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No more taboos

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contemporary cello

Cremona in London

Vincenzo Panormo's legacy

Handing down a tradition: Eduard Schmieder
June auction results

Rediscovering a legend: Catalan violinist Joan Manén
Shopping for a cello case

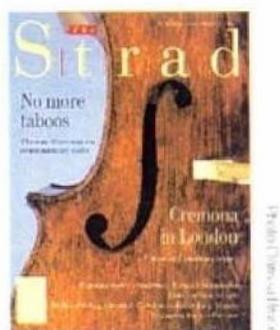


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There are many fine violin teachers. Some work their entire lives in anonymity, while others, who, because of some special quality or influence, are destined to succeed and swiftly become legends. One well on the way to the latter is the Soviet-born American, Eduard Schmieder.

During the Soviet regime, only those who co-operated with the government were allowed to perform in the West and in this way become more widely known. Schmieder's family were non-conformists and therefore in conflict with the communists, which put a great strain on Schmieder's career in the U SSR, so in 1980, after twelve years of teaching, he decided to emigrate to the US. His first job was at Lamar University at Beaumont, Texas. In 1983 he was invited to teach at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, Houston, continuing at Lamar for the first academic year. Within two years the Shepherd School of Music's intake of violin students had tripled. In 1986 he was appointed professor at the School of Music at the University of Southern California (USC), in the position formerly occupied by Jascha Heifetz, but he continued to teach simultaneously at USC and Rice for that academic year. In 1990 he moved on to the Meadows School of Music at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, where he holds the Algur H. Meadows Chair of Violin and Chamber Music Studies. Schmieder also gives masterclasses in conservatories worldwide and is visiting professor at the

Schools for thought

Eduard Schmieder, the Soviet-born violinist talks to Margaret Campbell about the various schools of violin playing and their implications on his teaching





Left: Schmierer teaching in Banff, Canada. 'There are as many different approaches as I have students'
 Below: Schmierer performs on Paganini's 'Cannon' violin in April 1996 at the Palazzo Ducale, Genoa, Italy.
 Bottom: Schmierer at eight years old. He went on to study at the Mussorsky Conservatoire in Leningrad under Pyotr Solomonovich Stolyarsky

Paris Conservatoire and many other musical institutions throughout Europe. He taught at the Interlochen Arts Center from 1983 to 1987 and in 1988 began his association with the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts in California where he is on the faculty as adviser to the string department. He also directs the Schmierer Violin Performance Course as part of their summer programme.

Dark, bearded and resembling an El Greco painting, Schmierer is quiet and rather shy, except when discussing his teaching. It is then that he is both articulate and forceful. 'I believe that a teacher lives through his students and the ultimate measure of my work becomes evident when they perform as soloists, chamber musicians or orchestral players. My concern for them includes a desire not only for musical development, but also for intellectual, cultural and human growth. All these so-called "non-musical factors" are important in themselves and bear heavily on a student's musical achievements.'

Schmierer is opposed to forcing students into a predetermined pedagogical mould such as the recognised 'schools'. 'I would rather call upon all known methods as a means of developing the ideal approach for each student. Among the factors I take into account in creating the proper cure for a given student's problems are their age, imagination, intellectual acuity, manual reflexes, physical characteristics, general level of technical development, general musical experience, maturity and temperament,



so there are as many different approaches as I have students.

'For me, the most important factor is the expressive spirit that lives in each of my students. It is my task to help liberate this spirit through a disciplined and rigorous approach to violin technique and a personal, loving attitude towards the student as an evolving musical personality. All students have these special qualities; it is for me to identify them and join them in the quest to reveal them through the making of music.'

Schmierer regards intuition as one of the most important gifts a teacher can possess: 'I think that I am blessed with the gift of intuition in teaching and communicating with students. Therefore it is important, not only what you say, but how you say it. Of course one must give precise information, but the manner in which this information is delivered is very important because the emotions you put into your words and the tone of your voice can make all the difference.'

Schmierer also believes that music is three-dimensional, not two. 'By two dimensions I mean that we as musicians communicate with the audience through sound and rhythm. But I believe there is another paramount factor in performance, which I call "emotional energy". I compare it with such phenomena as electricity or radio waves. I am convinced that there is an emotional energy which is very individual and can be transmitted by certain performers. We often hear



stunning technical performances where the tone quality is acoustically right and technical execution precise, but we leave the concert empty and disappointed. Then we hear a performance which is not so precise technically but moves us deeply. Usually, the note-perfect performance based only on the acoustical and stylistic principles does not reach the perceptive audience. So from many years of working with young people I discovered how to teach them to reach the audience emotionally. Of course, everyone communicates in their own way but I help them to use their emotional energy effectively.'

How does he manage to do this? 'Often a student is playing and attacks a note. The result is acoustically perfect



While the different schools of violin playing use similar principles in left-hand technique, right-hand technique differs significantly. Top: Old German hold; middle: Franco-Belgian hold; bottom: Russian hold

but I am not convinced that it is emotionally effective. There are images I give to my students. For example, working with a female student, I ask her, "What kind of person would you like to see as your future husband? Would you like him to be strong or weak?" The answer is always "Strong". "Would you like him to be rough or gentle?" The answer is always "gentle". I then say: "If you will touch the string in the strongest but the most gentle way you will achieve the right expression in the articulation of the note. Touch it in the way you would like the human being to touch you." Usually this kind of emotional appeal works immediately.'

How does Schmieder teach communication with an audience? 'Now we are talking about sound. I believe sound can be placed in two different categories: emotional and acoustical. For instance, we say that Mischa Elman had a golden sound David Oistrakh had a warm and heartfelt sound, Heifetz had an electrifying sound. I believe that all these come from the feelings of the individual by their way of touching the instrument. There are violinists who touch the strings gently, or the bow deeply, but only with highly developed emotions is one able to create a special type of sound. This is the highest artistry. Some have it inborn while others develop it. There is a seed of such ability inside of every one and I try to develop it in my students to the highest degree. Simultaneously I am working on the acoustical quality of the sound; how the sound is projected, how soft it is and what range is there between *fortissimo* and *pianissimo* and how clear is the articulation?'

So how does he produce this acoustical quality with his students? 'It is not very difficult with a diligent student. Unfortunately, today only acoustical, not emotional ideas are taught. Acoustical principles are easy to define and can be clearly communicated. Normally it is a question of the relationship between the speed of the bow, the pressure and the point of contact on the string. It takes practice to work it out but persistent individuals normally achieve good results. In addition to the knowledge of the acoustical principles one has to know the mechanical principles of handling the bow. The relationship between speed, and pressure and the point of contact is important, but if one does not know precisely the mechanics, the results are rarely satisfactory.



Schmieder does not accept the recognised merits of the different schools of playing as gospel: 'When we discuss the different schools we are mainly talking about right-hand technique. I have found that most violinists in the past were using similar principles in left-hand technique. What was significantly different were the mechanics of the right hand. Carl Flesch describes three schools in *The Art of Violin Playing* (Berlin, 1923): the German, Franco-Belgian, and Russian. In the German School the bow was held with the tips of the fingers close to each other; using considerable movement of fingers and wrist which would facilitate development. David Oistrakh once showed me a photograph of himself as a small boy practising with the right arm pressed against his body. This exercise was given to him by his teacher Stolyarsky, in order to disengage the upper arm from the movement and develop flexibility of the wrist and fingers. In the Franco-Belgian School the fingers are deeper on the stick and more spread than in the German School. The important factor is the balance between the tip of the bow and the frog, adding some pressure with the index finger at the tip of the bow and counter-balancing the weight at the heel with the little finger.

Flesch says that this is the school he learned, but at sometime he heard violinists from the Auer School and, stunned by the tone they produced, he decided that this was superior to anything he had heard previously. So he altered his own technique and taught this to his students. He describes the Russian way of handling the bow as a



deep hold by the index finger beyond the second joint. The weight of the hand is applied not parallel, but almost perpendicular to the stick.

'The most sensitive parts of the hands are the finger tips. Next the wrist. This is why the German or Joachim School employed the tips of the fingers and the wrist in the bow-hold. It was not important to have a big volume of sound at that time. Chronologically, the second school- as described by Flesch- was Franco-Belgian. He does not tell us why the bow was held as he describes. I have my own explanation. At the time when leading violin teachers at the Paris Conservatoire were developing their method, the student repertoire was based mostly on French violin music. This was largely based on dances which required many types of springing strokes such as *sautillé* and combinations of different strokes. With their particular way of holding the bow and balancing it, it was much easier to master this type of stroke.

'What happened next is very interesting. The great Russian School started in St. Petersburg and tradition holds that the founder of the school was Leopold Auer. In my opinion, this is inaccurate. The originator of the violin school at St

Petersburg was Wieniawski, who was soloist to the Czar's court from 1860 to 1872 and professor at the Conservatory from 1862 to 1968. Wieniawski studied at the Paris Conservatoire with Massart in the tradition of the Franco-Belgian School. He was perhaps the first violinist to perform in large halls, such as the Grand Hall of the Noble Assembly, now the Grand Hall of the St Petersburg Philharmonia. He understood the necessity of the bigger sound and "longer" bow for the acoustics of the big halls. He changed the grip, placed the index finger deeper and created a sound which was not known before him in either the German or Franco-Belgian schools.

'Although Wieniawski was a great artist, he was not the best teacher: Conversely Auel, who studied with both Dont and Joachim in the tradition of the German School, succeeded him in 1868 and was a very effective teacher with an intuitive and analytical mind. However Auer did not have a student of significant potential until 1904, when a young boy named Mischa Elman enrolled in his

class. What is of much greater significance is that during the period between 1868 to 1904, Auer was researching and developing his own method. He was creative and able to observe, analyse and synthesise; he noticed the way Wieniawski played and incorporated it into his teaching. I believe that the "Russian" school started with Wieniawski and was further

developed by Auer, one a representative of the Franco-Belgian, and the other of the German School. Flesch says that the Russian school is superior, but I cannot agree. The Franco-Belgian School was a step forward in the technique of balancing the bow and making a bigger sound, especially in the middle and lower parts, but the subtlety of the Joachim School was lost. The Russian School developed an advantage in tone production, especially in the upper part of the bow but the lower part became more difficult to control.

'The greatest example of so-called "Russian" school is Heifetz. Heifetz

'There are violinists who touch the strings gently, or the bow deeply, but only with highly developed emotions is one able to create a special type of sound. This is the highest artistry.'



Above, top: Schmieder with Igor Oistrakh.
Middle: Yehudi Menuhin, Schmieder and his class during an exchange programme in Los Angeles 1987.
Bottom: After a concert in Banff, left to right: Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi (cello), Kenneth Murphy (director of Banff Summer programme), Schmieder and John Kimura-Parker (piano)

Top: Photo: Christopher Siskel, Inc.

was a great master of the upper part of the bow. There is a video of him performing Kreisler's arrangement of the Mozart Rondo, playing spiccato close to the tip of the bow, something a less talented violinist would not be able to do with such results. Heifetz was a genius, but in his later years he developed a problem with his upper arm to which I fear the so called "Russian" grip contributed. If you listen to some of his late recordings you will hear some imperfection in articulation and tone production in the lower part of the bow.

Another important school is that of Ivan Galamian. He studied at the Moscow Conservatory for a short time and at the Paris Conservatoire with Capet, who had a reputation for teaching bow technique. Galamian was analytical and very intelligent, and I think he contributed to the development of bow technique a detail which is seldom mentioned. It is evident that the more of the hair one uses, the bigger the sound. The bow is heavier at the frog and lighter at the tip. Before Galamian it was common to start at the heel of the bow on the side of the hair, and only toward the tip was the bow turned in such a way that the entire hair was used. This was achieved by the wrist gradually being bent inwards toward the tip and outwards toward the heel. Galamian's teacher in Moscow was Konstantin Mostras, a highly educated methodologist who knew the physiology of violin playing. Mostras discovered that one of the physiological principles of tone production is to avoid an extreme position of the joints. If the wrist joint reaches this position, the player is "locking" certain nerves and blood circulation in his arm and the bow cannot be controlled. Galamian, developing this theory, made a progressive step and suggested that instead of bending the wrist one should rotate the stick with the fingers. In previous schools this movement was forbidden. By introducing new technique, Galamian facilitated control of the bow which led to the development of more condensed sound. In Galamian's school, compared to the Russian School, the tone is generally less colourful but more focused. At present we live in the world of loud sounds, but when we are teaching we must remember the development of sound in music. In the Baroque era the colours were soft and to sustain the sound was considered offensive. In the Classical era the sound was larger and



Below: Freezing in Russia, Schmieder (conductor), Atar Arad (viola soloist) and Eric Friedman (violin soloist) during their concert in St Petersburg's Philharmonic Great Hall



Below: Before conducting the Paris Conservatory Orchestra outside Église Saint-Louis des Invalides in Paris

more sustained. In the Romantic era we had gigantic orchestras and composers like Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler creating the apogee of volume and today the sound is often electronically amplified.

'I never met Galamian, but his example of breaking with tradition inspired me to go beyond the learned traditions and develop my own method. So what I have learned from Galamian, combined with my knowledge of the historic development gained through many years of experience and experimentation, brings me to a deep conviction that the best from all schools should be combined and amalgamated. I am striving to preserve the great tradition of the Russian School concerning the depth of the sound and advantage at the tip of the bow, the flexibility in the middle and lower part of the bow in the Franco-Belgian School and the colours, delicacy and sensitivity of the German School.'

Schmieder stands at a meeting point of violin traditions. With ideas of specific 'schools breaking down, he is in an ideal position to take violin playing into the next century.

