The Role of the Violin in Expressing the Musical Ideas of the Romantic Period and the Development of Violin Techniques in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.

Part I: Thesis

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

(Signed):……………………………………
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Abstract

The major purpose of the research in this thesis is to add to the available knowledge on advanced violin playing of the Romantic Period by, firstly, investigating the historical and technical knowledge and, secondly, adding some of my own findings. The project consists of a thesis, five recordings of live performances by the candidate and a guide to those performances.

The development of violin techniques in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the role of the instrument in expressing the musical ideals of the age were chosen to study because there is a general lack of literature on the subject written by players who have performed the music chosen by the researcher. Furthermore, studies of this literature have left some important questions unanswered.

One such question concerned how the development of the violin allowed musicians to better express the music in that era. Another question is what kinds of techniques were developed and how they related to the expression of the music.

The thesis includes a study of the historical background of the Romantic period, as well as instrument development in this period. Analyses are made of the music considering techniques only where they are new techniques which considers the expressive reasons lying behind the new styles of writing. Treatises, violin methods, as well as modern studies are examined and compared in order to determine the development of violin techniques specifically in the period.

This study is an investigation of both the written literature and the experiences of playing Romantic violin pieces in five concert situations, conducted over a time span of four years.

The first concert presented a programme of German composer Robert Schumann’s Violin Sonata No. 1 in A minor Op. 105; with French composer Camille Saint-Saëns’
Havanaise Op. 83; and also Fritz Kreisler-‘Pugnani’s’ Praeludium und Allegro.

The second concert presented a programme of Schubert’s Sonata in A major Op. 162 and Prokofiev’s Sonata No. 2 in D major Op. 94a.

The third concert presented a programme of Brahms’ Sonata No. 3 in D minor Op. 108 with Tchaikovsky’s Three Pieces Op. 42. It also included Ravel’s Tzigane.

The fourth concert programme presented Beethoven’s Piano Trio No. 1 in D major Op. 70, commonly called “The Ghost”.

The fifth concert presented a programme of Brahms’ Sonata No. 1 in G major Op. 78 and also the Sonata No. 2 in A major Op. 100. In addition his Sonatensatz (Scherzo) in C minor was performed.

For each of these concerts, the researcher made written reports detailing the reasons behind the choice of each piece, the place of the piece in the context of the research and an examination of the effectiveness of the concert recital programme. The reports included notes on the mastery of the different new violin techniques required to play the piece with an historic awareness. As evidence of this, each concert was recorded onto compact disc audio format. The reports were used as a basis for the accompanying Guide to Performance. This is a work of critical analysis and aims to give a record of the progress of the research through performance. It documents the gradual discovery of how the historical theory can be realised in practice and provides a rationale for the techniques and strategies adopted in the creative component.

The appendices include lists of repertoire and composers of the period, a chart of significant events from the period relating to the violin, and a chart of some of the key genealogical relationships in violin pedagogy.
The investigation of violin techniques of Romanticism produced a number of major results. One important finding suggests that there are solutions to the difficult technical passages, which require an understanding of the historical context and literary background.

In summary, this research produced findings which are of significance to violin educators and advanced violin students.
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