Zathureczky, who also studied with Hubay). Kless and Pauk, though they were both taught by Hubay pupils, play and teach in very different styles. Moreover, they do not seem to share a common vision of what constitutes an ‘ideal violin sound’ or an ideal musical interpretation. These differences raised questions in my mind about just what it *is* to be part of a musical tradition. How and to what extent do our teachers influence our approach to sound and musicianship? How can I, as a musician with a strong sense of individuality, relate to a tradition? Indeed, more generally, we need to ask what is a tradition? And is there always a conflict between individual musical expression and participation in a musical tradition?

**i. Virtuosity**

Giving special focus for these questions is the ideal of virtuosity, for *virtuosi* are situated both within the context of a tradition and apart from other practitioners. Similarly, a *virtuoso* performance (as distinct from a *virtuoso* performer) is both measured against other performances and stands apart from those performances.[[3]](#footnote-3) Generally, virtuosity and *virtuoso* are terms of praise, but not always so. Describing someone as a ‘*virtuoso*’ or commenting on a musician’s virtuosity can sometimes imply a criticism: the Oxford English Dictionary includes the negative connotation, ‘the pursuit of technique at the expense of emotional depth or creativity’ in its definition of virtuosity.[[4]](#footnote-4) Even its main definition, ‘exceptional technical skill in music or another artistic pursuit,’ focuses exclusively on technical skill. Amongst my professional musician colleagues, this definition (and sometimes elements of the negative connotation) seems to be widely accepted.[[5]](#footnote-5) This is not the conception of virtuosity that informs my own performance ideal, but it must be borne in mind. Technical skill is necessary for producing the violin sound I desire, but it is not sufficient.

Other contexts and conceptions of virtuosity suggest more subtle connotations, especially if we consider the relationship between virtuosity and virtue. The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy notes that ‘what is accepted and goes back to ancient times is the idea of virtues as dispositions, rather than skills or capacities.’[[6]](#footnote-6) This conception of virtue as a disposition reflects the etymological roots of virtuosity, which originates from the Homeric *areté* (i.e., inspired by Ares – a warrior’s excellence) through to Platonic and Aristotelian *areté* (a citizens’ excellence or excellence as a human being), and to the Roman *virtus* (suggesting manliness or moral perfection). In English, moral excellence or perfection has been the dominant connotation, reinforced by heavy usage from moralists and moral theorists.[[7]](#footnote-7) The primary exceptions are derived from the arts, and in particular music, by use of the terms *virtuoso* and virtuosity.

Vernon A. Howard, an American philosopher of education, suggests that the strong link between virtuosity and skill can lead to oversimplifications about the nature of virtuosity, which he thinks is more complex. In the following passage from ‘Virtuosity as a Performance Concept: A Philosophical Analysis,’ he examines the constituent elements of virtuosity:

The first thing that comes to mind when thinking about virtuosity is an extraordinarily high level of technical proficiency on an instrument or at singing. Left to that, virtuosity would be a skill, a facility that may be refined through practice to a high degree of speed and accuracy, like typing or perfecting one’s backhand at tennis. Perhaps that minimalist view accounts for the pejorative connotation of the word referring to “excessive attention to technique” or special effects.[[8]](#footnote-8) High technical proficiency is nonetheless a necessary condition of virtuosity in performance – usually measured against a long tradition of performance training and accomplishment.

Left out of the minimalist view is the role of *critical* skill, or judgement in the deployment of one’s facilities. Imagination as an element of control in the deployment of facilities is also an important ingredient in the growth of such judgement, the whole amounting to what is commonly called “musicianship.” In effect, musicianship is interpretive judgement exercised in the deployment of technical skills. Such judgement is by no means unique to musical or artistic performance, but it is differently manifest in different fields. As contrasted with the critical skills of the historian, the psychotherapist, or the solicitor, which are manifest in what they say or write – in their explanations, arguments, or theories – musicianship is manifest in execution, in that specific variety of thoughtful action I have called performance of a work.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Howard differentiates between technical proficiency and technical competency, noting that ‘one can be technically competent without being highly proficient.’ This difference is a matter of degree. A performer can possess either of these levels of skill alongside musicianship; equally, a performer can possess technical skills in the absence of musicianship. Musicianship without at least technical competency, however, is inconceivable.[[10]](#footnote-10) But Howard does not equate the possession of the skills of technical proficiency and musicianship with virtuosity. For him, virtuosity is not merely a level of skill. What is more – and this is especially pertinent to my own work – he thinks virtuosity is linked to tradition and learning:

…Both musicianship and technical proficiency, as conforming to acceptable standards, can be taught; virtuosity, precisely because it exceeds normal expectations and standards, cannot be taught. Like genius, it is learned, perhaps coached along, but not taught in the way that most elements of technique and musicianship can be taught. Virtuosity comes more by suggestion and example emanating from tradition than by instruction, however assiduous the latter may have been. Virtuosity, therefore, is an achievement, not a skill (though plenty of skill is involved!).[[11]](#footnote-11)

Howard maintains that virtuosity is learned, but at the same time, cannot be taught.[[12]](#footnote-12) This seems at first paradoxical: a constituent element of virtuosity is technical proficiency, which can certainly be taught; but in describing virtuosity itself as something that is learned but not taught, Howard is pointing to the difference between convention and tradition. Technical proficiency can be satisfied by meeting conventional standards, and along with musicianship, it can be taught using any number of didactic instructional approaches. Tradition, however, is more amorphous than convention and the virtuosity which can emanate from it is different in kind from proficiency as measured by conventions. A pair of analogies clarifies the point here: Its analogue in science is a major discovery or theoretical breakthrough. Like a high jumper who sets a world record, a virtuoso performance sets a standard for subsequent performers.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Accordingly, virtuosity is understood against the backdrop of an historical tradition. It is achieved by learning within the context of a tradition but not reducible to conventions that have emerged from the tradition, so it cannot be passed down by didactic instruction. Additionally, since this research focuses on virtuosity with reference to my performance rather than to me as a performer, I need to understand tradition in combination with authenticity.

**ii. Tradition and Authenticity**

It is difficult to define tradition and authenticity, both in general and as they apply in music.[[14]](#footnote-14) Both terms have been used so extensively and in such different contexts that they are in danger of losing all meaning. Each term is difficult to define in isolation. But if we consider them together, and see how they are interdefinable, it is possible to clarify the conceptual picture. Let us first focus briefly on tradition as it applies in music.

In his essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ T. S. Eliot, explores the role of tradition with regard to the composition of poetry.[[15]](#footnote-15) What Eliot says in that context is relevant to the context of musical performance. According to Eliot, a tradition is more than codified knowledge, i.e., the sort of thing found in a textbook. Because a tradition is not reducible to a set of formulas, which can then be memorized and applied as convention dictates, it cannot be transmitted didactically from generation to generation. From the point of view of a student – or even a seasoned practitioner – he says that ‘it [tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor.’[[16]](#footnote-16) An artist needs an ‘historical sense’. For Eliot, the cultivation of an historical sense ‘makes [an artist] traditional. And it is at the same time what makes [an artist] most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.’[[17]](#footnote-17) He goes on to clarify that operating within a tradition ‘involves, in the first place, the historical sense… and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.’ As a result, the past and the present are combined without one melding into the other or one dominating the other. Thus a performing artist with an historical sense must be conscious of both the past and the present, and of the *distinct* contribution of each. Vernon A. Howard echoes some of Eliot’s ideas when he writes about the nature of virtuosity as being inherently tied to and learned from tradition.

In musical performance, we cannot mention ‘tradition’ or ‘historical sense’ without immediately calling to mind the movement promoting historical period performance. This trend and Eliot’s ideas must be kept separate, for each implies something very different about authenticity. ‘Historical authenticity in performance’ often refers to a movement that became popular in the 1970s and 1980s in which music (usually early music) is performed ‘according to the reconstructed performing traditions and conditions of its own time and place.’[[18]](#footnote-18) Discussion of the motivations and influence of the movement is beyond the scope of this study, but it has undoubtedly had an impact on the trepidation with which musicians today tend to approach the idea of authenticity. In ‘On Letting the Music Speak for Itself: Some Reflections on Musicology and Performance’ Richard Taruskin describes the conflict between scholarship and the imagination. He writes that ‘music has to be imaginatively recreated in order to be retrieved, and here is where conflicts are likely to arise between the performer’s imagination and the scholar’s conscience, even (or especially) when the two are housed in a single mind.’[[19]](#footnote-19) Expanding on the nature of research and on its limitations, he explores what constitutes an authentic performance:

Research alone has never given, and is never likely to give (again for obvious reasons) enough information to achieve that wholeness of conception and that sureness of style – in a word, that fearlessness – any authentic, which is to say authoritative, performance must embody. Here is a paradox: which is more “authentic,” an historical reconstructionist performance of, say *Messiah*, or a Three Choirs Festival performance? Which, in other words, enjoys the commonality of work/performer, and (lest we forget) audience, the certainty of experience and of expectation that lends the proceedings the “cool, inevitable intention” Jeffrey Mark described? The Three Choirs performance surely speaks for a culture, not Handel’s perhaps, but that of the performers and their audience, certainly. It gives what Eliot called a sense “not only of the pastness of the past, but its presence.” The modernist, avant-garde, historical reconstruction of *Messiah* can only evoke the pastness of the past, and will therefore appeal not to the esthetic sense but merely to antiquarian curiosity – unless it derives its sustenance not only from whatever evidence musicological research may provide, but from imaginative leaps that will fill in the gaps research by its very nature must leave. Otherwise we will have not a performance but a documentation of the state of knowledge. As long as the reconstructionist performer holds himself to the same strict standards of accountability we rightly demand of any scholar, his efforts will be bent not on doing what the music was meant to do, but on simply “getting it right,” that is, on achieving what the mainstream performer takes for granted. He will end up, if he is lucky, with what the mainstream performer starts out with.

Taruskin wrote this over thirty years ago, but these conflicts are as evident today as when he first stated them. Now more than then, perhaps, the conflict between being true to the manuscript (or ‘consulting the oracle,’ as he refers to it in the same paper) and employing musical intuition and imagination seems to extend to the whole of the repertoire. But musicians can, according to Taruskin, bestow authenticity upon themselves by *providing themselves with tradition*. Here he echoes Eliot on the importance of developing one’s historical sense in the course of *earning* one’s tradition rather than simply inheriting it. Taruskin describes this view of authenticity in the following passage:

The most authoritative and compelling reconstructionist performances of old music, as well as the most controversial, have always been those that have proceeded from a vividly imagined – that is frankly to say imaginary – but coherent performance style. They provide themselves with Tradition, in the Eliot sense, and bestow authenticity upon themselves. Where such performers do not know the composer’s intentions they are unafraid to have intentions of their own, and to treat them with a comparable respect.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Here, Taruskin describes tradition and authenticity not as isolated, objective monuments, but as elements of a more personal creativity. Additionally, the theoretical relationship between the two concepts suggests a source for the artistic, rather than merely academic judgment.

Taruskin’s views of authenticity and tradition consciously pick up Eliot’s idea of tradition that is fluid and reflexive. For Eliot, art and mind ‘changes, and this change is a development which abandons nothing en route’.[[21]](#footnote-21) But further than that, he suggests that ‘the past [is] altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past’.[[22]](#footnote-22) This suggestion of Eliot’s, along with his emphasis on ‘the historical sense,’ is key to my approach to Bartók, which is why I devote so much energy to studying the ‘Hungarian school’ (and which qualifies as a tradition in Eliot’s sense of the word). The idea of musical tradition as a *fluid or dynamic entity*, much like a language that must be acquired with practice rather than rote study, expresses the kernel of my own approach to the learning documented in this study: to develop my own historical sense of the compositional elements and enduring musical standards that can guide my own performance of Bartok’s First Violin Sonata. This project is thus a case study in the cultivation of my consciousness of the past in light of present performance practices. In turn, I expect the elucidation of these different elements to foster further development throughout my career.[[23]](#footnote-23)

**iii. Language Learning, Music Mastery**

A single performance of music is essentially a series of quasi-linguistic expressions that operate within an evolving network of devices and rules of operation. To a comparable extent, a musical tradition is a quasi-linguistic tradition. Languages are not fixed, and learning one is not simply a transfer of skill or codified information from current speakers to new speakers. Learning to perform music is like learning a language in this respect: learning is inseparable from doing, a great deal of personal experimentation is required, and the role for didactic instruction becomes more diminished as one develops to higher levels. Teachers can guide a novice by correcting for subject-predicate disagreement or by conjugating verbs, but the real work must be done by the learner. Learning a language is, as Ludwig Wittgenstein insists, to enter into and to participate in a form of life.[[24]](#footnote-24) This idea that language is a form of life reflects the same dynamic fluidity as the concept of artistic tradition described above. The structural comparisons are worth exploring. While didactic instruction plays a limited role in the development of basic language fluency, it may not have any role in the attaining of mastery. Mastery, whether in fluency or musicianship, is not reducible to acquiring codified knowledge or a fixed set of practices. Mastery requires the *integration* of a student into a tradition or a form of life.

It is helpful here to consider musical language and tradition through Wittgenstein’s analogy of an ancient city:

Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The city Wittgenstein imagines here has a distant past that persists and remains central to its current life, and it has a more recent past that is connected to its oldest streets. The more recent additions to the city are more accessible to our current understanding, and they provide clues for making sense of older patterns. Similarly, in a musical tradition the recent past is evident in its established practitioners, and these practitioners are linked to those who came before them. The comparison between music and language is, in this way, crucially connected to the ‘historical sense’ that T. S. Eliot advocates and which is central to this study.

Understanding the level or standard of the learning that forms the basis of my study is important. Although I refer to my interactions with György Pauk, Yair Kless, and András Keller as lessons, these interactions were not typical lessons between a student-teacher in the sense that is often associated with instrumental teaching. In the pedagogical context, the aim is to develop a student’s competence. The method by which competence is developed incorporates a great deal of didactic instruction on the part of the teacher. By means of this instruction, habits are learned and acquired by the student. The final result is competence, which is analogous to linguistic fluency.

By contrast, each interaction between myself and Pauk, Kless and Keller was between a performer and a mentor. The aim here is excellence or virtuosity. Excellence develops as a result of advice and feedback from the mentor that leads to technical and artistic refinement. The ultimate result of the performer-mentor interaction is perhaps best described as that of a lexicographer’s understanding of the etymological roots and origins of terms. The following chart differentiates the student-teacher relation and the performer-mentor relationship as I understand them:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Student : Teacher  | Performer : Mentor  |
| 1. Competence | 1. Excellence  |
| 2. Didactic instruction  | 2. Critical feedback  |
| 3. Habits learned/acquired  | 3. Technical and artistic refinement  |
| RESULT: fluency, e.g., a competent speaker’s ability to communicate in a wide range of contexts  | RESULT: mastery, e.g., a lexicographer’s understanding of the etymological roots and origins of terms  |

**iv. Early twentieth century trends and Bartók as a case study**

I use my work on Bartók’s First Sonata as a case study in the kind of learning and engagement implicit in T. S. Eliot’s point that great labour is involved in acquiring an ‘historical sense.’[[26]](#footnote-26) In so doing, I develop my own interpretation of the work, with the conscious aim of developing a truly *virtuoso* performance. To this end, I approach the sonata from three angles: (1) a close study of the violinist-collaborators of the Hungarian school who played a formative role in the composition of the work; (2) study of the treatises that informed the violin playing of the time of its composition, especially within the Hungarian school; and (3) documented sessions with three mentors who represent this tradition in its current state.

**1) Bartók’s Violinist-collaborators**

As a pianist, Bartók’s conception of string sound was not borne of the kind of intimate experience of a professionally trained string player. Nevertheless, close friendships and working relationships with a number of violinists helped Bartók to better understand the mechanics, and more importantly the distinct sound-world, of violin playing. In this regard, Bartók’s conception embodies the spirit of violin playing from the early part of the twentieth century. My guiding hypothesis here is that the technique, sound, and musicianship of Bartók’s key violinist-collaborators are constitutive elements of the musical dialect of Bartók’s violin works.

I have identified three key violinists with whom Bartók was associated.[[27]](#footnote-27) Each of them played a significant role in Bartók’s musical life. Jelly d’Aranyi was the inspiration for both of Bartók’s sonatas for violin and piano. Joseph Szigeti was Bartók’s long-time friend and dedicatee of the Second Rhapsody. Finally, Zoltán Székely performed extensively with Bartók, with whom he shared many ideas about music and music-making. Székely was also the dedicatee of the First Rhapsody and the instigator behind the composition of Bartók’s Violin Concerto.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Each of these violinists, though, serves a further purpose here. In Jelly d’Aranyi, we see a violinist who exemplifies the balance of factors that give an artist an ‘historical sense’: she had an awareness of and a deep appreciation for her own musical tradition through a connection to Joachim; moreover, perhaps her most striking trait throughout her career was her individuality. So she embodies the two elements central to Eliot’s essay; i.e., tradition and individual talent.

Joseph Szigeti was central to some of the fundamental musical transformations of twentieth century violin playing. His natural inclination towards observation and reflection led to the publication of written works. These books chart significant changes in string playing and in musical approach during the first half of the twentieth century. Thus he documents key developments in the instrumental tradition for the era during which the sonata was written.

From the age of seventeen Zoltán Székely was a close personal friend to Bartók. Bartók must have recognized something in the young Székely that resonated with his own thoughts about music and performance. In choosing to play with the relatively unknown young violinist, Bartók sacrificed the potential boost to his career that playing with a well-known soloist can often bring. Additionally, this long and deep musical association means that Székely provided for Bartók the most intimate example of the violin sound.

By examining the training, playing characteristics, and motivations of these violinists, I aim to elucidate Bartók’s own conception of string sound.

**2) Treatises, Writings, and Recollections**

The evolution of violin playing has always been of great concern to players, teachers, and critics, and in the first quarter of the twentieth century these concerns were particularly acute. Many of the most important and influential *practicing* musicians wrote at length about the evolution of music and of violin playing.[[29]](#footnote-29) While their eighteenth and nineteenth century predecessors wrote mostly instrumental *manuals,* the early twentieth century writers often presented something quite different, taking both a broader approach to their subject and a narrower focus on their own personal engagement with the music: they write about their own lives; they speculate on the history and future of music; they expound on the role and duty of musicians; and they comment on the subtler, more abstract details of interpretation. Joseph Joachim, Carl Flesch, Leopold Auer, Lucien Capet, and Bartók’s collaborators Joseph Szigeti and Zoltán Székely were all prominent performers. Their recollections and writings about the changes they were witnessing in violin playing reveal a time of great transformation.

Joachim wrote in 1905 about interpreting music *in the spirit of its creator.*[[30]](#footnote-30)He shows a willingness, perhaps even a desire, to explore the somewhat ambiguous or intangible facets of music making; this heightened sense of the performer as a kind of spiritual medium reflected a new approach to musical writing in the early twentieth century, where intangible ideas and the very tangible physical aspects of violin playing are often juxtaposed.

Similarly, Lucien Capet describes in florid language the difference between the *détaché* and the slur.[[31]](#footnote-31) He writes:

The secret and holy language of the divine element, manifested in a more or less tangible manner, exists in our Art; it is sufficient for us to direct our imagination toward certain interior contemplations, in order that our superior Being smells the beneficent vapors of this mysterious language. We have within ourselves something which understands the word of each manifestation of nature, and it is this interior symphony that one must hear! …it is only a question of the *means* based on a perception of exterior sensations. But the profound visitation of these [physical] sensations will bring with it a knowledge which will allow the world of emotions to reveal itself through the *world of physical sensations,* like a ray of sunlight through the stained glass windows of a church![[32]](#footnote-32)

The relationship between intellect, natural feeling, and physical technique is complex and reflexive, and it is often unclear when examining changes in violin playing which element has catalyzed a larger set of changes. What is clear, though, is that the traditions and conventions of violin playing evolve slowly.

Amongst Bartók’s violinist-collaborators,Joseph Szigeti was a particularly astute musical observer. He devotes many pages of his book *With Strings Attached* to the question of violinistic evolution, noting at one point:

I would go so far as to suggest that such seemingly unrelated things as the cinema organ, the various electrical instruments for the home, the infinite possibilities of tone doctoring and amplifying (after all, it was the microphone that made crooning what it is), the prevalence of the saxophone tone in popular music – that all these have changed the general attitude toward violin-playing more than is generally realized. It would lead too far to investigate the changes in our playing style that the universal use of metal strings has effected. The overamplification of the solo parts in concerto recordings – obviously a distortion of musical values – is another of these negative influences.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Szigeti was clearly concerned about some of the changes he was witnessing in violin playing by the middle of the twentieth century. But it was the playing he heard in the early part of the century in Berlin – by Mischa Elman, Fritz Kreisler, and Eugene Ysaÿe – that changed Szigeti’s violinistic world.[[34]](#footnote-34) He says that hearing these violinists was like the opening of a door.[[35]](#footnote-35) He describes not simply ‘old’ and ‘new’ styles of playing; rather, he describes *three* eras of violin playing: the playing he knew in his Budapest days (pre-1905 Berlin experience); the playing typified by Elman, Kreisler, and Ysaÿe; and the more recent (1940s-50 perhaps) style that was just beginning to become popular.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Bartók was immersed in a world of string playing at the Liszt Academy that was just beginning to feel the influence of the playing that Szigeti witnessed in 1905. Szigeti and his colleagues in Hubay’s class were on the cusp of this change: they were deeply rooted in the playing style associated with the previous generation, but they were also beginning to feel drawn to the highly individualistic and fervently emotional style introduced by Elman, Kreisler, and Ysaÿe. In Chapter 3 I examine the violinistic trends at the turn of the twentieth century. I explore the possibilities and the limitations of some of the most influential written treatises that instigated or propagated these trends. And I attempt, by detailed examination and experimentation, to gain further insight into the conventions and traditions that formed the backdrop to the changes in violin playing that Szigeti describes.

**3) Documented Lessons**

I examine advanced learning and musical language in my own interactions with György Pauk, Yair Kless, and András Keller.[[37]](#footnote-37) While each of these artists has a direct link to the performance traditions associated with Bartók’s works, my primary motivation in playing for them was not simply in relation to historical performance details. Rather, I used the primary source material (Bartók’s music) as a focal point for broader questions about musical language, the complex and reciprocal relationship between ‘technique’ and ‘interpretation’, and for focusing my ideas about teaching, learning, critical feedback, and mastery. By placing the documented lessons side-by-side, I was able to unpack complex interactions and gestures and to identify each teacher’s key points of focus and the concepts that were common to all three musicians. Key points of interest emerged, ranging from the more technical to the abstract, and a categorisation of these points offers a guide to the key ideas and to how each idea was expressed. Alongside the written material, I provide corresponding video documentation of the lessons being analyzed.

Each mentor’s unique approach to both the music and to critical feedback means that a side-by-side comparison of the three lessons is complex. Not only do the mentors differ in how they express themselves verbally, but some rely to a great extent on non-verbal and sometimes very subtle expression. This makes it necessary to interpret not only what my mentors say, but also their gestures, their demonstrations (both on the violin and vocally), and the finer details of our nuanced interactions.

The process of describing and interpreting gestures, demonstrations, and interactions is complex. My descriptions are informed by many years of musical experience, by my relationship with each mentor and my in-depth knowledge of their teaching patterns and styles that emerges only through extended study, and by countless other factors. Naturally, I felt less comfortable describing the intention of András Keller’s gestures, since I had not previously studied with him. Conversely, I realized when analyzing György Pauk’s lesson that the majority of what he communicates to me is transmitted by unspoken, often very subtle gestures that I am immediately familiar with. It may be worth reiterating here that while I strive to examine this material as transparently and completely as possible, the aim of this analysis is not to look objectively at the performance practice issues raised here, but to explore the fundamentally abstract areas of musical language and learning and to elucidate my *own* learning process.

I have included full lesson transcripts in Appendix A.[[38]](#footnote-38)

**My documented performance material - commentary**

I recorded Bartók’s First Sonata four times over the course of this study, each time with pianist Tadashi Imai. In my commentary I compare the four recordings, listening for changes both in my interpretation of the work and in my approach to this particular musical dialect. I consider the complex instigators and influences behind these changes, and reflect on my four-year engagement with the tradition.

1. Defining ‘technique’ is problematic; provisionally, let me stipulate it as facility, accuracy of intonation, smoothness of bowing, and reliability on stage. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For an example of this conventionally held belief, see appendix A for the transcript of the discussion between Pauk and László Somfai, recorded July 2011 at the Bartók Festival and Seminar in Szombathely, Hungary. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Recent scholarship on virtuosity includes the following:

D’Arcy Wood, Gillen. *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840. Virtue and Virtuosity.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Gooley, Dana. ‘The Battle Against Instrumental Virtuosity in the Early Nineteenth Century’, in *Franz Liszt and His World,* ed. Christopher Gibbs and Dana Gooley (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2006)

Howard, Vernon A. *Charm and Speed: Virtuosity in the Performing Arts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008)

Kawabata, Mai. *Paganini: the ‘demonic’ virtuoso.* (Rochester, New York: Boydell Press, 2013)

Marotto, Mark; Roos, Johan; Victor, Bart. ‘Collective Virtuosity in Organizations: A Study of Peak Performance in an Orchestra’, *Journal of Management Studies,* 44/3 (2007)

Perry, Jeffrey. ‘Paganini’s Quest: The Twenty-four Capricci per violin solo, Op. 1’, *19th Century Music,* 27 (2004) pp. 208-229

Samson, Jim. *Virtuosity and the Musical Work: The Transcendental Studies of Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Oxford *English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For an example of how the term ‘virtuosity’ is often used, see the review of Ray Chen’s disc, ‘Virtuoso’ [SONY 88697 72320 2] in *The Strad*, 01 February 2011, by David Denton. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy,* ed. Simon Blackburn *(Oxford*: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 948 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Alasdair Macintyre. *After Virtue; A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Oxford English Dictionary, as cited by Vernon A. Howard. No further information given. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Vernon A. Howard. ‘Virtuosity as a Performance Concept: A Philosophical Analysis,’ Philosophy of Music Education Review, 5/1 (1997) p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid*., pp. 46-47 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ibid*., p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The relationship between teaching, learning and virtue is central to Plato’s dialogues, especially the *Protagoras* and the *Meno*. See Plato, *Protagoras and Meno*, trans. Adam Beresford (London: Penguin Classics, 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Howard, *Op. cit*., p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Scholarly debate on issues of musical tradition and authenticity reached a peak in the 1980s and 90s. Journal articles and books on tradition and authenticity appear less frequently today, and there seems to be a general acceptance that the moral and philosophical issues surrounding the subjects have been debated to such an extent that there is little left to be said on the matter. Today, the debate seems to take a more personal, performer-driven approach, and the role of the performer’s own creativity and imagination in dealing with the concept of authenticity is given more weight. This can be seen in two significant recent works:

Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Musical Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) [this volume contains chapters by both musicologists and performers. They are: Colin Lawson, Robin Stowell, Nicholas Kenyon, William Weber, Corey Jamason, Natasha Loges, David Wright, Eleonora Rocconi, John Haines, Jeremy Summerly, Stefano Mengozzi, Jon Banks, Timothy McGee, Keith Polk, Owen Rees, Tim Carter, Richard Wistreich, David Ponsford, Jonathan Wainwright, Simon McVeigh, John Potter, Peter Walls, Michael Musgrave, Will Crutchfield, Ian Pace, Stephen Cottrell, Jane Manning, Anthony Payne, Roger Heaton, William Mival]

Peter Walls. *History, Imagination and the Performance of Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. T. S. Eliot. ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent*’, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Fifth Edition, Volume 2* (New York: Norton & Company, 1986) [M. H. Abrams, General Editor] [first published in the *Egoist,* 1919] [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Ibid*., p. 2207 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Ibid*., p. 2207 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Joseph Kerman. *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) p. 184 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Richard Taruskin. ‘On Letting the Music Speak for Itself: Some Reflections on Musicology and Performance,’ *The Journal of Musicology*, 1/3 (1982), p. 343 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Ibid*., p. 343 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Eliot, *op. cit*., p. 2208 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Ibid*., p. 2208 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Ibid*., p. 2209 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd. 1958) p. 8e No. 19 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Ibid*., p. 8e No. 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Eliot, *op. cit.* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Bartók was also associated with many other violinists throughout his career, including a number of lesser-known Hubay pupils. Amongst his most notable relationships were those with André Gertler (1907-1998) and Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999). I have chosen to focus on Jelly d’Aranyi, Joseph Szigeti, and Zoltán Szekely because of the wealth of documented material about Bartók’s professional and personal relationships with each of these violinists. The nature of his relationship with Gertler is less clear and, according to Yair Kless (Gertler’s pupil), Gertler may have exaggerated the extent of his association with Bartók quite considerably. Bartók’s association with Menuhin is closely tied to his Solo Sonata, which Menuhin commissioned. This collaboration took place shortly before Bartók’s death in 1945, and is therefore not as relevant to my study. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This work is sometimes referred to as Bartók’s Second Violin Concerto. As his first attempt at a violin concerto (the early work written for Stefi Geyer) was not performed or published in his lifetime, Bartók considered the later work his only Violin Concerto. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Notable works include:

Leopold Auer. *My Long Life in Music* (London: Duckworth, 1921)

Leopold Auer. *Violin Playing as I Teach It* (London: Duckworth, 1921)

Carl Flesch. *Die Kunst des Violinspiels*, ed. and trans. Frederick Martens(New York: Carl Fischer, 1930) [originally published Berlin: Ries & Erler, 1923 (volume 1) and 1928 (volume 2)]

Joseph Joachim and Andreas Moser. *Violin School in 3* Volumes, trans. Alfred Moffat(Berlin: Simrock, 1905) [originally published in German as *Violinschule in 3 Bänden*, Simrock, 1905]

Lucien Capet. *Superior Bowing Technique*, ed. Stephen Shipps, trans. Margaret Schmidt (U.S.A.: Encore Music Publishers, 2013) [originally published in French as *La Technique Supérieure de l’Archet*, Paris, 1916] [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Joseph Joachim and Andreas Moser. *Violin School in 3* Volumes, trans. Alfred Moffat(Berlin: Simrock, 1905) [originally published in German as *Violinschule in 3 Bänden*, Simrock, 1905] p. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. It is worth noting here that this difference – that is, playing either with one note per bow-stroke or playing with more than one note per bow-stroke – is very rarely given much thought in itself. Various *aspects* of the the *détaché* and the slur form the basics of bow technique and, as such, are often studied in minute detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Lucien Capet. *Superior Bowing Technique*, ed. Stephen Shipps, trans. Margaret Schmidt (U.S.A.: Encore Music Publishers, 2013) [originally published in French as *La Technique Supérieure de l’Archet*, Paris, 1916] p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Joseph Szigeti. *With Strings Attached; Reminiscences and Reflections* ( London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1949) pp. 98-99 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For Szigeti’s account of this significant time in Berlin in 1905 see chapter 2 (ii. – Szigeti sub-chapter, pp. 41-42) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Szigeti, *op. cit*., *With Strings Attached,* pp. 89-90 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Szigeti uses a provocative quotation from Virgil Thomson to describe this new style of playing. This quotation is included in chapter 2 (ii. – Szigeti sub-chapter, p. 42) [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. All three teachers have authorised the use of the lesson material in this thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. A full description of how I deciphered and organised the transcript material can be found in chapter 4, along with an explanation of the highlighting that appears in the full transcripts. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)