

The Left Hand Pedagogy of Violinist Jan Sedivka

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Jan Boleslav Sedivka was widely regarded as one of Australia's leading violinists and string teachers. He was born on 8 September 1917 in Slany, Czechoslovakia, a small town approximately thirty kilometres north-west of Prague. He died in Hobart, Australia on 23 August 2009. After holding influential violin teaching posts in London (1949-1961) and Brisbane (1961-1965), he became Lecturer in Violin and Chamber Music at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music in 1966. From 1972 to 1982 he was the Director of Music of the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music, at the University of Tasmania.¹ In 1982 Sedivka became the Master Musician in Residence at the same institution, a position he held for over two decades.² Elinor Morrisby recently published a biography of Sedivka and states that his

"influence on string playing in Australia has been profound. He has enriched ensemble playing in incalculable ways, and in the music world has become a legend in his own time...Many of his students hold positions in Australian and European Orchestras; many more teach in music establishments or universities throughout the country."³

Sedivka's early attraction to the violin began when, as a small child, he heard a visiting student perform. This encounter ignited a passion and provided him with the motivation to explore the violin. After some time at the municipal school, Sedivka was accepted for study with Zigmund Polášek, a pupil of Otakar Šev ík (1852-1934). After less than two years tuition with this teacher, it was suggested that Sedivka should meet Otakar Šev ík (then 76).⁴

Sedivka studied with Šev ík from 1927-1931 and following this, graduated in 1938 from the Prague Conservatory with the highest honours from the Master School of Professor Jaroslav Kocián (1883-1950). Kocián "was considered the most

¹ The Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music became a part of the University of Tasmania in 1981, before this, it was within the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education.

² Within the Faculty of Arts.

³ Elinor Morrisby, *Up is Dow, A Life of Violinist Jan Sedivka*, (Melbourne: Lyrebird Press, 2008), 171.

⁴ Philip Borer, *Aspects of European Influences on Violin Playing and Teaching in Australia* (Hobart: University of Tasmania, Masters of Music Thesis, 1989), 133.

accomplished and characteristic exponent of the Šev ík school."⁵ Kocián also taught the violin virtuoso Joseph Suk (b. 1929) at the Prague Conservatory.

Sedivka's final pedagogical influence of a formal nature occurred during a special course in violin studies and pedagogy, undertaken between 1942 and 1945 in England, with Max Rostal (1905-1991). Rostal was a British violinist of Austrian birth, who studied with Arnold Rose in Vienna, and Carl Flesch in Berlin. In the 1920s Max Rostal was considered to be "[Carl] Flesch's most brilliant student."⁶ Rostal also taught Yfrah Neaman (b. 1923), Igor Ozim (b. 1931), and members of the Amadeus Quartet (founded in 1947). Along with his acclaim as a soloist and teacher, Rostal established the European String Teachers' Association in 1974. This institution was to provide teachers with an avenue for the "exchange of information on the technique and teaching of string playing."⁷ The impact on string performance and pedagogy of Rostal has been well documented and he was considered "in his manner of thinking and teaching – most like his late master [Flesch]."⁸

In summary, as a student Sedivka was subject to wide-ranging influences from the highly ordered and technically-based Šev ík school, to Kocián and finally, in England, by Max Rostal, of the Flesch and Šev ík schools. There can be no doubt that these influences helped to shape Sedivka's own pedagogy, however he "cannot be classified as a disciple of Šev ík, Kocián or Rostal"⁹ as he "was sceptical of any single wisdom."¹⁰ This article will outline the unique aspects of Jan Sedivka's left hand teaching in the context of other great masters of violin.¹¹

A wealth of original views regarding Sedivka and his teaching were gleaned through the combination of the author's own experiences as a student, the observation of many lessons and classes, a preliminary written questionnaire and an extensive series of oral interviews. The names of the interviewees have been withheld due to the provision of privacy, and thus have been identified by number only.

⁵ Boris Schwarz, *Great Masters of the Violin* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 399.

⁶ Schwarz, 341.

⁷ Noël Goodwin, "Rostal, Max," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2001 ed.

⁸ Schwarz, 342.

⁹ Morrisby, 167.

¹⁰ Stemler, "Sedivka Perspectives", personal notes from Leon Stemler, Sedivka Collection, quoted in Morrisby, 167.

¹¹ As three of the twentieth centuries most celebrated volumes on violin pedagogy, the texts of Leopold Auer, Ivan Galamian and Carl Flesch were consulted in depth.

Pedagogy broadly encompasses the science and art of teaching. Paul Ernest, a modern educationalist, has said that “pedagogy is merely a theory of techniques for achieving the ends of communicating or offering the selected knowledge or experiences to learners in a way consistent with [certain] values.”¹² Sedivka’s notion of pedagogy ran tangentially to this definition. Pedagogy was once described by him as, “how to make playing the violin complicated, if not impossible, and then how to overcome the manufactured complications.”¹³ On another occasion Sedivka stated that “learning to play the violin is not the attainment of information, but rather is the discovery of what one already knows.”¹⁴ While such statements may have been said in jest, they contain kernels of truth and therefore help illustrate and typify the individual and perhaps idiosyncratic nature of Sedivka’s pedagogical belief system.

It became apparent from many hours of observation, reinforced by the results of the preliminary questionnaire and interviews, that Sedivka’s teaching was pervaded by the passion to make violin playing easier. The easier the control over the instrumental mechanics of the violin, the easier it was to achieve the aim of ‘excellence of musicianship.’ Sedivka believed, in agreement with Flesch¹⁵ and Galamian¹⁶, that technique is the means for acquiring this end; his principal goal to find the most natural and appropriate technique for each individual. One student described Sedivka’s understanding of technique as the following:

“It is a means to an end, which is the final expressiveness on the violin; to make the instrument and preoccupation with instrumental difficulties as unimportant as possible and as easy as possible, in order to get to the expressiveness of the music. However, he is fascinated by technique as something to think about, and intellectually gets excited about issues of technique.”¹⁷

Many schools of violin playing require the rigid adherence to a set of predetermined technical and musical formulae. This research revealed, however, that Sedivka did not require this type of strict regime and did not transform students’ technique in his own image. Rather, he built and moulded personal

¹² Paul Ernest, “The One and the Many” in Leslie P. Steffe and Jerry Gale, eds, *Constructivism in Education* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), 484.

¹³ Violin lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 7 April 1998, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

¹⁴ Violin lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 10 June 1998, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

¹⁵ Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing*, vol. 1 (New York: Carl Fischer, 1924), 8.

¹⁶ Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (London: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 5.

¹⁷ Respondent 3, interviewed by author, 23 February 2001, sound recording.

characteristics already present but perhaps underdeveloped. One former student stated that "I have had lessons before [my time with Sedivka] where I came out with a bow arm that looked like everyone else's, except I could not do anything with it!"

Left Hand

An area of technique that emerged as consistently central to the teaching of Sedivka was the mechanism of the left-hand. Sedivka was fascinated by the fact that string players are required to use the four fingers of the left-hand in an equal way, despite the fundamental anatomical differences between those fingers. Sedivka believed that one has to counteract the innate differences in order to efficiently and ergonomically accommodate the fingerboard and also violinistic repertoire. He was surprised by the lack of understanding and common sense that most intelligent musicians and schools apply to the fingers' use. Sedivka would often say that many schools of violin pedagogy did not incorporate the use of the fourth finger in the rudimentary teaching of the left-hand.¹⁸ This belief does not contain the whole truth as pedagogues such as Rolland, did begin early tuition with the use of the fourth finger. In Sedivka's opinion, not incorporating the fourth finger lead to a common lack of facility in this finger. Sedivka commonly made an analogy between the four fingers and the legs of a quadruped, and would remark "does a doggie begin his life with three legs and grow a fourth when he is older and wiser?"¹⁹

The general problem with the use of the fourth finger, in Sedivka's opinion, was its shape, angle and position in relation to the balance of the hand. In most instances the hand is oriented and balanced around the first two fingers and the fourth is left to stretch for its notes. A former student remarked that "Sedivka would always joke with me about my Suzuki background, particularly with my hand being oriented towards fingers one, two and three, not two, three and four."²⁰ It could be stated that Sedivka believed that if the orientation was shifted to the second and third fingers the hand could be balanced, and could play each note of the hand position in an equal way. This coupled with, increasing the amplitude and decreasing the radius of the fourth finger, allows the finger to have a weight behind it that is relative to that of the other three fingers. John Curro, a student of Sedivka from 1961, documented

¹⁸ For example, the original editions of the Suzuki method did not incorporate the fourth finger until the student was half-way through book one. The revised edition published in 2007, however, incorporates its use in preliminary exercises before the first piece.

¹⁹ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 10 June 1998, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

²⁰ Respondent 8, interviewed by author, 13 March 2001, sound recording.

the principle of left-hand balance in his article "Upbeat and Focus" in the *Festschrift Jan Sedivka* volume. Curro stated

"The four fingers vary in size and strength on every hand, although the variations are not always of the same degree in every hand. No amount of finger exercises will alter this relative difference but only increase the efficiency of each finger to its maximum possibility. In order to play fast brilliant passages with maximum clarity the thumb should assume a compromise position so that it helps to support the fourth finger, which is the weakest. This means that it will leave the other fingers slightly weakened and gives a resultant evenness of strength to all four fingers".²¹

Sedivka employed the analogy between quadrupeds and the left-hand extensively, and insisted that a 'doggie' would not voluntarily walk with its weight on the front legs and drag the hind legs. However, violinists do it all the time. Sedivka also related the human legs and body to the action of the left-hand; "the hips are like the knuckles, and the legs are like the fingers; we do not walk with our hips behind our legs, we walk with them above, so why does one play in this manner!"²²

Further illustrations of Sedivka's method of teaching left-hand technique can be gleaned from the quotes documented below. Sedivka said

"We have four fingers, right? How many legs do we have? Two, yes? How many fingers? Four. We must treat our left-hand as a little chimpanzee might. A quadruped would not walk comfortably on two legs and then strain and stretch the other two to take more steps. No, he would balance the body on all four legs and rest the body on all four legs. We must shift the body of the hand to rest 'in four legs.'"²³

"We must use doggie intelligence, and learn to think like a quadruped not a biped."²⁴

Finding the most effective and balanced orientation of the left-hand fingers, coupled with effective thumb placement defines hand position. It could be documented that Sedivka did not view the role of the thumb in abstraction, but rather viewed its role in relation to the position of the fingers. Sedivka's notion of the role of the thumb was that

²¹ John Curro, "Upbeat and Focus" in *Festschrift Jan Sedivka*, David Mercer, ed., 8.

²² Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka, 21 May 1998, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Violin Class, Jan Sedivka, 23 March 1998, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

“the thumb plays the role of the fulcrum. It supports and counterbalances what the fingers are doing. For example, if the fingers go down the thumb must go up, if the fingers go to the left the thumb must go to the right and vice versa. You need to decide where to put the fingers and then work out where the thumb should go. If you want to pull your ear you don't think first where the thumb should go, you just do it!”²⁵

Through observation, the author gleaned that Sedivka's opinion of the position of the left arm was found according to the assumed position of the hand and arm. For example, if the hand is executing a phrase on the 'g' string in first position, that is to the left side of the fingerboard, the arm must accommodate this configuration by assuming an attitude to the right of the neck of the violin. In this way the integrity of the hand, wrist and arm position is maintained.

Finger Organization

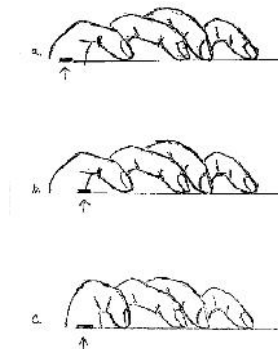
Linked with left-hand and arm position, and the use of the thumb, is the execution of finger extensions either with the first finger 'back' or the fourth finger 'up.' In Sedivka's view, the key to the extension was the height of the hand, arm and wrist in relation to the fingerboard. The lower the hand, or the lower the level of the knuckles, the wider apart the fingers naturally fall and therefore do not need to be 'stretched.' Sedivka would often physically manipulate a student's hand placement to demonstrate this concept. Whilst doing so, he would ask that "its not stuck together with pins is it,"²⁶ with regard to the inflexibility often encountered, and in an effort to induce muscle release in the hand. Also related is the device "opening-up the hand backwards" to execute an extension, instead of employing a discrete shift.²⁷ The diagram below shows a. a left hand in first position, b. in half position, having executed a shift and c. in half position "having opened up the hand backwards."²⁸

²⁵ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 11 August 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

²⁶ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka, 11 August 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

²⁷ Respondent 8, interviewed by author, 13 March 2001, sound recording.

²⁸ Diagram adapted from pictures of left hand position in Rolland, *Prelude to String Playing*, 1971.



Sedivka related the extension and the hand position to a flower:

“The hand is a little like a flower: at the base everything is small. We hold the thumb in close to the palm. As we go higher up the fingers stretch out. We always try to do the opposite!”²⁹

The vertical action of the left-hand fingers is fundamental to playing the violin. The action not only allows the note to be ‘played,’ but contributes to precisely how the note is played. The tone and intonation are affected when a finger’s weight, shape and angle are altered. It was apparent that, in Sedivka’s opinion, the notes produced by the fourth finger are often inferior due to the inadequacy of their use.

Finger pressure affects intonation, tone quality and the dynamic of any particular note. To effect a note with ‘good’ tone and intonation, the note must have an appropriate weight. This weight, according to Sedivka, originates in the finger, the hand, the arm and the shoulder, and requires a balance of energy in a downward and in an upward direction. Mono-directional pressure and weight can only lead to the tightening of the left-hand.³⁰

Sedivka promoted an “even finger pressure throughout the hand.”³¹ This was coupled with the balance of the hand; lessening the pressure of the first finger; and increasing that of the fourth finger. Finger pressure also relates to tone production. Obviously the bow is a major factor in tone production, however “the varying

²⁹ Violin lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 17 August 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

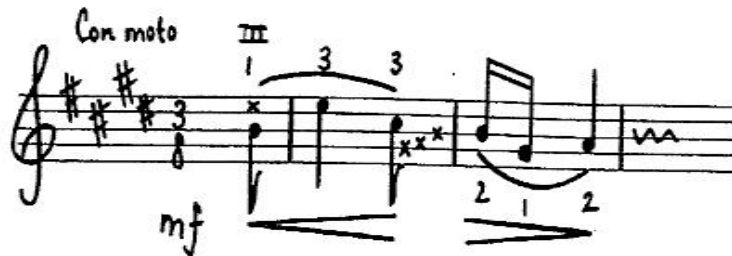
³⁰ Violin lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 30 March 1998, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

³¹ Respondent 8, interviewed by author, 13 March 2001, sound recording.

pressures of the bow and the left-hand, and the infinite variation of the two, are crucial to the better understanding of the tonal possibilities of the violin."³²

Finger Organisation

Another area central to the pedagogy of Sedivka was the organisation of the fingers of the left-hand. A former pupil stated that "finger organisation was ninety percent of what he talked about."³³ Any musical phrase dictates a sequence of pitches to produce the required 'tune.' For example, the opening of the Ballade of Jáná ek's Violin Sonata, requires the violinist to play the sequence b', e", c#", b', g#, a'. In Sedivka's opinion, to order the fingers in the same way as the composer, is not the most economical approach, nor will it produce the best results.



If, instead, the fingers are placed in the progression, b', e" then c#", g#" and b', concurrently, with the final a' prepared in the hand but not placed on the fingerboard until the after g#" semiquaver (as indicated by the x's in the diagram above), the sound of the action of the left-hand will be 'cleaner.' Also, this change in finger organisation requires less movement and is, therefore, more economical.

It could be argued that Sedivka's theory on hand position, like that of Flesch, is to prepare as many notes as early as possible. However, if the music dictates that a certain note cannot be placed on the fingerboard (due to the necessity of playing a lower note on the same string), in many cases Sedivka promoted that the position be 'felt' in the hand. The objective of early preparation is to reduce the number of movements in the hand and therefore increase the ease of execution and cleanness of action. Sedivka believed that there were "two sequences involved with playing a note or a grouping of notes: firstly, one has to prepare the mind and the body; and secondly one plays the note."³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka, 11 August 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

The key area of violin technique, 'holding the fingers down,' is associated with the issue of finger organisation. Notes in a descending sequence are produced by "the action of lifting the preceding note"³⁵ and, therefore, the 'new note' must be in place on the fingerboard before preceding note is played. It appears that, in agreement with Flesch, Sedivka's view was that the fingers should be left in place so that the action required to play a specific phrase is minimised. If, however, the freedom of the hand was inhibited by the act of leaving the fingers down, for example in an extension, the fingers should be released.³⁶

An important correlation exists between the organisation of the left-hand fingers, their early preparation, and the necessary horizontal action (action of moving the fingers left to right, and right to left across the fingerboard). Sedivka's viewpoint of the 'horizontal action of the fingers' was that this area is often lacking in a player's left-hand technique. For example, in an examination report of a former student, Sedivka wrote that "the knowledge of the vertical distances on the fingerboard is considerable, however, the knowledge of the horizontal distances is almost entirely lacking."³⁷ Traditionally, students are rigorously trained in the two-dimensional movements of the left-hand: the 'up and down' of the fingers in the one position and the 'up and down' of the fingers along the length of the fingerboard. Rarely do methods discuss the need for the players' intimate knowledge of the horizontal distances of the fingerboard.³⁸

In Sedivka's point of view the timing of the action of the left-hand fingers was crucial to the technique of the left-hand. If the timing is miscalculated, corresponding inaccuracies of intonation, finger pressure, and finger organisation can result: "the timing is everything."³⁹ A former student stated that "if I had to sum it up, I would say his genius is in helping one to make discoveries about the timing and focus of movement, within the mechanics of playing."⁴⁰

³⁵ *Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 15 February 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Former Sedivka student, Masters examination report, June 1998.

³⁸ For example when looking at a shift from the first to the third position, say from a first finger 'b' on the a string to a third finger, 'c#' on the e string, the first finger must understand not only the movement from first to third position, but the movement from the a to the e strings.

³⁹ *Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 1 March 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.*

⁴⁰ Respondent 3, interviewed by author, 23 February 2001, sound recording.

Fingering and Position Changing

'Fingering' was an area of constant inquiry in the pedagogy of Sedivka; never would he prescribe a definitive fingering for any given phrase. Fingering can be examined as a technical means, as a means of expression, and as a means for colouring. From a purely technical perspective, Sedivka, like Galamian, was guided by the principle that a musician should have the facility to execute a phrase with any desired fingering. In this way, Sedivka believed that if a performer does not have the facility to play a phrase with a specific fingering, that fingering then becomes the most appropriate choice, in order to gain the required technique. It could be recorded that students of Sedivka often found themselves bombarded with countless fingering permutations. "I have been amazed at how fingerings seemed to pour out of him, like water out of a tap."⁴¹ A prominent former student of Sedivka stated that

"His knowledge of fingerings was phenomenal. We had multiple fingerings for passages. I would be sent away to decide which one I wanted to use and how I could do it. There was a big emphasis on fingering and, in fact, I think this is a very important part of his teaching."⁴²

Coupled with fingering is the key area of violin technique 'position changing,' another topic that appeared to be fundamentally important to Sedivka. Galamian defined position changing as the "action of the entire arm and hand, including all of the fingers and the thumb. The flexibility of the thumb, important for all facets of the left-hand technique, was nowhere more essential than in shifting."⁴³ An alternative definition of position changing could be "the action of gliding with the third finger from the first position to the fourth position, using the first finger as a fulcrum and moving the distance of a perfect fourth."⁴⁴ As documented earlier, and in contrast to these definitions, Sedivka would refuse to be prescriptive and, would simplify the action by asking the student if they could "scratch their nose, with the left-hand."⁴⁵ Sedivka would emphasise that the action of position changing and nose scratching was identical.

⁴¹ Respondent 6, interviewed by author, 11 March 2001, sound recording.

⁴² Respondent 8, interviewed by author, 13 March 2001, sound recording.

⁴³ Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (London: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 24.

⁴⁴ Sedivka associate, conversation with author, 23 June 2001.

⁴⁵ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka, 19 March 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

The technique of position changing encompassed a considerable number of facets that Sedivka incorporated into his teaching. However, his primary concern with shifting appeared to be with the fact that many musicians did not incorporate the shift as an integral part of a musical phrase, instead, choosing simply to execute the action. Sedivka often commented that he would hear “note – oh my goodness shift – new note,” as opposed to a “note, linked with a beautiful expressive device and then another note.”⁴⁶ There are several reasons for this phenomenon; one of these is that, Sedivka believed that musicians often leave the shift too late, or in other words the timing of the position change was not appropriately considered. To this end, Sedivka related the story below:

“Moving to the Door; If you want to leave a room you don’t think right leg, one step forward, then left leg ‘Oh my goodness I can’t move my legs’, you think ‘door’ and the subconscious proceeds to get you to the door. We should do this when we play, however we think ‘note’ then ‘shift’ then ‘new note’ – it is stupid!”⁴⁷

As outlined in connection with the use of the fourth finger, Sedivka often remarked on the many oversights in the early years of string teaching. He would say that position changing was often taught after a few years of lessons, rather than included as an integral part of learning to play the violin.⁴⁸ Sedivka sometimes described the “note – oh my goodness – note” derogatorily as “AMEB position changing.”⁴⁹ With regard to position changing, *portamento* and *glissando*, Sedivka stressed the importance of the release of the left-hand and often used demonstration as an important element in the teaching of these techniques.⁵⁰

The framework for Galamian’s discussion of position changing, incorporates four types of shift.⁵¹ It was apparent that Sedivka would leave the choice of type of shift, as he did with most musical considerations, to the individual’s style and taste. As expressed by one former student: “he would leave that kind of musical inspiration as a very personal thing between the student and the rest of the world.”⁵² However,

⁴⁶ Violin Class, 15 March 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, as with the use of the fourth finger, the revised edition of the Suzuki method has brought the introduction to position changing from Volume 4, to Volume 2. In addition, other pedagogues such as Rolland incorporate preparatory shifting exercises at the commencement of tuition.

⁴⁹ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka, 1 June 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

⁵⁰ Respondent 8, interviewed by author, 13 March 2001, sound recording.

⁵¹ Galamian, 24.

⁵² Respondent 3, interviewed by author, 23 February 2001, sound recording.

Sedivka encompassed all types of shift in the notion that the player must always prepare for the context of the new note and new position early. For example, Sedivka would remind a player to shift on the string of the new note. Also, if a change of position was to include a change from first position to fifth position, the new context required the left arm and elbow to be to the right, and closer to the body. It appeared that Sedivka's conviction was that the new context should be assumed at the outset of the shift, not while the shift is in progress. Another example was that the hand must attain the position of the new group of notes, preceding the shift, not after the new position has been attained.

Double-stops, the knowledge of the horizontal distances on the fingerboard, finger organisation and timing are interrelated themes of left-hand technique. Consequently, a considerable number of the principles above can be applied to Sedivka's understanding of double-stops. Double-stops were often used by Sedivka to improve a performer's finger organisation and the early preparation of notes. A former pupil commented, with regard to double stopping, that "the notion of diagonal distances in the hand, predicated on the positioning of the hand further back than just the fingertips, was another revelatory thing in his teaching."⁵³ In addition, Sedivka often related the mechanics of double-stopping to how certain animals use their legs:

"We play octaves like a kangaroo with a walking stick; the two fingers are the legs and the thumb is the walking stick, supporting the legs. Thirds and fourths; like a camel."⁵⁴

Vibrato

Galamian's text describes three types of vibrato (arm, wrist and finger) that a performer should be capable of using interchangeably, and be able to vary at will, in the service of expression.⁵⁵ Sedivka's views on vibrato appeared to be similar, with the aim that his students developed complete control over their vibrato, and encouraged experimentation with vibrato types.⁵⁶ Sedivka saw vibrato as an essential expressive tool that should be used to highlight the tonal colours of a musical phrase. Galamian also discusses the use of vibrato within the context of

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 19 July 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

⁵⁵ Galamian, 37.

⁵⁶ Respondent 8, interviewed by author, 13 March 2001, sound recording.

stylistic considerations. For example, the music of Mozart would require less vibrato, than the music of Brahms. Sedivka did not subscribe to stylistic considerations alone, in accordance with the notion that 'nothing is absolute.' It appeared that for Sedivka a performance that was well considered, tasteful, beautiful and well executed, was more important than an emphasis on authenticity.

As with many other aspects of violin technique, vibrato did not escape Sedivka's relation to common, everyday events. Descriptions or visual images that he has used to describe particular types of vibrato include; "your vibrato needs to be like a little doggie on a short chain," when describing a fast and narrow action. When persuading a student to use a more continuous vibrato, Sedivka might say, "break your hand, my goodness,"⁵⁷ to encourage the student to work vigorously with the left-hand.

Technical Work

Instruction in scales was an area of technique that appeared to have evolved greatly throughout Sedivka's time in Australia. In the early days, Sedivka was described as being "a terribly tough teacher, very, very tough" as the expectation of good technique was incredibly high.⁵⁸ Students from this time, recounted that Sedivka required the practice of all scales, "the lot"⁵⁹ of studies and technical exercises.

In addition to the sheer volume of technical work covered, Sedivka insisted that the level of cerebral engagement in the activity was high. For example, he would ask students to play scales in an uncustomary fashion "D major in thirds, four down, two detached, three up," to ensure the constant engagement of the mind.⁶⁰ One student commented that "we would have to come up with as many ideas as he would on how to practice scales."⁶¹ In this way the practice of scales and technical exercises were not merely rote repetitions of prescribed patterns of notes, but were also exercises for the development of the relationship between the mind and muscles or, in Galamian's words, the "correlation."⁶² In Galamian's opinion it is this correlation that

⁵⁷ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 17 June 2001, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

⁵⁸ Respondent 4, interviewed by author, 25 February 2001, sound recording.

⁵⁹ Respondent 8, interviewed by author, 13 March 2001, sound recording.

⁶⁰ Respondent 3, interviewed by author, 23 February 2001, sound recording.

⁶¹ Respondent 8, interviewed by author, 13 March 2001, sound recording.

⁶² Galamian, 6.

holds the key to complete technical control. One student describing Sedivka's technique classes remarked

"Oh, the technique classes were such fun in those days because one had to play in front of people and play seven notes to the bow and fourteen, fifteen, different rhythms, seventeen, twenty-four, three then five then three and four, upside down and backwards."⁶³

Intonation and facility are the result of all of the areas of left-hand technique above. If a student has 'good' intonation and facility, the application of the left-hand technique has been successful. It appeared that Sedivka, like Galamian, believed that the performer must develop a highly sensitive ear and adjust according to individual situations and personal taste.⁶⁴ Sedivka discussed the notion of playing a note within the chord and thinking about intonation vertically, not merely horizontally.⁶⁵

Sedivka's influence in Australia was immense and, through this research it came to light, that perhaps the biggest contribution was his profound effect on individual players. Of particular significance was the "revelatory" concepts of his left hand teaching, and the relationship between the legs of a quadruped and the four fingers of the left hand. One former student stated that Sedivka's "students are his most significant contribution to the Australian music industry; he has taught a lot of students who have themselves inspired a lot of students."⁶⁶ A very high percentage of the students and colleagues interviewed shared the opinion that Sedivka's input had caused a fundamental change to their playing, specifically left hand technique and had had a significant impact on their careers and lives. "He has influenced everything about my life in the music industry;"⁶⁷ "Jan Sedivka made me as a musician, without him – I would not be where I am today."⁶⁸

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⁶³ Respondent 4, interviewed by author, 25 February 2001, sound recording.

⁶⁴ Violin Lesson, Jan Sedivka and author, 19 July 1999, Conservatorium of Music, University of Tasmania.

⁶⁵ Respondent 5, interviewed by author, 6 March 2001, sound recording.

⁶⁶ Respondent 12, interviewed by author, 11 June 2001, tape recording.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Respondent 13, interviewed by author, 11 June 2001, tape recording.

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