THE OPENER

Subproject: **BACK TO BASICS**

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This subproject is pedagogical in nature, as it searches for answers through direct work with a group of students.
The subproject is organized as a series of six monthly sessions, beginning in October 2024 and ending in March 2025. In addition to these, a special presentation was given in November as part of the weekly strings class. A performance involving all the strings from the Grieg Academy is planned for February 2025 as part of a project week. See detailed plan below.
The present text will cover the sessions that have taken place in the fall of 2024.

The initial research questions for this subproject were:

– How may the conscious and consistent adherence to basic principles of violin playing ensure a reliable and sustainable craft for the violinist?
– How may silence enrich the craft and life (inner and outer) of the violinist?

Although these questions have remained relevant for the entire project, I have come to realize that the limited time span covered by the project is not sufficient to answer them satisfactorily. Even though I have provisional answers based on my personal experience – at the time of this writing fifty years as a violinist, forty-seven as a performer and thirty-seven years and four months as a violin instructor – where the students are concerned, a full answer to these questions cannot become available in such a short time. I now see these sessions as a way of planting a seed for a possible future wherein the students may recognize the value of the ideas discussed and tried out.

An opportunity

The Opener has given me the chance to try out my most deep-rooted ideas about sharing knowledge – developed over three and a half decades – in a concentrated manner (see **Background** below).

A challenge

The Opener has made it necessary to reflect on my work as a violin instructor: what is it that I do when I teach? How do I do it and why?

A further challenge

The Back to Basics sessions were open for everyone and designed especially for the Grieg Academy violin class. As with much activity within the academic world, the sessions were highly recommended but not obligatory. Also, they took place between 08:30 and 10:00, making it imperative to get up early in order to attend. I knew from the outset that this was

going to be a problem. An extra effort was required! This would show whether the students found the sessions to be important enough to get out of bed in the morning.
There are currently nine full-time violin students at the Grieg Academy. Below I designate each with a number in order to show who attended each session:

Session 1 – Students 1, 2 and 3
Session 2 – Students 4, 5, and 6
Group class demonstration – Students 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8
Session 3 – Students 4, 5 and 7

This clearly shows the difficulty in achieving continuity and a satisfactory sense of a shared progression. Several of the ideas explored in a previous session had to be repeated in the later ones. This will be addressed in the final session (March 2025)

Background

In my early years in Norway I faced a clear decision between becoming a full-time teacher and a full-time orchestral musician. I opted for the former, as I found it to be – based on a few years' experience in both fields – much more rewarding. It also gave me much more freedom to pursue my musical interests, both within my place of work and outside. This choice soon led to an existential tension that has stayed, present and correct, with me for the past 37 years: I would rather teach for free and be paid for everything else I do. Having a teaching job has meant that the opposite is true: I receive a salary for teaching music and only get paid, relatively meagrely, for about 10% of the musical work I do outside of my daily place of work.
I also soon came to the conclusion that music is not an academic subject. Although it has academic aspects at the nuts-and-bolts level, music is, in essence, the art of combining sound and silence in meaningful ways; or, if we wish to look deeper, a way of giving silence a voice. Both descriptions may be hard to bring to actuality, but there is nothing academic about them. They are practical, as in *related to practice*.
In July 1988 I attended a seven-day long music course in Aurland, Norway, that completely recalibrated my way of looking at music, the world and myself. I had by then earned a bachelor's degree from a prestigious American music academy and had worked with some musicians of great renown. Yet, after only three days at the course I realized that I knew nothing about either myself or music. What I saw and learned in those seven days would require far more space than this text allows for. In short: I saw what music could be and what I could be within it.
That course – called Guitar Craft and led by the guitarist Robert Fripp – became a new source of existential tension or, to put it more colloquially "a thorn on my side". I have measured every musical situation since then in relation to what I was shown in those seven days, only very rarely coming close to it.
Guitar Craft – nowadays called The Guitar Circle – is very much in the Back to Basics vein in its approach to learning. Nothing whatsoever is taken for granted. Every action, however minute or automatic, is subjected to close scrutiny, down to the way one breathes, moves, eats, speaks or thinks. Although it uses the guitar as a tool to explore one's relationship to oneself and music, its principles can be applied to any instrument or, indeed, any walk of life.
The Alexander Technique was and is an intrinsic element of Guitar Craft/The Guitar Circle. I was exposed to it for the first time in the July 1988 course. Between the spring of 2001 and the spring of 2004 I took weekly Alexander Technique lessons in Bergen from Stephen Parker
The Alexander Technique – discovered and developed by Frederick Matthias Alexander is a

method that helps us become conscious about the use of our body by directing it from the inside. These three years further crystallized my practice and made me keenly aware of the necessity of a sound physical attitude in order to be able to properly do *anything at all*.

In short: my approach in conducting the Back to Basics sessions is informed, primarily, by Guitar Craft and the Alexander Technique applied specifically to violin playing.

Before proceeding, I must make the following disclaimer: I am in no way qualified to teach either Guitar Craft or the Alexander Technique. What I *can* do is to pass on some of the essential ideas from both crafts related to my practice and proven through personal experience.

A few words on approach

Taking Guitar Craft and the Alexander Technique as my main sources of inspiration in my work as a violin instructor may suggest that the rich tradition of violin playing and pedagogy is, at best, of peripheral interest to me. Such an assumption is partly true and partly untrue.
I chose the violin as my instrument. In fact, I demanded to learn the instrument at the age of nine. I fell in love with it as a child and the essential part of me knew it had to become my primary voice. I already knew, in my childlike way, that I wanted to become a musician from the age of eight. I became steadily acquainted with much of the standard repertoire for the violin from the Baroque to the Twentieth Century. First by ear, then gradually learning many of the key works from the literature. This became my backbone as a violinist. I learned to love the great violin works and my first teachers further inculcated in me a love for the instrument. In other words: the violin tradition is an intrinsic part of who I am as a musician. I have the greatest love and respect for it. Through the years I have also made myself acquainted with the most important violin methods from the past three centuries. I will discuss this further on the **Looking for context** section.

Tradition is a great asset to any craft. A deep pool of existing knowledge to lean on and explore.
It can also get in its own way.
One can easily become seduced by the playing of the great violinists from the present and the past, to the point of idly trying to imitate them. One can also easily become blind followers of a method, as represented by a teacher.
Tradition must, instead, be understood as an evolving entity rather than a fixed or rigid one. Some of the outer aspects of the methods by Leopold Mozart (mid 18th Century) and Simon Fischer (late 20th Century) as quite different. However, these and many other methods, share a number of unshakable principles that have stayed true through the centuries. These are the aspects of pedagogy that interest me: Universal Principles. They apply to anyone, anywhere, anytime. They are the “basics” included in this subproject’s moniker.
Back to Basics.
Let us begin from the beginning.
Let us agree on principles that apply to everyone.
And let us implement them consciously and consistently in our practice.

The plan of the Back to Basic Sessions

This section shows the content of the sessions conducted in the fall of 2024 and the plan for the sessions to be held in the first three months of 2025.

14. OCTOBER 2024

Without violins

Doing nothing:
Sitting exercise Video SITTING EXERCISE
The rationale behind the sitting exercise: if we wish to ask our body to do something we must first be able to ask it to do nothing. Our first action after the sitting exercise will then be intentional, leading to further intentional actions.

The left hand:
- Rotation exercise
- "Waving goodbye" exercise
- The action of each finger
  - On a table surface
  - In the air

The left arm:
- Support elbow with right hand. Let go
- In-out exercise
  - Up-down movement within "out" position (forearm)
  - Up-down movement within "in" position (hand)

All these principles were readdressed in the session of November 13th (see below) with a different group of students.

Reflections on the 14.10.24 session

Discussion about the exercise. Experience: a sense of calm. Possible reasons for it, referring to nervousness in performance.
All students had done something similar in other contexts, for example: mindfulness.

Discussion around "attention" . What is it? How does it happen? Does it happen? Does one engage it?
Walked out of the room and came in again. What had we noticed?
Discussion about working in groups.

Personally:
Partially successful session.
Spoke clearly and slowly enough, but can be even clearer.
Found myself fiddling with my fingers, not in complete control of my muscles, but able to return to semi-relaxed state upon noticing.

13. NOVEMBER 2024

Without violins

Doing nothing
Recap of previous session.

The left hand/arm –

Support the elbow with the right hand. Let go.
Waiving goodbye.
Lining up the fingers.

Low position. Move forearm up and down between first and third/fourth position)

High position. Bring elbow out; move forearm up and down between fifth position and the end of the fingerboard) Video I - 1

The right hand/arm –

Horizontal motions.
Support elbow with left hand while doing the following:
Middle to tip movement. Forearm.
Middle to frog. Whole arm, wrist bending gradually as we approach the frog.
Vertical motions.
Up-down exercise (arm)
Use only the necessary muscles, allowing the rest to relax and support the Motion Video I - 2

Crouching exercise Video I - 3

With violins

Placing the violin in relation to the body. Video II – 1
"Waiving goodbye" Video II – 2
With all four left hand fingers lined up on the A string, slide the hand along the string from first to seventh position while supporting the elbow with the right hand. Become aware of the light contact between head and instrument. Video II – 3
The action of each finger. They fall by their own weight. Demonstrated and tried on a music stand. Video II – 4
Holding the bow vertically. Placement of the thumb between second and third digits. Let the bow slide vertically from the hand grip: lightness of touch. Video II – 5
Replicating the movement of the bow arm by bowing along the bow stick. Must be done in pairs: one holds the bow, the other performs the motion.
On the string: middle to tip; middle to frog. Video II – 6
Where does the movement begin? Each student in turn.
What happens at the moment the decision is made to play a down bow?
Like taking the first step before walking on stage.
Become present ('doing nothing' exercise - quick). *Play from intention*

Without violins

Division of attention.
Alternatively strike the thighs with the hands: left-right.
+ Count out loud three bars of four: 1234 2234 3234. Expand to 6 bars, then 12.
+ Stomping on the floor with the left leg every third beats, beginning with the first beat of the first bar.

Take instruction as information that has to be verified in your own practice

Reflections on the 13.11.24 session

The exercise of replicating the movement of the bow arm by bowing along the bow stick did not go entirely well. The bow was held too far from the body to get the proper sensation of bowing. Note to self: prepare it better for a future demonstration. Use it in individual lessons. Good comments from the students re: where a bow stroke initiates.
Personally:
Much better control of myself. Clearer speaking. Truer to who I am.

5. DECEMBER 2024

As I was scheduled to perform Schoenberg's 'Phantasy for violin with accompaniment for the piano op. 47' on December 11th, I decided to present the work to the strings class. I saw this as a forerunner of the sessions in January and February 2025, on the theme of practicing. Here, however, we were starting at "the deep end". The Phantasy op. 47 is an atonal work, with barely the faintest tonal references on which the violinist's intonation may be anchored. Unlike in the standard canon, there is nothing in the piano part to help the violinist in pursuit of the right pitch. One is entirely reliant on one's ears, assuming a secure and through understanding of all existing intervals. In this session I played some excerpts from the standard repertoire (Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms) in order to underline Schoenberg's deep roots in tradition.
The central part of the presentation, however, was concerned with the technical aspects of securing intonation in a work of this character.
I introduced the idea of lateral knowledge of the fingerboard, as opposed to the linear/horizontal approach we learn from traditional scale and arpeggio practicing. This would be further explored in the session of December 11th. Being able to play any note on any string and immediately naming the corresponding notes with the same finger on the other strings greatly facilitates the pursuit of intonation. This applies to any kind of music but is particularly useful in music without a tonal centre. Carl Courvoisier touches on this in his "Technics of Violin Playing" (p. 51). This ability is further expanded by a thorough familiarity with the eight basic intervallic combinations possible with four fingers in position (see, again, December 11th session), and further yet with the judicious use of finger extensions, primarily – but not only – between 1 and 2 and between 3 and 4. Video SCH

Reflections on the 05.12.24 session

The presentation went well. As usual it took longer than anticipated, in spite of preparation. I had to cut some examples I had intended to use. All in all: satisfactory. I got across what I intended and spoke clearly.

11. DECEMBER 2024

Without violins

Recap of previous sessions

The kernel of vibrato. Fingers fall by their own weight. Three different heights result in three vibrato speeds. Using the natural falling of a leg as a simile III

24 four-finger combinations:

1234	**3**124
1243	3142
1324	3214
1342	3241
1423	3412
1432	3421
2134	**4**123
2143	4132
2314	4213
2341	4231
2413	4312
2431	4321

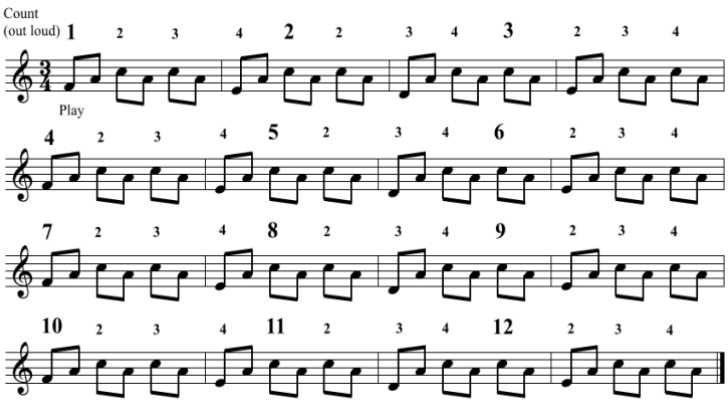
8 interval combinations with four fingers in succession (1234) in position, without stretching

half step – half step – half step
half – half – whole
half – whole – half
half – whole – whole
whole – half – whole
whole – whole – half
whole – whole – whole
half – whole – whole

Choose one key and play four-finger (1234) pattern along one string, covering an octave.
Adjust angle of arm in order to keep the fingers lined up. The first finger leads.
Repeat with 1234321 pattern.
Expand by moving the fingers up one string keeping the initial distance.
Play any note with any finger and name the corresponding notes in the other strings.
Central question:
How do the hands behave? The violinist must ask him/herself this question constantly in order to establish a healthy functioning of the hands.

Division of attention.
As in November session.

With violins



(This was the last exercise given at the Guitar Craft course I attended in Aurland in July of 1988)

Why the Back to Basics sessions are important.

To become ourselves we must address every aspect of our person.

Recall the moment when you realized music was wonderful and you wanted to follow that path, leading into…
The four stages of the musician (a retelling of a talk given by R. Fripp during the July 1988 Guitar Craft course in Aurland):
Visualizing an equilateral cross. The bottom represents the apprentice. The left point represents the crafts person. The right represents the master. The top represents the genius.
A good instructor and disciplined application are required to move from the bottom to the left. The crafts person is able to shape sound and can become a professional.
Mastery requires something more. It can be achieved through discipline. A master understands that music is silence expressing itself in sound. The master is able to shape silence.
The genius has no separation from music. He/she *is* music. We have all visited the genius realm early in life, at the moment we realized that music is wonderful. Naturally, we soon fell back to earth, not on a soft cushion but on a pointed stick that reminded us of that blissful encounter with music. We were then presented with a choice: begin the long journey that may enable us one day to visit that magic place again or do something else with our lives entirely.

The first requirement for embarking on the path to becoming a musician, or anything at all: get out of bed.

Reflections on the 11.12.24 session

Positive impression overall. Students were engaged and I managed to get my points across clearly enough. More at ease yet than the previous sessions.

JANUARY 2025

Theme: practicing (1)
I will bring a passage of violin music and practice it in front of the class.
The concept of Tacit Knowledge – central to artistic research – will be demonstrated in practice: every thought related to the learning of the passage, however seemingly insignificant, will be voiced in order to show a healthy process of learning on which to build on future practice sessions.
I will ask the students to bring a passage of their own to practice in front of the class in the following session.

FEBRUARY 2025

Theme: practicing (2)
Each student will present his or her passage and practice it in front of the class in a manner similar to the way I will have done in the January session.

MARCH 2025

Gathering the threads.
A summary of all the ideas and principles shared during the previous sessions.

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Looking for context

Let us face it: at this point in history there is nothing new to be learned about the principles of violin playing; no startling discovery waiting to happen. There are, however, countless approaches to learning and sharing the existing knowledge handed down to us by past masters of the craft. Each instructor finds his or her own way of sharing knowledge with students or colleagues. As instructors we 'reinvent the wheel' every time we teach. Each student is unique and requires an approach tailored to his or her needs.
A large number of violin methods have been published in the past three centuries. These are of great interest to the modern violinist and violin instructor. There is much to be learned from all of them if one assumes a double stance: as a beginner and as an experienced practitioner. The former gathers information; the latter gathers confirmation of what he/she already knows or finds points of dissent.
If the number of published methods can appear overwhelming to a budding instructor, what to say of the mountain of books filled with exercises, scales and etudes? A lifetime is not enough to practice all these existing collections. Nor would it help a student to attempt to do so.
Let us keep in mind that this overabundance of instructional books and compositions were written by violinists with an established teaching practice. It follows that learning to play the notes of any given exercise or etude is no use without the expert guidance of an experienced instructor. Classically trained musicians become adept at sight-reading anything that is put in front of them. Surely, certain combinations of notes are easier to "rattle off the page" than others: if they conform to easily identifiable diatonic patterns, the fingers will quickly find their way around them – provided one has diligently practiced scales and arpeggios over a long period. If, however, the score contains wide intervals or patterns that do not conform to a tonal scheme, the mere learning of the notes will require *thinking*. Perhaps even the acquisition of new skills. In the conservatoire system we are taught major & minor scales and arpeggios and chromatic scales. In my experience, however, students tend to freeze up helplessly when confronted by whole-tone patterns and diminished or octatonic scale patterns. The acclaimed Norwegian pedagogue Terje Moe Hansen had the foresight of addressing this large gap in modern violin pedagogy.
In more recent times, the Internet has made it possible for dozens upon dozens of violin teachers – and those of many other instruments – to spring out into global view. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram or Tonebase have given countless players a chance to share their knowledge with anyone willing to watch. Everyone has *something* of value to offer.
Naturally, no-one gives the whole picture but some have greater overview than others. With this state of affairs, it would seem we no longer need to go to a library or specialized store to get access to information about violin playing and pedagogy.
Well…
Yes, the way knowledge is disseminated has certainly changed. With the Internet everything – or almost – has become readily available. However, nothing – be it books or expert online instruction – can substitute one-on-one instruction happening *here and now over an extended*

period between a student and an instructor. Only an instructor present in the room with the student can properly follow up and nurture the student's progress over time.
Without wishing to disparage anyone's honest online contributions to violin pedagogy, there is, it seems to me, something inherently distasteful about presenting oneself to the world as an expert. In a few cases, the authority on display is so irrefutable that gratitude is the only reasonable response. In many others one wonders why any given character does not think it sufficient to share that knowledge with his or her students as teachers have done for centuries.
In December 2020, partly as a response to this emerging trend, I made an instructional video for my students. The subject was the double of Bach's B minor Sarabande and how I might go about learning and practicing it. I called it "an astonishingly boring video" and sent it to my students as a Christmas present before I went on research leave for three months. I later posted the video on my Facebook artist's page. This video can stand in for what I intend to do on the first two Back to Basics sessions of 2025. It also encapsulates my philosophy of practicing and, to a large extent, teaching.

In search for common ground and a wider context for my approach, I have revisited some of the methods with which I have familiarized myself over the years.
Here follows a brief and necessarily limited survey of a few methods that have appeared between the 18th and 20th centuries.

Geminiani

Francesco Geminiani's "The Art of Playing the Violin" was published in London in 1751. Geminiani wrote it in English.
The short volume consists of a number of instructions illustrated by music examples. These include scales with specific fingerings as well as compositions designed for the refinement of technique and the acquisition of good taste.
From the vantage point of the 21st Century, it is refreshing to see Geminiani address his method to both violinists and composers. This implies the indissoluble union of proper craft and creativity. Also the assumption that a performer and a composer reside within the same person. This was, let us remember, commonplace up to the Twentieth Century, where the roles of composer and performer became gradually differentiated.
Like Tartini, Geminiani places great emphasis on the practice of long notes with the swell towards the middle and a decay towards the end. This is the so-called "messa di voce", derived from singing and very in vogue in the 17th and 18th centuries. In a preserved letter, Tartini advises one of his pupils to practice such bow strokes daily (Alcántara)
Interestingly, Geminiani advocates the use of fingerboard markers for new beginners. This practice has remained in some schools up to the present. Like today, it was not universally accepted in the mid 18th Century. Neither was his ideal placement of the instrument at the bottom of the collarbone or his disdain for beginning every measure on a down bow.
Geminiani's distinction between "greater" (7) and "lesser" (5) semitones in the chromatic scale is interesting from today's perspective. It shows that intonation was still rooted in the laws of physics and that equal temperament was yet far from established.
One aspect of Geminiani's technical advice that does not resonate with me is his insistence on keeping the left hand thumb behind the first finger. This is a rigid instruction that fails to take into account the difference types of hands.
Among the many aspects of his method that *do* resonate, are

- His emphasis on shifts. In this connection he points out that, in descending shifts, the thumb must be the last to move. Many exercises are devoted to shifting technique, aiming at developing suppleness in the left hand.
- He entreats students to practice fingerings without the bow. Also a practice that is not universally accepted but which I have found to be sound and beneficial.
- I find the way he makes melodies out of scales – by varying the rhythm and providing a harmonic accompaniment in figured bass – endearing. Firstly, it shows the student that everything – even a scale – can be music. Secondly, it trains the student to think harmonically so that every note has a harmonic context, whether one plays alone or with others. I have found this skill to be generally lacking in students in my 37+ years as an instructor.

Of great value is Geminiani's systematic description of all types of articulation, their contemporaneous notation and the way they are supposed to be played with the bow. Likewise his list of ornaments and the way they are notated.

Leopold Mozart

Five years after the publication of Geminiani's method, Leopold Mozart published the first edition of his own violin treatise 'Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule' (Treatise on the fundamental principles of violin playing).
Should anyone need a practical description of the term "tacit knowledge", so central to artistic research, Mozart senior's violin treatise may well serve as a prime example. He was clearly motivated to write his book in order to raise the standards of what he saw as poor violin teaching where he lived and worked. He goes to great pains to describe the most common actions of violin playing, down to which finger one should use for a given note in a given position. He cannot hide his disdain for bad technique and poor taste, often resorting to sarcasm and irony. Like Geminiani, he entreats the violinist to make himself (it is always *he*) familiar with harmony and even poetry and literature in general, as well as with the art of singing. There, however, the similarities end. Mozart has no time for what he sees as the indulgence of the Italians, both in composition (wild, undisciplined modulations) and performance (flights of fancy, inconsequential bowings and excessive use of vibrato).
The Mozart treatise is of particular value for its meticulous enumeration of ornaments and their intended performance. Also for its many suggestions about bowing patterns for variation in harmonic progressions. Less appealing, from our point of view, are some of his suggestions regarding shifting and fingerings in general. Example: shifting many consecutive times with the second finger in upward scale passages.
Based on my experience, my main point of contention with L. Mozart's method is his clear differentiation between what he calls "whole" (1^{st}, 3^{rd}, 5^{th}, 7^{th}) and "half" (2^{nd}, 4^{th}, 6^{th}) positions. Although this may have to do with the fact that he was working with a violin devoid of either chin rest (Ludwig Spohr would invent it some decades later) or shoulder rest, I can't help but to speculate on the negative effect this way of thinking about positions may have had for future violin teaching. It is, in my experience, common to find that the 2^{nd} and 4^{th} positions – not to speak of the 6^{th} – often appear as a no-man's land of sorts to students in general – and to some professionals. We are still taught to think of 1^{st} and 3^{rd} positions as "safe". I was early saved from this unfortunate mindset by practicing Hans Sitt's studies in the 2^{nd}, 3^{rd}, 4^{th} and 5^{th} positions op. 32. And, of course, Rode's caprices nos. 3 and 9.
Another detail that has remained as a hang-up for violinists through the centuries is Mozart's dislike of the open strings. He repeatedly advises violinists to avoid using them in melodic passages, as they are "too shrill". I have encountered this often in my work with students,

when they try to avoid open strings at all costs, because they were told to do so earlier. In my view, the sound of the open string is the ideal one must strive for when playing stopped notes.

The 19th century gave us some of the most legendary and, reportedly, greatest violin virtuosos in history: Paganini, Ole Bull, Wieniawski, Vieuxtemps, Ernst, Sarasate, Joachim … to name some of the more prominent ones. Spohr, Viotti, Rode, de Beriot and others also enjoyed brilliant careers, if somewhat less outwardly grandiose than the players named previously. All of them were also prolific composers who wrote, in most cases, music of high quality that, with very few exceptions, was tailored to show their personal strengths. A notable exception was Spohr, who in addition to violin works wrote operas and chamber music with the skill of a learned composer. Vieuxtemps and Wieniawski also possessed a composer's craft robust enough to enable them to write large scale works in which violin virtuosity and musical substance went hand in hand. Viotti's concerto no. 22 – much admired by Brahms – has rightly also remained in the repertoire.
Spohr published his "Violinschule" in 1831. He was one of a relatively small number of prominent 19th Century violinists who wrote pedagogical treatises for the instrument. Delphine Alard (one of Sarasate's teachers) published his École du Violon around 1870. As early as 1802 Pierre Baillot, Rudolphe Kreutzer and Pierre Rode wrote a "Conservatoire Violin Method" together. Carl Courvoisier – a pupil of Joseph Joachim – published "Technics of Violin Playing" whose English edition appeared at the beginning of the 20th Century. Pierre Baillot, wrote "L'Art du Violon" (1834), Charles de Beriot "L'Ecole Transcendante" (18xx) and Henryk Wieniawski "Ecole Moderne" (18xx). The title of the last three can be somewhat misleading, as those volumes are a collection of caprices dealing with specific techniques. The instruction attached to them is minimal.
This essay cannot possibly accommodate any detailed commentary on these methods and etude books. Suffice it to say that they all provide a useful insight on the practices of their time. I would, instead, argue that the most valuable contribution to violin pedagogy in the 19th Century resides within the collections of etudes and caprices written by Rudolphe Kreutzer, Pierre Rode and Jacob Dont (op 35). Just about all necessary techniques for the acquisition of a sound violinistic craft can be applied by conscientiously practicing the short compositions contained in those collections. These can be supplemented by Kayser, Fiorillo, Léonard, Gavinies and others. Otherwise, the compositions by the virtuosi mentioned earlier, are an invaluable resource for understanding the 19 Century's "violin Zeitgeist". They also afford us a peek into the personal "peculiarities" – as Henrik Due might put it (see below) – of each of those players, some of whom did, indeed, create schools of playing.

Carl Flesch

Carl Flesch is rightly regarded as one of the foremost violin pedagogues of all time. Although he also enjoyed a successful concertizing career, he is mainly remembered as a great teacher. The first of the two volumes of his "Die Kunst des Violinspiels" (The Art of Violin Playing, first published in 1923) is the most comprehensive printed work of violin pedagogy from the first half of the Twentieth Century. It remains an indispensable reference even today.
It also represents the first link to a more human and less authoritarian mode of violin pedagogy further developed in the 20th century.
That Flesch covers all aspects of violin playing is a given. He considered this work as the most significant peak of his career. Tellingly, he mourns the fact that most of the great violin virtuosi of the 19th century failed to provide tutorial material that might have afforded their successors a better understanding of their practice and how they arrived at their respective styles of playing.

In relation to my work, the section of the book that interests me the most is the one devoted to practicing and, more specifically, the chapter called Practicing as a Tool for Learning (Flesch, p. 147). It does precisely what it announces, in a logical and creative way. The chapter displays many short examples from the repertoire with useful suggestions on how to master them. It represents one plausible entry point to the art of learning from the perspective of a violinist.

Henrik Due

Henrik Due was, with his wife Marie Barratt, the founder of the renowned Barratt Due Institute in Oslo. His handbook "Hvad enhver fiolinspiller bør vide" (what every violinist should know) was published in 1933, in a bilingual Norwegian and Swedish edition. It is to be thus assumed that he aimed the volume at budding violinists and violin instructors in the Scandinavian countries. Perhaps he sensed a lack of satisfactory string pedagogy there at the time.
While I cannot claim to have found anything genuinely new in this booklet, neither can I find much essentially wrong with it. Particularly praiseworthy is Due's insistence on the importance of a relaxed and supple musculature. He refers to sports training as a good example for violinists to follow.
His ideal bow hold is that the Belgian school: the bow stick is held by the thumb between the middle and ring fingers; it passes between the two lower joints of the index finger.
His insistence on the equal quality of teaching for amateurs and budding professionals is particularly praiseworthy. He claims that a healthy competence among amateurs is essential for a good music environment. (Due, p. 3)
He offers a logical but original solution for the frequent unevenness of attack between down and up bows: practice triplets, putting an accent on the first note of each triplet.
Due points out that the especially talented can allow themselves quirks that the less talented cannot afford. In a brief spell of dry humour he claims that such personal peculiarities tend to result in new violin schools. This echoes a similar statement from Carl Flesch (Flesch, Preface, vi.)
I am less sanguine about Due's admonition to move the left hand thumb down before a downward shift. This does not at all ring through from my practice. Neither does his admonition to keep the left hand finger pressure constant when performing one-finger shifts. These two small qualifications aside, I find Due's small book to be sensible, sound and refreshing.
He completes the tome with a series of scales, arpeggios and exercises.

Suzuki

Arguably no modern violin method has gained greater global traction than Shinichi Suzuki's. It is based on the principle that music can be learned in much the same way as one learns one's mother tongue. Suzuki famously said that if a small child can learn to speak Japanese, he can also learn to play the violin. The beginner is taught to play by ear and to imitate what his or her teacher shows. Music notation is introduced later. Parents are involved in their children's progress from the very beginning, making the experience of learning a collective affair where support, encouragement and mutual understanding are paramount. Kindness is an integral part of the Suzuki philosophy. By being kind to children they learn to be kind to others.

As in any oral tradition, the success of the method depends on the quality of instruction and the active participation of all involved in the learning journey – in this case teacher, child and parents.
I find it particularly interesting and positive in this method that children are initially taught to play by ear and imitation.
Interesting because this is the way music is learned in the "pop" world – pop being a term that includes very many styles of non-classical music. Pop musicians are often very poor readers or not readers at all. However, they become proficient at picking up or conceiving musical ideas by listening to them and then learn them by rote, through sheer repetition. Contrary to common belief in classical circles, such ideas can often be rather complex.
Positive because of my background. I grew up in Spain where – as in the other South European countries – one is introduced to "academic" music by the practice of solfège, i.e. sight-singing notated music without the aid of an instrument while marking the time signature with one hand. It is quite a feat of coordination for a beginner. Unless one is naturally predisposed to such exploits, this method tends to leave many young people by the wayside, failing to have fostered anything close to a love for music. Perhaps that is the purpose: sift out the underachievers in order to be left with the natural talents. This makes life potentially easier for the teacher but it also reinforces an unfortunate sense of elitism in classical music: '*music is not for everyone, only for the talented and the connoisseurs'*.
It is revealing that Suzuki believed that talent is not innate: it can be trained. This, for me, makes a connection to the founder of Guitar Craft, Robert Fripp. He began his musical journey tone deaf and without a sense of rhythm. All the same, music had spoken to him and, be sheer discipline and determination, he became a proficient player very quickly. No-one today would describe him as "untalented".

Kató Havas

The Hungarian Kató Havas set out, as an uncommonly gifted child, to become a successful concert violinist. After several years on the concert circuit, she got married and took an 18 years-long break form the stage in order to raise her family. During this time she collected the ideas that would develop into what she called A New Approach. She published a book with her findings, called A New Approach to Violin Playing, shortly followed by The Twelve Lesson Course and Stage Fright its Causes and Cures.
Havas continues the nurturing, person-friendly attitude hinted at by Flesch and fully embraced by Suzuki, Menuhin and others. The violin is treated like a friend, not like an object that must be mastered. Terms like hold, grip, hit or press are banned from her vocabulary. She substitutes them with positive words such as cradle, swing, cuddle or curl. Her work is directed towards the elimination of anxiety or fear aiming, instead, towards the development of an elemental joy of playing, giving and sharing. The three mentioned books are recommended reading for all violinists. Videos of her teaching are available on the internet and DVDs can be purchased.

Terje Moe Hansen

Another prominent Scandinavian violin pedagogue – a Norwegian, like Henrik Due.
Moe Hansen (born in 1953, on the same date as Paganini) became a violinist almost by accident. His father was a violin maker. He reportedly once asked his 20-year-old son – whose musical experience up to that point was playing guitar in bands – to try the sound of one of his instruments. He was amazed at his son's innate ability to play in tune, and with an intuitive vibrato, although he had had no previous training on the violin. Realizing he was too

old to start learning all the available pedagogical material, Moe Hansen devised a system of his own – the kernel of what would develop into his acclaimed method. After only three months of work with a local teacher he was admitted into the conservatoire.
Moe Hansen is left-handed and plays holding the bow with his left hand.
In 1997 he published the first of several pedagogical books that awoke international interest in the violin world: "A Modern Approach to Violin Virtuosity".
Developing the approach he adopted as a 20-year-old beginner, he laid-out a geometric division of the strings whereby all possible two-note intervals within the span of two octaves could be practiced. This is then expanded to cover all four strings, both alone and in different combinations. The number of available intervals is 12.400, apparently.
Moe Hansen realized that study material for violinists had failed to keep abreast of the advancements in composition from the beginning of the Twentieth Century to the present. Carl Flesch had commented this problem decades earlier in his book. (Flesch, p. 91)
The traditional material (Kreutzer, Rode, Dont, Sevcik, Schradieck et al. plus all the scale systems in existence) is of limited use if one tries to learn a piece of complex Twentieth Century music.
Even if his table of intervals may seem to verge on the obsessive, Moe Hansen deserves credit for being the first prominent violin pedagogue to notice the gap described above and do something about it. His is, arguably, the first properly new and original contribution to violin pedagogy in the Twentieth Century. Moe Hansen's methodology extends, naturally, beyond the mapping of the fingerboard. It takes into account the innate creativity of the students, even introducing improvisation as part of the work. He also has a great number of very useful physical exercises, both involving the violin and without it. These tie in neatly with previous work by Kató Havas and Yehudi Menuhin. I will return to Moe Hansen's work in the final reflections.

Simon Fisher

Fischer is one of the most successful and respected violin teachers of the past three and a half decades. His pedagogical books are widely used and he is in demand as a teacher worldwide. His book "Basics" contains 300 exercises covering every thinkable aspect of violin technique. Is it a method? If so, its layout is somewhat original and appropriate to our modern day penchant for easily digestible bits of information. It is divided in sections according to specific areas of technical study. Each section, however, consists of several easy to assimilate exercises intended to gradually build the technique of the violinist. The explanations are clear and thorough and are supplemented by a great number of pictures. Fischer has, as everyone nowadays, a website where one may explore his work through articles and, practically, the entire Basics series.

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Final reflections

To recapitulate, my initial questions at the beginning of this project were:

– How may the conscious and consistent adherence to basic principles of violin playing ensure a reliable and sustainable craft for the violinist?
– How may silence enrich the craft and life (inner and outer) of the violinist?

I have endeavoured to look for answers to these questions in the four sessions I have described earlier. As I also said above, diverse circumstances have made it difficult to arrive at these answers in a fully satisfactory form. The attendance to the sessions has been erratic, and the time scale of the project not large enough for any of the ideas or exercises presented to crystallize. I am aiming to get closer to it in the course of the three next sessions. In these I intend to make my motivation and intentions even clearer. I have a very fine group of students, and they deserve to know what lies behind my way of working. I am fully aware that said way of working may appear odd at times, as it is quite different from the traditional conservatoire way. In the meantime, this fall I have begun to feel the effect of the group work in my individual lessons. I can now refer to some of the principles that have been discussed during the Back to Basics meetings, knowing that the students will make the connection.

Regarding the first question, the historical methods I have explored – several of them for the second or third time – provide a very long answer to it. The evidence of violin playing to which we have access since the beginning of the gramophone era up to our day, provides another long answer. Everything we hear, from the earliest, primitive sound recordings of Sarasate, Joachim, Auer or Ysaÿe to the latest YouTube upload from one of today's virtuosi, is a result of centuries of violin pedagogy. All of the above methods have a great deal of value for anyone interested in the history of the violin and its pedagogy. They all contain sensible instructions of verifiable soundness, even after more that 270 years.

One aspect that all these methods generally fail to emphasize or even mention is presence. Two exceptions are Kató Havas and Terje Moe Hansen.
Havas' holistic approach is conducive to the development of presence, even if she did not – to my knowledge – use the term as part of her teaching.
In his book "Talent Utvikling" (talent development) Terje Moe Hansen writes the following:

> Concentration towards breathing gives us a sense of coming back to ourselves via a merging of body and mind. With a collected and indivisible "I". We will experience a new calm and oneness in our thoughts and actions. When our attention is directed towards the area around the solar plexus and follows the free breaths, we will experience a clearer mental presence and a richer and deeper experiencing of "I am". (Moe Hansen, p. 10 – translation: Ricardo Odriozola)

The above quotation appears under the heading "training consciousness". It is, from my perspective, pure gold and the only explicit reference to presence I have found in the relevant literature.
"Indivisible I"; a feeling of "I am". These expressions seem directly lifted from Gurdjieff's Work – the spiritual grandparent of Guitar Craft.
In the chapter about bow technique from the same book, Moe Hansen quotes F.M. Alexander:

> The parts of the body are so closely connected that any attempt at fundamentally changing the activity of one link automatically requires changes and adjustments of the whole. (Moe Hansen, p. 14 – translation: Ricardo Odriozola)

Moe Hansen's many preparatory exercises in the above mentioned book continue in the vein of Havas and Menuhin. This publication is also remarkable for its virtual lack of musical examples. These are – as is the case in Havas's "Stage Fright" – reduced to a bare minimum.

Presence is the inescapable condition for enabling intentional, positive action.

If we are present, a world of possibilities opens up. We are alert. We are in contact with ourselves. We see the world as it actually is. We are able to *do*.
If we are not present, things simply happen to us. Even worse, we can make bad decisions for which we may have to pay a very high price later.
The sitting exercise, introduced in the two first Back to Basics sessions, is one efficient way of developing presence.
On the theme of sitting, one of the strongest impressions I have retained from a violin-related film is the final section of Bruno Monsaingeon's documentary "Conversations with Yehudi Menuhin". Menuhin sits in the yogi position and talks about violin playing. During the end credits one sees Menuhin rolling his hands gracefully while speaking, with a serene smile on his face. As far as I am concerned, nothing encapsulates the joy of playing the violin – and life in general – better than those moments in the mentioned documentary, portions of which can be watched on YouTube.
Although Menuhin was an international violin soloist with a rich and busy performing career, he devoted a considerable amount of time to teaching. Like Havas, his approach was entirely based on a holistic union of body and mind.
We are fortunate to have his series of six lessons available to be watched. They also exist in book form. They cover all important aspects of violin playing in great depth and in an manner that is easy to understand and therefore also easy to apply, should one wish to do so.

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Young students have a general tendency to **shun the absence of sound**. Not silence, but the mere absence of sound. They often jump over rests, not realizing how important they are for the music. This unconscious fear of no-sound ties in with another shortcoming widespread among young players: **the inability to wait**. Something I have been able to verify time and again – both in myself and in others – is that **bad playing is almost always the result of playing too soon**; foolishly jumping into action without preparing for it or calculating the outcome.
Silence, or even simply stillness, is the source from which all positive action originates. The Norwegian composer Magnar Åm calls this "point zero": an empty room inside us wherein all possibilities are contained. Our most important task as aspiring musicians is to gain mastery of ourselves to the extent that we may feel this still point – where silence resides – within us, to the degree where we are fully present and ready to welcome music into our lives. Or simply play the first note of the day.

Another aspect that violin methods tend to bypass is the division of attention. This is the ability of holding two or more simultaneous courses of action, such as playing in one metre and counting in another – cf. the music example in the December 11th session. As performers, paying attention to two or more activities at once is a necessary part of our practice. In the conservatoire tradition we are put into situations of this kind in the manner of a child who, with no previous preparation, is thrown in the deep end of a pool and told to swim. We are put in chamber groups and orchestras and told what to do, but seldom how to do it or how one may go about getting there.

My motivation for teaching is to help students understand what they need to work on in order to have a long and healthy life in music. Fostering good habits is paramount. Equally important is to become aware of every new acquired good habit. This is for the students' sake and for the sake of those they may teach later in life. By achieving this, the students gradually become more themselves, more present, more able to take conscious action. While this is

taking place, they develop a relationship with music and learn about phrasing, style, articulation and all the technical aspects of the craft.
I do not presume to have found the ultimate method where violin teaching is concerned. Therefore I am reluctant to put all my experience as an instructor in book form, knowing full well that any idea I may put to paper will be a rehashing of available knowledge. If I do possess a method, it may be best described as *an absence of method*. I take all the useful aspects of historical pedagogy, all the fresh approaches I learn from public classes and online videos and digest them to the best of my ability. I then approach each student as a unique individual with needs that are partly universal and partly individual. I follow the Guitar Craft injunction 'we begin where we are'. I have met violinists of renown who have publicly expressed their dislike of and lack of patience for etudes. I love exercises and etudes and can spend hours working on them. By disposition, though, I am closer to the late William Pleeth who, in his book "Cello" wrote that he was sooner given to taking small passages out of the repertoire and create etudes out of them than to giving ready made etudes to his students. This is one further way of encouraging creativity in the student. It is easy enough to give the student an exercise. More valuable still is empowering students to devise their own, having become aware of a weakness that needs addressing. This is what Terje Moe Hansen did as an adult beginner with startling results.

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