

The West Riding Ensemble Bach 'Double' Violin Concerto Project: A Commentary

David Milsom, January 2025

In the summer of 1995, in the old National Sound Archive listening room on Exhibition Road, Kensington, I heard for the first time the Czech HMV recording of the Bach 'Double' Concerto played by Arnold and Alma Rosé (Bach, 1928), whilst researching my Masters thesis. The resulting text, *Early Recordings and Musical Style 1900-1950: Approaches to Baroque and Classical Violin Repertoire* (MMus thesis, University of Sheffield, 1996) explored the idea that, reading eighteenth-century instrumental treatises alongside listening to what we then called 'early recordings' revealed surprising parity: surprising, because the historical performance movement by that time had sought to distance itself from any iteration of 'romantic excess' and lack of discipline, and asserted an academic (and to my mind, rather 'dry') purity. But what I found in my early explorations of recordings of string players made before 1950 was often much more disciplined (if differently so) than I had imagined, and this set the course for an academic career exploring definitions of 'romanticism' in violin playing. Clearly, (which interested me even more) 'historical performance' was a highly political and potentially controversial issue, and so it has proven in the intervening time.¹

The austere and architectural playing of Joseph Joachim, in particular his Bach items, recorded in Berlin in 1903 for the Gramophone & Typewriter company (Bach, 2003a and b), were a significant contributory factor towards my contention that 'romanticism' needed to be defined and categorised. It appeared, indeed, not to be a slovenly and unprincipled morass of emotivity devoid of 'scholarship', but rather a theorised set of performance ideals and behaviours like anything else. Recordings by Mahler's concertmaster, Arnold Rosé (1863-

¹ This is an axiomatic issue. By the 1990s, music up to and including the Viennese 'classical' period was regularly subjected to scholarly analysis and performance that aimed to restore 'original' performing conditions. This still resonates today: whilst conservatoires are still liable to disregard historical performing practices applied to canonical repertory after 1800, most have historical performance programmes and specialist tutors devoted to 'baroque' performance especially. Indeed, when I explain that I research historical performance to products of such a conventional conservatoire system, most assume that I am a 'baroque violinist' in spite of a good three decades of practice research into romantic performing practices! An issue here is where there is a decisive 'gap' in practices: between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the article on 'Performing practice' in *the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (ed. S. Sadie, London, MacMillan, 1980, pp. 370 – 393), the section on 'After 1750' (itself revealing for its demarcation and relative concision compared to earlier epochs!) by Howard Meyer Brown is headed 'Continuity of tradition' (Sadie, 1980, 388). Yet there is far more evidence of a revolutionary 'break' with the advent of what might be termed 'performance modernism' separating the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than there is for a philosophical schism separating the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Certainly, this aligns with decades' worth of scholarship by Clive Brown, and my own work indeed probes this in some detail and in numerous contexts: a relatively early iteration is my *Theory and Practice* (Milsom, 2003), especially chapter 6 (pp. 189-204), and more recently my *Romantic Violin Performing Practices* (Milsom, 2020), especially chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 11 – 66). Readers themselves can perhaps ponder to what extent the monetisation of 'early music' hinges upon the myth of 'schism' into the nineteenth century, or for that matter, the extent to which the legitimacy of 'conservatoire-normative' teaching of canonical (classical and romantic) music is built upon the conceit that this is an enduring tradition linking directly to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and not, as seems to be a more evidence-based hypothesis, at most the stylistic and technical ideals of players stretching in continuum back no more than maybe eighty or fewer years.

1946)² further supported this gestational hypothesis, hence my listening to the Bach D Minor concerto BWV1043 on that far off summer afternoon.

Little prepared me for the shock at the insertion of a nineteenth-century cadenza in the last movement, however. At this early point in my scholarly development, received notions of 'purity', text fidelity and, to use an oft mis-appropriated word – 'authenticity' – made this romantic interruption seem somehow immoral. Indeed, it is interesting to note that a [YouTube re-issue of this recording](#) (from a Symposium CD re-issue) sanitises this matter by omitting this cadenza for fear, presumably, of more delicate persuasions being offended by this 'vandalism'. Nonetheless, I quickly warmed to this anachronistic insertion, and it had a quite profound effect upon me. This was not the detached respect of an aloof academia, fearful, presumably, of some form of moral retribution should one not serve the expectations and 'intentions' of the composer (what I have described humorously to my own students as the 'big hammer from the sky' paradigm!)³ but rather a *different form of veneration*: Bach belonged to them in their times, and therefore this inserted material might alternatively be viewed as a form of affectionate respect. Certainly, the activities of Arnold Rosé and his colleagues can give rise to feelings of observing a 'lost' tradition, and none more so than the Bach 'Double' recording. It is hard, indeed, to ignore the tragic circumstances that surround this: following the Anschluss in 1938, Arnold Rosé escaped to London and remained active during the Second World War including at the National Gallery concerts. Rosé's daughter Alma (1906-1944) perished in Auschwitz, her story told, not entirely accurately, in Arthur Miller's 1980 CBS television film, *Playing for Time* (with Jane Alexander playing Alma Rosé). It is hard to ignore with scholarly distance this harrowing background story.

Approaching thirty years later, having in the intervening time developed a professional scholarly profile as a specialist in 'romantic' violin performing practices alongside my concurrent career as a freelance violinist and instrumental teacher, I came across Hellmesberger's cadenzas published by Universal, and accessible on IMSLP (Hellmesberger, c.1895-1900). I shared the cadenza with my gifted student Maria Nikolaeva and her enthusiasm for this matched mine. At this point (late 2023) we decided to build a project around performing the concerto with this cadenza, and thus the *Bach Double Violin Concerto Project* came into being: a project, furthermore, that acted as a catalyst for the formation of a new string chamber group, *The West Riding Ensemble*, which has in a short space of time already proved to be a joyous (and academically satisfying) means of joining hitherto divergent strands of my professional life together.

² Arnold Rosé made a number of string quartet and solo violin (with piano) recordings from 1909 onwards. The 1928 Bach 'Double' performance with his daughter is one of the last, barring inclusion of his evident solos in a 1938 recording of Mahler's 9th Symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, cond. Bruno Walter, in 1938. His playing is subject to scrutiny in a number of my publications, including Milsom, 2003 and Milsom, 2020.

³ That is to say, much as I support the need to ensure that performances are grounded in actual knowledge and research, I pull back from the notion (that many appear to assume I support) that we 'should' play historical music in certain ways. I teach my students a simple maxim: 'Do what you like but always know why it is that you do what you do!' And, of course, my scholarly work hopes that, in the research into past styles of playing, new players will be inspired by this knowledge to secure for canonical music especially a vibrant, evolving, and varied future. When my 2003 monograph was published, an academic colleague was allegedly surprised by my 'ambivalence' to the messages it contained. I would prefer to see my attitude to my own scholarly work as 'pragmatic' rather than 'doctrinaire.' Perhaps it is the variety of my musical career to date that makes this the only realistic and sensible viewpoint to hold!

It is worth noting that performances of this concerto have often not only brought 'celebrity' players together (such as Efrem Zimbalist and Fritz Kreisler) but also family members (such as David and Igor Oistrakh), and students and teachers (such as Georges Enescu and Yehudi Menuhin). Thus, this new recording would act in continuum with this tradition. This would provide its own challenges, not least of course being the considerable gap in both age and experience – when we made the recording, I was 49 years old and Nikolaeva was 16, although it is curious that this 33 year age gap is smaller than the 43 year gap separating Arnold Rosé and his daughter Alma, who were aged 65 and 22 respectively when they made the recording that would influence our own project.

If, as I discussed with Nikolaeva, we were to perform this cadenza, we would need to do this within a suitable historical context. My immediate thought was to seek, to some degree at least, to emulate elements of the 1928 Rosé recording of it, and the obvious solution was to plan a modern studio recording doing this. This would mean using violins strung with gut strings of appropriate thickness to a late nineteenth or early twentieth century performance, as well as putting into practice something of the prevailing 'classical German school' aesthetic on which I have written widely and for a long time. Indeed, having consciously sought to disseminate such ideas in my *Romantic Violin Performing Practices* (Milsom, 2020) with the hope that players might experiment with such historical playing styles, I found the opportunity to do this with my own student who had, unsurprisingly, an entirely fresh outlook.

With customary intelligence, Nikolaeva reacted instinctively to listening to the Rosé performance, allied to an appropriate historical edition which I had to hand, the 1905 Simrock edition (plate number 12061, 12731) ascribed to Andreas Moser in a wartime reprint, which includes fingerings inviting portamenti, and stretches of up-bow staccati in the first movement (Joachim & Moser, 1905).⁴ Whilst it seems probable that there exists a Hellmesberger edition of the main body of the concerto (proximate to the cadenza edition), we were unable to find this in time for the project (it is neither listed on IMSLP, nor included in the [CHASE project collection](#)). The likelihood is made all the more probable by certain editorial features, such as slurring in of the first three notes of the finale theme in the Rosé recording, which is not included in the Joachim/Moser edition. (This can also be observed by means of corroboration in the published version of the Hellmesberger cadenza). Had we been aiming for a forensic re-enactment of this recording, using this Joachim/Moser edition would have been problematic, but as we sought a less specialised approach to style and practice in what is often described as a 'classical' Austro-German style of this period, I did not deem this particularly significant.

As we prepared for the recording session in March 2024, it became evident to me that we both had a strikingly compatible way of working. Given the fact that Nikolaeva is a student of mine, this might not be surprising, although the extent to which there is, as it were, a 'playing affinity' acted as one of several catalysts towards the formation of *The West Riding Ensemble*. This appeared to bode well for our collaboration on the project.

As the project was self-funded, we decided to include pianoforte rather than orchestral accompaniment, and benefitted from the presence, in St Paul's Hall, University of

⁴ The copy from which we played acknowledges Joachim's student and co-author of the 1902-5 *Violinschule*, Andreas Moser. Here again the tragic political circumstances of Germany between 1933 and 1945 are referenced: Joachim's name was expunged from numerous publications on account of him having been of Jewish heritage.

Huddersfield, of an 1897 Broadwood 'boudoir' grand purchased some years before for just such an eventuality. To play it, I enlisted my long-term chamber music partner and currently my PhD student, Jonathan Gooing. At the time of writing, Gooing is investigating romantic pianism in a chamber music and accompaniment setting and this made his inclusion valuable and of reciprocal scholarly benefit. Use of a pianoforte to accompany concerti was more normal on record and in concert in the early twentieth century than has subsequently become the case. Certainly, I viewed this pragmatic choice to be in no way incompatible with the scholarly elements of the project.⁵

The recording was undertaken on March 9th, 2024, at the University of Huddersfield with my academic colleague Dr Alexander Harker as recording engineer. Underlining my desire to provide my student with as many rich formative experiences as I could, the recording was not only her first performance on period instruments and experimenting with an historical style but also her first experience in the recording studio. After a number of interruptions due to other projects, the recordings were completed in November 2024 and were released on YouTube in January 2025. The resulting recording minimises edit points to give a vibrant rendition, favouring musical energy and excitement over technical perfection.

Meanwhile, the project facilitated a number of live performances of at least excerpts of the concerto. This included a complete, live performance (including the cadenza) with the University of Huddersfield String Orchestra in the University of Huddersfield Concert Series on April 14, 2024, followed by, to date, two live performances of the finale (St John's Ranmoor, May 17, 2024, accompanied by Philip Collin, and Firth Park Library in a Classical Sheffield outreach event, September 7, 2024, accompanied by Ruth Milsom).

Periods of reflection during the project inspired me to take the project a crucial and exciting step further, however, as the creative potential of this collaborative effort became apparent.

In January 2020, shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated an extended hiatus, I had the pleasure of making my first recordings by the acoustic/mechanical process. This came about as an extension of a Leverhulme Early-Career Fellowship undertaken by pianist Dr Inja Stanovic, sponsored by me and hosted by the University of Huddersfield. Discussions with Stanovic in 2017 at the start of the project included my admission that I had, for a long time,

⁵ As I reflect throughout Milsom, 2020, we live at a time of considerable piety and yet also substantial necessary pragmatism (or indeed, maybe even hypocrisy!) when it comes to decisions on the basis of 'performance history.' Almost any performance, for instance, of 'baroque' repertoire – such as choral music with orchestral accompaniment, will include a harpsichord, either 'real' or 'electronic' – the latter of which raises even more philosophical points to probe! Yet this is balanced often with 'modern instruments' – stringed instruments strung not only with metal-covered strings, as has been normative in my lifetime, but also, as I discuss in chapter 5 of my 2020 book, these are now almost always powerful steel or synthetic core items, not the gut core and aluminium-wound strings of my boyhood. Further, such keyboard sonorities are pitted against anachronistic string playing style (with vibrato!) although this has become less common in recent years in all except provincial, amateur players. Alongside, many works are now performed on 'period instruments' and many choirs, for instance, mount performances of celebrated works such as Handel's *Messiah* at so-called 'baroque pitch.' But the style of choral singing – and much more markedly the often twentieth-century operatic vocal style (molto vibrato!) of engaged soloists sits awkwardly with more ascetic 'period' orchestral sonorities. My conclusion, perhaps inevitably, is that to most performing musicians (and audiences) music is a living art not a museum artefact, and current renditions perhaps say far more about us now than they do of an imagined, incompletely understood, and agenda-driven view of the distant past. Perhaps all of this hinges on contemplation of what John Butt defined as the distinction between 'history' and 'heritage'. See Butt, *Playing with History* (Cambridge, CUP, 2002).

held a desire to undertake experiments using a variety of 'early recording' equipment in order to ascertain precisely what the affordances of such technologies were. The opportunity to make this happen was important from a research point of view but also, it must be admitted, had the potential to be fun!

As Stanovic has written in some detail, and as explored by the numerous activities of the [Early Recordings Association](#) it is a nonsense to speak of 'early recordings' as a singular entity: there were numerous different approaches and set-ups each with different virtues and limitations: the difference between, for instance, cylinder and flat disc recordings are marked, yet all are broadly described as 'acoustic' or 'mechanical'. This is explored in more depth in Eva Moreda Rodriguez & Inja Stanovic (eds.), *Early Sound Recordings – Academic Research and Practice* (Routledge, 2023), in which my own chapter, 'Understanding Joseph Joachim's Style and Practice: Recordings as a Research Tool' (pp. 99-117) is relevant to this paper.

Discussions with Stanovic showed that it was possible, in the twenty-first century, to make mechanical recordings. Further, by happy chance, one of the very few recording engineers able to do this was in Sheffield where Nikolaeva and I are based – Duncan Miller of [Vulcan Records](#).

The ability to make new mechanical recordings by processes very similar to those on numerous historical sound documents which I had studied in great depth was of enormous excitement. It would allow the 'limitations' of 'early recordings' to be tested. These are often 'talked up', perhaps suspiciously, as a means of excusing as inadmissible evidence the inconvenient 'truths' of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century performance style. Further, as this would be done with living subjects (and also in the existence of modern recording technology), such recordings would allow side by side comparisons of my attempts to emulate historical recordings in a process of reverse engineering as well as comparisons between our performance as heard via simultaneous modern and mechanical recording methods. It is reasonable, for instance, and as discussed in my book chapter in Rodriguez & Stanovic (Rodriguez & Stanovic, 2023, 99-117), to assert that, if my emulations on a comparable acoustic recording sounded similar to those of the figures I was studying, then the 'in the room' sounds I made in order to do this would, ipso facto, also be very similar to the historical players I sought to understand stylistically by means of the act of 'emulation' (see for instance the archive of my [AHRC Fellowship project](#) 2006-2009 at University of Leeds). This may refute or corroborate my at least partly instinctive contention that I had indeed 'understood' the prevailing aesthetics and performance philosophies of these players.

The opportunity to do this – including dealing with getting a good signal to noise ratio by being close enough to the recording horn, seeking ways of being expressive other than wide dynamic variation (the hegemonic totem of expressivity in modern 'conservatoire-normative' playing), getting used to making 'cuts' to fit compositions to the 3 minute side length of the 10-inch sides, and using tempo fluctuation and portamenti to aid a sense of musical direction – is illustrated in an album of violin and piano tracks emulating famous Austro-German players in *Austro-German Revivals* – new acoustic performances by Stanovic and me published by University of Huddersfield's [Pennine Records](#) label.

This prior experience made me want to record at least some of the Bach Double concerto by this method. In order to do this, Nikolaeva and I had to make some cuts to the main

portion of the finale in order to split this into two 3-minute slides including (since this was a major part of the research and, candidly, a section we both particularly enjoyed) a complete performance of the cadenza.

After some discussion of what we were going to do (and showing Nikolaeva some of my scholarly work to help prepare her for this new experience), we went to the premises of *Vulcan Records* on August 29, 2024. We were joined by Ruth Milsom, who had made some violin and piano recordings by this process with both me and Joanna Staruch-Smolec (Royal Brussels Conservatoire) in 2022. Whilst Nikolaeva and I retained the same period instrument set-up we had used for the electric recording, Ruth played Miller's Aeolian upright player piano of c.1920. This necessitated removing all front panels. This is a well-documented practice from the acoustic recording era, satisfying the expedient of gaining as much clarity and volume as possible.

As the accompanying photographs show, Nikolaeva and I were positioned in such a way that we could not see each other (in order to get our instruments close to the recording horns). My horn was a narrower bore than Nikolaeva's, which also had to capture the equivalent of 'ambient noise' in order to register the piano. Balancing the recording down the two funnels is a matter somewhat similar to getting the water temperature right in a 'mixer tap' with both hot and cold water feeds: too much power down one horn would obliterate the other. Further, Nikolaeva and Ruth Milsom had to balance their input into the same horn. In many ways, therefore, acoustic recording means that *the players are the recording engineers*: our positioning and playing is needed to gain balance on the recording, rather than this being the job of an engineer adjusting levels on specific microphones. But, of course, we had to do this with no aural feedback, and, in fact, it was to be some weeks before we were able to hear the recordings we had made.

This in mind, it is perhaps astonishing that the recording was so successful, and accolades should perhaps go disproportionately to Nikolaeva since she had never done anything like this before. Ruth Milsom's clear and audible pianism attests too to her instincts and abilities to adapt to the situation. Although the academic implications of the project will be discussed elsewhere (and, to a degree, further corroborate my initial reactions as given in Rodriguez & Stanovic, 2023), it is worth noting that musicians are often very adaptable to changing circumstances and are able, often deftly, to obviate numerous practical, spatial, acoustic, and physical hindrances as part of their normal practice. This somewhat refutes the perhaps exaggerated perception of 'discomfort' and 'challenge' as is normally ascribed to the process of making recordings by these 'early' methods.⁶

According to Duncan Miller, the resultant recording used technology much as it would have been in around 1910. Maria Nikolaeva almost certainly became the first musician of her age to make such a recording since around 1925, when the electric microphone was introduced,

⁶ The discomforts and difficulties of making acoustic recordings has become a prevalent and normative means by which to cast doubt upon the musical messages such recordings contain. See for example this: 'Gustav Holst found the strain of recording *The Planets* with members of the London Symphony Orchestra in 1923 in such cramped conditions more exhausting than anything he had ever done before; the first horn on that occasion was Aubrey Brain, known for his astonishing technical mastery, and yet even he broke down thirteen times at the opening of *Venus* 'as a result of the almost unbearable physical discomfort'. Timothy Day, *A Century of Recorded Music* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2000), p.12, quoting Imogen Holst, 'Recordings of Holst's Music', *Recorded Sound*, 59, July 1975, p.440)

and the greater affordances of this new technology resulted in its widespread and rapid displacement of acoustic recording methods. The technical success of the recording is a further testimony to her resilience, intelligence, and musical instinct in a project that has, quite literally, 'made history'.

A successor project will be a recording of a string quartet movement by the acoustic process, with an experimental session scheduled for February 18, 2025, given by *The West Riding Ensemble* (violin 1 Maria Nikolaeva, violin 2 David Milsom, viola Charlotte Kenyon, cello George Kennaway).⁷

A Specific Note on Performing Practices and instrument set-ups

It might be assumed that the success of the recordings is due to my careful and detailed coaching of my young mentee. Whilst this is true up to a point, her extraordinarily busy schedule limited the extent to which this was possible and, in any case, such 'micro-management' soon proved unnecessary. Whilst our rehearsals and 'lesson discussions' inevitably included finding solutions to both musical and technical problems, in truth many of Nikolaeva's stylistic decisions came simply from an awareness of this manner of playing (doubtless as a result of working with me) and an instinctive sense of what is 'right' in this context. Vibrato, whilst evident, tends to be quite narrow and by no means continuous: this perhaps locates the aesthetic in the early years of the twentieth century (as this project makes pertinent) when a degree of 'liberalisation' away from a strict (and at least *theoretical*) ideal of fundamentally *senza vibrato* playing was common before a more radical adoption of a wide and slow (and all-pervasive) vibrato from the 1930s onwards (see Milsom, 2003, chapter 4, pp. 111-148, as well as Milsom, 2020, especially chapters 1, 2, 3 and 6). Tempo flexibility is not so much in evidence here as it would have been in other compositional contexts, although some dramatic hastening in the central 'crisis' point of the slow movement attests to the discussions we had concerning harnessing tempo and its flexibility as a constituent of expressive playing, a matter perhaps sanitised from 'modern' playing also from the 1930s onwards (see Milsom, 2020, chapters 1 and 2).

To listeners unused to performances of 'baroque' repertoire embodying 'romantic' stylistic elements, it is the frequent resort to portamenti that characterises our new recordings. The 'classical' Austro-German school can be sparing here, as gauged by its most ascetic and academic representative, Joseph Joachim, as heard in his 1903 recordings. Arnold Rosé was rather more liberal in this respect and operated a distinctive (fast and accentual) effect broadly similar in style to Joachim's but apparently of quite different artistic motivation (see Milsom, 2003 chapter 3). The device can be heard to good effect in the slow movement, and also in the cadenza in the finale in its more melodic phrases. It must be stated that I did specify fingerings in Nikolaeva's part. These are her own choices, which are entirely consistent with this style of playing (including her use of, at times, slow and prominent slides). Slides from one finger to another all are of the B-portamento type (see Flesch, 1924-30, I, p.30 and Milsom, 2020, p.87-95); this includes slides up to harmonics (as was characteristic of this tradition) and in many

⁷ Cellist George Kennaway, author of *Playing the Cello 1780 – 1930* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2014) is a colleague and performer-scholar who, through various symposia, study days and experiment sessions, also has prior experience of making recordings by the acoustic process.

places where a less ambitious fingering would have been possible. To me, this was especially gratifying: getting younger players to adopt the portamento (rather than further to prolong the *still* prevalent conservatoire-normative bigotry against its use!) has been for a long time the ambition of many scholar-performers specialising in romantic string performing practices: that such practices were apparently not conscious and arose naturally from the context shows maybe that such devices are best integrated into performance out of artistic impulses rather than as a dry, academic exercise. Nonetheless, Nikolaeva is rather more sparing in her use of the portamento than I am, but I was happy to leave alone relatively small divergences of approach as a symbol of my artistic respect for her, as well as my willingness to allow individual differences of approach. Indeed, it is worth noting that the modern requirement, especially in chamber music, that playing style should match between different players is not, as one might assume, a self-evident virtue, but rather a quite recent phenomenon unlikely to be reflected in the more distant past by how players played together. Historical sound recordings can show this vividly. Partly, admittedly, this perhaps arose from the fact that rehearsal in the past was more limited than has become commonplace (although the inbuilt costs of rehearsing and the current lack of money in the arts means that this situation is changing). This is not the only explanation, however: there was an ideal in diversity and variety, as well as the frequent exhortation requiring of great players an 'individual voice' (see for instance, Milsom, 2003, chapter 6). Furthermore, another apparently unassailable shibboleth of modern performance – that it must be highly accurate technically – seems to have been less of an obsession in this period and indeed the more distant past. This is not an excuse for the blemishes in these recordings, but it is important to note that we were trying to craft a style and an aesthetic first and foremost: had absolute accuracy been the overwhelming aim of what we were doing different technical solutions would have been proposed to such an end.

For these recordings, we used a string set-up similar to those used by more conservative players up to at least the mid-1920s. For practical purposes, we used *Pirastro Eudoxa* aluminium-wound gut-core G strings, and the upper strings were thick uncovered gut (*Toro*) of 1.25, 0.88, and 0.68mm thickness – very much thicker than 'baroque' gut strings, and in conformity with evidence as to common thicknesses at this point in time (see Milsom, 2020, chapter 5). In order not to disturb Nikolaeva's own (nineteenth-century French) violin, I lent her my Fernando Solar Gonzalez instrument, on which I have performed and recorded on gut strings. This gave her the added challenge of adapting to an unusually large and thick-necked instrument very different from her own. In my own case, I swapped modern strings for gut strings on my 'modern' violin (John Cockburn, 2016), since it seemed only fair to give myself the inconvenience of swapping between period and gut strings for the project.

Postscript – Broader Speculations

The results of this 'practice-as-research' project, in both the 'modern' and 'acoustic/mechanical' sessions, show what can be achieved embedding scholarly knowledge into the performance of two players at very different points in their professional lives, yet brought together by artistic affinity. Indeed, it might be noted that in some respects, the standard of playing in the August 2024 'acoustic' recording is better than in the March 2024 modern recording, in spite of the highly unusual recording conditions, and the inability to edit the recordings in any way. This perhaps demonstrates just how quickly Nikolaeva has made

progress in the light of these on-going experiences – a matter moreover that continues in the more general context of playing professionally in *The West Riding Ensemble*. Nonetheless, I hope it is not a breach of scholarly objectivity to identify a certain ardent expressivity in the complete recording – especially evident in the central section of the slow movement, with its tempo volatility, and in the fiery playing at the conclusion of the finale cadenza. This willingness to see in this music an overt emotional element perhaps defines it, philosophically, as very much in the spirit of 'romantic' performance, rather than the more 'objective' stance of twentieth-century modernism (see Milsom 2020, chapter 2).

In terms of the rapidly developing parity stylistically between my student and myself, I have a hypothesis that this arises at least in part from an element of instrumental 'vocality.' In my 2020 book, in the attempt to get away from a prosaic parade of chapters on basic subjects such as vibrato, portamento and other outwardly observable constituents of style (which I had already employed in my 'first principles' 2003 text), I attempted to bring topics together to discern ruling performance ideals and philosophies. This included, crucially, defining 'romantic' practices in terms of vocality – as spoken/declaimed (Milsom, 2020 chapter 4) and as sung (chapter 3). This in itself followed on from the challenge I set in the introduction to the volume of essays on performing practice I edited and curated some years before, viz. to bring together again speech and song, and song and instrumental playing after positing that this link had been 'broken' in the twentieth century (Milsom, 2011, xxvi). My PhD student, Kristine Healy, further probed issues of 'vocality' in her PhD thesis, which looked in particular at interactions and dialogues between students, teachers and those deemed suitable to deliver conservatoire 'masterclasses' all of whom to a degree continue to assert a 'vocal ideal.'

It is thus perhaps not surprising that the natural and even 'instinctive' elements at play in the *Bach Double Violin Concerto Project* stem from the fact that an element that unites me and my colleague in these recordings is the fact that *we are both also singers*. This perhaps gives a sense of unconscious 'vocality' in phrase shaping, and also a shared sense of what is appropriate in terms of specific vocal ornaments such as vibrato and portamento. This supposition, certainly, has been corroborated by continued work in *The West Riding Ensemble*, albeit in rather different stylistic and historical playing contexts. As Tartini famously uttered to his students, 'Per ben suonare, bisogna ben cantare!'

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