

Pierre Baillot, The Art of the Violin: A New Method Dedicated to the Author's Students (1834)

L'Art du violon is the second treatise for the instrument published by Pierre Baillot, following the *Méthode de violon* created with his colleagues Rodolphe Kreutzer and Pierre Rode on commission from the Paris Conservatoire, of which the writing, completed in 1802, fell to Baillot alone. The author therefore brought abundant and varied experience to his new work. The virtuoso was then at the forefront of the French scene: a renowned soloist, sought-after chamber musician—between 1814 and 1840 his soirées revealed the Beethoven quartets to the Parisian public—leader of prestigious orchestras, composer of appreciated works especially for his own instrument (both chamber music and concertos), and finally a respected professor at the Conservatoire since its foundation in 1795, first as a substitute to Pierre Rode, then as holder of a permanent post from 1799. His pedagogical reputation is attested to by the success of his two violin treatises, which had a lasting impact on his contemporaries and successors.

It was in 1834 that Baillot published *L'Art du violon* under his own name, a work with which he “sought to complete” the method written with Kreutzer and Rode “by covering a great many new topics” (pg. 2). The work is indeed a remarkable one, but uneven on account of the quantity and diversity of its contents. The first part expounds “Mechanical Principles” while the second, devoted to “Expression and its Means” (pg. 262), is entirely reproduced from the 1802 treatise. But whereas this latter, despite its title, had consisted of an elementary tutor, the “new method” (pg. 2) was designed to guide the student from the rudiments to the heights of virtuosity as it then was. Baillot covers everything, or nearly: without once losing sight of the philosophical and humanistic aspirations already characteristic of the Conservatoire method-book, he covers a multitude of technical points as well as such practical questions as the stance of the instrumentalist, the choice of strings, how to tune the instrument—information which is hard to come by for that time. The work affords numerous glimpses into the function of oral tradition, so difficult to get at for a bygone era; Baillot takes the trouble to describe in detail “stolen time” (rubato), the realisation of ornaments and fermatas, the ideal of vocality, the “good taste” omnipresent in nineteenth-century musical sources, or again the use of the prelude, still practised in the concerts of the time. He testifies to practices forgotten today.

Other novelties add to the strength of *L'Art du violon*. Baillot illustrates each of his points with examples from the repertoire, bowed and fingered, thereby bringing his explanations more concretely to life. The plates engraved by Jacques-Édouard Gatteaux, showing the posture of the musician with his instruments, are the first to reflect a hold that is no longer “Baroque” and which all French pedagogues would recommend in their method-books until at least 1908. The violin rests on the

clavicle and no longer on the chest, the chin rests to the left of the tailpiece, the performer leans to the left, feet together, right elbow low. These illustrations were often reproduced in subsequent works, down to the beginning of the twentieth century.

Many authors would take inspiration from Baillot's *L'Art du violon*, making it a reference work for violin pedagogy in the nineteenth century and fulfilling the author's desire to create a "faithful witness to our love for the sublime art that we cultivate" (pg. 1). Circulated in French in numerous countries, the treatise was however translated less often than the method of 1802.

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