

PERFORMANCE-PRACTICE ISSUES IN BARTÓK'S SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN (1944)

by

OLIVER YATSUGAFU

(Under the Direction of Levon Ambartsumian and David Haas)

ABSTRACT

The Sonata for Solo Violin was composed by Béla Bartók in 1944 as a commission by the American violinist Yehudi Menuhin. The piece represents one of Bartók's last works. This Solo Sonata is a four-movement work with the following movements: ~~Tempo di ciaccona~~, "Fuga," ~~Melodia~~, and ~~Presto~~. The entire piece is approximately twenty minutes in length. The Solo Sonata stands as one of the most important 20th-century compositions for solo violin. The author has investigated the circumstances in which the Solo Sonata was created and its performance-practice issues. Therefore, this dissertation discusses Bartók's life and work in the United States of America, his encounter with Yehudi Menuhin, and the compositional history, performances, and reviews of the Solo Sonata. In addition, this document analyses briefly the form, style, and performance-practice challenges of each movement, appointing possible solutions.

INDEX WORDS: Béla Bartók, Sonata for Solo Violin, violin performance-practice issues, repertoire for solo violin, revisions, Solo Sonata creation, Solo Sonata form and style, Yehudi Menuhin, Rudolf Kolisch.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Rubia, who always unconditionally supports me; and to my son Lucas, who brightens up my life. They know what it takes to be on my side and yet they never gave up! I am grateful to have them with me. They are the two people who I love the most in this world.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Solo Sonata Sonata for Violin Solo by Béla Bartók

m. Measure

mm. Measures

When referring to *Sonata for Violin Solo*:

Tempo di ciaccona Movement I

Fuga Movement II

Melodia Movement III

Presto Movement IV

When referring to the violin Technique:

1 Index finger

2 Middle finger

3 Ring finger

4 Little (pinky) finger

The string abbreviations are as follows:

I First string E

II Second string A

III Third string D

IV Fourth string G

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Introductory Comments

The Hungarian composer Béla Bartók (1881-1945) wrote the Sonata for Solo Violin between February and March, 1944 in Asheville, North Carolina. The Sonata is a four-movement work with the following movement titles, I-Tempo di Ciaccona, II-Fuga, III-Melodia and IV-Presto. The duration of the complete piece is approximately twenty-six minutes.

The piece was commissioned by the American violinist Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999), one of the greatest violin players who ever lived. The violinist and composer first met each other in November 1943. On that occasion, Menuhin had a recital in the Carnegie Hall, New York, with the pianist Adolph Baller.¹ One year later, on November 26th 1944, Bartók attended Menuhin's premiere performance of the Solo Violin Sonata at the Carnegie Hall.²

Menuhin's first impression of the Solo Sonata was not entirely positive: "Little did I foresee that he would write me one of the masterpieces of all time. But when I saw it, in March 1944, I admit I was shaken. It seemed to me almost unplayable."³ However, after he had studied the piece and mastered its difficulties, he revised his opinion: "The first hasty impression was ill-judged: the Solo Sonata is eminently playable, beautifully composed for the violin, one of the most dramatic and fulfilling works that I know of, [the] most important composition for violin alone since Bach."⁴

¹ Malcolm Gillies, *Bartók Remembered: Yehudi Menuhin* (New York: WW Norton & Company Inc., 1990), 185.

² Benjamin Suchoff, *Béla Bartók: Life and Work* (Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2001), 158.

³ Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey* (London: Sym Music Company, 1996), 171.

⁴ Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, 171.

In the present day, the Sonata for Solo Violin stands as one of the most significant compositions in the 20th-century repertoire for solo violin. Evidence that this piece is becoming more and more established in the violin repertoire is found in the increasing number of recordings by prominent violinists,⁵ and the presence of it in the programs of various international violin competitions.⁶

2. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this document is to provide a detailed analysis of the performance-practice issues of Bartók's Sonata for Violin Solo. It will offer useful knowledge to the violinists who aspire to perform this piece, as well as contribute to the broader literature concerned with 20th-century performance issues.

The Solo Sonata presents both general and specific challenges. The piece features characteristics that occur often in 20th-century works for the violin, such as an atonal harmonic structure and sophisticated rhythmic complexities. These characteristics result in challenges for both hands. For the left hand, they include problems in intonation, shifting, scales in an atonal context, double stops, trills, left hand pizzicato, harmonics, chromatic glissando, fingering, and vibrato. For the right hand, there are issues in tone production, color, legato, stroke (detaché, martelé, spiccato, staccato), bow change and distribution, chords, and harmonics.

This document is especially concerned with the effects of the contrapuntal style on performance practice, including such technical demands as the following: difficult chords

⁵ See the recordings in the bibliography.

⁶ See, for example: The XII International Violin Competition –Città Di Brescia” – 2010 (<http://www.concorsoviolinobrescia.org/>), the 2010 International Violin Competition of Indianapolis – 2010 (<http://www.violin.org/2010comp.html>), the 43rd International Violin Competition Tibor Varga – 2010 (<http://www.concours-violon.ch/e/reglement.asp#1>), and the 2nd China International Violin Competition – 2008 (<http://www.qdviolin.cn/en/Repertoire.htm>).

(multiple stops), double stops, and extended techniques (artificial harmonics, left- hand pizzicato with sustained double-stops, microtones, “Bartók pizzicato,” etc.) throughout the piece.⁷

Additional insight into the technical and interpretative issues presented by the Bartók Solo Sonata was found in other scores and writings. I have consulted selected treatises on violin playing, as well as other contrapuntal works composed for solo violin, including Bach’s Third Sonata in C Major (BWV 1005), which has been identified as an influence on Bartók’s Solo Sonata, and E. Ysaÿe’s Sonata No. 1 op. 27. Certain of Menuhin’s thoughts about the piece will also appear, since he was the first to face its challenges in preparation for the premiere and was also responsible for the first published edition.

3. Delimitations

As stated above, this document is primarily concerned with the performance-practice issues in Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin. The background information will be restricted to the material that is most relevant to this work. A general description of the movements and their forms will be provided, but not a complete harmonic or formal analysis. The biographical matter about Bartók and Menuhin will be limited to the years surrounding the composition of the Solo Sonata.

This document will explore specific passages of the Solo Sonata; however, it will not include a full measure by measure commentary. Reviews about recordings will only be consulted in order to provide insight into particular problems. Pertinent passages from other violin works by Bartók will be mentioned; however a thorough discussion of these other pieces will not be provided. The passages discussed in detail are intended to be representative of the main

⁷ For more detailed information on the technical demands, see the sub-section “Methodology” below.

interpretive issues, but will not be expanded into an exhaustive guide to performing the entire work.

4. Methodology

The analysis of the performance-practice issues of the Sonata for Solo Violin will be based on the following scores:

Bartók, Béla. *Sonata for Solo Violin*, ed. Yehudi Menuhin. London: Hawkes & Son, Ltd., 1947.

Bartók, Béla. *Sonata for Solo Violin*, urtext edition. London: Hawkes & Son, Ltd., 1994.

Bartók, Béla. *Sonata for Solo Violin*. Photocopy of composer's holograph (1944). S.I.: s.n., 1950-59?

In researching the work, I will consult the following additional sources: recordings⁸, violin treatises, theses/dissertations, articles, interviews, and letters. These sources will be consulted in search of information that could be useful in addressing these and other issues:

- **Chords.** There are several challenging (and sometimes awkward) passages throughout the sonata. For example, the extremely high position chords in measure 44 in the 1st movement, and the unusual fifth chords in measures 99-113 in the 2nd movement.
- **Double stops.** Many passages combine a variety of intervals within an atonal context: e.g., the tenths with trills in measure 31 in the 3rd movement and the parallel fifths from m. 203 to m. 220 in the 4th movement.
- **Extended techniques.** Examples such as these are found throughout the piece:

⁸ Once Menuhin had published his edition of the Solo Sonata, the recordings by other violinists that appeared could also serve as alternative interpretations of the Sonata. However, no other violin player ~~dared~~ "to take on the endeavor of revising and publishing a new edition after Menuhin. Instead it fell to Peter Bartók, Béla Bartók's son, to release an urtext edition of the piece in 1994.

- Left-hand pizzicato (i.e. measures 145-150 in the 1st movement).
- Artificial harmonics (i.e. the specific usage of artificial harmonic with double stops in measures 66-67 in the 3rd movement).
- Microtones (i.e. measures 1-30 in the 4th movement).

My comments on stylistic influences on the Solo Sonata will include a comparative study of other works for solo violin: in particular, the contrapuntal style of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas BWV 1001-1006, and various violinistic passages in Ysaÿe's solo violin works.

5. Literature Review

Even though Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin occupies a major place in the modern violin repertory, many aspects about it have not received sufficient attention. However, in the book chapters, theses, and dissertations surveyed here, significant information is provided. The majority of the texts about the Sonata focus on historical and compositional aspects of it. I found four dissertations about this piece. The first one was written in 1992 and chronicles the historical background to the piece.⁹ The second one was produced in 1974 and examines the Solo Sonata's compositional characteristics, with respect to harmony and form.¹⁰ The third one was written in 1972 and is concerned with the duo sonatas for violin and piano as well as the Solo Sonata. Only eight pages are devoted to the Solo Sonata.¹¹ The fourth dissertation is the only one that contains discussion of both the technical and interpretative problems of the Solo Sonata. I was unable to obtain this short dissertation, dating back to 1971, but do not believe that its limited page count

⁹ Phillip Russel Coonce, "The Genesis of the Bela Bartok Sonata for Solo Violin," D.M.A. diss. (Manhattan School of Music, 1992).

¹⁰ Mary Baker Findley, "Bartok's Sonata for Solo Violin: Analysis and Perspective," D.M.A. diss. (University of Cincinnati, 1974).

¹¹ Raymond Benjamin Sidoti, "The Violin Sonatas of Bela Bartok: An Epitome of the Composer's Development," D.M.A. diss. (The Ohio State University, 1972).

would allow sufficient space for the detailed commentary on the Solo Sonata that I provide in Chapter Three.¹²

At the present time I have found no study of the Solo Sonata's performance practice issues. However, certain performance techniques have been discussed in several pedagogical works.¹³

6. Organization of Chapters

The dissertation's first chapter has provided a brief introduction to the document, highlighting its purpose, delimitation, and methodology, as well as situating it in the context of other research.

The second chapter begins with an overview concerning the life and work of Bartók during his years in the United States of America and also his last years of life, with special attention given to the context for the Solo Sonata. Following this, I provide biographical information about Yehudi Menuhin, who commissioned the piece, and comment on the encounters between the musicians. At the end, I provide an overview of performances and reviews since the work's premiere.

The third chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the performance-practice issues of the Sonata for Solo Violin. The chapter includes a brief rationale for the choice of editions. The bulk of the chapter is a commentary on the most significant challenges of each of the four movements. Each discussion will be introduced by a brief comment on the movement's form and style. These

¹² Clause Robert Groth Jr., "A Study of the Technical and Interpretative Problems Inherent in Bartók's Violin Sonatas," D.M.A. diss. (University of Oregon, 1971).

¹³ These two books will be consulted as authoritative sources on violin technique: Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing* (New York: Carl Fischer), 1924. Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), 1982.

are followed by the discussions of performance issues, including a basic description of the problem, examples from the score, and suggested solutions. Secondary sources will be referenced to give additional insights.

Chapter four will consist of a conclusion and suggestions for possible further research.

The Bibliography is divided into the following categories of sources: books, articles and reviews, theses/dissertations, scores, and recordings.

CHAPTER 2

THE CREATION OF THE SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN

1. Bartók's American Years: Life and Works in Exile

Béla Bartók lived the last five years of his life in the U.S., from 1940 until 1945, and this period was of great difficulty for him. One of the first circumstances that affected Bartók was his experience of Hungary during World War II. He was particularly opposed to the Anschluss initiated by the Nazi Party and, for that reason, was constantly thinking of leaving Hungary. As a matter of fact, the imminent risk of an invasion by the Nazis along with Bartók's fear of war weighed towards his final decision to leave Hungary and go to the U.S. in 1940.

Bartók and his wife Ditta arrived in New York on 30 October 1940. The conditions they faced in the U.S. were most unfavorable. Details about these difficulties were expressed in several letters that Bartók wrote at the time. One of the issues that were constantly upsetting him was related to his financial situation. Bartók's earnings were quite low upon his arrival in the U.S. His biographer Ujfalussy concluded that, "strange as it may seem, Béla Bartók, one of the foremost composers in the world and a famous pianist, was faced during the last years of his life with oppressive financial trouble." Unfortunately, he had neither sufficient funds to support himself nor his wife Ditta, and "[a]s a result, he was forced literally to struggle for his existence." Regrettably, these were the conditions under which he composed the Solo Sonata and other later works.

One of the most significant sources of income for Bartók came from Columbia University. He had been invited by the university to do research work on a folk music collection from the region of Yugoslavia, now Serbia and Croatia. He was in charge of this research from

1941 on, and seemed quite enthusiastic about it, as he affirmed in a letter to his son Peter Bartók of June 1941:

The reason for inviting me here (apart from the fact that it would help me personally) was so that I could accomplish certain research work, that is, to study and transcribe this incomparable material on Yugoslav folk music. It is, in fact, this work which brought me here (as far as work is concerned, without taking into consideration my own feelings): material such as this can be found nowhere else in the world, and (apart from some Bulgarian material) this is what was so badly lacking to me over in Europe.

As shown in this letter, he considered this job especially important and devoted considerable energy to the research. The folk music collection was published only after Bartók's death under the title *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs*. The contract Bartók signed with the university was for a six month period so that at the end of every semester he had to live with the uncertainty of whether the institution would renew his contract for the following term. The university actually renewed Bartók's contract regularly until 1943. Columbia University also conferred on him an honorary Doctor's Degree. However, in terms of finances, the contract with the university was not enough for him, so he had to look for other sources of income in the U.S. in order to guarantee his and his wife's subsistence.

Concert appearances and royalties from the performances of his pieces were another possibility of extra earnings for Bartók. However Bartók, as a concertizer, unfortunately did not have as many performance engagements as he had wished for. In a letter dated October 17, 1941 to one of his few friends in the U.S., Wilhelmine Creel – a former American pupil Bartók had taught in Budapest who was then living in Seattle – Bartók stated: –If I tell you that we have for this season one orchestra-engagement, three two-piano recitals, four minor engagements (piano

solo or lecture) and that is all, then you easily see how precarious our situation is.” Additionally, in a letter to his son, Peter Bartók, he expressed his disappointment: “[c]oncerts are too few and far between; if we had to live on the proceeds, I am sure that we might well go hungry.” With respect to his composing situation, Bartók, feared that “[his] career as a composer is as much as finished; the quasi boycott of [his] works by the leading orchestras continue, no performances either of old work[s] or new ones.” This statement is in a letter Bartók wrote to Mrs. Creel on New Year’s Eve, 1942. Indeed, he composed very little during the years he lived in the U.S.. There is more evidence of Bartók’s distress stated in a letter he wrote to Mrs. Creel in March, 1942, where Bartók seemed yet more pessimistic: “Our situation is getting daily worse and worse. All I can say is that never in my life since I earn my livelihood (that is from my 20th year) have I been in such a dreadful situation as I will be probably very soon.” In addition to the financial difficulties and musical career crisis Bartók was facing in the U.S., his health was also getting worse and his physical condition deteriorating. He frequently experienced rheumatic pains and had difficulty playing the piano: “Both my shoulders are now completely affected by the arthritis which has been coming on for years. For a while, I could not raise my right arm at all, to say nothing of not being able to play the piano.” This condition was reported in a letter Bartók wrote to Mrs. Muller on September 6, 1940. In August 1941, just about a year later, he had another break down caused by arthritis, but this time in his left arm. In March 1942, his fevers were reaching over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. In January 1943, Bartók appeared at a concert rehearsal for the orchestral version of his Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion (1943) in New York looking extremely thin. According to Bartók’s friend and author Agatha Fassett, some orchestra members were shocked when Bartók appeared at the rehearsal evidently weighing less than 90 pounds. Later in 1943, Bartók collapsed during a lecture he was giving at Harvard

University and had to be taken immediately to the hospital. This was also the year Bartók was diagnosed with leukemia. Despite the diagnosis, he still managed to improve in health gaining some weight back, and restoring his strength over that year. Bartók's recovery was also made possible because of the efforts of certain people who were profoundly touched by Bartók's state. Unquestionably, all the help Bartók received made his life last longer.

Harvard University kindly offered to pay for Bartók's immediate hospital treatment. His friends also mobilized themselves in an attempt to help him. The pianist Ernő Balogh convinced the ASCAP organization to pay for all Bartók's future hospital care. The violinist József Szigeti contacted Serge Koussevitzky, the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra at that time, and thanks to their conversation, Bartók was given a commission to compose an orchestral work for the Koussevitzky Foundation. The Concerto for Orchestra (finished on 8 October 1943) was the outcome of this commission. This piece restored Bartók's willingness to compose and became one of his most popular pieces, with forty-nine performances worldwide in 1948. In addition, his Second Violin Concerto (1938) was often being performed by prominent violinists at important venues throughout the United States. One of them was the violinist Yehudi Menuhin, who was performing Bartók's pieces not only in the U.S. but also in Europe.

2. Bartók and Menuhin: The Encounter

The composer Béla Bartók and the violinist Yehudi Menuhin first met each other in November 1943. The young Menuhin, aged twenty seven, had a performance scheduled at Carnegie Hall, New York, with pianist Adolph Baller and the program for the concert included Bartók's First Sonata for Violin and Piano. By the time they met, Menuhin was the most renowned American-born violinist.

Menuhin was born in New York in 1916 and was declared “one of the most celebrated child prodigies of the 20th century,” gifted with a unique and superb talent. He was nine years old when he had his debut with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in March 1926. In December 1926, Menuhin’s family travelled to Europe for the first time. His Paris debut occurred in February 1927, and in March he began to take lessons with the violinist George Enescu, one of the greatest violin players and teachers in Europe at that time. Menuhin’s debut at Carnegie Hall took place in November 1927 with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1928, he made his first recording on the Victor label. In April, 1929, Menuhin made his first appearance in Berlin with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and in November, made his debut in London with the London Symphony Orchestra. Remarkably, at the age of thirteen, Menuhin had already acquired an international reputation. In 1932, after he recorded the Violin Concerto in B minor by Edward Elgar with the composer as a conductor, Menuhin developed an interest in promoting and performing new works of living composers. One of the composers that engaged his interest was Béla Bartók.

While preparing for his first performance of Bartók’s First Sonata for Violin and Piano, he showed himself willing to take advice from the composer and wrote a letter to Bartók requesting an audition. The composer accepted it, so they set up a meeting at the apartment of a friend. Menuhin considered himself fortunate to hear Bartók’s comments on his interpretation of the First Sonata: “At the end of the first movement Bartók got up – the first slackening of his rigid concentration – and said, ‘I did not think music could be played like that until long after the composer was dead.’” Such a statement was certainly enough for the young violinist to become confident about his approach to Bartók’s music. Subsequently, Bartók attended Menuhin’s

concert at Carnegie Hall and was strongly impressed with the violinist's performance. A relationship of mutual respect grew between the two from that occasion onward.

In addition to the respect they developed for each other, Menuhin considered Bartók to be among the greatest composers of all time: "Here, in the twentieth century, was a composer to bear comparison with the giants of the past." Menuhin also expressed his predilection for Bartók's pieces above those of other 20th-century composers: "I came to love above any other contemporary works the compositions of Bartók, and more particularly the Violin Concerto no. 2 and the First Sonata for Violin and Piano." As matter of fact, he included Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2 (1938) in his 1943 concert season, promoting the piece and the composer throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Menuhin already knew about Bartók's financial situation, so during their first meeting the violinist introduced the idea of commissioning him to compose a piece for violin:

I knew he was in financial straits, that he was too proud to accept handouts, that he was the greatest of living composers. Unwilling to waste a moment, I asked him on the afternoon of our first meeting if I might commission him to compose a work for me. It didn't have to be anything large-scale, I urged; I was not hoping for a third concerto, just a work for violin alone.

Bartók accepted Menuhin's commission and agreed to compose a piece for unaccompanied violin. The composer received a \$500 commission from Menuhin to write one of his last pieces: the Sonata for Solo Violin.

3. The Compositional History of the Solo Sonata

As stated above, it was in November, 1943, that Yehudi Menuhin requested and commissioned Bartók to compose the Sonata for Solo Violin. Bartók composed the Solo Sonata

during the winter 1944, during his stay in Asheville, North Carolina, which had been funded by ASCAP. The hope was that Bartók's health would be prevented from getting worse in the upcoming winter and because North Carolina had a leading treatment center for leukemia at the time.

Bartók completed the entire piece within a six-week period which ran from early February until mid-March. The score is dated March 14, 1944. On March 18, 1944, Bartók wrote to Mr. Heinsheimer, who managed the New York bureau of Boosey and Hawkes, to inform him that the sonata was finished. Bartók told Mr. Heinsheimer that ~~there is~~ no hurry with the publication of the Solo Sonata; it first needs to be reviewed for playability by Menuhin or another violinist." Although he had considerable experience writing for the violin, he had doubts about some passages in the Solo Sonata.

Bartók and Menuhin discussed the Solo Sonata in several letters. In a letter of 21 April 1944, Bartók expressed his concerns about the playability of some passages and the technical demands of the new piece:

I should like to have your advice. I sent you two copies. Would you be so kind as to introduce in one of them the necessary changes in bowing, and perhaps the absolutely necessary fingering, and other suggestions, and return it to me? And also indicate the impracticable difficulties? I would try to change them.

In a letter of 30 June 1944, Bartók wrote to Menuhin to answer questions and approve the final changes in the score. He also noted that any further changes thereafter would come from Menuhin's suggestions. Bartók expressed relief after receiving Menuhin's comments about the piece: ~~I~~am very glad to hear that the work is playable." In the same letter, Bartók promised Menuhin exclusive performing rights for the piece, for a period of two years. As has been

mentioned, Menuhin's first impressions of the Solo Sonata were not entirely positive and he had, himself, serious doubts about its playability: "I suggested very little, finding what he wrote possible if difficult, but for the technical suggestions I did make were further thanks in further letters." In time, Menuhin mastered the difficulties of the Solo Sonata and soon after he regarded it as an authentic masterwork.

4. Rudolf Kolisch's influence on Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin

After Bartók finished composing the Solo Sonata in Asheville March 1944, he mailed the score of the piece to Menuhin at least twice, yet received no reply either time. When Bartók finally arrived in New York on April 1944, he decided to consult with his long-time colleague Rudolf Kolisch.

Rudolf Kolisch (July 20, 1896 – August 1, 1978) was a Viennese violinist who studied with the famous violinist and pedagogue Otokar Sevcik. Kolisch also studied theory and composition with Schreker and Schoenberg, the latter being the one who later brought Kolisch to the U.S.. In 1937, he applied for U.S. citizenship. Kolisch was also the leader of two string quartets: the Kolisch Quartet and the Pro Arte Quartet. Interestingly, he played a right-handed violin, a rare occurrence in the violin world. Kolisch was a notable musician, especially for having given first performances of several 20th-century chamber works as the first violin of the Kolisch Quartet, including Bartók's fifth and sixth string quartets. The relationship between Bartók and Kolisch dates from 1927, when they first shared the stage in a concert sponsored by the ISCM (International Society for Contemporary Music) in Germany.

Kolisch described his involvement with Bartók's Solo Sonata in the program notes for a performance of the piece that he gave at the Darmstadt Festival in 1955: "The performance

follows according to the manuscript that Béla Bartók gave to me after finishing the composition, with him requesting me to test if it was payable.” Kolisch learned the piece and alleged that ~~nothing~~ “nothing was unplayable,” although he admitted that there were some very difficult passages. When Kolisch heard that Menuhin found some passages unplayable, he was quite disappointed, but felt relieved when Menuhin finally changed his mind and acknowledged that everything was playable.

Additionally, in a letter of 25 November 1964, to Denijs Dille, the director of the Bartók Archivum in Budapest, Kolisch stated that Bartók gave him the manuscript of the Solo Sonata before Bartók showed it to Menuhin and it was only after Kolisch approved the playability of the piece that Bartók sent a copy to Menuhin. Kolisch’s statement is somewhat flawed as it is known that Bartók sent a copy of the Solo Sonata to Menuhin but had mailing problems and had not received a response from Menuhin. There was, inexplicably, a complete absence of documents authored by Menuhin between the end of 1943 and mid 1945.

Kolisch was probably the first one who noticed inconsistencies between the edition of the Solo Sonata published by Menuhin and the original manuscript:

I was very surprised when I saw that in the edition published after the death of Bartók, I found some differences that for me contradicted the intention of the composer. The most significant were in the last movement, in which the quarter and third tones were simplified to half-tones.

As a matter of fact Kolisch was the first to play the quarter-tone version in the last movement and was also responsible for bringing this matter to public attention. He called Menuhin’s attention to it as well: ~~L~~acking even was any reference to the original text. When I confronted Menuhin with this, he confessed freely that he did not have Bartók’s assent to this

‘simplification’ [and] he asked me for a copy of the manuscript and promised to revise the case.” Kolisch had the intention to propagate Bartók’s original text, so he gave a copy of the manuscript to many violinists. Menuhin, in turn, admitted his gaffe and stated: “I regret not having included the quarter-tone version in the published edition: other violinists should share my privilege of choosing the one or the other; I mean to include both in any future edition.” Unfortunately, this “future edition” Menuhin meant to publish never appeared.

The layout of the Sonata for Solo Violin follows a four movement plan. The first movement is marked Tempo di ciaccona. The term ciaccona indicates the pace, not the form of the movement. The overall structure of the first movement is sonata form. The second movement is called Fuga and it could be described as a “fugal fantasy.” The exposition of the movement follows strictly the structure of a genuine Baroque fugue. The third movement is named Melodia, which is a slow movement where the composer explores variation features in da capo aria form (ABA). The fourth movement is called Presto and is written in a Rondo form. Its opening is very fast and has a moto perpetuo character with sixteenth-note motion. This alternates with a contrasting theme, more related to folk music, and with dotted rhythms. Bartók used quarter-tone writing in the Presto and remarked in a letter to Menuhin that “the $\frac{1}{4}$ tones in the 4th movement have only colour-giving character, i.e. they are not ‘structural’ features, and – therefore – may be eliminated, as I tried to do so in the alternatives on the last page, which you may use if you don’t feel inclined to worry about the $\frac{1}{4}$ tone playing.” Interestingly, Menuhin chose to play those passages using the half step version, and according to his own explanation, he had only a few weeks to prepare the Solo Sonata for the premiere, and for that reason he made the choice to play the passages of the Presto in half steps, instead of quarter tones. Bartók and Menuhin met each

other once more just before the premiere, in November 1944, to discuss some few remaining issues. There is no surviving record of what they discussed.

Menuhin recorded the Solo Sonata in June 1947, three years after its first performance in New York. Even for the recording he decided not to play the quarter tone passages in the Presto, making evident his predilection of playing them all in half steps. The violinist considered that such an intense piece demanded many performances to be fully understood. After three years, Menuhin considered that he, himself, achieved a definitive interpretation of the piece.

Menuhin's edition of the Solo Sonata was released only in 1947. After Bartók's death, the piece remained fully under Menuhin's custody. For this edition, Menuhin worked with Erwin Stein, who was Bartók's editor and associate. Therefore, it was Stein who acted as the editor for the Boosey and Hawkes publication. When this edition came out, it received much criticism. One critic wrote that "[w]hen this Sonata appeared in a bowdlerized edition by Sir Yehudi, he was attacked for it in a program note by Mr. Sachs, co-editor of the Performer's Committee for 20th Century Music (The N.Y. Times, March, 1979)." Undeniably, there were some incongruities between Menuhin's edition and the original manuscript, but it would take decades before a second edition brought them to light.

5. Performances and Reviews

The premiere of Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin was performed by Yehudi Menuhin. It took place on November 26th, 1944, at Carnegie Hall, in the presence of the composer. At the end, Bartók was brought up to the stage to acknowledge the applause.

In the reviews, comments were made both about the composition and its performance, covering a range of viewpoints. The critic Olin Downes stated in the article ~~Menuhin Thrills~~

Capacity Crowd” that ~~B~~artók had reason to feel courage.” He was generally positive about the work as a compositional feat, saying that ~~t~~his courage is transmitted by the musical legacy of his final years.” As for the reception by the audience, Downes said that it ~~m~~ust have been rewarding to Mr. Bartók, who has had his share of the difficulties of the radical innovator.” He also considered the piece ~~a~~ test for the ears, the intelligence, and the receptiveness of the most learned listener [...] on initial acquaintance, we take none too kindly to the piece.” Downes’s review included a humorous anecdote concerning an audience member:

[O]ne listener was heard to remark ironically after the performance that unfortunately Mr. Menuhin had played a wrong note in the middle of the second movement. She had the critics there. Not one of them could have taken oath in distinguishing between the alleged wrong note and the alleged right one!

In addition to Olin Downes, other critics also reacted to the Solo Sonata and the premiere. The reviews cited by Bartók’s biographer, Lajos Lesznai, were mostly unfavorable, thus contradicting the generous applause at the premiere. Lesznai assumed that the success of the piece was attributed more to Menuhin’s performance than to the piece itself. As a matter of fact, Bartók also paid high acknowledgment to the violinist. Arthur Berger, a critic for The Sun, voiced yet another viewpoint, concluding that the ~~n~~ew work was well written but lacked profile.”

Concerning the difficulty of the piece, the conductor Antal Dorati, who first encouraged Menuhin to get involved with Bartók’s music, wrote in his memoirs that the Solo Sonata is a ~~f~~endishly difficult work.” Menuhin had played the piece for him in private, before the premiere.

On the other hand, Bartók had a different view of the Solo Sonata premiere saying that ~~“it~~ was a wonderful performance. It has 4 movements and lasts ca.20 minutes. I was afraid it is too long; imagine: listening to a single violin during 20 minutes. But it was quite all right, at least for me.” This comment is in Bartók’s letter to Wilhelmine Creel, written in December 1944. In appreciation to Menuhin’s performance, Bartók also said that ~~“my~~ sonata, too, was exceedingly well done. When there is a real great artist, then the composer’s advice and help is not necessary, the performer finds his way quite well, alone.” The composer acknowledged and trusted the violinist’s approach to the piece.

Menuhin, in turn, considered the Solo Sonata ~~“a~~ work of wild contrasts” and had a particular thought for each of the movements. Following his thoughts, the first movement ~~“translates~~ the greatest of Bach’s own works for solo violin, the last movement of the D minor Partita, into Hungarian idiom, free but disciplined. It is a grandiose movement of daunting breadth of expression.” Menuhin considered the second movement, the Fuga, as ~~“perhaps~~ the most aggressive, even brutal, music that I play;” the third movement, Melodia, represented by a ~~“complete~~ serenity,” and the last movement, Presto, featured by ~~“fast,~~ elusive, dancelike rhythms.” It is important to observe that all Menuhin’s words mentioned above refer to his general impression of the character of the Solo Sonata, without getting into the technical difficulties.

Menuhin was pleased with the fact that he gave Bartók the motivation to write the piece; however he regretted that he could not play a more mature interpretation of the Solo Sonata for the composer before his death. He mentioned his dissatisfaction: ~~“I~~regret that I was not able to let him hear it in a truly finished interpretation, for over the years the music has come to speak to me, and I believe all of us, in the deepest spiritual terms.” As for the premiere concert, Menuhin

admitted that Bartók was more pleased than he was with the performance. Menuhin thought that Bartók possibly read my good intentions and understood that in another twenty years I would do the Solo Sonata justice.” Menuhin also stated after the premiere that “[a]gain the critics refused to consecrate his genius. And again he was pleased to have heard himself live from beyond the grave.” For Bartók, that evening was certainly one of the few delightful moments he had in the U.S..

CHAPTER 3

PERFORMANCE-PRACTICE ISSUES OF THE SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN

1. Choice of edition

This chapter's commentary was made in reference to the urtext edition of the sonata that was prepared by Peter Bartók¹⁴, the son of Béla Bartók. His edition was published in 1994. His stated intent was to produce a score that would be faithful to his father's and attempts to be truthful to the manuscript score left by Béla Bartók. Peter Bartók's intention was to make possible an edition that revealed Béla Bartók's original thoughts. On the other hand, Menuhin's edition¹⁵ incorporates multiple alterations from the original version. An example of a significant modification by Menuhin already mentioned above is found in the last movement, wherein Menuhin omits any reference to the quarter tones that appear in the original manuscript. Instead, Menuhin's edition contains only half steps. It is known that Bartók gave Menuhin the option to play the half steps, in lieu of the quarter tones that Bartók had included in the original. The major concern related to Menuhin's edition is the withholding of information. If any violin player chooses Menuhin's edition and for some reason is not aware of the urtext edition, he or she might never know that the Presto has the quarter tone (or microtones) version, which to this day represent one of the most striking usages of quarters in the entire violin repertoire.

Despite the discrepancies between the urtext edition and Menuhin's edition, consulting and utilizing Menuhin's edition has benefited this chapter enormously, especially with regard to

¹⁴ Bartók, Béla. *Sonata for Solo Violin*, urtext edition. London: Hawkes & Son, Ltd., 1994.

¹⁵ Bartók, Béla. *Sonata for Solo Violin*, ed. Yehudi Menuhin. London: Hawkes & Son, Ltd., 1947.

fingering and bowing suggestions, neither of which are found in the urtext. Indeed, all the information concerning fingering and bowing contained in Menuhin's edition can be helpful in understanding his way of solving these related issues. Without question, Menuhin's suggestions are both pertinent and intelligent. Therefore the author makes frequent references to Menuhin's edition on matters of fingering and bowing.

2. The Form and Style of Movement I: *Tempo di Ciaccona*

The significance of the title *Tempo di Ciaccona* for the first movement's overall form has been misconstrued, on account of the term *ciaccona*. However, Halsey Stevens states that ~~it~~ should be observed that Bartók indicated only the pace of the first movement, not its form."¹⁶ In fact, he maintains that the movement *Tempo di Ciaccona* is ~~a~~ sonata-form movement in the character of a chaconne."¹⁷ This sonata form begins with an exposition that extends from m. 1 to m.52, with a second theme appearing at m.32. The development begins at m.53 and runs until m.90. The recapitulation extends from m.91 until m.120. It is followed by a coda that spans mm. 121—150.

Even though the movement is structured according to sonata form, a connection can be drawn between the *Tempo di Ciaccona* and J. S. Bach's Chaconne from the Second Partita. Amanda Bayley is correct to state that ~~Bach's~~ D minor Chaconne is also not far from the surface of Bartók's first movement."¹⁸ However, she suggests that Bartók employs Bach's style in his *Tempo di Ciaccona* in a subtle manner: ~~It~~ is only the stately rhythm of the Baroque type

¹⁶ Halsey Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 223.

¹⁷ Halsey Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, 223.

¹⁸ Amanda Bayley, *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 139.

that is retained in the opening bars.”¹⁹ Other similarities found in the rhythmic structure of both pieces include triple meter and similar pace. The phrase design of both pieces is based on a four-measure phrase structure. In other words, the openings of both Bartók’s *Tempo di Ciaccona* and Bach’s Chaconne show a four-bar opening phrase, cadencing on the dominant, which therefore represents a traditional baroque manner of phrasing.

The dense polyphonic texture of both works (irrespective of distinctions in the harmonic language) is also comparable. Several of the characteristics mentioned above are presented right at the beginning of both pieces, as shown in Examples 1 and 2 below:



Example 1. Opening measures (mm. 1-4) of the Chaconne from Bach’s Partita II.



Example 2. Opening measures (mm. 1-4) of *Tempo di Ciaccona* from Sonata for Solo Violin by Bartók. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Paul Griffiths asserts that the harmony of the *Tempo di Ciaccona* ~~is~~ firmly grounded in G minor at first, closing in major, but treated with extreme chromatic freedom.”²⁰ Indeed a first G-minor chord appears already in m. 1 (see Ex. 2). According to this view, the many dissonances that appear in the movement are the result of passing tones, which are derived from the polyphonic writing, as shown, for example, in Ex. 3 below:

¹⁹ Paul Griffiths, *Bartók* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1984), 179.

²⁰ Ibid.



Example 3. Dissonant passing tones on strong beats: Mvt. I, mm. 10-11. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The *Tempo di Ciaccona* is also indebted to *Magyar*²¹ folk music through the usage of its rhythmic character and the use of fourths, both vertically and horizontally, as shown in the Examples 4 and 5 below:



Example 4. Vertical fourths (double stops) in Mvt. I, m.79. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)



Example 5. Fourths in the melodic line of Mvt. I, mm.49-52. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Tempo di Ciaccona makes prominent use of high register passages with double stops in fifths and chords, as shown in the example below:

²¹ –Magyar” is the term Hungarians use in the Hungarian language to refer to themselves or to their language. The true Magyar folk music differed greatly from that of the Hungarian gypsies whose music had been regarded as the only Hungarian folk music.



Example 6. Use of high register fifths as double stops and within chords in Mvt. I, m. 100. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Another compositional characteristic is the use of drone strings to produce an ostinato technique, involving the rhythmic repetition of a single note, as shown in the example below:



Example 7. Use of drone open E string in Mvt. I, mm. 112-14. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Bartók uses all four open strings of the violin to produce such ostinati in the course of the first movement.

The following comments and examples are offered as an introduction to the most atypical technical challenges of the first movement, with suggestions for negotiating each challenge.

2.1. The Performance Challenge of Finger Sliding in Double Stops Passages



Example 8. A fingering solution: Mvt. I, m. 5, beats 2 and 3. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The difficulty of this passage on beats 2 and 3 in m.5 is mostly related to the left hand. It requires dexterity in double stops playing. Considering the score indication to sustain the C on the E string while playing the pitches of the lower voice (G E F) on the A string, the only possible way to execute it is through fingering in a specific way: by sliding the finger between the A and E strings. Otherwise, if a finger is lifted, it would not allow the C to be held while G, E, and F are being played. Having the fingers preset could be a possible approach to this issue. While the C—F fifth is being held with the second finger²², the first finger is placed on the A string mutely so that it is ready to play the E later on. If the G is played with the third finger, it can be articulated. The difficulty focuses on how best to proceed with the second finger. The second finger has to slide to the right while the third finger is placed on G, in a manner that ensures that the second finger keeps pressing the C on the E string and does not touch the A string, thereby allowing the E (first finger on the A string) to sound together with the C. Thereafter, the second finger must slide to the left side and grasp the A string in order to sound the C—F fifth again.

The violin player needs to be aware that sliding the finger in this way might generate a problem with intonation because the tone is so easily distorted. The accuracy of intonation is directly related to the precision of the fingers' articulation. For this reason, it is necessary to practice the passage in isolation. A useful exercise is to produce the F—C fifth (A and E strings respectively) with the second finger on fourth position and the first finger placed on the A string so as to play the E of the E—C sixth thereafter. The second finger should slide sideways, without any finger lifting. What also may help the second finger to move sideways is to twist or rotate the forearm a little bit, with pronation and supination motions. This technique allows the C on

²² Menuhin's fingering suggestion.

the E string to sound continuously while the E and the F on the A string are clearly being articulated. Sliding the second finger sideways repeatedly will make the passage less complex. The sliding technique applied in this passage is to some extent derived from the technique of sixths playing, as explained by Galamian in the double stops section of his book.²³

Once the difficulty is mastered, the next step is to play the passage with vibrato, particularly the fifths. The use of vibrato will add expression, making the phrase more intense and dramatic.

For the right hand, all three examples involve slurred notes and *forte* dynamics. It is important that the bow is well balanced, so as to avoid any disturbance in the sound while playing the double stops. Menuhin follows the score indication and his recording demonstrates exactly how this passage should sound. Andre Gertler optioned not to hold the C through the passage, which makes it considerably less complicated since no double stops playing is involved in this case.

The same problem occurs in the second beat of m.6 and in the last beat of m.106, as shown in the next two examples below:



Example 9. The sideways finger slide applied to the second beat of Mvt. I, m.6. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

²³ Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), 28.

The excerpt from m.6 is less complicated as the sliding technique is required only one time. The third finger is holding the fifth E-flat—B-flat.²⁴ The second finger has to be placed on the A string while the fifth E-flat—B-flat is sounding, so that it is ready to play the D-flat that follows. At this point, the third finger slides to the right, keeping the B-flat sounding while the lower voice notes D-flat—C—D-flat are played.

One more example of this technique is located in the last beat of m.106, as shown in the example below:



Example 10. The sideways finger slide applied to Mvt. I, m. 106, last beat. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The excerpt from m.106 also calls for a specific fingering. The second finger is placed on G-string, playing the E in fourth position²⁵. Here, the application of the technique could be slightly different. Instead of sliding the finger to the right to play B together with E, it is best to use the articulation between the middle and distal phalanges of the second finger (tip of the finger), flattening the distal phalange down until it presses the D string and plays the B. This type of fingering is possible only if the joint between the middle and distal phalange is flexible and relaxed. A stiff finger would not allow the finger's joint to move properly. A separate exercise without the violin could be done with the second finger, leaning it on the thumb and flexing its joint gently. A similar exercise is proposed by Galamian in his ~~method~~ of loosening the finger joints,²⁶ discussed in his treatment of vibrato. Now, with the violin in hand, the first and second

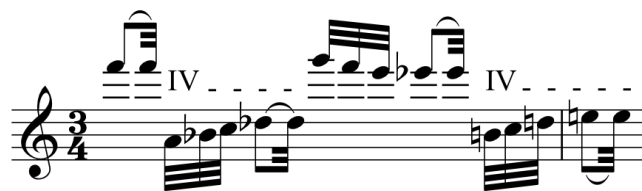
²⁴ Menuhin's fingering.

²⁵ Menuhin's fingering.

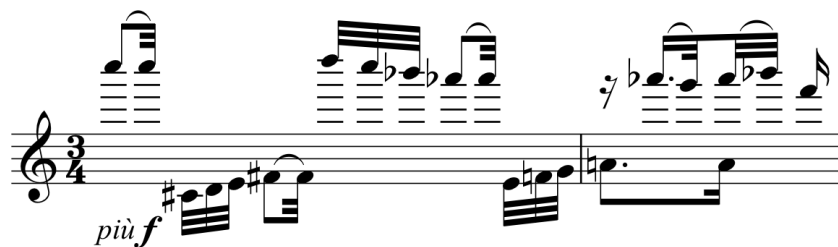
²⁶ Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), 41.

fingers²⁷ are placed on fourth position on G and D strings. The second finger has to flatten just like in the previous exercise without the violin, flattening its joint to play the B on the D string and the E on the G string that is to sound together with it. Since this passage requires a particular sort of fingering, it is important to exercise the second finger, so that it moves precisely back and forth from the tritone E A-sharp to the perfect fifth E—B.

2.2. The Performance Challenge of Shifting Combined with String Crossing



Example 11. Shifting with string crossing and register change in Mvt. I, m.9. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)



Example 12. Shifting with string crossing and rapid register change in Mvt. I, m.12. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The main problem of the two passages in m.9 and m.12 pertains to the left hand, specifically to shifting. The question is how to shift from a low position to a very high position with a string crossing from the E string to the G string with accuracy. First, a structural aspect has to be considered. The passage presents two contrasting voices, in the soprano and tenor registers. When this passage is performed, these two voices should be distinguished. A precise

²⁷ Menuhin's fingering.

tactile sense of the fingerboard is particularly required for this passage. Technically, it also depends on the fingering choice made by the violin player. Menuhin's fingering in m.9 makes sense in terms of maintaining the track of the positions through the whole passage, making the shifting occur within the thirty-second note runs.²⁸ However, when the same idea is presented in m.12, no fingering marks are made by Menuhin.

The passage in m.12 is even harder than the one in m.9, with a larger shifting between the voices. Unfortunately, there are no comments on this type of shifting in the books by Flesch²⁹ or Galamian. The principle of the shifting technique for this passage is based on the sense of touch, so that the violin player shifts and finds the position mutely, without the use of the glissando resource. The first problem is the shift from the tenth F-sharp—A on the last beat of m.11 to the high C on the down beat of m.12, beat 1. A practical way to reach the high C with precision in m.12 is to shift soundlessly from the A (fourth finger) of the tenth (F-sharp—A) in m.11 to the C above it on the A string with the first finger, getting into the ninth position, and subsequently finding the octave relation to the C on the E string that has to be played (with third finger preferably). For practice purposes, the shifting between A (fourth finger) from the tenth F-sharp—A and the intermediary C note (first finger) on the A string could be primarily done with glissando, so as to develop the exact sense of the distance that the first finger has to cover. Once this sense is developed, the shifting and the placement of C on the E string can all be done mutely and with accuracy.

The run in the second half of beat 1 in m.12 (C-sharp D E F) is less problematic since it is in the third position. It is necessary to develop the feeling of shifting from the high C (ninth position) to the C-sharp in third position. The following run is considerably harder to reach

²⁸ See example 11. Menuhin's edition.

²⁹ See the editor's remarks in Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing, Vol. 1* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1924), 98.

because it is in the tenth position. It is necessary to isolate the passage in order to figure it out. First, the violin player has to find the tenth position and practice the run D C B-flat A-flat and develop a thorough sense of that particular position, including the position, placement and angle of the arm, hand, and fingers. It is also important to pay attention to how the elbow moves along with the shifting, and how it is positioned. Subsequently, the violinist can practice the shifting between the bottom F-sharp on the third position on the G string and the high D on the E string in the tenth position. It is essential that once the high D is reached, the left hand fits right onto the designed position and gets exactly the same feeling as when the run was practiced by itself, without the shifting.

The right hand also has an important role in this passage. Setting up the bow and bow distribution are the main concerns for these passages. For instance, if the high C in m.12 is played down bow, the consecutive bowing will be at the tip for the C-sharp D E F-sharp run, with the F-sharp carrying the bow to the frog, then the next run D C B-flat A-flat will be right at the frog, basically causing the runs to alternate from one extremity of the bow to another. Fine control of the bow is necessary so that the voices are not affected by the different positions of the bow and the goal of distinguishing the voices is achieved. For each run, it is fundamental that the bow is positioned in advance, resting on the string for a fraction and with a slight pressure on it before the run is made. The weight difference between the tip and the frog also has to be considered, so that when the bow is placed at the tip, a little bit more weight is necessary, and when the bow is at the frog, less weight is necessary. In addition, since there are two voices alternating with each other, a clear distinction could be made through inserting a little break between the two. This break could be done by shortening the value of the eighth notes tied to the thirty-second notes, converting those thirty-second notes to thirty-second note rests. Proceeding

with the bow and left hand adjustments would not adversely affect the clarity and flow of the voices.

2.3. The Performance Challenge of Dissonant Double Stops: Augmented Octaves and the Major/Minor Ninth



Example 13. Dissonant double stops – augmented octaves and major/minor ninths in Mvt. I, mm. 10-11. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The central issue in this excerpt is mostly associated with the left hand. The position of the hand, shifting, and intonation are quite complex in these measures. It is not very common for violin players to practice dissonant double stops such as major/minor seconds, tritone, and ninth in their daily practice routine. Since this piece presents a great deal of dissonant passages that are unusual in the violin repertoire, particular attention must be devoted to them. Measure 10 features a passage with an augmented octave E—E-sharp (minor ninth E and F spelled enharmonically) going to a tenth (D-sharp—F-sharp) on beat 3. This is a rare double stop combination within the violin literature.

Since this passage involves finger extension, one way to approach this matter is first to find the E-natural in the fourth position with the first finger on the A string, then, placing the second finger on E-sharp (F natural) next to it, and after that, positioning the fourth finger on the high E-sharp on the E string and playing the octave E-sharps, checking for the intonation. It is important to keep all the involved fingers pressing down (1 2 4). Finally, the second finger E-

sharp on the A string can be lifted, so that the first finger E on A string and fourth finger E-sharp on the E string can sound the ninth. Once the intonation of the octave is to some extent more noticeable than the ninth, this is a convenient way to work out the problem of intervallic accuracy.

For the next passage in m.11, there is something that needs to be added. The first augmented octave (C-sharp—C-double sharp) in m.11 is preceded by a higher F-sharp. The option here is to shift down from that F-sharp with the third finger³⁰ in the fifth position to the C-double sharp with fourth finger in the low third position. The octave relation would be built up from the upper C-double sharp on the E string to the lower C-double sharp on the A string with the second finger. Then the actual C-sharp played with first finger could be placed after so as to sound the augmented octave.

The thirty-second note (i.e., the A-sharp—B ninth) located just before the last beat of m.11 would also have a different approach since it involves a string crossing in addition to the shifting. This ninth is preceded by a C—D-sharp tenth. In order to reach the A-sharp—B ninth, a string crossing from the A and E strings to the D and A strings must be made. For the left hand, it will be better to guide the shifting with the first finger, going from the C of the tenth to the A-sharp of the ninth. Once the A-sharp is properly reached, the same process of building up to the ninth takes place, with the B next to the A-sharp played with second finger, then finding the top B with fourth finger and finally lifting the second finger on the B, which leaves the A-sharp—B ninth sounding.

Once a sense for dissonant double stops is developed, the intermediate notes will not be required anymore. Another problem is the thirty-second note rhythm. It is essential that these

³⁰ Menuhin's fingering.

rhythms are well enunciated. For enunciation matters the bow would serve as an important aid. First, the fingers of the ninth are put in place, then the bow is quickly set before it starts sounding. The bow preparation will make the articulation clear.

A similar problem with fingering, shifting, and extension in dissonant double stops passages occurs in mm.40-2, as shown in the example below:



Example 14. Passage with various dissonant double stops in Mvt. I, mm.40-2. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

What makes this passage particularly hard is the combination and the succession of double stops, especially the dissonant ones in a higher register. Generally, two aspects must be taken into consideration regarding the fingering in this passage: the counterpoint with its different voices and the choice of a certain string and position that accommodate the voices so that the motion of the counterpoint and its texture make sense.

Measure 40 can be played adequately using the D and A strings, starting in the first position. The triplets on the 2nd beat of m.40 have an extension (pitches Eb and Bb with Db above them) and a diminished sixth: A—Fb. The diminished sixth at the end of the 2nd beat would be a good place to shift, using the second finger, and could be considered as a perfect fifth. The 3rd beat starts with an octave which could be played using 1 and 4 or 1 and 3. If 1 and 4 is the choice, then an additional shifting to the Cb with the fourth finger is necessary. It is fine since it is accompanied by the open D string at the bottom. Mm. 41 could be played either using the D and A strings or the G and D strings. If the choice is the G and D strings (considering it

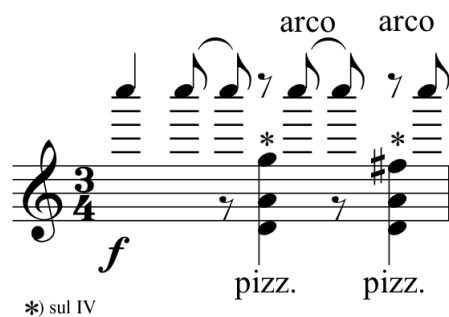
from the second triplet on), the passage would start on fifth position and the fingering would be 3 and 4 for G and Eb, then 3 playing the natural harmonic G and D, followed by 1 and 3 for the seventh Eb and D. The next double stop is Bb and D, where the Bb must be as an extension with the 4th finger, while the D remains with the 3rd finger going to Db with 2nd finger.

Subsequently, the pitches A and Db move to Eb in the top voice; this A could be an open string, facilitating the passage technically. The down side of this option is that since it is being played as an open string, the bottom voice crosses the higher one, causing a voice displacement. In this case the bottom voice would not have a smooth progression, as it would when it is all played using a same string. The last beat of mm.41 has to be played on D and A strings, starting in 3rd position, where the Ab is played with the 1st finger and the Fb with the 2nd finger going to Ab with 4th finger. The last two double stops of mm.41 include a D, which fits perfectly with an open string and the Ab on the top. Even though it is a repetition of the previous Ab, it needs to be played with another finger, in this case a shifting with the first finger, getting to the (low) seventh position and allowing the Cb to be reached with 3rd finger, and most importantly, the down beat of the next measure, mm.42 with the Db and Eb also played in the low seventh position.

An efficient way to practice this particular passage is to break it down into small pairs. Since the problem primarily involves the left hand, it is necessary to work on it separately. The pairs could be practiced with both detaché and slurred bowing. The passage starts on the 2nd beat of m.40 with E-flat D-flat. The D-flat is sustained and then played with B-flat, the two double stops thus forming the first pair of double stops. It is reasonable to repeat the pair a couple of times. The second pair starts with the previous B-flat D-flat and adds on the next A—F-flat. Then the A—F-flat is repeated with the next double stop A-flat—A-flat (octave), and so forth.

This process covers the entire sequence in a note by note manner. Once again, the repetition of the pairs is vital to assimilate the dissonant double stops, especially for those that appear after a shifting in a high position, making them more difficult to tune. Only after the entire sequence is understood and assimilated through this process, can the passage can finally be played as it is written, first in a slower tempo and little by little faster until the performance tempo is achieved.

2.4. The Performance Challenge of the Arco/Pizzicato Combination Involving Shifting



Example 15. The arco/pizz. combination in Mvt. I, m.43. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

As stated above, this passage presents challenges for both bow and left hand technique. Separately, the right hand deals with an exchange between arco and pizzicato playing. The left must accomplish large shifts. The urtext edition has only the top C in m.43, not the octave. The octave C was added by Menuhin in his edition and he also plays the octave in his recording. Interestingly, the two chords marked pizzicato have a small star next to them, indicating that they should be played on the G string. It is likely that that was Bartók's real intention. Menuhin's edition also presents the option of playing the pizzicato chords on the E string. From a technical standpoint, the use of the G string would avoid a shifting down to the first position to execute the pizzicatos. However, if the position of the high C is kept and the G of the first pizzicato chord is to be reached high up on G string, it would not come out well if the string is plucked, since that

G on the G string is in a very high position (close to the end of the fingerboard). The G string is very much shortened by that G of the pizzicato chord. Consequently, a better violinistic solution is to shift down to the first position to play the pizzicato chord and shift back up to play the high C.

For the right hand, it is important that the bow grip is kept for the pizzicato. Only the index finger needs to be extended to reach and pluck the strings involved in the chord. This way, only the index finger needs to be adjusted for this arco/pizzicato exchange.

2.5. The Performance Challenge of Chords in the High Register



Example 16. High register chords in Mvt. I, m.44. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The performance challenge involves both the left and right hands. This passage features unusual high register chords, which complicates the placement of the fingers in a high position and the execution of the chord with the bow. The original version of this measure is identical in both the urtext and Menuhin's edition. Menuhin's edition also has fingering marks. The chords in m.44 have to be executed in tenth position. Following Menuhin's fingering, these chords should supposedly be arpeggiated. It is possible to assume that just looking at the use of second finger. It would be impractical to hold three strings at once with the same finger and to play the

notes on the G, D, and A strings during the first chord in m.44. His recording clearly reveals the way he realized the passage. Such a performance of the chords makes them less complicated. The indication to play the middle notes of the chords with natural harmonics also facilitates their execution. For the following discussion, Menuhin's fingering will be maintained, as his realization is discussed in detail.

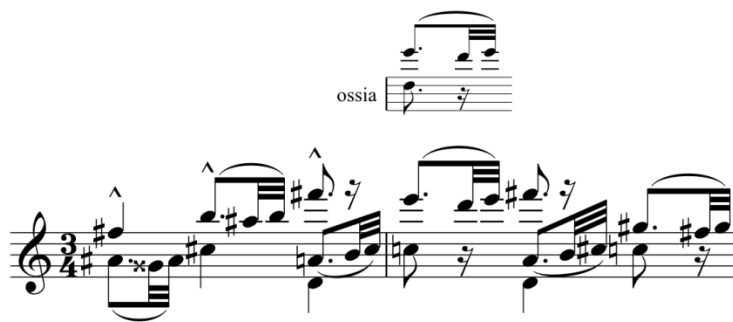
Since the high C of the first chord in m.44 is a repetition of the previous C in m.43 and is also the highest note of the chord, it could be thought of as a guide for the chord. In other words, the C of the first chord, played with third finger, could remain pressed on the E string during the execution of the other notes of that chord. The lowest note of the chord is E and it is to be played with the second finger on the G string. Thanks to the fifth parallelism on the fingerboard, this E on the G string is actually located a half step higher than the C on the E string, so the second finger E has to "cross" the third finger C in order to be reached. Then, there is the A on the D string, which is also to be played with the 2nd finger, but as a harmonic. The violin player must be aware that the interval between E on the G string and A on the D string is a perfect fourth. So the second finger has to move from one to another accordingly. The second finger E on the G string is pressed, but when it moves to A, it has to be released. If the indication to play the harmonic A is followed, then there is no need for the second finger to be pressed; a soft touch on A is enough to sound the harmonic. The same happens with E, the next note of the chord, which is also a harmonic.

The second chord of m.44 must be built in a different manner than the first one. The note prior to the chord is A, so this becomes the reference to get to the D-sharp, the lowest note of the chord. The interval between that D-sharp and A, the next note of the chord, is a tritone. So once more the second finger should cross the strings accordingly. The A on the A string is a harmonic,

so the second finger needs only a slight touch on the string. Then, the next two notes F and C form a perfect fifth, so it is better if the strings are pressed at the same time. It is crucial to find the right angle of the finger so that the fifth sounds perfectly in tune. The last chord of m.44 follows the same principle as the first one. The difference is that the note prior to the chord is an A, and the chord itself has C-sharp as the highest note. Despite these minor differences, the execution of this chord could follow the same procedure as the first one.

The bow should also be used accordingly, coordinating the string crossing with the second finger of the left hand. In order to execute the first chord in m.44, the bow has to be slightly lifted from the A on the E string to the E on the G string. Once the arpeggio is initiated, the string crossing should be guided with the elbow. Since the orientation of the chord is from the G to the E string, the elbow is higher when the arpeggio begins. The elbow is then lowered as the arpeggio is performed until the E string is reached.

2.6. The Performance Challenge of Chords Associated with Double-Stop of the Tenth and the Eleventh



Example 17. Eleventh and tenth used in two-voice part writing: Mvt. I, mm.71-2. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

This passage's main challenge involves the left hand. This passage features double stops (an eleventh and a tenth) used in two-voice part writing. The chord D—A—F-sharp in the last beat of m.71 is relatively simpler than the C—E tenth on the down beat of m.72 because the D and A of the D—A—F-sharp chord are open strings. The problem relies on moving from the chord in m.71 to the tenth in m.72, mostly because of the two thirty-second notes (B C-sharp) placed in between.

After playing the chord D—A—F-sharp in the last beat of m.71, a shifting to first position is necessary in order to play the B C-sharp thirty –second notes. Its execution in first position is facilitated by the sixteenth rest on the top voice, allowing the hand to move comfortably. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind what is next: the C—E tenth on the down beat of m.72. Instead of relaxing (or flexing) the fourth finger while playing the B C-sharp thirty-second notes in m.72, it is recommended to keep it stretched so to prepare it for the E of the tenth. In addition, the thumb needs to be active and positioned slightly underneath the neck of the violin as to assist the left hand through the extensions and shifting. The fingering suggested in Menuhin's edition works out fine for this passage, playing the thirty-second notes B with first finger and C-sharp with second finger, allowing then the first finger to play C-natural and the fourth finger to play E of the tenth.

In order to move from the tenth on the down beat of m.72 to the next chord on the second beat of m.72, it is necessary to lift the first finger C of the tenth keeping the E sounding and relocate the hand up to fourth position. Repositioning the hand would allow the thirty second notes (D E) to be played with the third and fourth fingers respectively. The D and A of the D—A—F-sharp chord are open strings and the F-sharp could be reached through a shifting from E

with the same fourth finger. On account of the next two thirty-second notes (B C-sharp) in m.72, it is important that the left hand shifts back to the first position.

2.7. The Performance Challenge of Perfect Fifths Alone and within Chords in the High Register



Example 18. Fifths and fifth chords in a high register passage: Mvt. I, mm.99-100. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

This passage presents challenges for both hands. For the left hand, it deals with fingering issues and the positioning of fifths chord and fifth double stops in high positions. For the right hand, the difficulty centers on how to perform those chords and double stops with a good sound.

This is certainly one of the hardest passages of the first movement, possibly of the whole piece. One possible way toward mastering this passage is to use Bartók's *ossia* first. Bartók's alternative is basically a transposition of the passage one octave down, so that the strings and fingering pattern are identical in both octaves. However, it is necessary to realize that the fingering used in the lower octave may not fit if applied in the higher octave. For instance, in m.99, the fifths thirty second notes (B, C in the top notes) with the fifth quarter note (D-flat top note) could be fingered using 1 2 3 in the first position. However, if the same passage is played an octave higher up in the eighth position, the fingers may not fit in that position as the distance between the half steps reduces significantly. It also depends on the width of the fingers of the

violin player. A player with thinner fingers may not have a problem. On the other hand, a player with thicker fingers may not accommodate the upper positions well. Another fingering option for the fifths run (B C D-flat top notes) in m.99 would be 1 2 2 instead of 1 2 3. The same fingering 1 2 2 could be applied in the fifth run (C-sharp D E-flat) in m.100. For the fifth chord G D A in m.100, a good fingering would be 2 2 3. It is not optimal but it is suitable to the circumstances since it is not possible to play three strings at once with the same finger. In other words, the second finger would hold G D and the third finger would hold A only. It is pertinent to observe the parallel relation between the strings in a perfect fifth chord, so that the fingers placement can follow this alignment.

In terms of performing this passage, it is fundamental that the violin player has a perfect feeling of the dimensions of the fingerboard up in the eighth and ninth positions along with the precise notion of the angle that each of the fingers should have so as to play the fifths with accuracy. In order to work out the intonation of the perfect fifths it is important to adjust the angle of the fingers through the lateral movement of the elbow. Thus it is the elbow that gives the fingers the right angle and pressure balance between strings to play the fifths. As a rule, the more the elbow moves to the right the more the fingers take on an upright shape in relation to the fingerboard. On the other hand, the more the elbow moves to the left the more the fingers form a flat shape in relation to the fingerboard.

The two fifths formed with the thirty-second notes E B and F C and the fifth quarter note G-flat D-flat in m.99 are located in the eighth position. If the fingering 1 2 2 is followed, the second finger should shift up to ninth position. Then, the last eighth note B of m.99 is to be played with third finger. In order to play the first chord of m.100, the third finger should shift down a half step from B-flat in m.99 to A in m.100, and then the second finger should shift up

from the fifth G-flat D-flat in m.99 to the fifth G D in m.100. In this way, the second and third fingers move one against the other. It is essential that the left hand remains at ninth position with no hand relocation. The next fifths run F-sharp C-sharp, G D, and A-flat E-flat in m.100 is also in ninth position. Even with the 1 2 2 fingering, the ninth position should be kept and the second finger A-flat E-flat should be played as an extension so as to facilitate the execution of the next chord. The next fifth chord A-flat E-flat B-flat is in the second beat of m.100. As suggested before, the second finger from the previous fifth should be kept and the third finger placed on the B-flat, which takes into consideration the fifths' parallel alignment with the second finger.

The execution of the chords and double stops also presents a bowing challenge. The bow orientation is the first issue. Although this passage is technically demanding, the violin player has to keep in mind that it still must result in a musical phrase, which means that attention be given to the bowing of it. Initially, it might seem simpler to play all the chords with down bow. However in this case, the phrase would become choppy and would not make sense. An idea that works well in this kind of situation is to play only the melodic notes of the passage, in order to determine the shape and musical intent of the phrase. In deciding to play broken or unbroken chords, the player must take note of the duration of the chords. The first chord should be a broken chord since it has quarter-note duration. The eighth-note chords could eventually be played as unbroken chords. The placement of the bow on the string is also important. The sounding point should be closer to the bridge and as the bow moves downward or upward it should stay parallel to the bridge.

2.8. The Performance Challenge of Double Stops with Left-hand Pizzicato



Example 19. Sustained double stops over left hand pizzicatos in Mvt. I, mm.145-7. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The issue related to this passage concerns mostly the left hand, with certain difficulty for the right hand as well. This is also one of the hardest passages of the piece. The task is to sustain the long double stops at a piano dynamic while playing the left hand pizzicatos. At the beginning of m.145, it is advised to have the notes B-flat, F, D, and B-flat already placed on the fingerboard as if to play a chord. In this way, all the involved fingers would be ready to play their pitches. The fingers should adopt a more upright shape so that while the sixth D B-flat is being sustained, the fourth finger would be able to reach up the G string and play the B-flat pizzicato without touching any other strings or generating undesirable noises. The same is valid for the F pizzicato in m.146, still wherein the D—B-flat sixth is being sustained on the top.

A good fingering for the C-sharp—B-flat seventh in m.146 would be 1 3, with the first finger holding the F-sharp—C-sharp fifth. When the F-sharp already set, it becomes less difficult to play the pizzicato with the fourth finger thereafter. For the last seventh (C—B-flat), the fingering would be the same as the previous one. The difference is that while the seventh is being held, the second finger could be placed silently so as to play the G-sharp pizzicato also with the fourth finger that follows.

3. The Form and Style of Movement II: *Fuga*

Baroque fugal technique is employed in this movement, although not strictly. The Fuga could also be characterized as a “fugal fantasy”³¹ in view of the fact that there are some long passages wherein the fugue subject does not appear. In terms of its character, the Fuga produces sensations of power and aggression that grow from the very beginning all the way through the movement. Menuhin considered this particular movement to be the most brutal music he had ever played and with good reason.

Regardless of its character, the movement conforms to fugal expectations with respect to the individual entries. The exposition features four voices and the entries (mm.1-20) follow the traditional order with respect to starting pitch: C, G, C, and G. The range of the subject is narrow, encompassing the chromatic tones between B and F-sharp (not ordered), which is characteristic of Bartók’s treatment of thematic ideas. Due to certain technical limitations, some parts are composed in single or two-part textures.³² One writer has described this movement as Bartók’s “ultimate offering as a contrapuntalist.”³³ It is also marked by a “striking range of variation technique”³⁴ in the imitative passages, with constant modifications of the subject, only the first answer of which is exact. For the third and fourth entries, there are note repetitions, embellishments, and rhythmic displacements.³⁵

The main subject is presented in the lowest register. It has motifs separated by rests, spanning at total of five measures. The C is the primary tonal centre, as shown in Ex. 20:

³¹ Halsey Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, 224.

³² Gillies, *The Bartók Companion*, 342.

³³ Gillies, *The Bartók Companion*, 341.

³⁴ Gillies, *The Bartók Companion*, 337.

³⁵ Gillies, *The Bartók Companion*, 342.



Example 20. The main subject (bass voice) of the *Fuga* presented in mm.1-5. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The counter-subject is presented by the tenor voice and is a real answer to the main subject, transposed a fifth higher, as shown in Ex. 21:



Example 21. The counter-subject as a real answer, as presented in mm.6-11. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The third voice is presented in the alto register and is the original statement transposed an octave higher with a denser texture, as shown in Ex. 22:



Example 22. The alto voice carrying the original statement an octave higher in Mvt. II, mm.11-5. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The fourth voice is presented in the soprano register. It is the counter-subject transposed an octave higher and its texture is even more elaborate with some four- note chords, as shown in Ex. 23:



Example 23. The soprano voice presenting the counter-subject an octave higher in Mvt. II, mm.16-20. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Episode I follows the Exposition and is seventeen measures long (mm.21-37) and has no clear thematic elements. The subject returns in an altered form in m.38 characterizing the Middle Entry I. Here the statement begins with F-sharp, which is a tritone from the previous C. Following the F-sharp statement, there is a tonal ~~turning~~ point³⁶ from m.44 until m.50, with the subject in inversion and located in the lower voice parts. Episode II starts in m.51 and runs until m.62. In the Middle Entry II from m.63 until m.76, there is an ~~antiphonal~~ play between ordinary and inverted forms³⁷ of the opening motifs enhanced with free development. The voices are also distinguished by the use of bow for higher voices and pizzicato for lower voices. Middle Entry III starts in m.77 and extends until m.87. Since it follows Middle Entry II, it could be characterized as a ~~counter~~ exposition” representing the last complete statement. Episode III encompasses mm.88-92 and has open strings A and D as pedal points. Middle Entry IV is only six measures long, from m.93 until m.98. It is a brief recollection of Middle Entry II. The Coda comprises mm.99-107 and features the last appearance of the subject involving four simultaneous parts. This passage is all in parallel fifth chords, creating a major second interval between the tenor and alto voice.

3.1. The Performance Challenge of Atypical Chords



Example 24. Atypical dissonant chord in Mvt. II, mm.18-19, beat 2. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

³⁶ Gillies, *The Bartók Companion*, 343.

³⁷ Gillies, *The Bartók Companion*, 344.

The chord appearing on the second beat of m.19 is an atypical chord because it is built up by a minor third D-sharp F-sharp and a major ninth A B, a rare combination of intervals for the violin. Initially, it is important to take note of the pitches that surround this particular chord so as to best calculate an effective approach. A similar chord appears in m.18 as the last eighth note of that bar. If one looks at the two lowest voices in mm.18-9, it is possible to draw an ascending line of thirds, starting with B D on the second beat of m.18 and ending with E G on the third beat of m.19. In order to execute the chord C-sharp—E—A—A on the last beat of m.18, the violin player first needs to determine the fingering for that chord and then decide on the placement order of the fingers. The finger that is placed first is not always the lowest note (C-sharp, in this case) of the chord. For this chord, it is actually better to place the top note A with third finger first, then the E with first finger and finally the C-sharp with fourth finger.³⁸ The A in the middle of the chord is an open string. Although the fingers are set this way, the chord should be performed from the bottom to the top.

Subsequently, the chord D-sharp—F-sharp—A—B appears in m.19 in the second half of beat two. There is a B-flat octave that precedes this chord. For this octave, Menuhin's fingering (1 3) is quite functional, for it allows the third finger to be used to shift from the top B-flat of the octave to the B natural top note of the next chord. Once again the finger that is placed first is the B with third finger, i.e., the top note of the chord. The next note is the open string A. Menuhin's fingering 1 4 for the D-sharp—F-sharp third created in the lowest notes works very well, too. This chord should also be executed from the bottom to the top. The fingering 1 4 could also be kept for the next third (E G) on the third beat of m.19.

³⁸ Menuhin's fingering.

3.2. The Performance Challenge of Unusual Pizzicato Usages



Example 25. Example of unison pizzicato in Mvt. II, m.64. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The use of the bowed unison is relatively frequent in the violin repertoire. On the other hand, the unison pizzicato is rather rare. This type of pizzicato is not necessarily complicated to perform once the exact finger extensions of 1 and 4 for the unison are set and the shifting from one unison to another is worked out. The difficulty is the same for pizzicato and arco playing. It will help the pizzicato to come out more if the fingers are pressed a little harder on the fingerboard, especially for a forte pizzicato.



Example 26. Example of double octave pizzicato in Mvt. II, m.65. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The type of double stop shown in Ex. 26 is only possible if pizzicato is used. Because of the double octave distance, it would be impossible to play this passage with the bow, as the bottom note is on the G string and the top note is on the E string.

Menuhin proposes two different ways to play this passage.³⁹ The first suggestion is to play the bottom note with the right hand pizzicato and the top note with left hand pizzicato. The other suggestion is to play the double stops with two fingers of the right hand. The second option is definitely more practical as it allows the notes to sound more evenly. The down side of the first suggestion is that the left hand pizzicato has to be with the fourth finger, which makes it more difficult for the sound to project. Following the second option, the index and middle fingers of the right hand would be the best fingers to execute this passage. A convenient way to arrange these fingers is to have them shaped like a hook, with the first finger playing the bottom note and the second finger playing the top note. Since there are not any rests that would allow a smoother switch between the bow /pizzicato/bow playing, it is also necessary that the bow grip does not alter too much, keeping all the other fingers adjusted for the bow playing. As for the left hand, the violin player has to be careful with the intonation of the double octaves. Menuhin's fingering 1 3 is effective for this passage, except for the Gs, which have the fingering 0 2. It is also necessary to press the strings harder with the fingers of the left hand so that the pizzicatos come out more.



Example 27. Example of pizzicato with glissando in Mvt. II, m.68. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The line between G and D-sharp that is found in m.68 (Ex. 27) indicates that a glissando should be applied. It is quite hard to perform this glissando with pizzicato, because it is hard to pluck a string and sustain it, unless it is an open string. In this case, the glissando is on the G

³⁹ Menuhin's edition, p.10.

string and starts with the G open string, making it a little less problematic to perform. It also helps the glissando if the second finger⁴⁰ presses the top nut on the G string while the G open string is plucked. From that point, the finger can slide up to the D-sharp. It is also important that for the second finger to press the G string against the fingerboard significantly harder and its fingertip to be positioned in a more vertical alignment.

There is a question to be raised regarding the D-sharp, namely whether it should or should not be plucked. There is no clear indication in the score. Of course, by the time the glissando reaches the D-sharp, the sound is weaker, giving an impression of a diminuendo. One detail could be the determining factor: the slur above the two notes. Of course there is no legato playing in pizzicato passages but given that the score calls for the slur, the D-sharp should not be plucked. If it is plucked, the G and the D-sharp would sound like separated notes.



Example 28. Example of a triple A unison pizzicato in the down beat of m.72. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Measure 72 of the urtext contains a triple unison pizzicato pitch, which Menuhin chose to disregard in his edition. In order to perform the triple unison pizzicato of the pitch A in m.72 (Ex. 28), the use of the G, D, and A strings is required. Prior to that, the last beat of the preceding measure has to be considered. There is an F glissando up to B-flat on the G string with involving arco. The fourth finger is the best finger to execute this glissando. In order to play the following unison pizzicato, the fourth finger shifts down from the B-flat and plays the A (on the G string),

⁴⁰ Menuhin's fingering.

while the first finger extends and plays the A on the D string, and the remaining A is played as an open string A.

3.3. The Performance Challenge of Triple Stops



Example 29. Example of triple stops in Mvt. II, m.88. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Bartók requests in the score that the middle part (melodic line) of the chords shown in Ex. 29 be played on the G string. It would not sound well if all the chords of this passage are played as broken chords. The chords in forte are relatively less complicated to play on three strings simultaneously. On the other hand, it is more difficult to play the unbroken chords at a piano dynamic, especially the eighth-note chords with dashes indicating to hold them a little longer. For the parts that are marked piano, it is better to use a sounding point closer to the fingerboard. It is smoother and the angle between strings is flatter, making it a little less difficult to play the three strings at once. For the chords with dashes, it is more satisfactory to have only the upper notes sustained instead of bearing down excessively on three strings.

3.4. The Performance Challenge of Chords Involving Fifths



Example 30. Example of fifth chords in Mvt. II, mm. 99-100. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

This is probably the longest passage of parallel chords involving fifths to be found within the entire literature of violin music. The chords with A and E open strings are less difficult to execute. Conversely, the chords with fingered fifths in both bottom and top parts are significantly harder to perform. For this passage, the fingering could be either 1 3 or 1 4. For the 1 3 fingering, it is necessary for the third finger to stretch to reach the lowest two notes. When the 1 4 fingering is used, it is typically harder for the fourth finger to play the fifth with accuracy because it is usually thinner and it does not easily accommodate this type of double stop, especially in higher positions. Nevertheless, for intonation and sound production purposes it is essential that the left hand has the right angle, with the fingers lying down properly.

4. The Form and Style of Movement III: *Melodia*

Movement III features a calm and elegant example of the composer's "night music" compositional style, structured in the ternary form of ABA'. The A section, ranging from m.1 until m.29, is a monophonic song with four phrases. The B section, from m.30 to m.48, has a contrasting texture with double stops, chords and tremolos, which gives the music a more agitated feeling. The movement also contains bird calls in the last measure of the B section, as shown in Ex. 31 below:



Example 31. Bird call in Mvt. III, m.48. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

The A' section, extending from m.49 to m.67, brings back melodic material from A with alterations. One of these pertains to register: the original melody is raised two octaves higher at m.49. It also presents rhythmic variations involving triplets and sixteenth notes.

4.1. The Performance Challenge of Tenths Combined with Trills and Fingered Tremolo



Example 32. Example of trills and fingered tremolos in Mvt. III, mm.31-2. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

In terms of stretching the fingers, the tenths extension is one of the greatest for the left hand, especially when they lie in a lower position such as first or second positions. In the case of the passage in mm.31-2, the tenths are located in the third, second, and first positions respectively. Bartók's intention was to have the trills played together with the tenths in m.31. The lower note of the tenth, played with first finger, should be trilled with the second finger, while the top note of the tenth is held with the fourth finger. With this being the case, the passage becomes nearly impossible for violinists with small hands and short fingers.

The *ossia* proposed by Bartók is more technically negotiable. It is similar to the solution given for the fourth beat of m.31, where fingered tremolos are suggested. In the present case, it is more practical to use the third finger to articulate the tenth than the second finger. However, an adjustment of the hand is needed in order to enable the third finger to play the tremolo. Before any further work, all the tenths have to be practiced separately. After this, the tremolo can be

added. It is likely that the left hand and fingers will undergo a readjustment in order to perform the passage with all the fingered tremolos, as it is different than playing the tenths alone. The intervallic relation between the bottom note of the tenth and the note of the tremolo is always a perfect fourth. The intervallic relation between the tremolo note and the top note of the tenth is always a minor seventh, which results in both an interval and a fingering pattern. The melodic interval between each descending tenth is a minor second from the first D-flat—F-flat to the C—E-flat, and a major second from the C—E-flat to the B-flat—D-flat.

Instead of playing the tremolo as printed right away, the passage could be first practiced slowly with slower rhythms such as eighth notes for the third finger, so that the third finger, as well as the first and fourth fingers forming the tenth and the hand as a whole become accustomed more gradually to the shape that is necessary to execute the passage. It is also appropriate to position the thumb under the neck of the instrument and with a slightly higher alignment, i.e., between the second and third fingers. The passage will also become more secure if the beginning of each tenth is held a little longer before the third finger is applied. Once a feeling for the passage is acquired, it will be possible to perform the tenth with tremolo right away, without the necessity of holding the tenth any longer. Since this is a legato passage, the notes should all be connected and the bow should not come to a stop between the tenths.

4.2. The Performance Challenge of Double Artificial Harmonics



Example 33. Double artificial harmonics in Mvt. III, mm.66-7. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

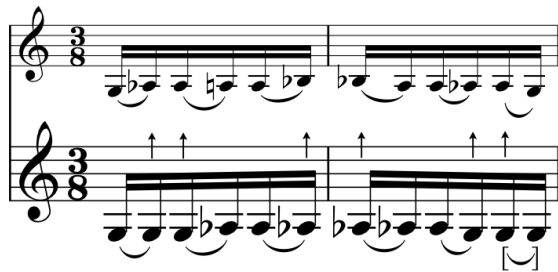
The usage of fifths double artificial harmonics is a rare occurrence in the violin literature. This passage is especially hard to perform because it is composed entirely in fifths, which generates an intonation problem. It is also slow due to the sustained notes and gets softer as it approaches the end, which is a challenge for bow control. First and foremost, it is necessary to play the fifths with accuracy. To this end, it is indispensable to practice the fifths without the harmonics but with the fingering maintained. In the next stage, the dynamics could be added and the balance of the bow worked out. The string crossings are particularly difficult in this passage because they are likely to generate an undesirable gap between notes. In order to avoid this, it is important to connect the notes as smoothly as possible in order to make the phrasing delicate. In the final stage, the artificial harmonics involving the fourth finger could be included. It is possible that the angle of the fingers will have to be slightly adjusted in order to produce the harmonics.

5. The Form and Style of Movement IV: *Presto*

The fourth movement is composed in a free rondo form based on an alternation between a perpetual motion episode and a homophonic/ polyphonic passage. Section A runs from m.1 until m.99 and features the ritornello theme in perpetual motion character. Section B extends from m.101 until m.200. It is a contrasting section with chords and a folklike tune that undergoes rhythmic variation featuring hemiola. The return of A occurs in m.201 and lasts until m.269. The C section is marked *Tranquillo*. It is a simpler songlike theme that begins in m.270 and extends until m.333. It is noteworthy that Section C also contains parts of B that reappear from m.312 until m.333.

The next section is a combination of the A and B sections, beginning with melodic material from Section A, which is used from m.334 until m.348. The B idea returns from m.349 until m.351 and is rather short, after which material from Section A returns briefly, from m.352 until m.356. The last return of B material begins in m.357 and leads into the Coda in m.398. As such, it is more extended than the previous passages with thematic recurrences. The Coda that begins in m.399 is mainly based on material that was introduced in the first part of Section C.

5.1. The Performance Challenge of Microtones (Quarter tones)



Example 34. A quarter-tone passage in Mvt. IV, mm.3-4. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Since quarter-tone tuning is an unconventional tuning system, it is a considerable challenge to perform Bartók's original version of the Presto. At the outset, the subdivision of the tone needs to be clear. It may be assumed that the tempered tuning system is still in force. If so, then the intervallic distance between C and D is a whole tone. The distance between C and C-sharp is a half tone or semitone, thereby dividing the whole tone into two equal parts. All of this is thoroughly conventional. However, in order to obtain the quarter tone, a division of the whole tone into four equal parts is necessary. In other words, the half tone must be divided by two yet again, thus generating the quarter tone. In order to play the passage in mm.3-4 this tuning system must be adopted.

Next, the question of how to finger the quarter tones must be raised. There are evidently two basic options, just as there are for the fingering of chromatic scales. The first option involves sliding the fingers through the tones, in a pattern of 1 1, then 2 2, and so on. The other option involves fingering each tone with a different finger. The choice depends basically on the shape of the fingers of the violin player. If the fingers are wide, it may be more difficult for each finger to play a different tone, as they would not have enough room to fit. For the purpose of this document, the author will address the matter by means of a fingered quarter tone, thus avoiding the use of the same finger to play different notes.

In this case, the fingering used for the passage in mm.3-4 will be 0 (i.e., open string G) 1 2 3. It is appropriate to begin with the tones that are most familiar to the player: i.e., the G, which is an open string, and the A-flat, which is played with second finger. The quarter tone from G should be placed right in the middle—i.e., halfway—between G natural and A-flat. The same situation occurs later with the quarter tone of A-flat. Here the quarter tone of G can be played with the first finger, close to the top nut. The actual A-flat follows directly in its conventional place albeit with the second finger. The next tone is a quarter tone of A-flat, which lies right between A-flat and A natural. Therefore it is $\frac{1}{4}$ lower than the A natural. All the tones should be practiced slowly and note by note, until a precise sense for the quarter tones is achieved.

5.2. Special Quarter-Tone Fingering



Example 35. Quarter tones in Mvt. IV, mm.21-4. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

Once more the first task is to define the fingering that will be applied to this passage. For the descending line starting with F-sharp and E in m.21, and ending with C and B-flat in m.25, the suggestion is to use 3 2 for each of the major second intervals, including the quarter-tone intervals. In this case, it is advised to use the second finger as a guide through the passage. In other words, the second finger is responsible for the shifting between each of the major second intervals. One way of working out the passage is to subdivide it into smaller parts, only a measure at first, in order to practice the shifting without the quarter tones. For instance, the F-sharp and E in m.21 would go directly to the F and E-flat. Once this first step is taken, the quarter tones can be added. It is important to perceive that the quarter tones go right in between F-sharp—E and F—E-flat. In general terms, the quarter tone F is lower than F-sharp and higher than the F natural. The same is true for the E-flat quarter tone, which is lower than E natural and higher than E-flat. The same reasoning can be applied through the whole passage.

5.3. Division of the Whole Step into Third-Tones



*) Equal division of the interval C#-D# into third-tones.

Example 36. Division into third tones in Mvt. IV, mm.58-9. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

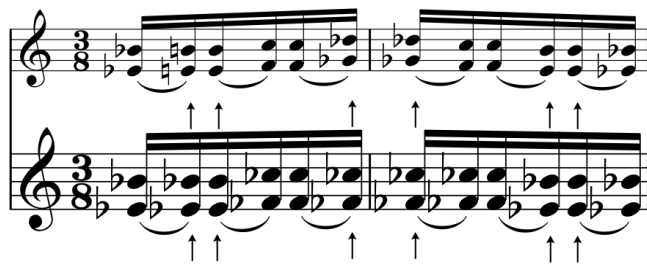
Bartók's explanation of his intent for this passage appears in the score: "[e]qual division of the interval C-sharp—D-sharp into third-tones."⁴¹ According to this division of the tone into

⁴¹ Urtext edition.

three units, the first third tone D is lower than the D natural, and the second D is higher than the D natural. The C-sharp is kept unaltered and the D-sharp is also kept unaltered.

The fingering for this passage also depends on the width of the fingers of the violin player. A convenient fingering would involve playing the C-sharp with the first finger, the third notes with second and third fingers, and the D-sharp with fourth finger. Alternatively, one could play the two third notes D with second finger, sliding from one to another, and then, the D-sharp with the third finger.

5.4. Parallel Fifths Involving Quarter Tones

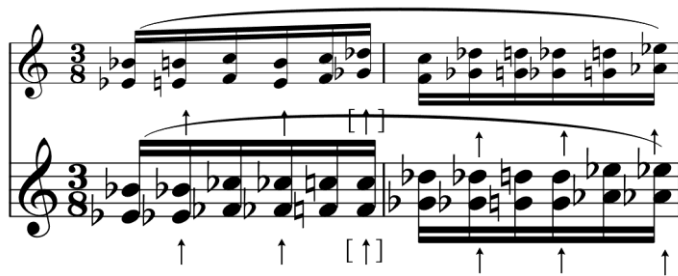


Example 37. Fifths separated by quarter tones in Mvt. IV, mm.203-4. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

This passage is similar to the one at the beginning of the movement. The difference is that the passage here is in double stops, having perfect fifths vertically along with the quarter tones horizontally. For this passage, the intonation difficulty is doubled since the quarter tones are combined with double stops. The reasoning used in the previous passage also works for this passage. The violin player has to have a high level of intonation sensitivity in order to perform this passage with accuracy. As discussed before, this type of tuning system not only affects the intonation but also the clarity of the quarter tones. Once more the fingering is of great importance to the result. Following the principle of playing each quarter tone with a different finger is one way to attain a distinctive tone articulation. If this is followed, it is important to realize that the fingers have to be almost squeezed so they fit exactly where they belong for each

of the quarter tones. For instance, if the chromatic scale is played up on A string, the notes are A B-flat B C C-sharp with the following fingering 0 (open strings) 1 2 3 4, respectively. As for the quarter tone, it is A A quarter tone A-sharp A-sharp quarter tone B with the fingering 0 (open string) 1 2 3 4 respectively.

5.5. The Performance Challenge of Parallel Fifths Creating an Ascending Quarter-Tone –Scale”



Example 38. A quarter-tone scale of parallel fifths in Mvt. IV, mm.213-4. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

This passage is similar to a chromatic ascending scale, albeit, with quarter tones. The 1 2 fingering used to play the ascending chromatic scales could also be applied here. This fingering is also functional because every shift falls into the more familiar half tones, with half position shifting up to low fourth position.

5.6. The Performance Challenge of Fifths used to Produce an Ascending Arpeggio



Example 39. Parallel fifths creating an ascending arpeggio in Mvt. IV, mm.245-8. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

This is one of the hardest passages of the movement, especially mm.247-8, which lie a higher register. The main difficulty of this passage is related to the left hand. Playing the fifths with the fourth finger is harder than playing with any other finger, so it is better to avoid its use as much as possible. This passage should be practiced slowly so as to develop a precise sense of the fifths, in terms of intonation, angle, and articulation of the fingers. Any adjustments will be disastrous to the passage. Menuhin's fingering suggestion is certainly appropriate for those who have thicker and longer fingers. The use of extension involving the fourth finger in m.247 and especially in m. 248, with the B-flat—F fifth produced by means of the fourth finger as an extension in fourth position, shows Menuhin's predilection and facility when executing this kind of passage. Nonetheless, if the fourth finger is used, it is likely for most everyone that this finger will end up lying relatively flat onto the string.

Another option for m.248 is to use the fingering 1 2 1 2 1 2, or perhaps 1 3 1 3 1 3. These options, on the one hand, will require more shifting, but on the other hand, they avoid the use of the fourth finger, which produces the most difficulties with respect to tuning and articulation.

5.7. The Performance Challenge of a Tritonal Ascending Chromatic Scale and Glissando



Example 40. Tritonal ascending chromatic scale and glissando in Mvt. IV, mm. 354-6. (Reprinted by Permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.)

This is another example of a rare occurrence in the violin repertoire. It is supposed to be executed entirely on the G and D strings. Menuhin's fingering once again proves to be effective.

His suggestion is to play the first A-flat of the A-flat—D tritone in m.354 with the second finger. The D is naturally an open string. After that, the tritone chromatic scale follows with the same fingering 1 2, including the glissando in mm.345-6. It is important to mention that Bartók's intention was that the glissando should go up until the D G-sharp grace note in m.346. Another characteristic of this passage is the use of *sul ponticello*. Not everyone realizes that the *sul ponticello* should remain in force until the composer marks *ordinario*, which means ordinary, normal sound.

The difficulty of this passage is related to the left hand. In order to perform this passage, the violin player has to be aware that it is a succession of fast shifts, in other words, for each tritone that is played, a shift is needed. The glissando represented by the double line in mm.345-6 is just a slide up from E-flat—A to the D—G-sharp. The first portion of the passage should be worked out separately. At first, slow practice of one note per bow is appropriate. The shifting should be considered in such a way that while the hand moves up, the fingers 1 and 2 should release the pressure exerted onto the G and D strings quickly, keeping just a slight touch on the strings, then shift, and then press the strings again to play the next tritone. Once the feeling of each shift is acquired, the violinist could go on and play the passage with the actual slur, gradually increasing the tempo. It might also help to make up words for the passage, whose rhythm would correspond to the irregular rhythm of six sixteenth notes in mm.344-5. For one example, “Colorado Florida” would work nicely, since each syllable of these two words aligns exactly with one of the six sixteenth notes.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

During my doctoral studies I chose to learn and perform Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin. I became deeply involved with this piece and attempted to learn as much as possible about it. In the research process, I found out that there was almost no research on its performance-practice issues. This was the main motivation to explore its performance challenges in detail and turn it into my dissertation topic. As should be clear by now, I focused primarily on the most unusual characteristics that appear in this piece.

I established research goals that included the investigation of Bartók's life and work and the compositional process of the piece, both of which added significantly to my understanding of the piece. The analysis of the performance-practice issues of the Solo Sonata resulted in comments on the most significant challenges of each movement, including examples from the score and possible solutions. Through my research and performing experience, I concluded that the sonata is entirely playable, yet it demands an advanced technique and mature musicianship. The accurate execution of the chords, double stops, and extended techniques is the only means for realizing Bartók's musical ideas. The quarter-tone playing in the last movement is probably the most unusual feature contained in this piece. The presto tempo makes it even a bigger challenge. By contrast, Bartók's 2nd Violin Concerto involves passages with quarter-tone playing, but none of them feature fast rhythms combined with a fast tempo. Moreover, , the majority of violin players do not systematically study quarter tones during their training. For this reason it takes a large amount of time to practice and master these passages in the last movement. One's ear for intonation also has to be raised to a higher level, to prevent the passages from

sounding out of tune. The fingering is also decisive, not only for intonation but also for the clarity of articulation. My approach to the quarter-tone playing resembles the approach for chromatic scale playing, since both involve a subdivision of the tone. Technically, the dilemma of fingering is equivalent on both types of playing, as was amply discussed in chapter 3.

Problems of phrasing are always a concern. In the Solo Sonata the problems are further complicated, on account of the polyphonic content, difficult chords, and double stops. The many choppy phrases also require extra care. Ultimately the violin player must combine effective technical solutions with a well thought out interpretation that takes into consideration both the musical style and the player's own artistic goals.

Despite having stylistic influences from other works for solo violin, such as Bach's Sonatas and Partitas BWV 1001-1006, and a range of violinistic passages of Ysaÿe's solo violin works, the Sonata for Solo Violin by Béla Bartók is unique. As previously stated, I have only discussed the aspects and excerpts that I considered the most relevant for my topic. Without a doubt, there are other significant performance-practice issues to be discussed. I hope that I have provided an essential starting point that can inspire further contributions in the future.

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