

The Rise of the Chinrest and Shoulder Rest: Their Influence on Violin Performance Practice

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In recent decades there has been growing interest in the performance practice of nineteenth-century repertoire, both in scholarly research and within the movement for historically informed performance (HIP). In 1985, Robin Stowell published his book about the violin technique of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹ Through the analysis of different violin methods, he was the first to provide a detailed overview of general posture and its evolution—including body position and foot placement—not to mention the position of the left and right hands and arms. Stanley Ritchie's research covers the same period, but with a more practice-oriented approach.² More recently, Clive Brown published a detailed article on the posture of nineteenth century violinists.³ In spite of their merits, these overviews of nineteenth-century violin practice do not address the critical link between posture and left-hand technique.

The present article examines how chinrests, shoulder rests, and other tools for increasing instrument stability gradually became commonplace among late nineteenth and early twentieth century violinists and suggests that the use of these tools led to changes in left hand technique. These changes likely had a direct impact on the execution of typical nineteenth century style elements such as *portamento*. In my conclusion, I argue that it is only through practice-based research that the postures and practices reported in historical documents can be tested for their effect on technique and, in turn, technique's potential interpretive and rhetorical consequences. This approach might serve as a corrective for the present state of affairs in which historical documentation is not always considered. Some violinists stubbornly use a chin-off position for music from the early nineteenth century while others use the chinrest for the same repertoire, perhaps out of habit or convenience.⁴ Practice based research is therefore a necessary step for coming to an informed perspective on how nineteenth-century violinists played and for using that perspective in the interpretation of works historically associated with particular violinists or schools of the period.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, violin repertoire became more demanding, making frequent movement of the left hand up and down the neck of the instrument increasingly necessary and forcing musicians to seek solutions that would provide greater stability and comfort. Rather simply resting the violin on the shoulder and holding it with the left hand as they had done before, musicians began gripping the instrument between their chin and the left shoulder or collarbone, freeing up the left hand for more complicated movements

¹ Robin Stowell, *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1985).

² Stanley Ritchie, *Before the Chinrest: a Violinist's Guide to the Mysteries of Pre-Chinrest Technique and Style* (Bloomington, 2012).

³ Clive Brown, *Physical parameters of 19th and early 20th-century violin playing* (<http://mhm.hud.ac.uk/chase/article/physical-parameters-of-19th-and-early-20th-century-violin-playing-clive-brown/>, last consultation on 9 March 2019).

⁴ In the "chin-off" position, the violin is only held by its neck, between the thumb and index finger of the left hand; "chin-on" refers to gripping the violin with the chin.

up and down the fingerboard. Evidence of this change in practice appears in violin methods of the second half of the eighteenth century.

Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, various aids were developed to help musicians grip their instrument between the chin and shoulder. Chinrests are now used to fill the space between chin and violin, with shoulder rests filling the space between the violin and collarbone. Although these accessories are very common today, they only came into standard use a few decades ago (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Contemporary position of a modern violinist, with chinrest and shoulder rest (photo of author).

Chin-off to chin-on

In the first edition of his violin method, published in 1756, Leopold Mozart (1719-1787) describes two options for holding the violin.⁵ In the first, ideal position, (Fig. 2), the violin is placed against the chest and is slightly inclined with the right side down, so that the bow moves more vertically than horizontally. In the second position, (Fig. 3), the instrument is shifted to the left so that its bottom left side rests on the front part of the left shoulder. The right side next to the tailpiece comes under the chin. Mozart gives this second option because it makes it easier to keep the violin in place when the left hand makes larger movements up and down the strings. However, Mozart never discusses placing the chin on the violin (not even temporarily during position changes) and this remains the case in his method's reprints of 1770 and 1787.⁶

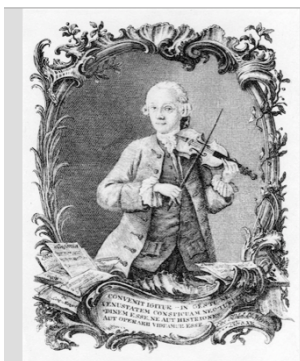


Figure 2. Ideal posture (Leopold Mozart, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, 1756, cover).

⁵ Leopold Mozart, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (Augsburg, 1756), p. 148.

⁶ L. Mozart, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (Augsburg, 1770 and 1787), p. 54.



Figure 3. Alternative posture for difficult passages (Leopold Mozart, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, 1756, p. 52b).

In 1774, Georg Simon Löhlein (1725-1781) was the first to describe a “chin-on” position. To keep the violin from sliding off the collarbone, he asks the violinist to place the chin on the upper plate of the violin to the left side of the tailpiece. Gripping the violin with the chin had considerable consequences on the general posture of the violinist, the effects of which were still clearly visible into the nineteenth century. The first consequence, when the chin was placed on the left side of the tailpiece, was a shift in the violin’s position. Löhlein wrote that the chin should not be placed to the right of the tailpiece because this causes the violin to shift too far to the left and makes bowing more difficult.⁷ This was in direct opposition with Mozart’s second position in which the violin rests on the left shoulder, therefore shifting left, lying more horizontally, and making it necessary to raise the right arm for the bow to reach the lowest strings. Löhlein suggests placing the violin more to the right, not on the left shoulder, but between the left shoulder and collarbone. In doing so, he brings the violin directly under the chin, which grips the instrument on the left side of the tailpiece. A second notable difference with the positions in Mozart’s method is Löhlein’s suggestion to place the violin directly in front of the body, or as it is often expressed in nineteenth century methods, with the scroll of the violin opposite the center of the left shoulder and the left elbow below the center of the violin. This position became widely accepted and is found in numerous violin methods from the end of the eighteenth century well into the twentieth century.⁸

The chin-off position was recommended less and less during the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. In a number of methods from that period, however, a position is described that lies between chin-off and -on, namely: gripping the violin with the chin only when extra stability is needed during shifts of the left hand. As Johann Samuel Petri (1738-1808) wrote: “Endlich so darf man bei dieser Stellung nur mit dem Kinne ein wenig

⁷ G.S. Löhlein, *Anweisungen*, p. 12.

⁸ In: François Alday, *Grande méthode élémentaire pour le violon* (Lyon, ca. 1795); Pierre Baillot, Rodolph Kreutzer and Pierre Rode, *Méthode de violon* (Paris, 1803); Jacques-Joseph Martinn, *Méthode de violon* (Paris, ca. 1810); Franz Joseph Froehlich, *Vollständige theoretisch-practische Musikschule für alle beyne Orchester gebrauchliche wichtigere Instrumente* (Bonn, [1811]); J.P. Billiard, *Méthode de violon* (Paris, 1817) Louis Spohr, *Violinschule* (Vienna, 1832); Jacques-Féréol Mazas, *Méthode de violon* (Paris, ca. 1832); Pierre Baillot, *L’Art du violon, nouvelle méthode* (Paris, 1834); Wilhelm Valentin Volckmar, *Violinschule zum Gebrauch für Schullehrerseminarien und Seminarpräparandenschulen* (Kassel – Wolfenbüttel, 1841); François Antoine Habeneck, *Méthode théorique et pratique de violon* (Paris, 1842); Jean-Delphin Alard, *École de violon* (Paris, 1844); Friedrich Barnbeck, *Theoretisch-praktische Anleitung zum Violinspiel* (Stuttgart, 1844); Ferdinand David, *Violinschule* (Leipzig, 1863); C.G. Straub, *Kurze Anleitung zum Violinspielen* (Esslingen, 1864); Henry Holmes, *Spohr’s Violin School* (London, 1878); William Crawford Honeyman, *The Violin: How to Master it* (Boston, 1883); Louis Schubert, *Violinschule* (Brunswick, 1882); Reinhold Jockisch, *Katechismus der Violine* (Leipzig, 1900); Leopold Auer, *Violin Playing as I Teach It* (New York, 1921); L. Auer, *Graded Course of Violin Playing* (New York, 1925).

andrücken, um die Geige fest zu halten, wenn die linke Hand bei Passagen in der übergelegten Applikatur in die Höhe steigen muss.”⁹

From the end of the eighteenth century onward, authors generally agreed that the violin should be gripped with the chin at all times. However, consensus on the placement of the chin to the left or right of the tailpiece only came later with both positions apparently co-existing for a time. Michel Woldemar (1750-1815) writes in his method that the choice is unimportant.¹⁰ According to him, Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770), Ignaz Fränzl (1736-1811), and Wilhelm Cramer (1746-1799) placed the chin to the right of the tailpiece, while Pietro Locatelli (1695-1764), Ivan Mane Jarnović (1747-1804) and Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824) all placed the chin to the left of the tailpiece. In Woldemar’s revision of Mozart’s violin method, however, the author only mentions placing the chin to the left.¹¹

Only a chin-on position is described in Baillot, Kreutzer, and Rode’s *Méthode*.¹² Pierre Baillot (1771-1842) gives more details, asking that the chin be placed on the left of the tailpiece, very close, but not directly against it.¹³ Similar positions were also described by François Alday (1761-1835), Jacques-Joseph Martinn (1775-1836), Franz Joseph Froehlich (1780-1862), J. P. Billiard (?-?) and Jacques Féréol Mazas (1782-1849).¹⁴ Froehlich only mentions the placement of the chin to the right of the tailpiece to reinforce his statement that the position on the left is the best and most frequently used. The description given by Mazas is in perfect agreement with that of Baillot, whereas Louis Spohr (1784-1859) demonstrates a slightly different chin placement, stating, “Will der Schüler sich des Geigenhalters nicht bedienen, so wird das Kinn theils auf die Decke zur Linken des Saitenhalters, theils auf diesen selbst gelegt.”¹⁵ In asking the violinist to put the chin partly on the tailpiece Spohr differs from Baillot, Kreutzer, and Rode’s *Méthode* (leaving aside, for the moment, the question of chinrests). Drawings found in the methods of Spohr and Baillot also support this idea (see Fig. 4 and 5). The distinction lies in the downward inclination of the right side of the violin: 25 to 30 degrees in the case of Spohr and 45 degrees with Baillot. The greater the inclination, the easier it is to place the chin to the left of the tailpiece. With Spohr the violin is closer to a horizontal position, the chin is positioned more toward the instrument’s center, and thus, a bit on the tailpiece.



Figure 4. L. Spohr, *Violinschule*, p. 24b. Placement of the chin partly on the tailpiece.

⁹ Johann Samuel Petri, *Anleitung zur praktischen Musik* (Leipzig, 1782), p. 384.

¹⁰ Michel Woldemar, *Grande méthode ou étude élémentaire pour le violon* (Paris, ca. 1800), p. 2.

¹¹ M. Woldemar, *Méthode de violon par L. Mozart, rédigée par Woldemar, élève de Lolli* (Paris, 1801), p. 6.

¹² P. Baillot, R. Kreutzer and P. Rode, *Méthode*, p. 5.

¹³ P. Baillot, *L'art du violon*, p. 11.

¹⁴ F. Alday, *Grande méthode*, p. 3; J.-J. Martinn, *Méthode*, p. 2; F. J. Froehlich, *Vollständige theoretisch-praktische*, p. 13; J.P. Billiard, *Méthode*, p. 27; J.-F. Mazas, *Méthode*, p. 2.

¹⁵ L. Spohr, *Violinschule*, p. 24.



Figure 5. P. Baillot, *L'art du violon*, p. 10b. Placement of the chin to the left of the tailpiece.

The invention and gradual adoption of chinrests

In order to grip the violin more firmly and with less exertion, nineteenth-century violinists looked for ways to fill the gap that naturally occurs between the chin and the collarbone. One solution was Spohr's *Geigenhalter* (Fig. 6). The detailed drawings of his *Violonschule* show this chinrest in detail, describing where and how it should be attached to the instrument. Crafted from ebony, Spohr's chinrest was placed just above the tailpiece. The end button of the violin was replaced by a perfectly fitted cylinder of wood that formed a single piece with the rest of the chinrest,¹⁶ and a length of gut string knotted below the tailpiece was used to attach the tailpiece to the cylinder instead of the end button. A recess on the edge of the chinrest prevented it from coming into contact with the edge of the violin and the uppermost surface of the chinrest, upon which the chin effectively rested, was slightly hollowed out to improve grip.¹⁷

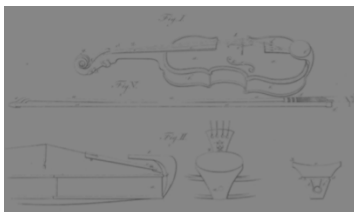


Figure 6. Spohr's *Geigenhalter* as presented in his *Violonschule*, p. 8b.

Spohr claimed that his *Geigenhalter* was used by his students and many other violinists, but this is difficult to verify because, in contrast with other types of nineteenth-century chinrests, no physical specimens of his chinrest survive. Moreover, Spohr's own students and friends contradict his claims. His most influential student, Ferdinand David (1810-1873), did not mention use of the chinrest in his own method.¹⁸ The organist and theorist Wilhelm Volckmar (1812-1887), for whom Spohr had great admiration, does not mention Spohr's chinrest either. Like Spohr, Volckmar had the student place the chin partly on the top of the violin and partly on the tailpiece.¹⁹ Friedrich Barnbeck (1807-1883), another Spohr student, does not mention use of a chinrest and even placed his chin to the left without touching the tailpiece.²⁰ The English violinist William Honeyman (1845-1919) wrote an extensive violin

¹⁶ This cylinder was 0,5 cm in diameter and 2 cm long.

¹⁷ L. Spohr, *Violonschule*, p. 8-9.

¹⁸ F. David, *Violonschule*.

¹⁹ W.V. Valentin Volckmar, *Violonschule*, p. 5.

²⁰ F. Barnbeck, *Theoretisch-praktische Anleitung*, p. 6.

method in which he claims that Spohr's chinrest was never widely adopted because it was placed in the middle of the violin whereas, according to him, it should be placed on the left.²¹ Given that none of Spohr's students mention the use of his chinrest and that none of his chinrests have survived to the present day, it seems likely that his innovation's impact was minimal at best.

By the end of the nineteenth century, mention of chinrests began to appear in other violin methods, but many authors passed over them in silence and may have even disapproved of their use. Heinrich Dessauer's 1900 reworking of Christian Hohmann's method is perhaps the last such text that does not mention the chinrest or depict it in illustrations.²²

Many violinists held varying opinions about the use of the chinrest itself or the form it should take. In his violin method, Honeyman writes that Wilma Neruda (1838-1911), whose musicianship was admired by the renowned nineteenth-century violinist Joseph Joachim, played without a chinrest.²³ In a portrait of George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), Joachim himself is depicted at a young age playing without a chinrest and with the degree of inclination described as optimal by Spohr. As a result, his chin partly ends up on the tailpiece. (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. George Frederic Watts, *Joseph Joachim*, 1866 (Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey).

François Prume (1816-1849) and Claudio Brindis de Salas Garrido (1852-1911) both studied with Hubert Léonard (1819-1890) at the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles, and neither of them used a chinrest. In contrast, Henry Schradieck (1846-1918), Henri Marteau (1874-1934), and the Belgian Martin-Pierre Marsick (1847-1924), also students of Léonard, used chinrests (Fig. 8). Narcisse-Augustin Lefort (1852-1933), a violin teacher at the Paris Conservatory from 1892 to 1925 (and therefore well into the twentieth century), was photographed at a mature age without a chinrest on his violin.

²¹ W.C. Honeyman, *The Violin*, p. 32.

²² Christian Heinrich Hohmann, *Praktische Violinschule*, ed. Heinrich Dessauer (London, 1900), p. 5.

²³ *Letters from and to Joseph Joachim*, selected and translated by Nora Bickley (London, 1914), p. 385.



Figure 8. Martin-Pierre Marsick (private collection Jacques Marsick; date unknown)

The press confirms these findings. A series of opinion pieces printed in several issues of *The Musical Times* in 1915 discussed the use of chinrests and indicates that their use was still actively debated at the time. Although the majority of the authors agreed on the chinrest's necessity, some violinists still felt differently, even at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁴

Different models of chinrests

Honeyman describes three models of chinrests in his method. All three were attached to the left of the tailpiece, but were only to be used if the cloth or cushion placed underneath the student's clothing proved insufficient. The first consisted of two cushions covered in green velvet, one above and one below the violin. Honeyman was not in favor of this solution as it was too thick to be effective while playing.²⁵ The second chinrest he describes is seen in many photos of nineteenth and twentieth-century violinists and consisted of an oval ebony plate two inches (5,08 cm) wide and three inches (7,62 cm) long that fastened under the violin with two metal screws and which had a small depression for the chin. Honeyman described it as a recent invention. Joachim, among others, was depicted with such a chinrest at a later age (see Fig. 9). In the W. E. Hill & Sons catalog of 1950, the names of famous violinists are given to various models of chinrests, the "Joachim" among them (Fig. 10), a model that is still sold under the same name.²⁶ Honeyman describes a third model, which he himself invented, in which tailpiece and chinrest are fused, with the chinrest to the left of the tailpiece. Strangely enough, this model was never manufactured. (Honeyman himself, it should be said, always played without a chinrest.)

²⁴ *The Musical Times*, Vol. 56, No. 864 (1 February 1915), p. 105-106. No. 866 (1 April 1915), p. 223-224. No. 867 (1 May 1915), p. 284.

²⁵ W. C. Honeyman, *The Violin*, p. 33-34.

²⁶ Including Specialty Violin Making Products (<http://www.specialtyviolin.com/>) and Concord Musical Supplies (<https://www.concordmusic.com/>).



Figure 10. “The Joachim” in the 1950 catalog *Chin-Rests for the Violin* of W. E. Hill & Sons.



Figure 9. From left to right: Aldredo Piatti, Carl Reinecke, and Joseph Joachim in Bonn, May 1890. (Royal Academy of Music, London/Lebrecht Music & Arts)

Reinhold Jockisch (1848-1906) described another model of chinrest in 1900. This was a ebony plate with a hollow for the chin that rested above the tailpiece and was held in place with metal screws. He claimed that this model had been in use for several decades.²⁷ The same author also described a chinrest notable for being attached to a shoulder rest and invented by Francis L. Becker (?-?) in New York. The illustration for Becker’s patent application shows a bakelite chinrest with a cushion attached to its underside.²⁸ This cushion was to be placed on the left side of the chest, but a metal rod prevented it from touching the underside of the violin to avoid the sound-dampening effect of a cushion or cloth. Examples of this combined chinrest-shoulder rest are held in the Musical Instruments Museum of Brussels and in private collections.²⁹ (Fig. 11)



Figure 11. Becker chinrest-shoulder rest (Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels, inv. no. CORD0035-01).

²⁷ R. Jockisch, *Katechismus*, p. 44.

²⁸ Patent application No. 252,923, United States Patent Office, F. L. Becker, 1882.

²⁹ Brussels, Musical Instruments Museum, inv. nos. 1991.085-04 and CORD0035-01. The upper plates of these two chinrests have different shapes, but both bear the Becker trademark.

In his method, Leopold Sass (1874-1957) notes that he prefers the “Prager Model,” (one also described by Jockisch), offering an illustration and adding that it can be adjusted as high as 30 mm.³⁰ Jockisch indicates that the Prager Model was sold by Bruno Klemm Jr. in Markneukirchen (Fig. 12).³¹



Figure 12. The “Prager Model” chinrest, depicted in L. Sass, *Zum Problem der Violintechnik*, p. 22.

Leopold Auer (1845-1930) was a student of Joachim and was himself a famous pedagogue. In his method, *Violin Playing*, he indicates his preference for a particular model of chinrest.³² Auer’s *Graded Course* stipulates that chinrests be made of hard rubber and metal and attached to the left of the tailpiece, emphasizing the importance of choosing a model adjusted to the length of the violinist’s neck.³³ Carl Flesch (1873-1944) literally describes the chinrest as a necessary evil for performing position changes with greater ease, one that, according to him, dampens the sound of the violin.³⁴ Flesch expressed his distaste for the “Prager Kinnhalter,” which he felt was too high. He was also opposed to the use of chinrests that extend beyond the center of the tailpiece. His preference was for a model placed to the left of the tailpiece, but with a small extension on the right that bridged the tailpiece. In the abovementioned W. E. Hill & Sons catalog of 1950, the model referred to as “The Flesch” fits this description (Fig. 13).



Figure 13. “The Flesch” in the catalog *Chin-Rests for the Violin* from W. E. Hill & Sons (1950).

In portraits and photographs of various well-known violinists active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a few different models of chinrests can be recognized. Most musicians seemed to use a chinrest that was placed completely to the left of the tailpiece, with the exception of Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931) who used a model placed to the left of the tailpiece while also bridging it. (Fig. 14) In the Hill catalog of 1950, this model is referred to as “The Strad.”

³⁰ August Leopold Sass, *Zum Problem der Violintechnik* (Leipzig, 1913), p. 21-22; R. Jockisch, *Katechismus*, p. 44.

³¹ R. Jockisch, *Katechismus*, p. 44.

³² L. Auer, *Violin playing*, p. 32.

³³ L. Auer, *Graded Course* p. 9.

³⁴ Carl Flesch, *Die Kunst des Violinspiels* (Berlin, 1928), p. 7.



Figure 14. Eugène Ysaÿe with his violin and chinrest (Granger Historical Picture Archive; date unknown).

Among the violinists that used chinrests placed to the left of the tailpiece, one generally finds two models. The first can be clearly observed in the photo of Martin-Pierre Marsick seen above in Figure 8. Other violinists photographed with similar chinrests include Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908), Henry Schradieck (1846-1918), Hugo Heermann (1844-1935) and Marie Soldat (1863-1955).³⁵ The various patent applications filed between 1875 and 1922 clearly show similar forms, always describing the way the chinrest is attached to the violin, rather than the specific form of the plate.³⁶ The second most common model seen in historical photos is the so-called Joachim or Kreisler model. According to the Hill catalog, these models are similar, but the Kreisler is somewhat thicker, a difference that is unfortunately impossible to distinguish in historical photographs. This model was used by Joseph Joachim, Willy Hess (1859-1939), the youngest Müller Quartet (Karl, Hugo, Bernhard and Wilhelm), Henri Marteau, Adolph Brodsky (1851-1929), Arnold Rosé (1863-1946), Karel Halíř (1859-1909), Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), Amanda Röntgen-Maier (1853-1894), and Marie Soldat.³⁷

Handkerchiefs and cushions

Baillot was the first to mention the possible use of a handkerchief or cushion to fill in the gap between the back of the violin and the musician's shoulder. At the end of his chapter on general posture, Baillot also adds that children, young people, and women can put a thick handkerchief or cushion under clothing on the left shoulder for additional invisible assistance while playing.³⁸ In his method, Charles de Bériot (1802-1870) extensively discusses how clothing can be used to the advantage of the violinist. Concerning the elementary posture for the violinist, he recommends: "Le violon placé sur la clavicule gauche, appuyé contre le cou, et soutenu par le col de l'habit et du gilet qui le font incliner naturellement vers la droite."³⁹

³⁵ Photos are retrievable via Google Images and on Alamy.com, 19thcenturyphotos.com, gallica.bnf.fr, wikipedia.org.

³⁶ Patent application No. 160,136, United States Patent Office, C. F. Albert, 1875; Patent application No. 252,923, United States Patent Office, F. L. Becker, 1882; Patent application No. 576,950, United States Patent Office, M. H. Coloney, 1897; Patent application No. 654,678, United States Patent Office, F. Schmidt, 1900; Patent application No. 775,465, United States Patent Office, F. L. Becker, 1904; Patent application No. 775,792, United States Patent Office, F. L. Becker, 1904; Patent application No. 932,844, United States Patent Office, G. Besheim, 1909; Patent application No. 1,416,644, United States Patent Office, G. W. Jordan, 1922.

³⁷ Photos are retrievable via Google Images and on Alamy.com, 19thcenturyphotos.com, gallica.bnf.fr, wikipedia.org.

³⁸ P. Baillot, *L'Art*, p. 15.

³⁹ Charles de Bériot. *Méthode de violon* (Paris, [1857]), p. 4.

He also mentions that children, who, because of their lighter clothing, do not have the advantage of a collar, may use a handkerchief or small cushion to avoid learning the habit of raising their left shoulder.⁴⁰ Ferdinand David was the first violinist to recommend the use of a cloth or small cushion on the left shoulder for all violinists. As a basic technique (in which he deviates from his contemporaries), he also suggests that the left shoulder be raised slightly at all times. According to him, a cloth or cushion should thus ensure that the left shoulder is not raised too much.⁴¹ Honeyman states that “if the student be a gentleman” and his collarbone is too small to hold the violin effectively, a cushion or cloth may also be placed under clothing or the use of a chinrest may be allowed. He never specifically mentions the use of a chinrest and a cushion together and may be referring to using one or the other.⁴² In his method, Hermann Schröder (1843-1909) writes that it is best to insert a cushion under the left collar. This keeps the violin a little higher and increases its stability during position shifts.⁴³ Dessauer also discusses the possible use of a small cushion that could be placed under the waistcoat on the collarbone. However, he still does not mention the use of a chinrest.⁴⁴

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the combination of chinrest and cloth or cushion begin to appear in methods with consistency, but many authors were still opposed to the use of either a cushion or cloth. In his method from 1900, Jockisch was first to discuss the use of both a cushion and a chinrest, noting that, for taller, leaner people, a chinrest alone is insufficient. Jockisch adds that such musicians may also require the use of a cloth or small cushion resting on the collarbone. According to him, such a cloth or cushion is best made of velvet; silk and cotton were considered less suitable materials.⁴⁵ Sass clearly expressed his preference for the use of a chinrest in combination with a cushion: according to him, a “Prager Kinnhalter” together with a flat cushion worked best. He also discussed the use of a shoulder rest or *Schulterhalter* for the first time, but was less enthusiastic about its adoption. According to him, the use of a removable shoulder pad could be used to completely replace the use of the cushion, but without any certain success.⁴⁶ The use of a cushion in combination with a chinrest was far from systematic until well into the twentieth century. Such well-known violinists as Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987) and Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999) used only a chinrest and were not known to use additional cushioning.

A similar evolution can be observed in other violin methods. Joachim and Moser do not mention the cushion in their methods at all.⁴⁷ Auer completely disapproves of its use, writing that a cushion reduces the violin’s sound production by at least a third.⁴⁸ Flesch also recommends limiting the use of cushions. In a footnote he writes that some players (including Fritz Kreisler) do not completely close their shirt collars, instead folding the collar’s left side to create an improvised cushion.⁴⁹ The use of clothing to hold the violin in place was therefore a common practice until well into the twentieth century. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, photographs show violinists playing without the use of cushioning. This technique is also described by Auer. According to him, the use of a cushion is superfluous, and it is sufficient to maintain the violin held high enough without touching

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ F. David, *Violinschule*, p. 5.

⁴² W. C. Honeyman, *The Violin*, p. 33-34.

⁴³ Hermann Schröder, *Die Kunst des Violinspiels* (Cologne, 1887), p. 82.

⁴⁴ C. H. Hohmann, ed. Dessauer, *Praktische Violinschule*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ R. Jockisch, *Katechismus*, p. 43.

⁴⁶ A. L. Sass, *Zum Problem*, p. 22-23.

⁴⁷ Joseph Joachim and Andreas Moser, *Violinschule* (Berlin, 1905), p. 12.

⁴⁸ L. Auer, *Violin Playing*, p. 32.

⁴⁹ C. Flesch, *Die Kunst*, p. 7.

the left shoulder.⁵⁰ A photo from 1893 depicts the Quatuor Ysaÿe with Mathieu Crickboom (1871-1947) playing the second violin, clearly without a cushion (Fig. 15).



Figure 15. Quatuor Ysaÿe, Parijs, Salle Pleyel, 1893. From left to right: Eugène Ysaÿe, Joseph Jacob, Léon van Hout, Mathieu Crickboom, Claude Debussy (piano). (Lebrecht Music & Arts)

In 1903, Bernhard Poehland (c. 1869-1922) designed a cushion that was held to the instrument using two rubber bands (and was therefore no longer hidden by clothing): one band was attached to the end button and the other to the bottom left corner of the violin (Fig. 16).⁵¹ A similar model is still available under the name the “Poehland Violin Shoulder Pad.”⁵²

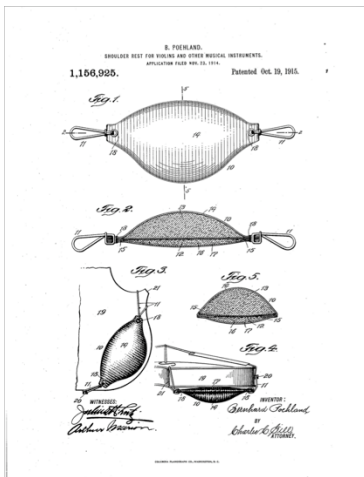


Figure 16. Bernhard Poehland patent application for a shoulder cushion, 1903. United (States Patent Office)

Shoulder Rests

Sass mentions the use of a *Schulterhalter* relatively early, in 1913.⁵³ However, this term requires further definition: in the nineteenth and a greater part of the twentieth century, it was probably used broadly to refer variously to a cushion, a combination of chin and shoulder rest, or as a removable and separate shoulder rest. This is evident from the names given to various

⁵⁰ L. Auer, *Graded Course*, p. 10.

⁵¹ Patent application 1,156,925, United States Patent Office, B. Poehland, 1903.

⁵² RDM Enterprises

(http://www.rdment.com/rdment.com/10.POEHLAND_SHOULDER_PADS_%26_SHOULDER_RESTS.html). Consulted 12 June 2019.

⁵³ A. L. Sass, *Zum Problem*, p. 21-22.

models in patent applications in which the Poehland cushion from 1903 and the combination chin and shoulder support are called shoulder rests. Today we use the term “shoulder rest” only to refer to an easily removable model, neither a cushion nor an apparatus screwed to the instrument. This present-day model of the shoulder rest seems to have been invented by Vlado Kolitsch (1899-1979) in 1936. In his patent application, Koltisch states that his model is based on that of Mirko Medakovic (?-?). Koltisch’s innovation, made to avoid damaging the instrument, was to use rubber hooks to attach the shoulder rest to the violin rather than Medakovic’s metal screw system (Fig. 17).

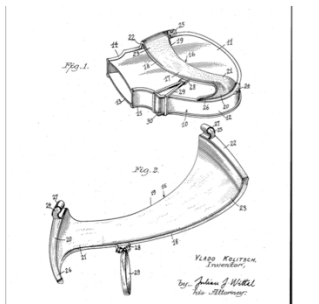


Figure 17. Patent application of Vlado Kolitsch for the first easily removable shoulder rest, 1936. (United States Patent Office)

The patent application for the now widely used shoulder rest by Joseph Kun (1930-1996) dates from 1994 and includes rubber mounting brackets and a plastic mold covered with a polyurethane foam cushion. Between Kolitsch and Kun we can find different models of cushions and shoulder supports in different patent applications. The degree of actual use of various models of shoulder rests remains to be determined and will require further research beyond the scope of the present project.

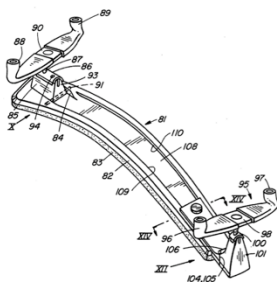


FIG. 9
Figure 18. Patent application of Kun, 1994, United States Patent Office.

Posture, portamento, and left hand technique

In their *Méthode de violon*, Baillot, Rode and Kreutzer describe the teachings of their common teacher, Giovanni Battista Viotti.⁵⁴ Viotti was born in Fontanetto Po in northern Italy and received his musical education in Turin, where he took violin lessons from Gaetano Pugnani (1731-1798). Viotti’s first concert at the *Concert spirituel* in Paris on 17 March 1782 was an instant success and his style of playing influenced a whole new generation of violinists.⁵⁵ An article in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* from 1811 describes the basic

⁵⁴ P. Baillot, R. Kreutzer and P. Rode, *Méthode*.

⁵⁵ White, Chappell, “Viotti, Giovanni Battista,” *Grove Music Online*, 1 January 2001. Oxford University Press, Accessed 9 March 2019.

principles of Viotti's school: "[...] grosser, starker, voller Ton ist das erste; Verbindung desselben zu kräftigem, eindringlichem, schön verbundenem Gesang das Zweyte; Mannigfaltigkeit, Reiz, Schatten und Licht, als das Dritte, muss durch die verschiedensten *Strich-Arten* ins Spiel gebracht werden."⁵⁶ The main feature of Viotti's new "Parisian school" was a robust and full tone combined with excellent legato technique. The search for the perfect legato resulted in the development of *portamento*, also called *port-de-voix* or *slide*, an important nineteenth-century stylistic feature. This element, when performed with historical accuracy, contrasts with the present-day tastes and practices of both performers and listeners who generally prefer clean and transparent performances. Charles de Bériot describes the *port-de-voix* in the following terms. "On appelle *Port-de-voix* une traînée de son qui remplit l'intervalle entre deux notes liées par la même syllabe ou le même coup d'archet, soit en montant, soit en descendant. La place du port-de-voix est donc toujours assignée dans la phrase du chant."⁵⁷

Proof of the *portamento*'s previous importance is found in the recordings of violinists from the early twentieth century. For example, in 1920, Marie Soldat, a faithful student of Joseph Joachim, made a recording of the Adagio from Spohr's *Ninth Violin Concerto*.⁵⁸ In his method of 1832, Spohr provided a fully annotated version of his score with fingerings, vibrato marks, bowings, dynamics, and articulation.⁵⁹ Moreover, we know that Joachim's technique was derived from the tradition of Ferdinand David and thus directly from that of Spohr, who was David's teacher. Although one might argue that a century had passed between the first edition of Spohr's concerto and Soldat's recording of that work and that Soldat's technique had therefore become too far removed from Spohr's to draw any reliable conclusions, one finds only minimal adjustments when comparing the various annotated editions of Spohr's violin method to those Guillaume Rémy (1856-1932) published in 1920.⁶⁰ The David, Schradieck, Friedrich Hermann (1828-1907), and Auer versions of the Spohr method also show little deviation from Spohr's original instructions and may feasibly be used as evidence of the continuity and stability of the performance traditions and practices to which Marie Soldat ascribed. (Hermann and Schradieck were both students of David, while Joachim was Auer's teacher.) In the editions of Johann Lauterbach (1832-1918), Marteau, and Rémy, there is no adjustment in the use of *portamento*. It may be therefore be argued that Soldat's recording is a legitimate trace of a performance practice dating back to the early nineteenth century. Her version differs only minimally from Spohr's publication. In addition, every time Spohr provides the instruction that a *portamento* be performed, Soldat meticulously follows his instructions.

To realize a legato connection between two notes, a finger must remain on the string to slide to the next note. This may lead to instability with the instrument slipping away from the collarbone—particularly when the left hand shifts down towards the scroll of the violin. Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762) described how a downward shift of left hand position

⁵⁶ "Bemerkungen über Musik in Warschau", *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 3 July 1811, p. 452. The emphasis on "Strich-Arten" is found in the original text.

⁵⁷ C. de Bériot. *Méthode*, p. 214.

⁵⁸ Recorded in 1920. Otto Schulhof, pianist. Union A 3000/1;

David Milsom, "Marie Soldat-Roeger (1863-1955): Her Significance to the Study of Nineteenth-Century Performing Practices" (<http://www.davidmilsom.com>, 2007 and 2015). Milsom demonstrates Soldat's loyalty to her teacher and proves that Soldat was part of a dying tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century (namely that of Joachim), to which she remained faithful until the end of her career.

⁵⁹ L. Spohr, *Violinschule*, p. 204-230.

⁶⁰ Ferdinand David's personal copy with his notes in pencil, noted on the first edition (Offenbach am Main, 1820) (University of Huddersfield, <http://mhm.hud.ac.uk/chase/view/edition/1133/>); Henry Schradieck (Offenbach am Main, 1879); Henry Schradieck (New York, 1895); Friedrich Hermann (Leipzig, 1889); Leopold Auer (Braunschweig, 1890); Johann Lauterbach (Bremen, 1890); Henri Marteau (Leipzig, 1913); Guillaume Rémy (Paris, 1920).

should be made: the four fingers first glide from the higher to the lower position, the thumb stays in the higher position for a while and is only later brought to the lower position (the thumb and other fingers independently of each other). This is a practice that is no longer part of present-day violin technique.⁶¹

It could be argued that if the violin is gripped between the collarbone and chin, the thumb and other fingers of the left hand should always move together smoothly during position changes. However, various sources show that a certain independence of the thumb and the other fingers of the left hand remained into the early twentieth century, perhaps because the supporting function of the thumb could not be abandoned until greater instrument stability had been found. In contrast with Geminiani, Ferdinand David was the first, in 1863, to explicitly mention that the thumb might go back to the lower position a little earlier than the other fingers. The explanation for the difference in approaches can be found in the basic posture of violinist. The chin-off position of Geminiani requires constant support of the violin with the left thumb. In David's technique, the thumb has greater freedom of movement because the violin is gripped with the chin. As a result, an independent movement of the thumb compromises the stability of the violin to a lesser degree.

Moser and Joachim also provide evidence of such independence: while the last note is played in the third position, the thumb stretches and is placed in first position. When sliding the hand into first position, the upper joint of the left thumb is then used as a hinge (Fig. 19).⁶²



Figure 19. Joachim-Moser, *Violinschule*, (part 1, p. 16), illustration showing position of the left thumb during a position change.

Leopold Auer describes the entire movement of the left hand during a change of position:

While ascending from a lower into a higher position is comparatively not so difficult, owing to the supporting pressure of the thumb, the descending movement from a higher to a lower position is a different matter. In order to enable the thumb in such cases to supply the necessary counter-pressure, it must be moved into the lower position in advance of the gliding finger, while the latter is still in the higher position; for this gliding movement it will be of additional advantage to hold the violin somewhat higher in order to counter-act the descending movement of the thumb.⁶³

Martin-Pierre Marsick relates similar experiences, but goes into greater detail and spends no less than sixteen pages on the technique of position changes. This, he believes, is where the “secret of the violin playing lies.” In all exercises, Marsick meticulously indicates where the thumb should shift up or down.⁶⁴ This technique gradually disappeared with the increased

⁶¹ Francesco Geminiani, *The Art of Playing on the Violin* (London, 1751).

⁶² J. Joachim and A. Moser, *Violinschule*, section 2, p. 76-77.

⁶³ L. Auer, *Graded Course*, Book five, p. 15.

⁶⁴ Martin-Pierre Marsick, *La grammaire du violon* (Paris, 1924), p. 72-87.

use of the chinrest and cushion in combination. This combination was favored by Hermann Schröder, who wrote that leaving the thumb behind with a higher position change or allowing it to go down sooner with a falling position should be avoided at all times. He preferred the thumb and fingers to move along the neck at the same time.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Although gripping the violin with the chin became standard practice over the course of the nineteenth century, the technique was no panacea. In their constant search for the best position to ensure stability while playing, violinists continued to seek ways to further immobilize their instrument, as is evidenced by the extensive chapters on the topic found in different violin methods from the period. The chinrest only came into common use in the later years of the nineteenth century, but even then it was not universally accepted by all violinists, and until the early twentieth century many images show violinists without chinrests. This suggests that, for much of the nineteenth-century, violin repertoire was performed without a chinrest. Even in the 1920s, there was still strong opposition to filling the gap between violin and collarbone (for example by Auer and Flesch).

For a historically informed performance of the nineteenth-century repertoire for violin, there is an absolute necessity for careful application of specific postures. Accurate renditions of *portamento* are only possible through the correct application of the typical nineteenth-century techniques used for position changes. The complete freedom that the use of a chinrest and shoulder support later gave to the left hand completely eliminates the need to keep a finger on the string at all times, meaning that legato phrasing could be played without *portamento*.

The rejection of *portamento* in current performance practice is, just as with the performance of Italian *bel canto*, primarily an expression of contemporary taste and preference. Today, contemporary performance of the nineteenth-century repertoire might attempt to meet the same requirements of clarity and transparency that are often imposed on and expected in the performance of early and contemporary music. Historical documents suggest that the current, “clean” portamento-free style favored by contemporary violinists in the legato passages of nineteenth-century music does not correspond with the style in which the music was played when it was first composed. A historically-informed approach, in itself, does not have restrain creativity. However, if we want to look for the foundations of nineteenth-century technique and aesthetics in violin playing, all elements that have been handed down from that practice can help us arrive at a practical and therefore internalized appreciation of precisely those elements that seem so far removed from present-day taste. For practice-oriented research, experimenting with nineteenth-century positions is a one way of getting closer to the reasons behind a specific playing style and its aesthetic implications.

Abstract

The present article examines how chinrests, shoulder rests, and other tools for increasing instrument stability gradually became commonplace among late nineteenth and early twentieth century violinists and suggests that the use of these tools led to changes in left hand technique. These changes likely had a direct impact on the execution of typical nineteenth century style elements such as *portamento*. In my conclusion, I argue that it is only through practice-based research that the postures and practices reported in historical documents can be tested for their effect on technique and, in turn, technique’s potential interpretive and

⁶⁵ H. Schröder, *Die Kunst*, p. 82.

rhetorical consequences. This approach might serve as a corrective for the present state of affairs in which historical documentation is not always considered. Some violinists stubbornly use a chin-off position for music from the early nineteenth century while others use the chinrest for the same repertoire, perhaps out of habit or convenience. Practice based research is therefore a necessary step for coming to an informed perspective on how nineteenth-century violinists played and for using that perspective in the interpretation of works historically associated with particular violinists or schools of the period.

(TRANSLATION: KATTY KOCHMAN AND CHRISTOPHER BRENT MURRAY)