U.R.C.O Grant Proposal 2014 Violin Pedagogy Grant Proposal

Brynn Seegmiller
Utah State University

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2014 Violin Pedagogy Grant Proposal
Simon Fischer, author of Basics and Practice Technique Books

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Abstract

This project will evaluate similarities and differences between three major pedagogues of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries of violin technique: Carl Flesch, Ivan Galamian, and Simon Fischer. Simon Fischer is the most recent of these, and his methods will be the focus of this project. Mr. Fischer teaches at Guildhall School of Music in London and has published a series of technique books, titled Basics and Practice, which are used at many universities around the globe. Study of these books will be augmented by interviews and lessons with the author himself. These will be augmented with lessons about Fischer’s techniques with his colleagues at the Guildhall Conservatory and the Royal College of Music, both located in London, by studying their interpretation of these publications. These personal interactions will be the basis for an analysis of how the introduction of the Basics and Practice series has adapted elements from earlier methodologies from Galamian and Flesch. I will present my research in a lecture-recital in August as well as implement lessons learned and best practices into my personal teaching philosophy.

Introduction

I am pursuing a Bachelor of Music degree in violin performance under the tutelage of Rebecca McFaul of the Fry Street Quartet, focusing especially on pedagogy. As part of this, I aim to increase my understanding of current techniques used to teach violin in a variety of collegiate settings. I propose to use Simon Fischer’s books Basics and Practice as the starting point for this research, assessing how his techniques are used by selected contemporary pedagogues in London and Utah, and by comparing his methods to Ivan Galamian and Carl Flesch on whose work modern violin technique is largely based.

Simon Fischer is a renowned pedagogue and violinist. Born in Australia, he moved to England to continue his professional career, taking from some of the greatest teachers of the time, including Ivan Galamian. In his studies, he was exposed to a variety of techniques. After his postgraduate work in New York with Dorothy DeLay, one of the most famous teachers of the contemporary era, he moved back to England to be a lecturer of professional practice at Guildhall Conservatory of Music and Drama. He published Basics and Practice in 1996 and 1998, respectively, and they have been translated into five languages, with Italian being the most recent. These books have quickly become a standard in universities and private studios all over the world.

The books have nearly one thousand exercises for better violin-playing technique. Mr. Fischer focused on concise, clear language in the instructions and directed the books towards students, including those teaching themselves. However, in their versatility, the books lend themselves well to a pre-professional environment. Utah State University has recently implemented these publications in a new class taught to violin majors.

My research will focus on Mr. Fischer’s motivation for publishing his books as well as their effects on professors’ teaching methods. In addition to researching the books and teaching technique, I will also be studying the interpretation of these publications by taking lessons from renowned teachers in London that are currently employing his techniques. Many professionals have implemented Mr. Fischer’s method in their own studios, though each teacher has his or her individual style and emphasis.

After becoming familiar with Fischer’s writings as well as how they are interpreted by a number of pedagogues, I will then compare Fischer’s approach to teaching tone production, violin positioning, and

1 Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Royal Scottish Academy, University of New Hampshire, Utah State University, University of Colorado Boulder, Western Illinois University, Yehudi Menuhin School
3 Fischer, The Violin Lesson, 2008
5 Guildhall School of Music and Drama
6 Fischer, Basics: 300 Exercises and Practice Routines for the Violin, 2-3.
practice techniques to those taught by Ivan Galamian and Carl Flesch. As a part of this, I will be researching the interpretation taken by contemporary pedagogues. Specifically, I will be seeking lessons from Stephanie Gonley and Janice Graham of Guildhall as well as Gabrielle Lestor at the Royal College to assess similarities and differences between the three methods.

After my return from England, I anticipate incorporating my findings into my personal practice and performance as well as my teaching techniques for my current and future students.

**Literature Review**

Carl Flesch (1873–1944) and Ivan Galamian (1903–1981) were world-renowned pedagogues from their respective eras. These two masters had much in common regarding their approach to the violin, including that they used the standard teaching tools of Sevcik and Dont, popular pedagogues of the time, while intermingling these with their own style. Being students of the Russian and French schools of teaching, they shared a similar style of playing as well as a similar philosophy of teaching. However, they also differed on several important topics within these areas.

While describing the posture and stance of playing the violin, Flesch is incredibly specific, stating the feet angles and positions under the body had an immense effect on tone production. Galamian was the opposite, ascribing to the idea that the performer should chose to do what felt comfortable and natural. This was not the only aspect they disagreed on; they had different priorities for their students. Carl Flesch thought that there should be an emphasis on performance, solid technique, and a general knowledge of musical essentials such as repertoire and theory. Galamian took a more nuanced approach. He believed that the student should hold responsibility for their progression as well as a firm understanding on how musical ideas knit together.

Arney discusses that in each of their treatises on violin playing, they have several common topics that reflect their background. Both of them discuss practicing and the effect it has on performing. Each states that there needs to be a balance in time spent playing or it could have a disastrous effect on the progress of the student. Both agree that if one spends too long playing, it not only hinders progress, but damage valuable tendons.

The other topic that they both discuss in their publications is incompetent instruction. Both Galamian and Flesch submit that several personalities are unsuited to teaching the violin and cannot be tolerated in a scholastic setting. Other contemporaries of the time believed that violin instruction should be very structured and disciplined. Flesch, and to some extent Galamian, was a revolutionary on this topic, stating that instruction needs to be a nurturing process in which the teacher helps discover the student’s potential.

Even with these contributions, over the years, the Flesch and Galamain methods have, to some extent, become outdated. The posture while holding the violin has changed as well as technical aspects, such as vibrato, bowing styles, and bow holds. In general, however, Flesch’s and Galamian’s philosophies and publications have withstood the test of time, and they continue to be standard repertoire in violin

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10 Flesch, The Art of Violin Playing, 124.
12 Arney, A Comparison of the violin pedagogy, 87-89.
13 Galamian, Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching, 74.
14 Galamian, Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching, 83.
pedagogy. Lessons have become a nurturing setting, where students can receive guidance from instructors, not a place where teachers force beliefs on students. Teachers continue to use Flesch’s and Galamian’s publications in private teaching as a basis for excellence. The technique and approach has changed, but the philosophy remains the same.

It is with this history and in this environment that Mr. Fischer, a contemporary pedagogue, has developed a method of teaching that incorporates the attitude of Flesch and Galamian in a simpler, more detailed way. Mr. Fischer believes that technique should be tailored to each student’s needs and has developed several books that explain the fundamentals of playing. Mr. Fischer’s revolutionary books bring about a new way of practicing the violin for artistic success in the twenty-first century. Through my research, I will study these approaches in depth. My assessment of the interactions of these methods and the merits of each will provide a solid foundation to build my pedagogical techniques.

**Timeline**

January 1–May 2  Begin thorough study of *Basics* in individual practice.

January 1–May 2  Meet weekly (Fridays at 10:30 am) with Professor McFaul to discuss findings in the predetermined reading and exercises from *Basics*.

Present–May 2  Begin contacting professors in at Guildhall and the Royal College and setting up lessons.


Early August  Present lecture-recital on findings.

**Budget**

All costs in the budget were done using a conversion factor of $1.60 per £1. The first item in the budget is for violin lessons. Each professor charges £60, which converts to about $97.72. I expect to stay in London for 3 days to take lessons.

**Table 1. Cost of Violin Lessons**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janice Graham</td>
<td>$97.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Fischer #1</td>
<td>$97.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Fischer #2</td>
<td>$97.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabrielle Lestor</td>
<td>$97.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Gonley</td>
<td>$97.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$488.60</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Second, the budget next takes into account meal costs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meal</th>
<th>Cost Each</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>$17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>$17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>$20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$54</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>$162</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the duration of my study in London, I will be staying at a bed and breakfast in London, which roughly costs $75 a night.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost Each</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lodging</td>
<td>$75</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>$225</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My travel in London will require a travel card and a train ticket from Aldeburgh.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Train Ticket from Aldeburgh</td>
<td>$75.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Day Travel Card</td>
<td>$51.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$126.65</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Cost of Needed Funding: $1,002.25
Total Needed from URCO funds: $500.00
Total Needed from Sponsor Department: $500.00

Sources


