Abstracts

DAVID MILSON: The Franco-Belgian School of Violin Playing: Towards an Understanding of Chronology and Characteristics, 1850-1925

The term ‘school’ is often used, in various contexts, as a means of trying to understand different strains of performance style and practice. Sometimes the word suggests a literal association with a particular institution, sometimes a set of genealogical relationships between teachers and pupils, and sometimes in the manner of musicological terms such as ‘Classical’ or ‘Romantic’ — as a way of generalising chronological and characteristic parameters. In violin playing the term has been used with varying degrees of effectiveness and the need to try and examine such terms critically (or at the least to define their usage) is of obvious relevance and importance. This article, taken from a keynote presentation, attempts to look at the notional ‘Franco-Belgian School’ of violin playing. It aims to ascertain the basis of the term by examining chronological aspects — when it might be said to exist — and what appear to be its characteristics in terms of style. The ‘Franco-Belgian School’ was cited towards the end of the nineteenth century mainly, it would seem, as a means of differentiating it from the so-called ‘German School’; certainly, there are clear distinctions to be made between those trained in Paris and Brussels and those trained, for example, in the cultural milieu of Leipzig and (via Joachim’s activities there) at the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. This paper will attempt to trace the development of a ‘Franco-Belgian School’ by looking at critical reception and the writings of contemporary observers, as well as examining key aspects of performance style (such as forms of portamento) which might be said to create a clear ‘Franco-Belgian’ performance identity. The paper will conclude by musing upon the changing trends in violin performance and the extent to which the ‘Franco-Belgian School’ contributed to later, twentieth-century trends in style.

ÉTIENNE JARDIN: Les violonistes en concert à Paris (1822-1848)

Scrutiny of the extant documents issuing from the administration of the “Droit des pauvres” (taxation of public artistic events introduced during the French Revolution) allows us to learn more about Parisian musical life in the first part of the nineteenth century. From the registers kept by this administration (“l’Assistance publique”), we know, for example, the dates, venues, organizer’s names and receipt details for public concerts in Paris between 1822 and 1848. This information has been arranged into a directory of more than 3000 entries that can inform us about certain categories of musicians, including the violinists who represent 13% of musicians identified in the index (93 on 687). This group is positioned third in a list arranged according to the instrument played: in first place are singers – 29% – in second place, pianists – 24%. This article focuses on three points: the evolution of the concert in Paris from the middle of the Restoration to the end of the monarchie de Juillet; the place of the violinists
in this development; the compositions of the group formed by the violinists and concert organisers. Particular importance is attached to places frequented by musicians; the frequency of concerts; the commercial success of the performances; and to various subsets that can be observed among Parisian violinists, namely Conservatoire students, representatives of ‘Belgian school’, German musicians, Italian musicians, and so forth.

Renata Suchowiejko: «Toutes les passions rapprochent les hommes». Le jeu du violon en tant qu’art oratoire et langue des sentiments.

The identification of music as a language – an idea expressed in dogmatic terms by Jean-Jacques Rousseau – came to be strongly influential. In the first half of the nineteenth century it was discussed widely by theorists, composers and interpreters. French theoretical treatises are replete with the metaphorical conception of the musical work as a «discourse of sounds». Comparing music to an oratorical art was powerfully echoed in methods for violin, particularly the Méthode du Conservatoire and those by Pierre Baillot and Charles de Bériot. The conceptions of these French masters, formed in the aesthetic tradition of the eighteenth century, foreshadow a Romantic ideology that was gradually establishing itself. The conversational aspect of music, together with references to the sphere of feelings as a source of aesthetic experience and creative activity, constituted the main axiom of violin treatises, establishing a theoretical basis for musical interpretation. Such contextualization of the beginnings of the Franco-Belgian school of violin – encompassing its varying facets and aesthetic and cultural influences – establishes the school’s unique place in the history of interpretation.

Rohan H. Stewart-MacDonald: Approaches to the Orchestra in the Violin Concertos of Nicolò Paganini

Paganini’s deployment of the orchestra in his violin concertos is periodically criticized for conservatism: simple accompanimental textures project the solo with a lack of dramatic interplay between the solo and ensemble. This approach is seen to be redolent of the early nineteenth-century virtuoso concerto generally, in which composers, constrained by factors like low standards of orchestral playing, adhered to simple formulas. Closer scrutiny of Paganini’s orchestral scores, however, reveals invention and finesse within admittedly circumscribed boundaries. Orthodox views on the orchestral writing of Paganini and others can be traced to the spectrum of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theoretical writings explored in several studies by Simon P. Keefe. Heinrich Christoph Koch (1749-1816) emphasised the importance of dramatic interplay between solo and ensemble; this could involve effects of ‘grandeur’ arising from tutti textures, or it could entail dialogic relationships between solo and individual orchestral sections or instruments (‘intimate grandeur’). Dialogic textures are rare in Paganini’s scores; but moments of tutti grandeur are frequent, and the composer’s careful handling of his orchestral resources supports other, equally valid aesthetic priorities related to his position vis-à-vis contemporary Franco-Italian composers of violin
concertos such as Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824), Pierre Rode (1774-1830), Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766-1831) and Pierre Baillot (1771-1842). Paganini’s scores, with their liberal use of percussion and their particular approach to accompanimental sonority, also strongly invite comparison with those of Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868), Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) and Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835). The ‘operatic’ nature of Paganini’s scoring logically reflects his immersion in Italian musical culture. The comparative approach adopted throughout the article continues the recent objective, in Paganini scholarship, of defining with more precision Paganini’s position within early nineteenth-century musical style. References are also made to the concertos of Louis Spohr (1784-1859), despite his geographical and (alleged) stylistic distance from Paganini.