



String Chamber Music of the Classical German School, 1840-1900: A Scholarly Investigation through Reconstructive Performance

Project duration: September 2006 – August 2009

ARCHIVE INTRODUCTION

David Milsom, 2009 (revised May 2015)

Project Context

The aim of this project was to make a set of new study recordings, based upon the intelligence we have for nineteenth-century German string performing practice of the 'classical' German school. In string-playing, this 'school' equate to the tradition espoused by Louis Spohr, musicians based in Leipzig at the time of Mendelssohn, and Joseph Joachim and his protégés, who represented perhaps the final flowering of this tradition before it was expunged by artistic sensibilities of a rather different aesthetic motivation in the early years of the twentieth century.

The roots of the project were in my own work as a scholar of nineteenth-century violin performing practice; thus, analysis and commentary is mostly concentrated upon violin practices. I worked in close association with my long-standing colleague, former PhD supervisor and project mentor, Clive Brown. The 'string chamber music' theme inherent in the project title derives from the works prepared and performed, which represent a wide cross-section of chamber music of the period: violin and piano duos, string duos, piano trios and string quartets.

I had the opportunity to work with such a wide-ranging repertoire due to the existence of Leeds University Centre for Historically Informed Performance (LUCHIP), of which Clive Brown is the director and I was formerly the project manager. This 'centre' acts as a means of bringing together musicians and scholars based in the Leeds University School of Music to undertake historically-informed performances (based directly upon scholarly activity in the School) and to get up related research projects and conferences. As well as providing the required research environment for this AHRC-funded fellowship, LUCHIP won a large research grant (also AHRC) to collate, digitise and study nineteenth-century chamber music editions in a 4-year project from 2008-2012.¹

¹ 'CHASE': 19th- and Early 20th-Century Annotated Editions of String Music: Bibliographical Problems, Editorial Content and Implications for Performance Practice' (AHRC Research Grant project, Universities of Leeds and Cardiff, 2008-12) www.chase.leeds.ac.uk

Project Personnel

Clive Brown (violin) – Head of School, Director of LUCHIP, internationally-known expert in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performing practice. Project mentor.

Hengching Fang (viola) – PhD student (completed in 2009, in which I was Internal Examiner), researcher into viola performing practices from Joseph Joachim to Lionel Tertis (recordings made in 2008)

Jonathan Goosing (piano) – RNCM répétiteur, piano tutor at Sheffield University, Senior Lecturer at Bishop Grossteste College, Lincoln. My regular duo partner since 1992, with extensive HIP experience with me from 2000 to present day.

Daniel Gordon (piano) – Leeds University répétiteur, extensive HIP experience as part of LUCHIP and Clive Brown's regular duo partner

George Kennaway (cello) – Research Assistant on AHRC Research Grant project, member of LUCHIP, PhD student of Clive Brown (studying nineteenth-century cello performing practice with a particular emphasis on editions by Grutzmacher), ex sub-principal cellist of the orchestra of Opera North

Kerry-Anne Kubisa – recording engineer, School of Music, University of Leeds

Mark Wales – freelance IT consultant (Small Hadron Collider), who has helped me prepare the archive materials and edition scans

Ruth Milsom – my wife, piano teacher and accompanist, fellow partner in Milsom School of Music (my instrumental teaching practice in Sheffield): miscellaneous administrative and research assistance including helping to set up the recording sessions at St John's Church, Ranmoor, Sheffield.

Purpose and Rationale

My purpose here is to demonstrate, in practice, the fruits of academic research into string performance traits of this period, focusing specifically upon violin-playing. All performances were made after careful consideration of annotated editions and early recordings, where available, and against the backdrop of scholarly knowledge I have gained in the past fourteen years (since beginning my MMus research, which also considered the intelligence of early recordings and in the case of this preliminary study, their relevance to eighteenth-century music²).

The project was based around a relatively simple, but hopefully effective ideal – to undertake a number of performing projects as a 'posthumous disciple' of the classical German school of violin playing. The German school is associated here specifically with the pedagogic writings and discernible evidence outputs (word texts, performance editions, and – where available – sound recordings) of Louis Spohr, Ferdinand David, Joseph Joachim, and close associates. As the project went

² D. Milsom, *Early Recordings and Musical Style 1900-1950: Approaches to Baroque and Classical Violin Repertoire* (unpublished MMus thesis; Sheffield, 1996).

**MILSOM: String Chamber Music of the Classical German School, 1840-1900:
A Scholarly Investigation through Reconstructive Performance**

on, and because of the comparative rich vein of evidence surrounding his performance style and aesthetic, Joseph Joachim became the focal figure. When it came to putting research into practice, I was fundamentally trying to emulate likely, observable characteristics of him and his students at the Berlin *Hochschule für Musik*. Given the scholarly aspirations of the project and its performances, this required a basic methodology, which I termed the *Three Stages*, viz:

STAGE 1: performances based around the most direct evidence – specifically, the existence of pedagogic writing, annotated editions, **and** relevant early sound recordings by those directly involved with the nineteenth-century German school. Inevitably, this stage focused on nineteenth-century players who lived into the recordings era, including Joachim himself.

STAGE 2: performances based around the existence of pedagogic writings (and other written documentation) and annotated editions, but without directly-connected sound recordings.

STAGE 3: the most speculative part of the process – projecting stages 1 and 2 onto works performed due to their current repertoire significance, but in the absence of the direct evidence found in stages 1 and 2. Crucially, this hypothetical approach looked at trying to embody and assimilate performance characteristics. Practically, it involved inventing fingerings, bowings, and tonal characteristics that credibly allowed for performances to embody the sound of the classical German violin-playing aesthetic.

The resultant recordings are far from perfect technically – and this is not primarily their intention in any case. What I seek to demonstrate is that, with careful consideration of the documentation and a free, unprejudiced view of performance style in many ways diametrically opposed to modern practices, it is possible to get up performances that display at least something of the practices of this tradition. This work is unique, as far as I know, in both its scope and its intentions. Arguably, modern HIP in the commercial domain is influenced only superficially (on an intentionally selective basis) by the fruits of scholarly research. At the time of starting the project, most performing practice musicology (included writings by Clive Brown) was disseminated via books and articles, but not via recorded sound.

[2015: since the time of this project, the whole sphere of performance studies and practice-led research has moved on considerably and a much more varied landscape has emerged, spearheaded by a growing body of genuine scholar-performers. In 2006, however, this rationale was deemed to be valid and world-leading, and, of course, explains in no small part the funding of this project by the AHRC.]

Archive Contents

Each work's webpage contains an MP3 sound file of my performance of this work, along with analysis of historical renditions relevant to my recording.³ There are also scanned images of relevant editions, replicating, as appropriate, annotations from my analyses of old recordings and/or my own markings used in the performances. Some works also have graph images plotting tempo flexibility, gained from analysis of historical and new recordings via the Sonic Visualiser programme.⁴ There is also an 'Analysis and Commentary' document for each work, which aims to highlight some of the main issues inherent in performing it. There are references to external studies, including my own previous text, *Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth Century String Performance* (Aldershot, 2003),⁵ which acts as a context and provides further scholarly substantiation of this research-based performance project. Clive Brown's seminal text *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (Oxford, 1999)⁶ provides very detailed scholarly background informing this project. These texts should be viewed in conjunction with this project archive.

Other appended articles and documents are as follows:

- Bibliography
- Discography
- Article on reviving Joseph Joachim's performing style
- Article on the significance of Marie Soldat-Roeger's recordings
- Performance Evidence 1 – annotated editions
- Performance Evidence 2 – early recordings
- Project Editions (bibliographic details of scores used and studied)
- Project Outputs and Dissemination (details of talks, articles and activity undertaken during the project)
- The New Recordings: Technical Specifications and Methodology
- Track List

³ Mechanical copyright restrictions have precluded inclusion of sound files of any such historical (and commercially-re-released) recording. See Discography for relevant details. [2015: much of this material is now available via streaming sites such as Spotify or Naxos Music Library.]

⁴ Chris Cannam, Christian Landone, and Mark Sandler, Sonic Visualiser: An Open Source Application for Viewing, Analysing, and Annotating Music Audio Files, in Proceedings of the ACM Multimedia 2010 International Conference. www.sonicvisualiser.org

⁵ D. Milsom, *Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Violin Performance, 1850-1900*, Aldershot, 2003

⁶ C. Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900*, Oxford, 1999