

Holding the violin and how it influences sound and playing in historical performance practice.

Historical perspectives



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Introduction: research questions and research process

It would seem to be obvious that the position of the violin influences the sound and (to some extent) other aspects of technique and interpretation. However I did not find any study which could tell me how exactly. I was curious how much the sound would change with different positions and if I could use this knowledge in my everyday life. Could it really be a tool of expression? Does the way we hold the instrument influence other choices we make about performance practice e.g. regarding fingering or bowing? Additional motivation for doing this research were my talks with fellow students and colleagues when I learnt that this is not a topic that people know a lot about. Therefore I decided to write this paper hoping to clarify certain facts from the history and maybe to encourage some violinists to deepen this topic as well and add a new layer to their playing.

It is important to say that this research and its results is only valid for contemporary players of historical violin. In the past they did not appear to find the difference in sound between the ways of holding instruments. However what they did notice was how strange or unnatural players looked while using particular methods of holding the violin. They also mentioned technical difficulties which arise with certain violin holds. Today we have the advantage of knowledge of the different methods of violinists who lived before us. Therefore we can use all of this knowledge to improve and extend our violin technique today.

Normally each violin player learns one way of holding the instrument which he then keeps for his lifetime. That said we can think that whatever method we chose and for whatever reason, we are fully justified not to change it. The difference is that in the past people played mostly music contemporary to them and the technique they used was suitable for that period of time. We on the other hand are expected to perform the whole range of music from 16th up to the 20th century. Because of this if we would like to achieve the most appropriate violin sound for each time period it would be interesting to experiment with the violin technique as well.

There can be many reasons for choosing a particular way of holding the (historical) instrument. It depends on the teacher, the student's will to experiment and read the sources or just choosing what seems to be comfortable. We may think that violin technique is something which is given and stable and is not possible to change. What I would like to suggest is to try to look at it from another point of view. To consider that we can use our technique in order to achieve greater effects while playing on the violin.

There are also other, more objective reasons which influence the choice of the violin hold. These can be the size of the instrument itself, the body of the player, traditions (especially in the case of folk and traditional music).

The research process started with exploring the history of how the violin used to be held¹. The knowledge gained in this process was the base for experiments with sound as well as with different postures. This experience showed whether there are other aspects of violin playing which can be influenced by the position of the violin. After this, the final conclusion was formed.

I decided to look at the history of holding the violin mostly from the point of view of primary sources. I agree that they are often written by violin tutors, not always virtuosi and each of them wrote from their own point of view. However books that were published influenced the general public, whether amateur or more advanced players. In the time when publishing was still very

1 By holding the violin I mean position of the instrument on the player's body.

expensive this also meant that the book was of some importance (or was likely to sell well and bring the invested money back to the publisher). Of course students cannot only repeat their masters. The music and style evolved and new generations had to find solutions for problems which did not exist before. However I decided to keep track to the mainstream way of teaching as it is the only one we can actually trace.

There are few things that should be considered before I can continue with the main topic of this paper.

Shape and length of violin neck

The early baroque violin's neck (in the 16th / 17th century) was shaped in a different way. The neck was shorter and thicker and attached to the instrument with a different angle.² Also the fingerboard was often shorter making distances between notes much smaller than on the modern violin.

The diagrams made by George Stoppani can help to see the difference³.

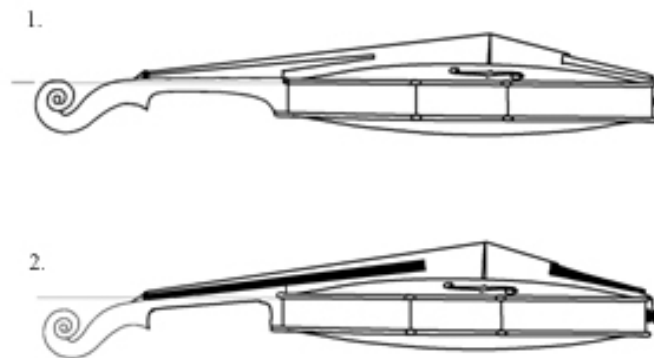


Figure 1: Illustration of the difference in body shape of early and modern violin

A proper baroque set up makes it easier to play without supporting the instrument with the chin, especially if we wish to place the violin lower than the collar bone. The modern or classical neck is longer and if we try to hold the instrument further from the chin it becomes too big. The baroque neck on the other hand is of perfect length both to find the notes easily on the fingerboard and not to force the player to go too far when shifting. Early violins tended to have smaller bodies which helped in this respect. That is why while choosing a way of holding the instrument we need to take into consideration what kind of violin we own and respect its possibilities and limitations.⁴

Clothing

Some people suggest that clothing or in other words fashion influenced the way the players held their instruments. Clothes in the baroque period were often very elaborated and heavy and it was hardly possible to raise the arms above the shoulder level, not to speak about holding them that way

2 <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1235&context=ppr> last accessed: 2.02.2016

3 <http://www.themonteverdiviolins.org/bass-bar.jpg> last accessed: 4.01.2016

4 Quite often in treatises there are reproductions of fingerboards in real size what confirms this theory. For example F.Geminiani – The art of playing on the Violin, C.Tessarini – An Accurate Method to attain the Art of Playing the Violin

for longer.⁵ That could support placing the violin lower on the body. However this view might be controversial. I found few references dealing with this issue. For example in the article published in *The Musical Times* in 1915 Mr Albert Sammons mentions shape and height of players collars as a reason for using (higher) chin rests.⁶ So at least in the 20th century clothing was (still ?) being an issue.

Bow

Different types of bows (and bow holds) produced different sound effects. They had diverse shapes and weight. That obviously made impact on the sound production and interpretation (for example Muffat's bowing played with a short French bow is much easier as opposed to trying to perform it with a late baroque bow) but for the purpose of this paper I decided to limit myself only to the left hand technique. If we want to make experiments with sound we need to have some things fixed in order to be able to change the others. By changing everything at the same time it is impossible to decide what made the difference. That is why during experiments I only used one violin and one bow.

Anatomical differences

Body type and gender could have had an impact on choosing the way of holding the violin. Each body is different and therefore every player needs to adjust the way of playing the instrument to find which one works well for him. What is more, due to anatomical differences between men and women certain types of holding the violin are hardly possible for ladies. This is the case with holding the instrument against the left breast. We do not have many paintings of women playing the violin in the baroque period but on those that we have women do not attempt to hold their instruments that way.

Paintings

It is clear that not all the paintings are of the same value if it comes to judging their relevance as evidence of history. Not every artist was skilled enough or aimed to depict reality in their works. I tried to choose the most relevant examples.

There will be a lot of quotations from original treatises. Most of them were already translated by professionals. The source of translation will be always given in footnotes. Some of the translation is made with the help of irreplaceable Izleh Henry, who deserves special thanks for his selfless help and support.

⁵ http://www.kipar.org/archive/costume-workshop/part2_1dress.html last accessed: 4.01.2016

⁶ Why All Chin-Rests Should Be Abolished Author(s): Arthur Hartmann Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 56, No. 864 (Feb. 1, 1915), pp. 105-106 Published by: Musical Times Publications Ltd. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/909014> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:22 UTC

The history of holding the violin:

Introduction

In order to decide whether holding the instrument has any impact on the way of playing we have to first learn and understand what was happening with the violin left hand technique throughout history. I chose to look at the primary sources until the invention of chin and shoulder rest (pad) that seemed to me to make a complete change in the attitude towards violin technique. However these appliances took long to become standard equipment of violin players and even in the period after their invention we find exceptional players performing without them.

Contrary to the common belief there were more than two ways of holding the instrument and they coexisted during most of the given time period. We tend to classify violin holds as chin on and chin off meaning *with placing the chin on the violin's belly* or without. However the situation was much more complex than that. There were of course moments in history when one or another method was predominant but there were no strict rules about holding the instrument until the late 18th century.

This part of the paper is not meant to be a compilation of information from all the violin treatises nor does it serve the purpose of giving an overview of what was written in violin methods. However I tried to look at as much information as possible.



Figure 2: P.Longhi - *Il concerto Venice*, 1741

Beginnings (up to the year 1556):

The frame date of this chapter is the year 1556 when the first treatise describing the violin in its *proper* characteristic was published. What happened before that is not so clear and can be deduced mostly from iconography and secondary sources (e.g. private correspondence or pay slips of musicians).

The earliest evidence of violin-like instruments come from the court of Ferrara from the beginning of the 16th century. There is a depiction of a violin-like and viola-like instrument on one of the walls as well as two court documents which suggest existence of a violin consort at the court of Isabella d'Este by the year 1511.⁷ The consort existed certainly by the year 1533 when the book by Lanfranco was published (describing 4 instruments of violin family where the soprano, alto and *co[n]traalto* still had three strings while the basso had four strings)⁸ Other sources confirm that in 1523 in Savoy the amount of 6 scudi was paid for a service of trumpets and violins (spelled *vyolons*)⁹ which can suggest that the violin was already becoming more popular. One of the first iconographical sources is the fresco of Gaudenzio Ferrari *The Madonna of the Orange Trees* painted in 1529-1530 in the Church St. Cristoforo in Vercelli.¹⁰ The instrument from the fresco has (still) only three strings however the rest of its features already resemble the violin as we know it.¹¹



Figure 3: G. Ferrari -*The Madonna of the Orange Trees* (detail)- 1529/1530 Vercelli

It is probable that the violin emerged from other instruments which existed before it, mainly the rebec, lira da braccio and fidel.¹² It took all the main features of those instruments in terms of its construction. What is interesting is that those 3 instruments were held in different ways.

The rebec (Figure 4¹³ and 5¹⁴), an instrument with a very long history, could be held low on the

7 Boyden, David - et al. "Violin." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed January 4, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/41161pg1>

8 Lanfranco, Giovanni Maria – *Scintille di musica*, Brescia 1533 p. 138

9 Boyden David D. - *The History of violin playing from its origins to 1761*, Oxford University Press 1990, reprinted in 2002 p.21

10 <http://www.christianrault.com/cn/releases/how-when-and-where-the-specific-technological-features-of-the-violin-family-appeared> last accessed: 5.01.2016

11 <http://www.christianrault.com/cn/releases/how-when-and-where-the-specific-technological-features-of-the-violin-family-appeared> last accessed: 5.01.2016

12 Boyden, David - *The history of violin playing from its origins to 1761* p.10

13 <http://mbarouen.fr/en/oeuvres/the-virgin-among-the-virgins> last accessed: 8.03.2016

14 <https://www.art-prints-on-demand.com/a/angelico-fra/angel-playing-instruments-3.html> last accessed: 8.03.2016

chest or high under the chin (not to mention not playing it on the arm at all). The lira da braccio (Figure 7¹⁵) was a much bigger instrument playing mostly chords and according to available sources was held under the chin (with the chin on the instrument) while the fidel (Figure 8¹⁶) was generally played chin off. I assume that the first players of violins were the same people who normally played one of those 3 instruments. Possibly then they used the same technique they already knew even if the properties of the violin were a little different than those of its ancestors.



Figure 5: G. Davis -
Virgin among Virgins,
1509 - rebec played chin
off



Figure 4: B. Fra
Angelico - *Angel
playing instruments* -
rebec played chin on



Figure 6: H. Memling -
Angel musicians (fidel)



Figure 7: B. Montagna - *Madonna in trono e santi*,
Milano 1500 (lira da braccio)

15 <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/356347389242009277/> last accessed: 8.03.2016

16 http://www.wga.hu/support/viewer_m/z.html last accessed: 8.03.2016



Figure 8: B. Da Campione - Fresco from Eremitani Church in Padova
(rebec and lira da braccio played together)

Ways of holding the violin in the XVI century

P. Jambe de Fer Epitome Musical

The first description of violin in the form we know now (with 4 strings tuned in fifths) can be found in the treatise of Philibert Jamb de Fer *Epitome Musical* (Lyon, 1556).¹⁷ The same book gives also a description of how the violin was held:

*“The Italians call it the violon da braccia, or violone because it is supported on the arm, some use scarfs, cords, or other things.”*¹⁸

This quotation is quite ambiguous. On one hand Jambe de Fer seems to be comparing two families of instruments – viole da gamba and violins. At the same time he uses the word *violon* which, if used in Italian, implies the bass member of the violin family. But it could as well be a mix of French *violon* and Italian *da braccio*. There is no iconographical evidence from the period showing violin players supporting their instruments with scarfs or cords. However later Jambe de Fer says that the bass member of the violin family is very heavy to carry and because of that it got a small hook in the iron ring attached to the back of the instrument so that it does not interfere with the player. There are preserved cellos which bear signs of such rings (like Amati's *King* cello). Could it be that

17 There is a description of an instrument called *skrzypice* in Polish literature of 1500s. The word differs only in one letter from the word currently used to describe violin - *skrzypce*. That could imply that the instrument was present in the same or a very similar form in the territory of Poland before the Italian *violino* arrived so it was not necessary to change the name. Could the instrument have been brought from Italy to Poland or vice versa and was it the same instrument which was mentioned by both Agricola and Praetorius? This still needs to be researched. - source <http://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/skrzypice.html> last accessed: 7.03.2016

18 Jambe de Fer, Philibert - *Epitome Musical*, Lyon 1556 p. 63 – translation after Gwilt, Richard - “Traditions of Baroque Violin Playing” - <http://www.baroque-violin.info/vhold2.html> last accessed 6.12.2015

also the violins were, at times, attached to the players' bodies?

There is one more interesting quotation from this book which explains why there are not so many written sources from this period as well as what the social position of violin players was at that time:

*“We call viols those with which gentlemen, merchants, and other virtuous people pass their time. The Italians call them viole da gambe (...) The other type [of instrument] is called violin; it's commonly used for dancing (...) I have not illustrated the said violin because you can think of it as resembling the viol, added to which there are few persons who use it save those who make a living from it through their labour”*¹⁹

The violin was used mostly by professionals while people of high social status preferred to occupy themselves with the viole da gambe. There was no need for written instruction since only professionals were interested and they learnt solely by oral tradition and kept their secrets preserved among themselves.

Iconography

No more written sources are available to us in the 16th century,²⁰ so the only way to gain more insight into what was happening is to look at the paintings. Those show a very interesting tendency. The type of performed music (and consequently the kind of musicians and their education) could also influence the way they held their instruments.

To illustrate this point I would like to present two paintings. The first one is a work of an anonymous French painter depicting Marguerite de Valois (*La Reine Margot*) dancing la Volta at the Valois Court²¹.



Figure 9: Anonymous: Marguerite de Valois (*La Reine Margot*), 1553-1615, dancing la Volta at the Valois Court.



Figure 10: Anonymous: Marguerite de Valois (*La Reine Margot*), 1553-1615, dancing la Volta at the Valois Court (detail)

19 Jambe de Fer, Philibert – *Epitome Musical*, Lyon 1556 p. 62-63 – quotation after Boyden, D. “History of violin playing...” p. 32

20 About holding the violin

21 <https://www.lessingimages.com/viewimage.asp?i=250107+9+&cr=7&cl=1> last accessed: 7.03.2016

In the top left-hand corner we see a group of musicians playing La Volta²² (zoomed on Figure 10). It's clear that all 3 of them hold their instruments low. They do not all hold the violin in the same position but generally the instruments rest below the collar bone, sometimes around the sternum. The chin does not touch the instruments which would not even be possible in this position. The music they play is rather simple, not involving higher positions, and was probably improvised (the musicians are not using scores).²³

As a comparison, this following image painted by Hans Mielich from the codex he illustrated.



Figure 11: H. Mielich – Orlando di Lasso surrounded by instrumentalists and singers of the chapel of the Duke of Bavaria – *Codex Musicus* 130 - Munich c. 1575 (detail)

In this painting we can see many instrumentalists. The portrayed image is the wedding of Wilhelm V, Duke of Bavaria, and René of Lorraine in 1568²⁴. The musical direction of this event was given to Orlando di Lasso, who we can see in the painting, sitting by the harpsichord. This painting preserves the memory of instruments employed in that performance. We know that one of the performed pieces was a 6 voiced motet by Cipriano de Rore which was played by 6 *viole da braccio*.²⁵ Contrary to the previous painting, here the players are holding their instruments much higher. The violins are held near the chin, above the collar bone. The musicians are reading music from parts lying on the keyboard instrument.

This example suggests that the type of music to be performed could determine the way the instrument was held. More noble, court music required a more graceful appearance from the musicians than improvised dance melodies.

However the reason can be even more simple. Musicians playing in inns or during parades had to

22 A late renaissance dance the main figure of which was a turn and lift in a closed position, danced to music similar to the galliard.

23 Of course that image could also be just a beautiful composition of musicians without connection to reality. The argument for that is that the instruments are well visible, as if it the main intention of the painter was to show the instruments.

24 Boyden, David – History... p. 61-62

25 Ibid p.62

move from place to place while playing and therefore resting the instrument low against the breast was comfortable and did not limit other movements of the body. At the court or chapel, performers did not move performing, which made holding the instrument on the collar bone much more practical and helpful in releasing the hand from constant support of the violin.

XVII century

In the 17th century the status of the violin changed. The composers started to write specifically for this instrument which freed it from its consort role. That in consequence made it more visible in concert life and more noble men became interested in learning how to play it. We start having more and more written information about the instrument and its technique. It is important to remember that these instructions were intended for amateurs and people learning by themselves.²⁶ They do not describe the real level of violin technique at that time. What is written down is not what was performed. It is enough to look at the treatises for voice or other instruments which became popular before the violin. We find information about diminutions²⁷, vibrato²⁸ or descriptions of fingering²⁹. Why would violin players not use the same knowledge? After reading a beautiful description of the violin from Mersenne³⁰ from as early as 1636/37 praising a variety of techniques one can use on the violin (including vibrato, the mute, scordatura or chords) it is hard to believe that (at least the best) players would not make use of them even if they are hardly preserved in manuscripts or prints.

Together with the popularity of the violin we see more and more instructions on how to hold it. Here is a list of some of the important treatises together with their instructions:

M.Praetorius – *Syntagma Musicum* - Wolfenbüttel 1614-20

*Violino da braccio (...) is called “da braccio” because it is held on the arm*³¹

P.Trichet – *Traité des instruments* - Paris ca. 1640

*One holds it resting against the left shoulder*³²

J.Playford – *A Brief Introduction To The Skill Of Music* - London 1664

*First, the Violin is usually plaid above hand, the Neck thereof being held by the left hand; the lower part thereof is rested on the left breast, a little below the shoulder*³³

J.J.Prinner – *Musicalischer Schlüssel* - Salsburg 1670

(...) hold the violin so firmly with your chin that there's no reason to hold it with the left

26 Violin Methods Old and New Author(s): Jeffrey Pulver Source: Proceedings of the Musical Association, 50th Sess. (1923 - 1924), pp. 101-127 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Royal Musical Association Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/765783> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:25 UTC

27 Rognoni, Riccardo – Passaggi per potersi esercitare nel diminuire terminatamente - 1592 – violin listed as an instrument suitable for diminutions in the *chapter A I Virtuosi Lettori*

28 Neumann, Frederick (1991) The Vibrato Controversy, Performance Practice Review: Vol. 4: No. 1, Article 3. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.199104.01.3 Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol4/iss1/3>

29 Woodfield, Ian - Viol Playing Techniques in the Mid-16th Century: A Survey of Ganassi's Fingering Instructions - Early Music, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Oct., 1978) pp. 544-545+547+549 Published by: Oxford University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3125752> Accessed: 06-01-2016 15:35 UT

30 Mersenne, Marin – Harmonie universelle, Livre quatriesme, Paris 1636 p.177-190

31 Praetorius, Michael – Syntagma Musicum Book II p.48 – translation after R.Gwilt – Traditions of Baroque Violin Playing <http://www.baroque-violin.info/vhold2.html> last accessed: 2.01.2016

32 Tarling, Judy - Baroque String Playing for Ingenious Learners, Corda Music Publications 2001p. 64

33 Playford, John - A Brief Introduction To The Skill Of Music London 1644 4th edition p.109

hand³⁴

G.Falck – *Idea Boni Contoris* - Nürnberg 1688

*The instrument is to be placed against the left breast so that it will tilt toward the right side*³⁵

J. Lenton – *The Gentleman's Diversion, or the Violin Explained* - London 1693

*the best way of commanding the Instrument will be to place it something higher than your Breast*³⁶

D.Merck – *Compedium Musicae Instrumentalis Chohelicae* - Augsburg 1695

*Hold the violin neatly below the left breast, leaving the arm free and not resting it on the stomach*³⁷

D.Speer – *Grundrichtiger Unterricht der musikalischen Kunst* - Ulm 1697

*“The remainder, how one holds the violin correctly in the hand, rests it on the breast, leads the bow ... that a trusted teacher must show his student”*³⁸

Roger North about N. Matteis

He rested his instrument *against his short ribs*³⁹

The above sources mention three ways of holding the violin. The first of them is on or against the breast, the second is below the breast (even as low as the short ribs) and the third (mentioned only once) is to hold the violin with one's chin. This confirms that there was never a single way of holding the instrument but many ways which coexisted at the same time (and place). It is important to mention that it is not always easy to determine the exact place on the body that the writer had in mind. Sometimes the description is not very exact (as in the case of Praetorius) but often translating from old languages is not easy. For example in old French the word *poitrine* which generally means breast could also possibly mean *neck*. Similarly in German the word *Brust* has meanings of *breast* and *chest* so ultimately *on the left breast* could be also translated as *on the left side of the chest*⁴⁰. In this case as long as there are no more details about the way of holding the instrument (e.g. where to put the chin) descriptions need to be treated as pointing out only an approximate location on the body.

Two of above authors need a little more explanation. Their instructions are very interesting also in the sense that they seem to be a commentary on current trends.

34 Prinner, John Jacob - Musicalischer Schlüssel, Edition Fuzeau 2007 (no page number) – quotation after: Medlam Charles; Almond, Clare- On Holding the Violin Source: Early Music, Vol. 7, No. 4, Keyboard Issue 1 (Oct., 1979), pp. 561+563 Published by: Oxford University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3126505> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:21 UTC

35 Falck, Georg – *Idea Boni Contoris*, Edition Fuzeau 2007 p.189 translation after: Riley, Maurice – The teaching of bowed string instruments from 1511 to 1756 p. 244

36 The Gentleman's Diversion: John Lenton and the First Violin Tutor Author(s): Malcolm Boyd and John Rayson Source: Early Music, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Jul., 1982), pp. 329-332 Published by: Oxford University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3126198> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:24 UTC

37 Riley, Maurice – The teaching of bowed instruments from 1511 to 1756 p. 260

38 Gwilt, Richard – Traditions of Baroque Violin Playing <http://www.baroque-violin.info/vhold2.html> last accessed: 1.02.2016

39 Violin Fingering Author(s): Sonya Monosoff and Peter Walls Source: Early Music, Vol. 13, No. 1, The Early Piano II (Feb., 1985), pp. 76-79 Published by: Oxford University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3127409> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:22 UTC

40 Gwilt, Richard – Traditions of Baroque Violin Playing <http://www.baroque-violin.info/vhold2.html> last accessed: 1.02.2016

Johann Jacob Prinner

J.J. Prinner wrote his *Musicalischer Schlissel* in 1677. Surprisingly he advises to hold the violin firmly with the chin. He also gives us also some more interesting details. Here is the whole quotation:

If you want to master the violin, then you must hold it under the chin so that the left arm is curved like a hoop, and also with a curved hand you should lay the neck at the top near the pegs between the thumb, and the violin must be held firmly with the chin so that you have no reason to hold it with the left hand, because it would otherwise be impossible that I could run quickly from high to low, or to play in tune, unless one held the violin with the right hand so that it didn't fall, and thereby several notes would be missed out, disregarding respected Virtuosi that I have known, who didn't observe this, and just set the violin on the breast, being of the opinion that it be nice and charming, because they took it from a painting, where the Angel plays the violin to St. Francis, created by a painter, but they should have known that this same painter might have been very artistic with his paintbrush, but not with the violin.⁴¹

This paragraph almost sounds like a reproach towards those *respected Virtuosi*. Why would Prinner be so passionate about this aspect? Who was he and who were the virtuosi?

J.J. Prinner (1624-1694) was an Austrian composer who worked in the circles where also H.I.F. Biber and J.H. Schmelzer were employed⁴². Schmelzer even recommended Prinner for the position of Prince-Bishop of Olomouc at Kroměříž⁴³ but in the end the place was taken by somebody else. Biber and Schmelzer were both praised for their violin skills. Could the phrase about violin virtuosos refer to them? Or could it be a reference to players who Prinner met during his studies in Siena? There is no painting of neither Schmelzer or Biber playing the violin so we cannot say for sure which technique they used. The only source of information is their music. And here, indeed, one sees that it is possible to employ the chin off technique. We can observe it especially in Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* which give us some clues about the fingerings.⁴⁴

Still, why did this sentence appear in the treatise in such a negative form? Could it be just a difference of opinion? On the other hand we have Schmelzer who apparently said that⁴⁵:

For a start, he understands composition well, otherwise he's a really good organist, understands something of the violin, has studied well and is a good German poet.⁴⁶

Whatever the reason is we are left with a very illustrative description of virtuoso violin players supporting their instruments with their right hands (while playing!). In the end Prinner did not make history as a violin player but thanks to him we know at least about one example of a 17th century violinist holding his instrument *firmly with the chin*.⁴⁷

41 Prinner, Johann Jacob – *Musicalischer Schlissel* (no page number) translation after Gwilt, Richard – *Traditions of Baroque Violin Playing* <http://www.baroque-violin.info/vhold2.html> last accessed: 1.02.2016

42 Dann, Elias; Sehnal, Jiří - "Biber, Heinrich Ignaz Franz von." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03037>

43 Federhofer, Hellmut - "Prinner, Johann Jacob", *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed January 6, 2016,

44 These sonatas are mostly in scordatura which is however written out as it should be played and not as it sounds. In consequence we have only one fingering we can choose in order to play the right notes. Thanks to this we know where to shift. In order to go down from higher positions we often have an open string. Shifting on open strings is one of the recommendations while applying chin off technique.

45 https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Jacob_Prinner last accessed 2.03.2016

46 Translation after R.Gwilt – *Traditions...*

47 Prinner's work was never published, it is in manuscript form, therefore it did not have a great impact.

John Lenton

John Lenton's (1657-1719) *Gentleman's Diversion, or the Violin Explained* is, until now, the first preserved violin tutor designed specifically for the violin.⁴⁸ Lenton was a *gentleman extraordinary* of the Chapel Royal and a member of 24 Violins on the court, the position he kept from 1681 till his death⁴⁹. He probably performed with Purcell, therefore the instructions he gives in his book (however basic and directed for amateurs and gentlemen – as the title says) should be of some interest. The only preserved copy of this book is now in the Cardiff Public Library (M.C.1.90) and for years stayed unnoticed due to a missing first page.

The whole quotation about holding the violin reads as follows:

*as I would have none get a habit of holding an Instrument under the Chin, so I would have them avoid placing it as low as the Girdle, which is a mongrel sort of way us'd by some in imitation of the Italians, never considering the Nature of the Musick they are to perform; but certainly for English compositions, which generally carry a gay lively Air with them, the best way of commanding the Instrument will be to place it something higher than your Breast (...)*⁵⁰

This, besides being another ironic comment, is interesting information. According to this we could assume that the Italian way of holding the violin was to hold it very low, next to one's girdle. Despite Italy being a (possible) place of the emerging violin, a great amount of music published there and a number of advanced players traveling Europe, there is no written information on how to hold the violin in Italy in the first half of the 18th century. However there is a front page from a chap-book from as early as 1550s⁵¹ titled *La Violina Con la sua risposta et altre canzoni Musicali bellissime* which depicts a figure playing a violin which is held high under the chin.⁵² On whom could Lenton then have based his assessment of Italian players? Possibly on one specific Italian who came to England in the 1670s, Nicola Matteis. According to Roger North, Matteis was *the second to Corelli*.⁵³ His way of playing the violin was extraordinary and it was he who changed the taste of English men and brought Italian style to England.⁵⁴ Matteis's violin technique seems to be very different from the English one. R. North writes:

*He was a very robust and tall man, and having long armes, held his Instrument almost against his Girdle, and his bow was long as for a Base violl, and he touched his deviation with the very point. And I have found very few that will believe it possible he could perform as he did in that posture. (...) He first shew'd us the Holding the bow, without touching the hair, which before him was not done in England: but from this first hint, it was immediately taken up by the best hands in a few years and became the universall practise.*⁵⁵

48 Katz, Mark - *The Violin: A Research and Information Guide*, Taylor & Francis 2006 p.128; Stowell Robin – *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin*, Cambridge University Press 1992 p. 224

49 *The Gentleman's Diversion*: John Lenton and the First Violin Tutor Author(s): Malcolm Boyd and John Rayson Source: *Early Music*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Jul., 1982), pp. 329-332 Published by: Oxford University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3126198> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:24 UTC

50 *ibid*

51 Pulver, Jeffrey - *Violin Methods Old and New*, Source: *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 50th Sess. (1923 - 1924), pp. 101-127 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Royal Musical Association Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/765783> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:25 UTC

52 Thomas, H. - *A Rare Italian Chap-Book*, Source: *The British Museum Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Mar., 1937), pp. 90-91

53 North, Roger – *Memoirs of Music* edited by E. Rimbault London 1846 (*Memoires of Musick being Some Historico-Criticall Collections of that Subject*. 1728) p. 123

54 *Ibid* p. 122

55 Tilmouth, Michael - Nicola Matteis, Source: *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Jan., 1960), pp. 22-40 Published

It seems that John Lenton criticized the new trend which came to England together with Matteis. There is nothing surprising about this. He himself worked in the court and was one of the *four-and-twenty fiddlers* ensemble founded by Charles II as an imitation of Louis XIV⁵⁶. The difference of style must have been shocking to him hence the protective tone. No matter what, Matteis's technique stayed unique to him and did not appear in any other source.

Iconography

To complete the picture of 17th century violin technique it would be useful to observe the players in action. I chose several examples of paintings and engravings which show a diversity of violin holds.

The figures numbered from 12 till 15 show four different variants of placing the violin on the breast/chest. On the first painting the violin lies more horizontally under the collar-bone⁵⁷ (the violin head facing downwards – very often seen on paintings) while on the second one it is more tilted towards the right side⁵⁸ (the violin head directed straight). On Figure 14⁵⁹ and 15⁶⁰ the violin lies more in the centre of the body, around the sternum, also at different angles to the ground. It is interesting that these two paintings were created by the same painter (Frans Hals) who was a Dutch portrait painter. Additionally we know who was the model for the first painting – a violinist Daniel van Aken.

On Figures 16⁶¹ and 17⁶² violinists hold their instruments with their chins. In the case of the young boy it is on the tail-piece, the man places it more on the right side of the violin. If we look carefully we can see that on all of these paintings the violinists' left thumb seems to be gripping the neck very strongly, even sticking out above the fingerboard. In the beginning of the 20th century it was called the *old way*⁶³ and was warned against from the middle of 18th century (as something that can disturb the G string⁶⁴).

Figure 18⁶⁵ is one of the few examples of the violin being played as a *da gamba* instrument while on the Figure 19⁶⁶ there is a group of 3 musicians playing together and each of them having a slightly different technique.

After all the unknown players there is also an example of a celebrity. The famous Arcangelo Corelli performing in the Piazza di Spagna in 1687⁶⁷ appears on the Figure 20. According to C. Riedo this engraving is quite reliable for a number of reasons.⁶⁸ On the left side of the orchestra, on the podium there are two concertino violins – Arcangelo Corelli and Matteo Fornari. We can see (with a lot of zoom – Figure 21) that the two violinists hold their instruments below the collar bone, not touching them with their chins.

by: Oxford University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/740406> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:46 UTC

56 R. North – *Memoirs of Musick* p. 98

57 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerrit_Dou#/media/File:Gerard_Dou_-_Violon_Player_-_WGA06663.jpg last accessed: 7.03.2016

58 <http://nmwa.org/works/concert> last accessed: 7.03.2016

59 <http://www.wikiart.org/en/frans-hals/daniel-van-aken-playing-the-violin> last accessed: 7.03.2016

60 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boy_Playing_A_Violin_hq.jpg last accessed: 7.03.2016

61 <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/jan-steen#supersized-genre-painting-251754> last accessed: 7.03.2016

62 <http://www.1st-art-gallery.com/Jan-Steen/Jan-Steen-oil-paintings-3.html> last accessed: 7.03.2016

63 Winram, James - *Violin Playing and Violin Adjustment*, Edinburgh 1908

64 e.g. Hiller – *Anweisung* p.5-6

65 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pieter_de_Hooch last accessed: 7.03.2016

66 <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Lib/Hammerschmidt.htm> last accessed: 7.03.2016

67 Spitzer John, Zaslaw Neal - *The Birth of the Orchestra: History of an Institution, 1650-1815*, Oxford University Press 2004 p. 112

68 Riedo Christoph - *How Might Arcangelo Corelli Have Played the Violin?* Music in Art 2014, https://www.academia.edu/9482272/How_Might_Arcangelo_Corelli_Have_Played_the_Violin_in_Music_in_Art_3_9_Spring_Fall_2014_S._103_118 last accessed: 1.03.2016



Figure 12: G. Dou – Violin player 1653



Figure 13: J. Leyster – The Concert 1633



Figure 14: F. Hals – Daniel van Aken Playing the Violin c.1640



Figure 15: F. Hals – Boy Playing A Violin



Figure 17 J.Steen – Meal (detail) c.1650



Figure 16: J.Steen – Inn with Violinist and Card Players (detail) 1668



Figure 19: P. de Hooch – A Musical Party (detail) 1677



Figure 18: Detail of the title page of the edition of Andreas Hammer-Schmidt's Masses - 1663

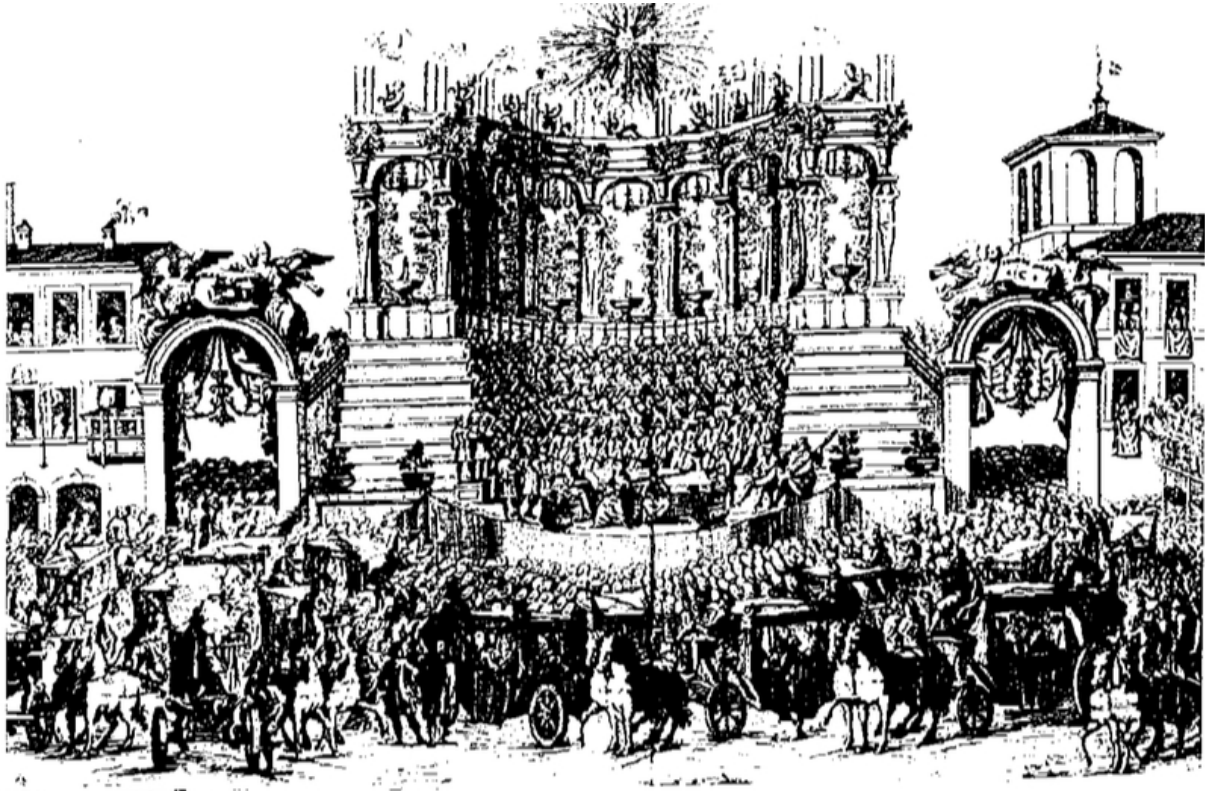


Figure 20: Serenata in the Piazza di Spagna, Rome 1687



*Figure 21: Detail of the
previous picture –
A.Corelli and M.Fornari*

As the last example I would like to show photos of an organ in Stralsund (Germany). It is an instrument by F. Stellwagen with original sculptures from 1659 (photos made by A.Osiecka in 2012).



Figure 22: Organ is Stralsund 1659



Figure 23: Organ is Stralsund - Violinist 1



Figure 24: Organ is Stralsund - Violinist 2



Figure 25: Organ is Stralsund - Violinist 3

Here besides the violin being held in 3 different ways, we have a violin being held in the right hand and the bow in the left one. The obvious reason is symmetry of the whole sculpture but a reversed instrument could also be an option. There are few sources showing such instruments. The first one is a sketch by L.Carracci where the left hand holds bow and the right hand tunes the violin.⁶⁹ On the second one (of Dutch origin) we can see a violin player in an inn holding the violin in his right hand. Also L.Sass speaks in his book about his dream to order a reversed violin so he could develop his hands in an equal way.⁷⁰

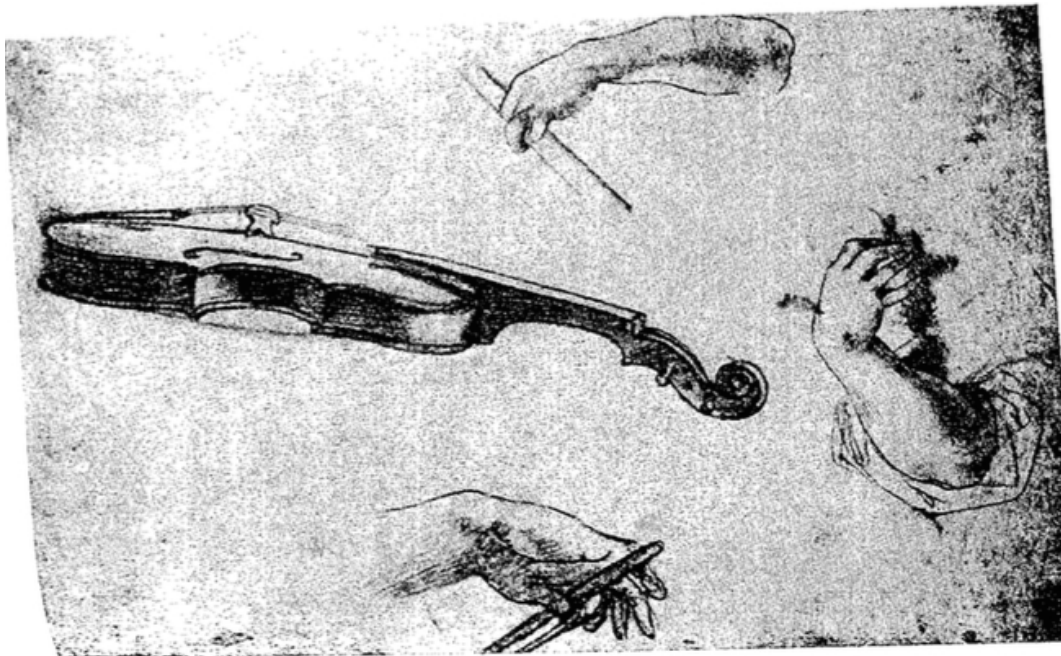


Figure 26: L.Carracci (1555-1619) – Sketch

⁶⁹ Boyden, David – The History... Plate 16

⁷⁰ Sass, August Leopold – The secrets of violin technic, 1910 p.29



Figure 27: C. Boel – The Violin Player (17th century)

XVIII century

In the 18th century there are many treatises in which we find information on how to position the violin.

Michel Pignolet de Monteclair - *Méthode facile pour apprendre à jouer du violon* – Paris 1711/1712

*The neck of the violin to be placed between the thumb and the adjoining finger. The fingerboard should be grasp loosely to avoid stiffening the fingers and the wrist. To hold the violin securely, the tail-piece is placed against the neck just under the left cheek. The elbow should be held directly under the violin. The fingers are to be curved so that the tips, not the nails, are placed on the strings. The left wrist is to be bent.*⁷¹



Figure 28: Michel Pignolet de Monteclair - *Méthode facile pour apprendre à jouer du violon*

⁷¹ Monteclair, Michel Pignolet de - *Méthode facile pour apprendre à jouer du violon* Paris 1711/1712 p.2 Edition Fuzeau 2003 translation after J.Tarling "Baroque String Playing.." p.65

Sebastien de Brossard – *Méthode de violon* manuscrite, sans page titre – c.1711

*For a good holding of the violin, one must put the part of the neck that is closer to the pegs and the nut (...) between the thumb and the following finger (...) and that the inside of the hand does not touch the «bourdon» (G-string) or the «chanterelle» (E-string), so that they do not interfere with the sound when one plays open strings. To hold the violin firmly, one must press strongly the side where the button is against the left shoulder, a bit under the cheek, or lower if it is more convenient, but always minding that the elbow is turned in way that it is directly under the violin*⁷²

Pierre Dupont – *Principes de violon par demandes et reponce* – Paris 1718⁷³

(no description)



Figure 29: Pierre Dupont – *Principes de violon*

⁷² Brossard, Sebastien de – *Méthode de violon* manuscrite, sans page titre – chapter second, Edition Fuzeau 2003 translation I.Henry

⁷³ Dupont, Pierre – *Principes de violon par demandes et reponce*, Paris 1718, Edition Fuzeau 2003

Peter Prelleur – The Modern Musick-Master or the Universal Musician Part V. The Art of Playing on the Violin – London 1731⁷⁴

(no description)



Figure 30: Peter Prelleur - *The Art of Playing on the Violin*

Joseph Friedrich Bernhard Caspar Majer – *Museum Musicum Theoretico Practicum* – Schwalbisch-Hall 1732

One must hold the violin between the left thumb and the forefinger, but not so firm, so that the fingers can freely go to the higher position and come back, moreover the Violin will be held on the left breast but also that it can lean towards the right side.⁷⁵

Michelle Corette – *L'ecole d'Orphée, méthode pour apprendre facilement à jouer du violon* – Paris 1738

Take the fingerboard of the violin in the left hand and hold it with the thumb and the first finger without gripping with the hand, rounding the first, second, third finger and holding the little one stretched out. It is necessary to put a chin on the violin when one changes position which gives complete freedom to the left hand mainly when returning to first position.⁷⁶

74 Prelleur, Peter – *The Modern Music-Master, Part V: The Art of Playing on the Violin*, London 1731 p.2

75 Majer, Joseph Friedrich Bernhard Caspar – *Museum Musicum Theoretico Practicum* Fuzeau 2003 p.76 translated by I. Henry

76 Corette, Michelle – *L'ecole d'Orphée, méthode pour apprendre facilement à jouer du violon*, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.7– translation after Tarling, Judy - *Baroque String Playing for Ingenious Learners*, Corda Music Publications 2001. p. 65



Figure 31: Michel Corrette - *L'ecole d'Orphée*

Robert Crome – *The Fiddle New Model'd* - London c. 1735/1740

Take the fiddle and hold it in your Left Hand. Let the Neck lie between your fore Finger and Thumb, turning your Wrist, that your Fingers may lie over the Finger Board to be in readyness when you want them: then let the back part rest on your left Breast. The best way is to stay it with your Chin, that it may remain steady.⁷⁷

This description sounds confusing at first. How could the violin be at the same time placed on the breast and be supported by the chin? Probably also in English the word *breast* had double meaning.

Francesco Veracini – an engraving from *Sonate Accademiche op.2* – London and Firenze 1744



Figure 32: Francesco Veracini - *Sonate Accademiche op.2*

⁷⁷ Crome, Robert – *The Fiddle New Model'd* – p.34

Francesco Geminiani – *The Art of Playing on The Violin* - London 1751

*The violin must be rested just below the Collar-bone, turning the right-hand Side a little downwards, so there may be no Necessity of raising the Bow very high, when the fourth String is to be struck. Observe also, that the Head of the Violin must be nearly Horizontal with that part which rests against the Breast, that the hand may be shifted with Facility and without any Danger of dropping the Instrument.*⁷⁸

Leopold Mozart – *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinshule* - Augsburg 1756

The first way of holding the violin has a rather pleasant and relaxed appearance. Here the violin is quite unconstrained; held chest-high, slanting, and in such fashion that the stokes of the bow are directed more upwards than horizontal. This position is undoubtedly natural and pleasant to the eyes of the onlookers but somewhat difficult and inconvenient for the player as during quick movements of the hand in the high position, the violin has no support and must therefore necessarily fall unless by long practice the advantage the advantage of being able to hold it between the thumb and index-finger has been acquired.

*The second is a comfortable method. The violin is placed against the neck so that it lies somewhat in front of the shoulder and the side on which the E (thinnest) string lies comes under the chin, whereby the violin remains unmoved in its place even during the strongest movements of the ascending and descending hand.*⁷⁹

The important point about Leopold Mozart is the fact that his violin treatise was extremely influential. What is more, the whole published amount was sold out until c. 1764 and up to the year 1800 it had 4 German editions (with slight alterations over time – also about position of the violin) and translations into French and Dutch (translation into Russian followed in 1804).⁸⁰ That popularity proves that methods he writes about were well known worldwide. If he then preferred the second one wouldn't his own son (and student) apply it in his violin playing?



Figure 33: L.Mozart – The 1st method



Figure 34: L.Mozart - The 2nd method

78 Geminiani, Francesco – *The Art of Playing on the Violin* pp.1-2

79 Mozart, Leopold - *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinshule* Augsburg 1756, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.53 translation after Tarling, Judy - *Baroque String Playing*. p. 66-67

80 <http://www.leopold-mozart-competition.de/en/mozart/content/343> last accessed: 1.03.2016

Jose Herrando - *Arte y puntual explicacion del modo de tocar el violin con perfeccion y facilidad, siendo muy util para cualquiera que aprenda, asi aficionado como professor, aprovechandose los maestros en la enseñanza de sus discipulos con mas brevedad y descanso* – Paris 1756

“The violin is held in the left hand (...) The stringholder must come under the chin, being secured by it, the face turned a bit toward the right hand”⁸¹



Figure 35: L.Velarguez - Herrando playing violin

François-Alexandre-Pierre de Garsault – *Notionnaire ou Memorial Raisonne de ce qu'il y a d'utile et d'interessant* – Paris 1761

*One holds the violin against the left shoulder; the neck forward, sustained by the left hand.*⁸²

L'abbé le fils – *Principes du Violon* – Paris 1761

*The violin should be placed on the collar bone, placing the chin on the side of the 4th string, it is necessary to lower the side of the top string a bit. The hand should be at the similar height to the collar. The neck should be held without gripping between the thumb and the 1st joint of the index finger; the part of the neck found on this side of the thumb must be put on the plump prominence of the 1st join. One must observe the position of the thumb with regard to the open bottom string.*⁸³

Francesco Geminiani – *L'art du Jouer le Violon* – 3rd edition - Paris c. 1763

(description is exact translation of English text)

81 Herrando, Jose - *Arte y puntual explicacion del modo de tocar el violin con perfeccion y facilidad*, Paris 1756 p.2 translation after Boyden, David “The history of violin playing.” p.368

82 Garsault, François-Alexandre-Pierre de – *Notionnaire ou Memorial Raisonne*, Paris 1762, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.634 translated by I.Henry

83 L'Abbé le fils – *Principes du Violon* 1761, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.1 – translation after Tarling, Judy - *Baroque String Playing*.. p. 67



Figure 36: F.Geminiani – *L'art du Jouer le Violon* 3rd edition

The famous Geminiani's engraving (above) brought about a lot of controversy. As it was mistakenly attributed to the first French edition of his treatise it suggested a disproportion between the written text and the illustration. How could Geminiani advise placing the violin below the collar bone and yet include an engraving of himself holding the instrument with his chin? When we look above to the engraving of Herrando (Figure 35) we see that those two engravings are nearly the same, only the heads are different. Because of the incorrect date of Geminiani's engraving many theories arose.⁸⁴ Why would Geminiani's picture appear in the Herrando's treatise? However if we take into consideration that the engraving appeared only in the 3rd edition of c.1763 it is clear that the situation was the opposite – Herrando's engraving was added to Geminiani's treatise. Therefore the written information and the engraving are not in contradiction. Both treatises were published by the same publishing house so probably it was just a decision of the publisher to add that picture to a (possibly) posthumous edition of Geminiani's work.

C.R.Brijon – *Réflexions sur la Musique, et la vraie manière de l'exécuter sur le Violon* – Paris 1763

*One puts the violin on the left collar-bone, letting it bend on the side of the stomach. The hand which sustains the violin should be at the same height of the [player's] neck. One must hold the violin without pressing too much, in order to confer more freedom to the fingers.*⁸⁵

***Encyclopedie de Diderot* – Paris 1751-1772**

To play the violin, that you hold with the left hand, the bow with the right hand, one takes it from the neck at L (...) One brings then the lower part of the instrument under the chin by turning

84 Moreno, Emilio – Aspectos técnicos del tratado de violín de José Herrando (1756): El Violín Español en el contexto Europeo de mediados del siglo XVIII; D.Luisi – Posizione e tenuta del violino e dell'arco dall'inizio del XVII alla fine del XVIII secolo Source: Revista de Musicología, Vol. 11, No. 3, Homenaje a Carlos III (Septiembre-diciembre 1988), pp. 555-655 Published by: Sociedad Española de Musicología (SEDEM) Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20795256> Accessed: 19-01-2016 19:31 UTC

85 Brijon, C.R. – *Réflexions*, Paris 1763, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.19

*[bending] the wrist, so that the cleat where the button F is fixed, answers; one bends a little bit the head to press with the chin where the E letter is and thus strengthen the instrument.*⁸⁶

[E=left side of the violin]

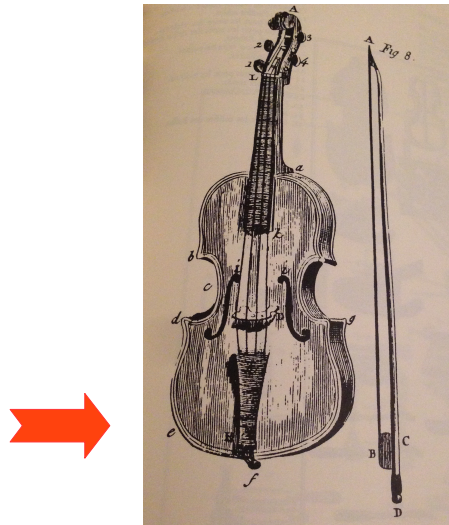


Figure 37: Encyclopedie de Diderot - example

Jean-Baptiste Labadens – *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre à jouer du violon* – Paris 1772

*One must hold the violin with the left hand and put it on the breast, in a way that the button where the tailpiece is bound is against the middle of the body; one must hold the violin leaning from left towards right, so that the «chanterelle» (E string) is a lot lower than the fourth string*⁸⁷



Figure 38: Labadens – *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre à jouer du violon*

⁸⁶ Encyclopedie de Diderot, Paris 1751-1772, Edition Fuzeau 2001 p.319

⁸⁷ Labadens, Jean-Baptiste – *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre à jouer du violon*, Paris 1772, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p. 18 translated by I.Henry

Georg Simon Löhlein – *Anweisung zum Violinspielen* - Leipzig und Büllichau 1774

*One holds the violin from its lower part, where the button is, so that the tailpiece is fixed to the left shoulder, but without lifting the shoulder, and turn the violin a bit towards the inside, towards the breast. Some violinists put the chin on the right side of the table, some others on the left side; the body and the instrument remains freer if you do not apply so much pressure with the chin when you need to reach higher position. When difficulties are met, if the hand has to travel up and down, it is preferable to apply the pressure on the right side.*⁸⁸



Figure 39: Georg Simon Löhlein – *Anweisung zum Violinspielen*

Pietro Signoretti – *Methode contenant les principes de la musique et du violon* – La Haye 1777

*One must hold the violin neck in the left hand. One should then put the violin under the chin, on the left side, so that the chin is on the right side of the violin.*⁸⁹

John Preston (publisher) – *The entire new and compleat tutor for the violin* – London 1778⁹⁰

(no description of violin position)



Figure 40: *The entire new and compleat tutor for the violin*

88 Löhlein, Georg Simon – *Anweisung zum Violinspielen*, Leipzig und Büllichau 1774, Edition Fuzeau 2007 p.12 translated by I.Henry

89 Signoretti, Pietro – *Methode contenant les principes de la musique et du violon - Seconde Partie*, La Haya 1777, Edition Fuzeau 2005, p.1 translated by I.Henry

90 Preston, John (publisher) – *The Compleat Tutor for the Violin*, London, 1778

Jean-Benjamin de Laborde – *Essai sur la Musique ancienne et moderne* - Paris 1780

One holds the violin with the left hand, the bow with the right; one takes it by the neck and puts its lower part under the chin, so that the button is on the left collar-bone⁹¹

Michel Corrette – *L'art De se perfectionner dans le Violon Ou l'on donne à étudier des Leçons Sur toutes les positions des quatre cordes du Violon et les différens coups d'archet* - Paris 1782

It must be held between the chin and the top of the breast, the chin turned on the side of the fourth string, named «bourdon»⁹²



Figure 41: Michel Corrette – *L'art De se perfectionner dans le Violon*

Francesco Geminiani (Christoph Torricella – editor) – *Gründliche Anleitung oder Violin Schule ou Fundament pour le Violon* – Wien 1782

The violin should be held between the collar-bone and the jawbone a bit on the right side, so that one must not lift too much the arm when using the first string. Also the upside and downside part of the violin should form a right line with the breast, so that the hand can play light and travel up and down, and the violin does not slip away. Finally, the chin has to be placed on the right side and not on the left side of the tail piece in order to improve the playing.⁹³

It is interesting that over the years editors *improved* the old treatises. In this case in 30 years since the first edition of Geminiani's method the violin technique must have changed enough to make his instructions old-fashioned, yet the name of the author kept attracting people to buy this new book. The same situation happened with instructions of Leopold Mozart in works of Cartier and Woldemar. This also indicates the direction in which position of the violin changed.

91 Laborde, Jean-Benjamin de – *Essai sur la Musique ancienne et moderne*, Paris 1780, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.359 translated by I.Henry

92 Corrette, Michel – *L'art* – p.2 Edition Fuzeau 2003 – small handwritten notes on top of the page – Rés F.891 translated by I.Henry

93 Geminiani, Francesco (Christoph Torricella – editor) – *Gründliche Anleitung*, Wien 1782, Edition Fuzeau 2007 p.1 translated by I.Henry

Louis Bornet l'aîné – Nouvelle Méthode de Violon et de Musique - Paris 1786

The violin has to be put under the chin, in a way that the button arrives in the middle of the neck, the hand at the height of the shoulder, the head straight and the chin doesn't press the violin, the elbow under the violin and close to the body, without being fixed to it.⁹⁴

Anonyme – Principes pour apprendre facilement à jouer du Violon - Paris c. 1790

It must be held between the chin and the top of the breast, the chin turned on the side of the fourth string, named «bourdon»⁹⁵

Francesco Galeazzi – Elementi Teorico-Pratici - Rome 1791

Place the chin on the left side of the violin, that is to say on the G-string side immediately next to the tailpiece, and not on the opposite side. (...) This position is unattractive and causes those ridiculous contortions all too characteristic of those who hold the violin so.⁹⁶

Johann Adam Hiller – Anweisung zum Violinspielen, für Schulen, und zum Selbstunterrichte – Leipzig 1792

Among many violin players, it is easy to notice, considering the Holding and «Installation», that they do not come from the best School, or that they do not play very precisely or properly. Mozart gave a double example of the right way to hold a violin. And if he says that the first one is pleasant and easy, he also says that it is not to recommend, because when the hand goes up and down, the violin can not be held straight if one could not, through a long training, acquire the advantage of holding firmly the violin between the thumb and forefinger against the violin-neck. The second manner is more sure and better. The violin will indeed be held against the neck so that the front part of the shoulder is a bit [uncovered], and the side of the violin where the E-string is held straight under the chin.⁹⁷

Louis-Antoine Durieu – Methode de Violon – Paris 1794

One must hold [the violin] putting the button that holds the tail on the neck, without consideration on which side of the tail. However, it is more secure on the left side⁹⁸

Giuseppe Cambini – Nouvelle Méthode Theorique et Pratique Pour le Violon – Paris 1795

There is only one good way of holding the violin. All the others are bad. Experience and the lessons of good masters have adequately demonstrated this. The back of the instrument must be positioned on the collar bone so that the chin can be pressed on it opposite the fourth [G] string, because changing the position of the hand, or, if you like, shifting, requires that the violin should be

94 Bornet, Louis l'aîné – Nouvelle Méthode de Violon et de Musique Paris 1786, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.5 translated by I.Henry

95 Anonyme – Principes pour apprendre facilement à jouer du Violon, Paris c. 1790, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.2 translated by I.Henry

96 Galeazzi, Francesco - Elementi Teorico-Pratici p. 79 -80 Rome 1791, translation after R.Gwilt - Traditions...

97 Hiller, Johann Adam – Anweisung zum Violinspielen, Leipzig 1792, Edition Fuzeau 2007 p.5-6 translated by I.Henry

98 Durieu, Louis-Antoine – Methode de Violon, Paris 1794, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.2 translated by I.Henry

supported firmly.⁹⁹

Ignaz Schwegl – Grundlehre der Violin. Zweiter Theil Wien 1795¹⁰⁰

(no description)

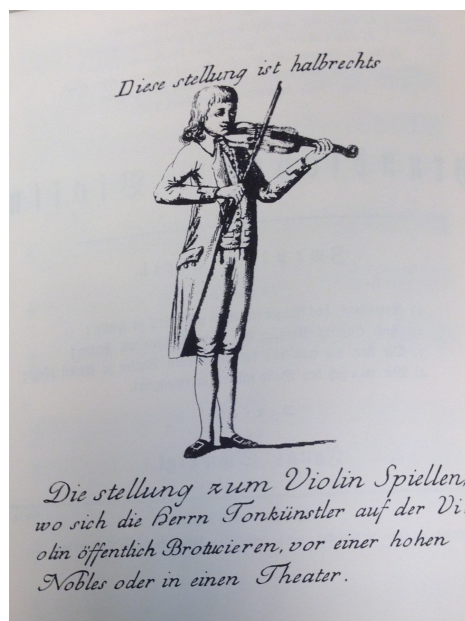


Image 42: Ignaz Schwegl – Grundlehre der Violin. Zweiter Theil

Antoine Bailleux – Méthode raisonnée Pour apprendre à Jouer du Violon – Paris 1796

*The violin has to be held so that the chin is on the side of the fourth string, and lower the side of the chanterelle. When one wants to shift, one must put the chin on the violin, it gives a great liberty for the left hand, especially to come back to the ordinary position. One can get this skill with assiduous exercise.*¹⁰¹

Anonyme – Principes de Violon – Paris (no date)

*The violin is held between the chin and the left side of the chest on which it is based but slightly tilted to one side, so that the left side of the Violin is a little higher than the right.*¹⁰²

99 Cambini, Giuseppe – Nouvelle Méthode Paris 1795 p.2 translation after Brown, Clive - Physical parameters of 19th and early 20th-century violin playing

100 Schwegl, Ignaz – Grundlehre der Violin. Zweiter Theil, Wien 1795 Fuzeau 2007

101 Bailleux, Antoine – Méthode raisonnée, Paris 1796, Fuzeau 2003 p. 6 translated by I. Henry

102 Anonyme – Principes de Violon, Paris n.d. p.6, Fuzeau 2003 translated by I. Henry

Bartolomeo Campagnoli – *Metodo della meccanica progressive per violino* – Milano 1797

*The back of the violin is placed on the left collar bone, and the chin pressed lightly on the belly, on the side of G string close to the tail piece. It is necessary to avoid drawing the chin too near the collar bone, and thereby holding the violin constrainedly; but it should be so directed, that the head of the performer may remain as nearly upright as possible.*¹⁰³



Figure 43: Bartolomeo Campagnoli – *Metodo per Violino*

Bernardo Lorenziti – *Principes ou nouvelle méthode de musique* - Paris 1798

*The violin must be held between the chin and the top of the breast, the chin turned on the side of the fourth string (also named «bourdon»)*¹⁰⁴

Jean-Baptiste Cartier - *L'Art du Violon* - Paris 1798

*There are generally two ways of holding the violin. The first one is to put it directly against the breast, lowering a bit the side of the Chanterelle (E string). The second is more comfortable for the player; one puts the violin on the collar-bone so that the chin is on the side of the fourth-string lowering a bit the side of the chanterelle. (Mozart the Father - Violin school)*¹⁰⁵

Of course Cartier *updated* the recommendation of L.Mozart to hold the chin on the side of the 1st string and advises to place it on the side of the 4th string.

103 Campagnoli, Bartolomeo – *Metodo per Violino*, Milano 1797, Edition Fuzeau 2005 p.1 translation after R.Stowell
Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the late Eighteen and Early Nineteenth Centuries p.41

104 Lorenziti, Bernardo – *Principes ou nouvelle méthode*, Paris 1798 p.2, Edition Fuzeau 2003 translated by I.Henry

105 Cartier, Jean-Baptiste - *L'Art du Violon*, Paris 1798, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.1 translated by I.Henry

l'aine Anicot – *Principes du Violon* – Paris c. 1800

*One must hold the violin between the chin and the left side of the breast, on which it has to lean a bit to the side, which means that the left side of the violin has to be a bit higher than the right one, in order to touch easily the four strings with the bow.*¹⁰⁶

Jean-Baptiste Bedard – *Nouvelle méthode de violon* - Paris 1800

*Put it directly against the breast, leaned a bit to the side of the chanterelle, the chin turned towards the fourth string*¹⁰⁷

Michel Woldemar – *Grande méthode* - Paris c.1800

*The violin is held with the left hand, [pressed] on the collar-bone from below, and under the chin from the top, the arm must be turned and be very close to the body, not so far from the hips*¹⁰⁸
*It's immaterial whether one places the chin on the right or the left part of the violin, as Tartini, Frantzl and Cramer used to place it on the right and Locatelli, Jarnovick and Viotti placed it on the left. This latter manner is the most general.*¹⁰⁹

It is impossible to summarize briefly the changes that happened in music during the 18th century.

Violin technique underwent a huge development, however the universal method of holding the instrument was still not developed. There was a general tendency to move the instrument higher on the body but there were still many exceptions. Towards the end of the century holding the violin with one's chin on the left side of the tailpiece was the most usual. This is possibly because it gave the biggest advantage to the performer obliged to play music of the classical period. Looking at the music written during that time by the biggest virtuosos, one can only wonder how they were able to perform it without any appliances to support the violin under the chin. Later methods like those of Löhlein or Campagnoli become much more detailed in dealing with the general posture of the violin player. Possibly as the repertoire developed teaching those aspects became much more important. We also see a lot of emphasis put on the position of the elbow, with developing different ways of using it as support for the violin. Support of the instrument thus became a very important issue at the end of the 18th century. Technical difficulties together with more general access to studying instruments could also be a reason for the emergence of a new musical form – the etude.

106 Anicot, l'aine – *Principes du Violon*, Paris c.1800, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.3 translated by I.Henry

107 Bedard, Jean-Baptiste – *Nouvelle méthode de violon*, Paris 1800, Edition Fuzeau 2003 p.10 translated by I.Henry

108 Woldemar, Michel – *Grande méthode* Paris c.1800, Edition Fuzeau 2001 p.2 translated by I.Henry

109 Woldemar, Michel – *Grande méthode* p.2 translation after Stowell, Robin – *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, Cambridge University Press 1990 p.39

The Paris Conservatoire and the official method

The Paris Conservatoire was established in 1795 as a result of political and social changes at the end of 18th century in France. More institutive teaching programs replaced traditional master-student relations. That required an official method of teaching. Such a book was written in 1803 by Rodolphe Kreutzer, Pierre Rode and Pierre Baillot.¹¹⁰ Those three gentlemen became professors of violin in the Paris Conservatoire and writing such a treatise was one of their duties. The Paris institution was so influential that in a couple of decades musicians in Europe started to be taught using its example.

As described in the previous chapter, the violin was gradually held higher with the chin on the left side of the tailpiece. However there were still other methods recommended at the same time. Michel Woldemar even specified which virtuosi used which method of holding the instrument. It is interesting to read that Viotti preferred the left side of the violin as a point of support for his chin as he was not only an exceptional violinist but also a teacher of Baillot and Rode and had a lot of influence on Kreutzer. It is natural then that they included his way of holding the violin in their method:

*The violin should be placed on the collar bone, held with the chin on the left side of the tail, somewhat tilted to the right, supported horizontally by the left hand in a way that the end of the neck is in the middle of the shoulder.*¹¹¹

There is no picture in this method. The details were certainly taught during private lessons. More information can be found in the private treatise of Pierre Baillot, *L'Art du Violon*, which was published in Paris in 1834. The description of how to hold the violin is generally the same as in the official Conservatoire method but with much more detail and such examples of good posture¹¹²:

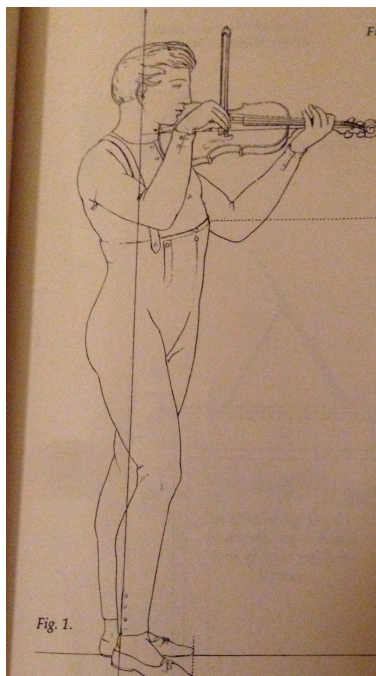


Figure 45: P.Baillot - *L'art du violon* - example 1

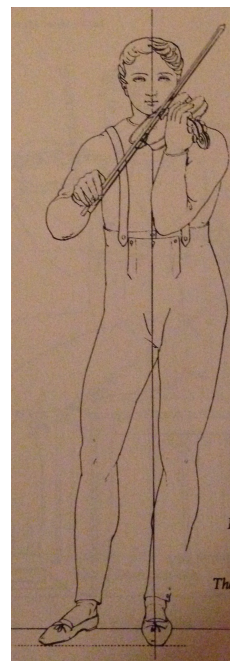


Figure 44: P.Baillot - *L'Art du Violon* - example 2

110 Bennett J. – The Origin of The French Conservatoire, “The Musical Times”, Vol. 31 No.569, 1890

111 *Methodé de Violon par MM. Baillot, Rode et Kreutzer*, Paris 1803 p.5 translated by I.Henry

112 Baillot, Pierre – *The Art of The Violin*, Northwestern University Press 2000 Plate 1

The Paris Conservatoire established a new way of teaching violin which was gradually adopted by other schools and nations. In principle from now on the way of placing the chin on the left side of the violin was established. However it took a lot of time to become completely established. As late as 1846 J.F. Hanks writes that many people still hold the violin against the breast (however he admits that the most approved method of holding the violin is to place it on the left collar bone and to keep it in place by placing the chin on the left side of the tailpiece).¹¹³ Another famous example of the old method could be Joseph Joachim whose famous painting clearly shows that his chin is on the right side of the tailpiece¹¹⁴.



Figure 46: A.Menzel – J.Joachim and C.Schumann playing music

Increasing technical requirements prompted a need to find a greater violin stability. In the era before chin rests that was achieved merely by position of the body, elbow or pressure of the chin on the violin or against the neck (e.g. Habeneck, de Beriot¹¹⁵). Paganini is known for contractions of his body which were presumably helping him with executing difficult passages.¹¹⁶ However this soon was not enough. This is when the new inventions appeared.

113 Hanks, Jarvis F. - A Complete System for the Violin, Timothy B.Mason 1846

114 <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0a/JoachimAndClaraSchumann.jpg> last accessed 7.01.2016

115 Habeneck, François-Antoine – Méthode théorique et pratique de violon Paris 1842 p.30, Bériot, Charles-Auguste de Méthode de violon, Op.102 Paris c.1870 p.4

116 The Secret of Paganini's Technique Author(s): Edgar Istel and Theodore Baker Source: The Musical Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan., 1930), pp. 101-116 Published by: Oxford University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/738605> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:30 UTC

Chin rests and pads

Baillot was the first one to mention pads in his treatise of 1834. He says that especially for small children, young people and women it might be useful to put a little tissue between the left arm and the instrument for support.¹¹⁷ It is difficult to know if he used it already from the beginning of his teaching at the Conservatoire or whether this reflection came later, with experience. It is really interesting to see how detailed Baillot's explanation of holding the violin and position of the player is. He explained every single angle of the violinist's body, and even the distance between a music stand and the player and the angle under which one needs to look at it. It was not only meant to help with acquiring perfect technique but also to make a better (visual) impression on the audience. Interestingly, he also mentions that the reason why it is better for women to have a thick handkerchief or a type of cushion under their instruments is that they have nothing in their clothes to help them put the violin in the right position.¹¹⁸ Thus this is another reference to the importance of clothing in violin playing.

The first chin rest seems to have been invented by Louis Spohr. He describes it in his violin method of c.1832 and says that his students, colleagues and he himself had been using it with great success for around 10 years. Despite later opinions, the chin rest (called a fiddle-holder) was not meant to protect the varnish of an instrument. The inventor himself claims that at that time it was really necessary to hold the violin firmly with the chin and that no matter on which side of the tailpiece one places it, it is still difficult to do so without constraint. A fiddle-holder was a remedy for that as well as a mean to free the sound vibrations which used to be limited by pressure of chin on the instrument's belly.¹¹⁹

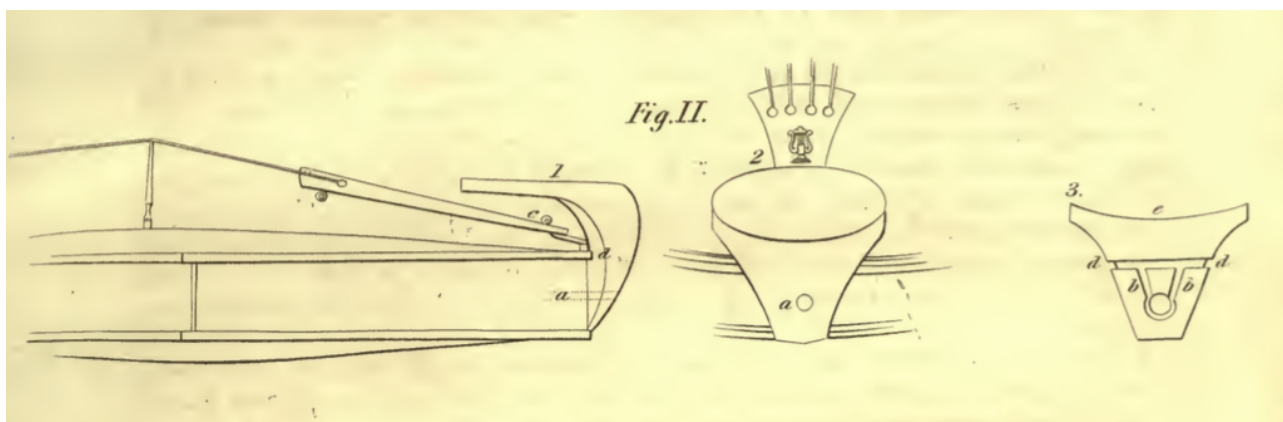


Figure 47: L. Spohr - Celebrated Violin School - fiddle-holder

This chin rest does not touch the belly of the violin having in this respect considerable advantage on modern chin rests. It was attached to the instrument by a peg, which replaced the original violin's button. The design is really interesting and I imagine it was the best compromise between holding the instrument stably under the chin and not limiting its sound quality properties. While using a fiddle-holder both hands become freer therefore not only shifting becomes easier but also bowing is unaffected since the violin does not move under the chin with every position change. With all the new bow strokes developing that seems to be a major improvement.

117 Baillot, Pierre – The Art of Playing the Violin p.26

118 Ibid p.26

119 Spohr, Louis – Celebrated Violin School translated by John Bishop, London, n.d. p.2-3

The posture of a player also wins because of the new invention. It is unrestrained and more dignified. The player seems to be totally at ease which give a very beautiful visual impression.



Figure 48: L.Spohr - Celebrated Violin School - violinist posture

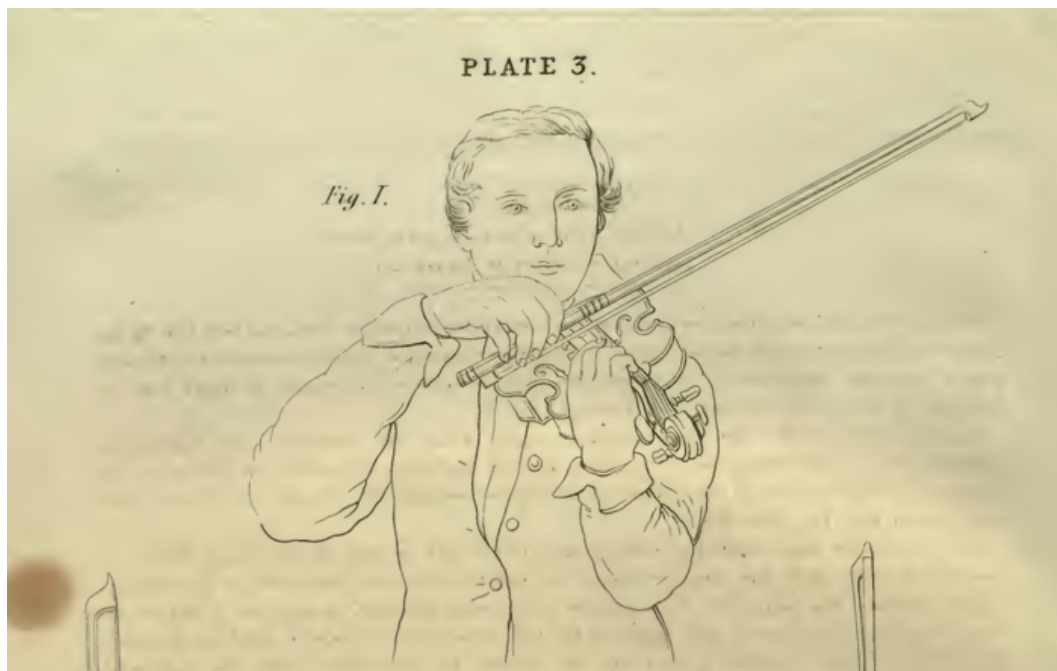


Figure 49: L.Spohr - Celebrated Violin School – violinist posture

However both these inventions needed a lot of time to become regular additions to the violin. Even as late as in the beginning of the 20th century gentlemen were arguing on the pages of *The Musical Times* whether the chin rests should be abolished. The arguments raised on one side (A.Hartmann) were that the chin rest was only invented to preserve the varnish and the biggest virtuosi of the 19th century did not use it (Paganini), or that having them did not make any difference to them (Sarasate). The other side's argument (T.Fussell) was that by holding the violin with the chin without a chin rest one can never get a full sound out of the instrument. The last of the gentlemen (A.Sammons) says that playing with a chin rest is just more comfortable.¹²⁰ There is one more very interesting view included in this discourse. As one of the important factors of choosing to play with or without a chin rest Mr Sammons gives collars they wear nowadays. He finds it impossible to play with this collar without a chin rest and says that recently because of this, he chose to use a high chin rest and finds it much more comfortable.¹²¹ Therefore – another reference to the importance of clothing in violin playing.

The most fascinating thought though are instructions that A. Hartmann gives about holding the violin (and this is already the year 1915):

*The violin should be held firmly (at times only) by the chin and the shoulder (...) and finally, so that at certain times the violin may lie lightly on the collar-bone so as to allow full and free vibration of all its parts.*¹²²

Arthur Hartmann was not an ordinary man. He was a distinguished contemporary violinist and a great teacher, performing more than a thousand recitals over Europe and the United States also together with Claude Debussy, his close friend. Therefore he can be considered a specialist of violin playing even if his technique seems to be a bit old-fashioned (e.g. the head of his violin faces down and not straight as in newer methods – Figure 50¹²³)



Figure 50: Arthur Hartmann

120 Why All Chin-Rests Should Be Abolished Author(s): Arthur Hartmann Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 56, No. 864 (Feb. 1, 1915), pp. 105-106 Published by: Musical Times Publications Ltd. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/909014> Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:22 UTC

121 *ibid*

122 *ibid*

123 Martens, Frederick – *Violin Mastery*, Dover Publications 2006 p.40

Different violin holds - conclusions

In the previous chapter I presented the history of violin holds in quotes and pictures. It is clear that the universal method of holding the violin was not developed even in the 19th century.

The many ways in which the violin was held can be classified in those 8 groups:

1. [supported on the arm by a scarf, chord or other things - arguable]
2. below the breast, against short ribs
3. against the shoulder/breast
4. below the collar-bone
5. on the collar-bone– chin only supports the instrument from time to time
6. chin on the right side of the tail-piece
7. chin on the left side of the tail-piece
8. chin rest and/or shoulder pad

There were many ways of holding the violin. These 8 groups are only an indication since every violin hold had many variants. There were differences in the position of the elbow, direction of the violin's head, its inclination and many more. As presented before the holding of the instrument depended on many factors. That could be a teacher, the school of playing, the type of performed music as well as more personal matters like the build of a player, the violin shape or even the clothes. It is hardly possible to choose a historically correct method of holding the instrument knowing how personal it was. Most of the descriptions we have come from the teachers and scholars and rarely describe exact performers. There are just a few examples where we know how a certain virtuoso held the instrument and those remarks are not always completely reliable. And even if we know how Matteis held his violin would we like to repeat it knowing that he was the only one to do it this way? His music was published and performed by many others who held the violin differently. If one wishes to imitate one of the performers then which one would be historically correct? And, if we decide to imitate a certain performer, wouldn't it be mere acting and not true art? Should we not develop our own technique based on the many historical sources which would be the result of what was achieved in violin playing in the past?

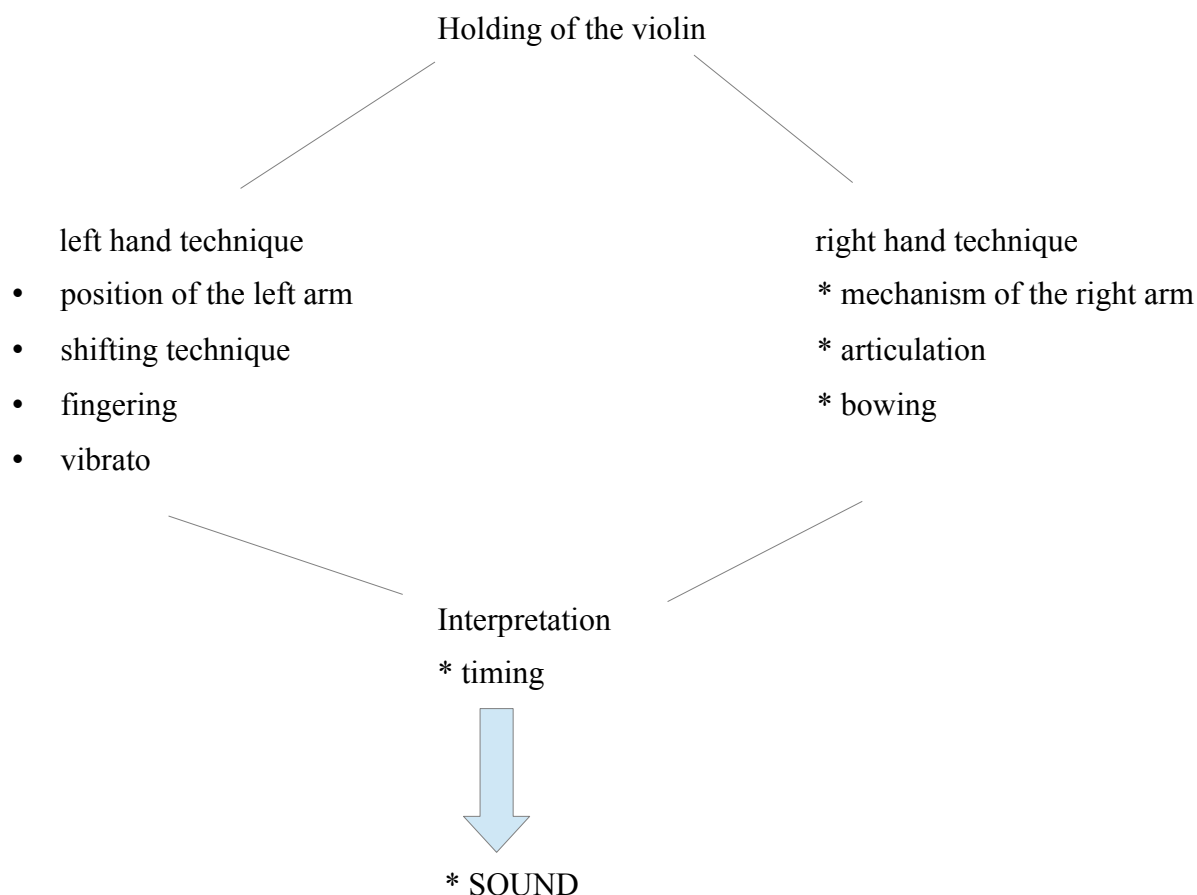
From an historical point of view we observe (with many exceptions) a process of changing in holding the violin in the order presented above. However the methods from point 2 till point 5 coexisted from the beginning of violin playing until the second half of the 18th century, the last 4 points appeared also together later on. It is only in the second half of the 18th century that holding the violin against the breast started to be obsolete and became a technique used mostly (if not only) by folk musicians. After this point most of the musicians would place their chin on one or another side of the violin. And if we want to play repertoire from the 19th century we need to make a decision about using the chin rest or not (with both options being possible still in the 20th century).

How violin playing changes depending on the violin hold? Practical experiments

The fundamental fault of most pupils is that they do not know how to hold either the bow or the violin. - Franz Kneisel¹²⁴

Holding the violin is the most important aspect of violin technique and the base for its later development. But how does it apply to historically informed musicians who abandon their own developed technique in order to search for something new? There are many choices and compromises to be made and many questions to be asked. Especially in early music each solution brings many consequences. In my opinion if such a fundamental question of holding the violin is not raised to the consciousness of students it results in technical problems and limitations.

But how does the position of the violin really influence our performance?



¹²⁴ Martens, Frederick – Violin Mastery, Dover Publications 2006 p.74

Left hand technique

Position of the arm

The functioning of the left hand depends on the position of the violin on the body. In each position the arm needs different tools to help the fingers reach all the notes on the fingerboard. The position of the elbow, fingers, height and inclination of the violin, are all changed throughout history together with rising difficulty of the pieces, changes of style and instrument and bow development.

Most of the detailed descriptions of the left hand technique come from the late 18th century. In the previous chapter I proved that before that period most of the violin holds were present. From the second half of the 18th century we have still the choice of using either the old-fashioned chin off grip (most likely with supporting the instrument with the chin) or to go with the development of violin technique and adopt one of the grips where the chin presses (at least at times) on the belly of the instrument. Therefore this part will mostly concentrate on differences between those two holds and their variants.

The points in which most of the authors agreed were not to raise the left shoulder, not to constrain the chest, not to press the chin on the belly too much and to tilt the violin to the side in such a way that the bow can play on all the strings without problems. The means to achieve them were different.

The support of the instrument could generally be provided by the chin, shoulder and left hand (sometimes even the palm). Some of the writers still advise to use the thumb, some say that the elbow pressed against the trunk can be used to support the violin.¹²⁵ It seems that Paganini used that method combined with the support from his hand and chin.¹²⁶ Some sources speak about pressing the violin more into the neck when it needs to be grasped more firmly. The proportion in which all the elements provided support depended on the violin hold which was used. The later the period the less the left hand was employed due to a more stable grip with the chin. With the adoption of the chin rest the left hand gradually received full freedom from supporting the instrument (which happened only in the 20th century).



*Figure 51: G.F.Kerstin -
Der Geiger Nicolo Paganini*

¹²⁵ B.Campagnoli

¹²⁶ Istel, Edgar; Baker, Theodore - The Secret of Paganini's Technique, Source: The Musical Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan., 1930), pp. 101-116 Published by: Oxford University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/738605>
Accessed: 21-08-2015 07:30 UTC

Engravings from the treatises of the late 18th century show differences in violin level. This depended a lot on whether the chin rest was used and on which side the chin was placed. Still in Campagnoli's method the violin is directed downwards. He was considered a very good player however his technique was already old-fashioned. L.Spohr wrote about him that *His method, it is true, is of the old school; but his play is pure and finished.*¹²⁷ In Spohr's method however, the violin is already directed more horizontally. It is not only due to the chin rest since that position can be seen also in the method of Baillot, a student of Viotti. Directing the violin head lower seems to facilitate the work of the right arm which does not need to be raised too high to reach all of the strings. This way was considered natural for Baillot for playing while seated.¹²⁸ Directing the head of the violin more horizontally or higher on the other hand moved the weight of the instrument towards the player's neck which was helpful for the support of the instrument, especially in higher positions. Raising the instrument higher also gives a better support for the bow since in this way the instrument and bow give opposite forces to each other which balance in the point of contact of the bow with a string.

There is another direction which varies depending on the type of grip of the violin. The instrument could be held straight in front of the player or be directed a bit to the left. Both ways are present in the sources. Generally placing the chin on the right side of the tailpiece causes the violin to be positioned further to the left of the player's body and directs it more to the left side. On the other hand putting the chin on the left side necessitates positioning the violin more in the middle of the body and makes the instrument more straight.

The inclination of the violin to the right is something usually advised and often difficult to achieve. In my opinion clothing had a much bigger role than we wish to admit. Even on the above painting of Paganini (Figure 51) one can see how big his collar was and that it partly overlapped onto the violin. Nowadays we have to make a decision whether we want to help the violin to tilt to the right side or not. Various writers differed in the prescribed angle of the inclination. Baillot wrote about 45 degrees¹²⁹, Spohr about 25 degrees¹³⁰. In some cases, depending on the build of a player, it is possible to find a natural way of holding the instrument without the help of a pad so that it tilts to the right side. In others, without it the violin stays nearly flat on the collar-bone. This is not optimal as the fingers of the left hand have a much bigger distance to reach especially on the 4th string, the right arm needs to be raised much more while playing on the G string and we cannot use natural weight of the arm anymore. In this case also the elbow needs to be turned much more under the violin.

The position of the elbow depended a lot on all the above aspects of left hand technique and changed accordingly to the way of holding the violin. Usually it was recommended to have it under the middle of the instrument¹³¹ however Campagnoli advises to place the elbow well under the violin and even to lean it against the body if necessary¹³² (Figure 43). This is to get additional support for the chin-restless violin. Later, with the adoption of chin rests, the elbow was released from most of its supporting function. The perfect method of placing the elbow (hand and fingers) in the correct position is the so called *Geminiani grip*. When the fingers are put in that position the rest of the arm should naturally adopt a good position. This was repeated by many authors since the time of Geminiani well into the 19th century.

127 Spohr, Louis – Autobiography, Longman, Roberts, & Green 1865 Translated from the German p.72

128 Baillot, Pierre - The Art of the Violin p.22

129 Ibid p.19

130 Spohr, Louis – Celebrated Violin School p.13

131 P.Baillot, L.Spohr

132 Campagnoli, Bartolomeo - Metodo della meccanica progressiva per violino p.2

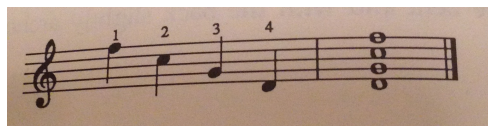


Image 52: Geminiani grip as presented in P.Baillot's *The Art of the Violin*

Nowadays the usual position of the thumb on the fingerboard is opposite to the first (fore) finger. This was only one of the options advised back then. The other one was to place the thumb opposite the second finger or between the first and the second one. That position of the thumb allowed the hand to have bigger extensions and to reach more notes on the fingerboard without shifting. The thumb's role changed with time. With the position of the violin against the breast or lower it was one of only 2 contact points of the violin and the player and it was also responsible for bringing the hand back into the lower positions. It used to stick out more above the fingerboard and to grip it stronger in order to support the instrument as much as possible.¹³³ With time and raising the position of the violin the thumb did not have to work so hard as there was one more point of contact – the chin. It went a bit more under the fingerboard and did not press so strongly on the neck of the violin. This greater freedom of the hand is necessary to play repertoire from the second half of the 18th century and later. Therefore adjusting the position of the thumb could be of consideration to players who would like to change their violin hold from low to high or the opposite.

Shifting

The technique of changing positions is crucial for the chin-restless violinist. Finding a way to do it comfortably and unrestrainedly is of highest importance not only for playing in tune but also for the violinist's health. Not holding the instrument with the chin implies developing other tools to bring the hand down to low positions. As mentioned before the thumb was often employed as a means of support for the instrument. It was also used a lot in shifting.

There is hardly any description of the mechanics of shifting in the primary sources. There are however a lot of preserved fingerings which can give us an idea of what that could look like. There are few methods of changing positions that we can use depending on the violin hold.

The method we associate mostly with the chin off ways of playing the violin was based on the thumb crawling down the fingerboard and creating a kind of pivot to lift the rest of the hand. There are however two options. Two of the authors of modern treatises of baroque violin (Stanley Ritchi and Elizabeth Wallfisch) advise to move the thumb first and then the fingers¹³⁴. However the only (to my knowledge) baroque source of information about shifting – F.Geminiani mentions the opposite method - first move the fingers and then follow them with the thumb¹³⁵, which is often employed by baroque violinists.¹³⁶ Later in the 20th century Galamian acknowledges both possibilities in his *Principles of Violin Playing in Teaching* explaining that the first one works best for small changes (like descending from the 3rd to the 1st position) and the second one can be used to shift down from much higher positions.¹³⁷ Various writers describe tricks which can be used by a player to facilitate the shifting. That includes unsounded preparatory note, playing the last and

¹³³ Look at contemporary paintings

¹³⁴ Wallfisch, Elizabeth - *The Art of Playing 'chin-off' for the Brave and Curious: A Treatise on One Technical Aspect of 'baroque' Violin Playing in the Year 2003*, King's Music 2005 p.15, Ritchie Stanley – *Before the Chinrest* – Indiana University Press 2012 p.30

¹³⁵ Geminiani, Francesco – *The Art of Playing on the Violin* p.3 example [E]

¹³⁶ e.g. explanation of Tricia Ahern (Tafelmusik): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-9r077PCBc> last accessed: 1.03.2016

¹³⁷ Galamian, Ivan - *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, Dover Publications 2013 p.23-24

highest note of a passage with a harmonic or using detached bowing.¹³⁸

As early as 1738 Corrette says that it is necessary to use the chin to support the violin during shifting.¹³⁹ Possibly already then the use of the thumb and chin was combined. Gradually the proportion between the two changed towards only chin/shoulder support which we have now in the modern violin. The absence of direct instructions regarding changing positions can possibly be explained by the more personal attitude towards students. Tartini says:

*As regards changing position, it is impossible to give any hard and fast rules. The student should adopt whatever method he finds more comfortable in each case, and he should therefore practice the hand shifts in every possible way so that he is prepared for every situation that may arise.*¹⁴⁰

Fingering

Depending on the violin grip, we employ different ways of shifting which cause us to choose different fingerings. With a no chin method no shift or small shifts are generally preferred over big jumps (with the exception of Geminiani who seems to do the opposite). From the preserved fingerings we can learn a lot about habits of changing positions¹⁴¹ (this however was usually marked only in more difficult passages). When we do not use our chins we tend to keep our hand in low positions and to avoid more difficult shifts (like shifting with the same finger). However as violinists of the 18th century became more accustomed to the chin based grip they experimented more and more with different types of fingerings. Mozart for example suggests that one can use higher positions for the sake of necessity, convenience or elegance e.g. to play the notes which lie close together on one string.¹⁴² Galleazzi recommends changing strings as little as possible and in order to determine in which position the passage should be played one needs to examine its highest and lowest note and adjust the rest to it.¹⁴³ Spohr writes that nowadays the high positions are also used on lower strings and not only on the E string.¹⁴⁴ P.Baillot gives many instructions on how to choose the fingering but besides the *the most secure* and *the easiest* fingering he mentions also the *expressive* fingering which is characteristic of a composer. He compares the fingering of Viotti (who would always stay in the same position as much as possible), Kreutzer (who would shift frequently on all the strings) and Rode (who shifted on the same string). Each of these methods has its advantages and disadvantages. He says that:

*It is by observing (...) the differences which result from the choice of position, of string, and of fingering, that violinists can finger their own music so much better, depending on the type of expression they would like to give it.*¹⁴⁵

Some of the preserved fingerings can be performed with any of the violin holds and some require chin support. By looking at the music we can often guess if the composer had a chin based grip in mind. In this case we will probably not find open strings or repeated notes on which we could shift down from high positions – chin support allows the player to shift swiftly in virtually any moment he wishes. Instead we find big jumps in fast tempos and a lot of passage work. In the following example W.A.Mozart not only writes huge jumps (between bars 19 and 20, 21 and 22 and bars 23

138 Stowell, Robin – Violin Technique and Performance Practice.. p.98

139 Corrette, Michelle – L'ecole d'Orphée, méthode pour apprendre facilement à jouer du violon p.7

140 Tartini, Giuseppe – Traité des agréments de la musique ed.E.R.Jacobi, New York 1961 p.56

141 e.g. in Leclair's First Book of Sonatas published in Paris in 1723

142 Mozart, Leopold – A treatise on the fundamental principles of violin playing, Oxford University Press 1985p.132

143 Galeazzi, Francesco – Elementi vol. I p.123

144 Spohr, Louis - Celebrated Violin School p.77

145 Baillot, Pierre – The Art of the Violin p.263

and 24) but also shifting needs to happen during the long slur. In this case trying not to touch the instrument with a chin takes a lot of energy and practice and is not justified by any historical evidence.



Figure 53: W.A.Mozart - Symphony no 35 in D major - 1st movement Allegro con spirito

Vibrato and portamento

I find that portamento (in the meaning of gradual slide between notes of different pitch) and vibrato require a stable violin grip. In case of portamento, especially while shifting down, the whole hand should change the position at the same time. Of course it is possible to make some sort of portamento just by sliding the finger but since this is an ornament which connects two notes in different positions in my opinion the effect is much better when the whole hand moves at the same time. There is evidence of portamento becoming more and more popular towards the end of 18th century causing different reactions.¹⁴⁶ Reichardt writes that it is only permissible for a soloist¹⁴⁷ and Burney seems to be charmed by its usage.¹⁴⁸ However there are descriptions of it in all the major violin treatises of that period¹⁴⁹ whether to approve it or disapprove with its application, which only proves its growing popularity.

Vibrato is another technique which grew in popularity with time. Geminiani writes that it should be employed as often as possible¹⁵⁰ however after trying it together with his violin hold I think that *as often as possible* can be translated as *whenever possible* as without gripping the instrument more firmly it is not possible to use constant vibrato without making the instrument tremble. Mozart distinguishes 3 types of vibrato (slow, accelerating and fast) and Spohr adds the fourth one – decelerating.¹⁵¹ Such a development of vibrato techniques could be emphasized by the fact that with a firmer grip it was finally possible to execute.

146 Stowell, Robin – The Early Violin and Viola: A Practical Guide, Cambridge University Press 2001 p.60

147 Reichardt, Johann Friedrich – Ueber die Pflichten des Ripien-Violonisten, Berlin, Leipzig 1776, Edition Fuzeau 2007 p.35

148 Burney, Charles - A General History Of Music: From The Earliest Ages to the Present Period, 1782 p.992

149 Cambini, L'Abbé le fils, Mozart, Campagnoli, Spohr, Habeneck, Baillot, Beriot

150 Geminiani, Francesco – The Art of Playing on the Violin. London 1751 p.8

151 Stowell, Robin – The Cambridge Companion to the Violin p.131

Right hand technique

Right hand technique is inevitably connected with that of the left hand. The position of the instrument, its direction and inclination determine the position of the right arm and its distance from the body. The lower and more in front the instrument, the lower the arm. The more to the left the instrument, the higher the elbow needs to be. The same applies to the inclination – the bigger angle means a lower arm and if the violin is more horizontal the higher one needs to raise the elbow. It is often the case that in playing baroque violin it is recommended to have the elbow low but little is being said that in order to do it one often needs to adjust the position of the instrument as well. If we want to force the elbow to stay low but at the same time the violin is horizontal the bow cannot easily reach the G string and the sound is not at its best. To solve this problem one can either change the inclination of the instrument by placing a pad under it or raise the right arm a little bit. Bringing the both arms more together to the centre of the body can possibly create a compromise between the preferred violin hold and the recommended bow arm technique.

The bow not only creates sound but also provides stability to the instrument. If the violin is placed very low the bow arm (equipped with a short bow back then) does not have any problem in reaching all the strings, especially when the G string is employed only at times. In higher holds, if the violin is not supported by the chin the bow's role increases. It can be used very well to stabilize the instrument during shifts. Placing the chin on the right side of the tail piece gives support to the left hand to reach higher positions on the two higher strings. Placing it on the left side facilitated the use of all the strings, especially for the right hand.

With articulation again, the same as in the case of left hand technique, some of the things can be performed with any violin hold and some require more stability. The second half of the 18th century with its transitional bows and later on with the advance of the new Tourte model encouraged developing new bow strokes, many of which seem to be impractical without holding the violin firmly with the chin. Namely martelé, staccato (especially if includes crossing strings), ricochet, fouetté which often require more force from the player and consequently make the violin tremble if not secured tightly. Also the slurred legato especially when connected with playing on one string seems to gain a lot when the chin stabilizes the instrument.

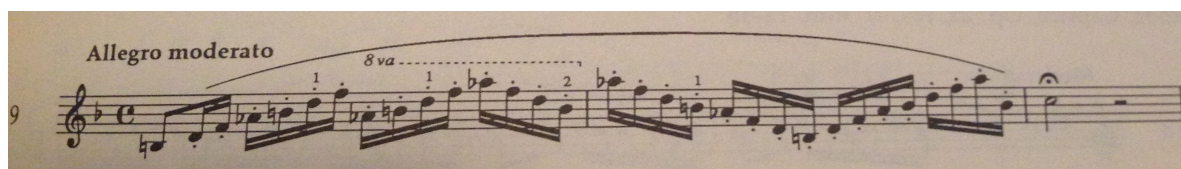


Figure 54: Ex.12.39 from P.Baillot - The Art of the Violin p.179 - Staccato with crossing strings

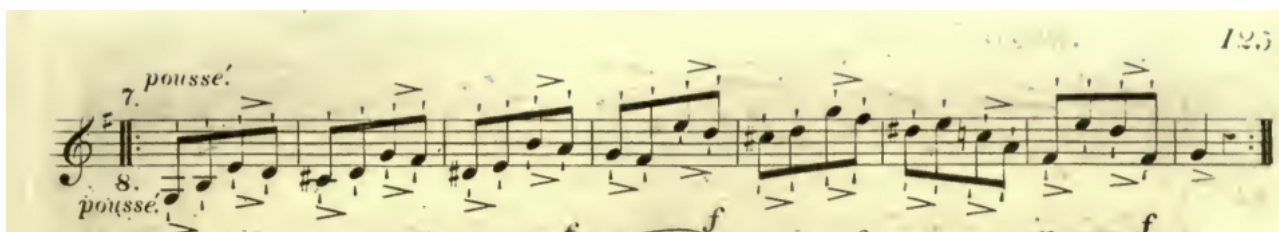


Figure 55: Ex. 7 and 8 from L.Spohr - Celebrated Violin School p.125 - fouetté

What I noticed in my own practice is that sometimes I used to choose the bowing to match my pre-chosen way of holding and supporting the violin. Very often, like in the example below, I used to retake the bow to gain time I needed for changing position in playing with the chin off the violin. However musically this retake is not necessary and creates additional accents. It is a pity to compromise musical choices because of technical limitations when there is an easy (and historically correct) solution to a problem – holding the violin.¹⁵²



Figure 56: J.M.Kraus - Sonata for violin and bc in d minor VB 157

Another compromise which is often seen when a baroque violinist tries to perform later repertoire without adjusting the technique is the timing of big jumps. Especially in the later period it often happens that the solo violin has a long scale finishing very high after which comes a big jump towards the cadence. It is less disturbing when a composer provides an open string after the highest note to bring the hand down but it is not always the case. Very often I saw a lot of extra time taken on such a scale or in the jump during which the audience can observe a desperate crawl down the fingerboard which is unfortunately often hearable. The solution is the same – hold the violin and the timing will be entirely your decision and not dictated by your technique.



Figure 57: S.le Duc - Sonata 4 for violin and bc

¹⁵² Of course there is nothing wrong if someone actually prefers this extra accent. What I mean is to make a conscious choice as opposite to making musical choices based on the limitations of our technique.

Sound

In my opinion sound is in the end the only thing which is of real interest to the audience. By means of sound we can bring all the affects and emotion to the listeners. Since the 17th century various writers praised the violin for its expressive possibilities and variety of effects that can be achieved on it.

But the sound depends on many aspects. Leaving aside the properties of different instruments, set-up or bow, how much can the sound depend on the position of the violin on the player's body? According to the article of Bernard Richardson the form of the force at the bridge would be virtually the same on each instrument (given the same set of strings, player and playing conditions). However the sound would not be the same. It is the body of the instrument which responds to the vibration of the string and colors the sound.¹⁵³ Would it not be logical that anything that can alter vibrations of the belly will change the sound?

The least contact points the instrument has with the player's body, the more freely it vibrates. Therefore it is true that with just two points of contact (like in low positions against the breast) the sound is more round and free than when we employ a chin grip. But is it necessarily better at any cost? In the works which compared two violin holds we do not find descriptions of differences in sound. What they concentrated on was the posture, facility of playing, security of intonation and avoiding contractions of the body.¹⁵⁴ They describe how much more secure the violin was when held with the chin at least during the shifts and how much freer the left hand was. I did not find any source saying that one or another way of holding the instrument made a disagreeable sound. The comparison of the vibration of the belly came only later, after the invention of the chin rest. This was to say that even if it does damp the violin a little bit it still does it less than pressing the belly with the whole chin.¹⁵⁵

Throughout history, violin players searched for the best solution to support the instrument and to achieve a beautiful sound. Obviously the definition of beauty changed over time. But are we competent to judge which sound is more beautiful? After making several live experiments I always got the feedback that there is a big difference in sound with different violin holds and I never heard that one or another sound is better. It appears that the players of the time did not mind compromising the amount of sound in order to have better management of the instrument. Why would we then try to achieve the idea of not touching the instrument with the chin even in later music (or at all)?

The difference in the sound is obvious in a live experiment however it does not transmit well into a non-professional recording machine. Probably the differences of sound would also disappear in a big concert hall. In order to compare the difference of sound one needs to have something to compare it to. But I feel that it is a matter of what the player hears next to the ear which makes him feel more at ease and free to produce the sound he wishes. There is a difference in sound and in the feeling of the instrument which responds differently depending on the violin hold. I also feel encouraged to create different type of sound depending on how I hold the instrument. It is still my sound, because it is me and my violin speaking. But maybe a little bit different, like a foreign language which can sometimes express much better what we feel and what our native language cannot describe.

153 Richardson, Bernard – The physics of the violin in Stowell, Robin – The Cambridge Companion to the Violin, Cambridge University Press 1992 p.36

154 e.g. Mozart, Galeazzi

155 Spohr, Louis – Celebrated Violin School p.2

Conclusions

The main aim of this paper was to see whether the position of the violin had any influence on the sound and violin technique. After examining the sources and doing several live experiments I am certain that it does.

In the previous chapters I presented how the attitude towards violin holds changed from the emerging of the violin to the advent of the chin rest. As seen before, different violin holds coexisted at the same time.

Most of the time, especially in earlier repertoire, it is not possible to judge with certainty about the violin hold employed by the composer or performer of the piece. This opens new possibilities of experimentation. If we know how the violin hold influenced the sound we can use it to create more variety, even within the same piece. If we know what sound we want to achieve we can adjust our technique a little bit and receive it with less effort.

Holding of the violin, being the most fundamental violin technique, influences greatly the rest of the violinist's development. I tried to outline all the elements of technique and interpretation that are or could be influenced by it. But can we use this knowledge in our performance practice?

First of all I find it important to learn more than one method of holding the instrument. I do not think we should necessarily change our violin hold from piece to piece in a real concert situation however in my opinion studying only one way immediately from the beginning is limiting to the performer.

The violin players of the baroque and classical periods learned only one way of playing the violin but they did not have to perform the whole range of music from renaissance to romanticism. And even if they did play a piece from the more distant past, they performed it according to their esthetic views.¹⁵⁶ But if our aim is to represent original ideas and style of the past maybe it is not a bad idea to try to incorporate at least some parts of their technique(s) as well.

There are some general objective limitations. These have to do with the size of the violin, length of its neck and the build of particular player. This I find very important to take note of. A very small hand, a big violin and a low position of the instrument against the breast will not work very well together and might be potentially dangerous to health due to excessive stretches. However there are many tricks that we can still learn from our ancestors. Some of them can be placing the chin on the instrument in difficult passages, redirecting or tilting the violin, adjusting right hand technique to the left one and changing the side of the chin in relation to the tailpiece. We can choose to hold the instrument more or less firmly depending on our needs. Especially for later music I always found it very difficult to know how to hold the violin without chin and shoulder rests and still be able to play the repertoire. Primary sources give a lot of trouble shooting information which we can learn from.

Violin technique can be adjusted to reach a certain sound effect we are aiming for. It is good to experiment even if only to be aware of different effects we can possibly create. Awareness and knowledge is something very important that we can achieve by trying different things. And later there is time to decide.

It is impossible to give a straightforward direction of how one should hold the violin. It depends on too many factors to have a valid prescription working for every person. The only advice is to experiment and make personal choices. However I hope that with this paper I have been able to encourage potential readers to give up their habits at least for a moment and search for these new possibilities.

156 e.g. Mendelssohn's arrangement of J.S.Bach's Matthew Passion

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