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**Efficiency in Practicing Poulenc Violin Sonata
With Reflection on Teaching Methods of Milan
Vitek**

Written reflection within degree project

The sounding part consists of the following recording:

Poulenc violin sonata

Abstract

Professional musicians are often short of time and playing a musical instrument is not always ergonomic, violin especially. Efficiency in practice is needed to achieve desired results in a relatively short timeframe. I tried to go deeper in this subject with help of prof. Milan Vitek, who is known for his focus on practicing while teaching students.

In the thesis I wrote a biography of prof. Milan Vitek to summarize what made him the great interpret and pedagogue he is. He was influenced by violin methodology of Otakar Sevcik, therefore this thesis also contains Sevcik's biography and a description of his teaching methods.

I also interviewed prof. Milan Vitek's former students. Later I described a lesson with Milan Vitek, where I played the first movement of Poulenc violin sonata.

With help of this collected information I tried to define how to practice efficiently and stay motivated as a violinist.

Key words: Milan Vitek, Poulenc Violin Sonata, Otakar Sevcik, The Violin Methodology in Use, Efficiency in practicing

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Introduction

Prof. Milan Vitek has been a very important personality in my musical development, I always found his methods of problem solving in the practicing process very helpful. He often says very optimistically that problems and obstacles are here to be solved. I would like to go deeper into this matter and describe his very inspiring way of making every second of practice productive but not overwhelming at the same time. How to teach and motivate students to practice efficiently as a violin pedagogue?

What is the reason efficiency in practice is so important? In my opinion there are two aspects that make us musicians consider getting more done in a shorter amount of time. Playing the violin is not the most natural neither ergonomic movement, too many hours of repetitive one-sided physical activity might lead to an injury. The other reason is that in the career of a professional musician you are often forced to work with a certain time pressure. I want to explore the life of Milan Vitek to find out what made him become the interpreter he is now and how he gained the knowledge of efficient practice he passes on his students.

Milan Vitek is known for his analytical exercises; how can you create these by yourself for your students?

I would like to go into a more detailed explanation of the practicing process itself. One of the complicated aspects of violin playing is having a good intonation. How do we achieve that more effectively with a good practice process?

Even if it sometimes helps to separate the left and right hand so you can simplify and slow down your movements with the bow arm to concentrate on your left arm you should still be able to keep a good quality sound when practicing intonation. Our brain automatizes repeated actions into habits and that's why we should never stop focusing on the sound. How do we achieve having a good sound even when we practice intonation??

How can we make our practice more ergonomic? Sometimes we are doing too many extra movements that are unnecessary and can lead to overusing certain parts of our body resulting in pain. How do we make ourselves realize these things even before pain occurs? There have been a couple of times when I put my violin down after a practice session and realized that certain tendons of my arm were aching. Is taking breaks saving us from getting pain? What should a good practice schedule look like? Is it important to keep routines?

For how many minutes is our brain able to concentrate fully? Should we customize our practicing routine based on that?

A very difficult obstacle to overcome is the bad habits we picked up when we were younger and which our previous teachers didn't warn us about. We are so used to them that we don't even realize we are doing them. It can be anything from keeping a bad posture to moving in a way that negatively affects our sound. How do we get rid of these? How do we make ourselves conscious about every movement we are doing? Sometimes we tend to change our setting onto autopilot and stop being conscious of what we are doing, how do we prevent that?

Another very important aspect of practicing is keeping a mindset that allows us to make mistakes and try to fix them, instead of fearing them. How does prof. Vitek make his students change their mindset if they lack confidence? How not to get frustrated with us, when the journey to achieve what we want takes longer than we expected?

In our practice rooms we should keep in mind, that we are going to perform the piece on stage for audience in the future. How do we prepare for a different kind of focus? When is the right time to start playing by heart? Should you start memorizing a piece from the beginning of the practice process or should you first let your ears and hands process the piece and start memorizing it when your interpretation of the piece reached a certain level? What are all the tools we can use for confidently memorize a piece? How to develop the best way that suits you as an individual? Are there more ways to prevent memory slips?

I would also like to focus on the time spent practicing but not playing. What is all the information you should get to know before you start to play a new piece? Is it good to listen to recordings to get to know different ways of playing a certain work or should you just start with the score, knowledge of the composer that you have from music history and study the piece just by yourself, so you achieve a more authentic interpretation without getting influenced from what you heard from other players? Is it more beneficial to practice for a shorter time but to go to concerts often and get inspired by experiencing music? Does it work just by spending a lot of time inside a practice room without getting any inspiration from the outside? Is this mindset sustainable?

The main aim of this thesis is to describe ways of efficient practice and how to stay motivated. I am very grateful that I can reflect on this matter with the help of prof. Vitek's methods. He has many years of experience both as an interpret and as a teacher. Every musician applies different methods of how to practice, I would like to not only describe a way of practicing, but also offer different tools, so any individual person could choose their best way based on this research.

Methodology

I am going to use various research methods to get closer to answering my questions listed in the introduction. I am going to write a short biography of Milan Vitek to find out what made him become the interpret and pedagogue he is now.

Since all of Milan Vitek's teachers were students of Otakar Sevcik and Vitek often uses his exercises while teaching I am also going to include Sevcik's biography to map what led to the process of writing the exercises. The following chapter will be devoted to Sevcik's exercise books and their use according to him and his students.

There is no better way to find out about teacher's methodology than to interview his students. I am going to dedicate two chapters to interviews with two different generations of his students and summarize them.

To show what specific impact this thesis had on the sounding part of my exam, I am also going to include an analysis of a lesson with Milan Vitek on Poulenc violin sonata that is part of my master concert programme.

Biography of Milan Vitek

Childhood and studies at Conservatory in Brno

Milan Vitek was born 30th August 1938 in Ostrava. He started to play the violin when he was six years old under a pedagogical guidance of Josef Povysil, who was a pupil of Otakar Sevcik. He has very nice memories of that time.

“My first teacher, Josef Povysil, was a concertmaster in the opera orchestra in the town where I was born, in Ostrava. His lessons were quite unusual; he treated me as a friend despite my age of 6. The lessons were longer than usual - two, three, four hours at a time once a week - but full of fun and very enjoyable. Because of that, my practicing time was also very playful and fun, and I didn't have the feeling that I had to practice. I looked forward to taking the violin and just enjoying it. I studied with him for six or seven years. I think generally the first teachers you have are the ones who have the most extreme influence on you. They can give you so much or they can somehow discourage you. That was an essential time for me.”¹

In 1963 he started studying at Brno Conservatory under prof. Julius Remes. He learned most of his technical skills from Remes, who was known for creating short exercises for students to solve their technical difficulties. His way of teaching was very analytical. Milan Vitek is very fond of his approach and uses similar methods with his students as well.

At the Conservatory in Brno Milan had opportunities to grow broadly as a musician in a very natural way, not only did he have lessons with prof. Remes, played chamber music and orchestra, but he also naturally developed in other disciplines such as sight-reading. “Every week, I and my very good friend Marco Hondas borrowed sheet music for many sonatas and other pieces for violin and piano from the library. Every Sunday we were playing them since early morning until our neighbors started knocking on the radiators to make us stop playing. This was the best way how to get to know new repertoire, because we always chose works, we hadn't known from before. It was very intelligent, but entertaining time for us.”

¹ Oberlin Conservatory Magazine Home: String Theory: They Are Winners Already

One of his first memories has rather humorous character. The first time when he played for an audience in the hall of the Conservatory, he was observing in the mirror that was opposite to him whether his knees were visibly shaking. To his relief it wasn't visible.

In his student years at the Conservatory, he also got to know his first wife, Veruska, born Plackova. They first met when Milan was 19 and was playing the violin together with the Choir of the University in Brno where Veruska studied Pharmacy. They got married in 1957.

Studies at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague and early career

Milan started studying with prof. Jaroslav Pekelsky at The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in 1960. He describes him as a pedagogue that taught students how to be self-sufficient. Prof. Straus, also a pupil of Mr. Pekelsky said: “The main characteristic of his violin teaching would be giving his students the freedom of discovery by themselves even if it might lead to dead ends, especially with stubborn students, knowing that this was the only way how to make students interpret music truly and authentically. Each student in his class was unique in their own way. There were no unifying aspects that would lead to an acknowledgment of them being students of the same pedagogue. Every student was allowed to have their own creative approach in within they worked on a certain repertoire reaching a required level of performance. The pedagogue was in this case a mirror reflecting unexperienced students which was supervising and guarding student’s development without interfering when not necessary but didn’t tolerate any major misinterpretations of pieces.”²

In 1959 Milan received a price at the Jacques Thibault competition in Paris. The path to this victory wasn’t easy at all. First, he had to win the national round in Czechia, which he managed and was sent to Paris. One week before the competition he was told by the state that he wasn’t allowed to go to France in the end and that there wouldn’t be any Czech citizen taking part in this competition. Milan decided to take a break from playing the violin for a couple of days and played tennis and table tennis instead. That led to him being in a completely different mental state when the regime decided to allow him to participate in the competition two days before the competition started. He was more relaxed, looking forward to play the pieces again, and that was one of the reasons of his successful participation. In 1961 he won the Llangollen Music Festival competition in Wales.

He finished his studies at The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in 1964. The programme of his exam concert consisted of a sonata and Three Madrigals by Bohuslav Martinu. He performed these pieces together with his colleagues violist Karel Rehak and pianist Jaroslav Kolar. “Our concert was right after a new permission to play Bohuslav Martinu pieces in Czechia. We thought we would premiere the Three Madrigals, but in the end, it was the members of the Smetana quartet that premiered it two weeks before us” says Milan Vitek.

² Hudební rozhledy: časopis pro hudební kulturu.

In his student years Milan was already a member of Trio Pro Camera together with pianist Zdenek Kozina and cellist Ladislav Pospisil.³

He was also one of the founding members of the Prague chamber soloists led by a conductor, Vaclav Neumann, who was a member of the Czech philharmonics and a violist of the Smetana quartet. The members of the Prague chamber soloists were mostly members of the Prague symphony orchestra FOK. Seven violinists, two violists, two cellists, a double bass player and harpsichord player Zuzana Ruzickova. Section leaders were Milan Vitek, Eva Cervenkova, Hubert Simacek, Jan Hollinger and Japanese double bass player Asahiko Eguchi.

The first performance of this orchestra took place on 20th January 1963. The programme played in this concert was Händel's fifth concerto grosso D major from opus 6, concerto for harpsichord g minor by Jiri Benda, Invention no. 3 for strings by Jan Klusak written in 1962 and Divertimento for strings by Bela Bartok. The concert was very successful, which was proven by a critique by Zdenek Candra in the magazine Hudebni rozhledy.

“Prague chamber soloists enriched our musical life playing on a very high artistic level. The repertoire chosen was very interesting for the audience. Already with their first performance they proved to be one of the best Czech and even European chamber orchestras.”⁴

At this time Milan was also part of Laterna Magika, an ensemble that was created to represent Czechoslovakia at the Expo 1958 in Brussels. The stage director Alfred Radok and set designer Josef Svoboda believed in combining film projection and live performance. This performance in 1958 had enormous success and the ensemble continues to create these unique mixed productions up until now. Milan Vitek took part as a violinist in Otvirani studanek, which was premiered on 27.5.1966 by Milos Forman and Alfred Radok.⁵

In 1967-1968 Milan Vitek was a member of Czech nonet, an ensemble founded in 1924 by Emil Leichner, that became the residential ensemble of the Czech philharmonic orchestra in 1951. Besides standard classical works this ensemble was also performing contemporary pieces. This meant broadening of the repertoire for a nonet ensemble, because many composers at that time were asked to write music for this formation. One of the pieces commissioned by the ensemble was Nonet no. 2 H 374 by Bohuslav Martinu.

³ Hudební rozhledy: časopis pro hudební kulturu, 165.

⁴ Hudební rozhledy: časopis pro hudební kulturu. Praha: Panorama, 205.

⁵ Hudební rozhledy: časopis pro hudební kulturu. Praha: Panorama, 413.

He completed this piece in 1959, the final year of his life, and the piece was premiered posthumously at the Salzburg festival and came out in print in autumn of the same year. ⁶

There was an article published in the magazine *Hudebni rozhledy* in 1974 for the fifty years anniversary of the Czech nonet. "Czech composers dominate in the world composition scene undoubtedly in one discipline writing nonets." There were many nonets created for the Czech nonet. The pieces would have never been written without the Czech nonet and Czech nonet would never keep its existence for long without performing these pieces. Today there is more than 150 pieces commissioned for the Czech nonet not only written by Czech composers, but also from composers based abroad like Ruzinski, Kornhaut, Osterc and Lutoslawski. One of the composers that wrote a piece for Czech nonet was Sergej Prokofiev, who wrote a quintet for violin, oboe, clarinet, viola and double bass in 1932. ⁷

At the time Milan Vitek was playing in the ensemble it consisted of these members: Milan Vitek –violin, Milan Heřmánek–viola, Rudolf Lojda – cello, Václav Fuka – double bass, Jiří Válek – flute, Karel Lang –oboe, Václav Kyzivát – clarinet, Jaroslav Řezáč – bassoon, Arnošt Charvát –French horn.

When Milan was getting home from one of the rehearsals of Czech nonet, something very alarming happened. Suddenly a tank appeared, coming from Hradebni street in front of the bus Milan was traveling with. The bus driver was forced to abruptly stop the bus, the passengers fell, and Milan Vitek's violin was smashed into pieces.

Milan, his wife Vera and their at that time four-year-old son Tomas migrated the same year of this accident. Their leave was possible also thanks to John Winter, director of the Royal Danish opera in Copenhagen. His goal was to help musicians in occupied Czechoslovakia, because of that he made a request to the Czech concert agency Pragokonzert to organize an audition for the alternating concertmaster position. Milan won this audition and accepted his place in the orchestra. His departure for Denmark meant that he could not enter Czechoslovakia until the velvet revolution in 1989. If he did so, it would mean that he and his wife would get arrested for about a year. Until this day Milan doesn't have a Czech citizenship. He often mentions how painful it was for him to fly above Czechia to Israel in the eighties, seeing the Lysa hora mountain from the plane, knowing, he isn't allowed to enter his birth land without serious consequences affecting him and his whole family.

⁶ KOVAŘÍK, Vladimír a Jaroslav MIHULE. *Hudební výchova pro první až čtvrtý ročník*, 347.

⁷ *Hudební rozhledy: časopis pro hudební kulturu*.

Early career in Denmark, member of a Czech quartet

Milan received a very warm welcome from his colleagues in Denmark. "I was happy working in the orchestra (Royal Danish opera) I had many friends there, the atmosphere was very friendly and welcoming from the beginning. I never understood the fact, that in some orchestras, there are players, that feel worthless, because they dreamed about something in their eyes "bigger" but ended up in an orchestra and take it as a failure. A musician's whole life is chamber music, even if a soloist is playing a solo concerto with orchestra, it's still chamber music, not very different from playing in a string quartet. It's basically almost no difference. In an orchestra, you have to play with the same energy and initiative as if you play solo. I don't like to look at bored faces in some orchestras. Nobody is worth less, but sometimes people in orchestras see themselves that way. It's human stupidity They are making their own life difficult, it's nonsense. Orchestra players often complain about conductors but a disagreement with a conductor can't make you lose the joy of playing beautiful music."

Shortly after Milan came to Copenhagen, they established a piano trio with John Winther and cello section leader of the Danish opera, Piere-Rene Honens. The trio was called Winther trio. In 1971 the trio had to stop their artistic cooperation, because John Winther left for Australia to become the director of the Opera in Sydney.

In 1972 Milan accepted an offer to be one of the members of Czech quartet that had its seat in Canada. The quartet was established partly by the former members of quartet Hlavniho mesta Prahy. (The Quartet of the Capital City Prague). This quartet was also the residency ensemble of McMaster University in Hamilton in Ontario province. Milan was at the same time also a concertmaster of Hamilton symphonic orchestra. This was the most intense and difficult period in Milan Vitek's career. "We had a tour in Austria and Germany at all the famous concert halls. I had never played in a string quartet before, I had to study about forty quartets that we performed. Besides playing in a quartet I was also teaching at Hamilton university. It was a crazy period for me. I was often falling asleep having my violin in hand. We also had a tour in Toronto performing a programme named The History of String quartet where we played pieces from Haydn to Bartok." The quartet members were: Milan Vitek-first violin, Rudolf Kalup-second violin, Jaroslav Karlovský-violin, Zdeněk Koníček-cello.

Milan returned to Denmark in 1974, same year he also accepted a place at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. He founded a string orchestra at the school touring in Scandinavia, England, Germany and Switzerland. World famous soloists as for example Yehudi Menuhin, Jean Pierre Rampal or Michel Debost were accompanied by the string orchestra.

In this period, he also founded a piano trio named Trio Pro Camera with a cellist Pierre Rene Honnens and a pianist Elisabeth Westenholz. This ensemble recorded Brahms' piano trios, Smetana's trio in g-minor, Mendelssohn piano trio d-minor. With the same name, but a different pianist, Bohumila Jedlickova, this ensemble recorded trio by Niels Wilhelm Gade and Peter Erasmus Lange-Müller. Milan Vitek cooperated with Pierre Honens until 1999.

In 1992 Milan started teaching at Musikhögskolan in Göteborg. He founded a string orchestra Camerata Romana in Sweden, which is currently named Camerata Nordica. This orchestra is known for its way of performing various works for orchestra without a conductor and by heart.

In 1993 Milan became a guest teacher at Oberlin College in Ohio for about a year. Some of his students from Scandinavia followed him to the U.S. to study in America for a year. Milan believes that getting to know new environment and a new perspective on life in a different country always has a positive impact on a student's development. "When you are abroad you have to process an incredible amount of information, you are a bit like a sponge that absorbs water. International students help students that are in their home country by bringing new impulses and inspiring them with their intensity of interest. I took seven students with me to Oberlin. I formed a chamber orchestra with both groups of students, from Oberlin and Scandinavia. We played for example Grieg's suite for string orchestra. Malin Broman was one of my students from Sweden, I made her play the viola for the first time in Oberlin.

In 1999 Milan Vitek received the Knight's Cross of Dannebrog, 1st Class, by Her Royal Highness Margrethe II, the Queen of Denmark, for his outstanding contributions to Danish cultural life.

Professor at Oberlin College

On 1st July 2001 Milan became a professor at Oberlin College in Ohio, where he was a guest teacher in 1993-94. Vitek describes his beginnings “Oberlin College is a very liberal, progressivist institution. It was already proven in the past by its act of solidarity towards teachers affected by McCarthyism that were suspected of being communists and suspended from universities in California. Oberlin College employed these people. When I found out that there was a position of violin teacher opened in 2001 I didn’t hesitate at all and accepted the offer, because after the experiences from previous years I was more than happy for this opportunity. I wasn’t allowed to teach in Denmark after the age of 65, but I didn’t want to quit my teaching job yet.”

An article was printed in Oberlin Conservatory Magazine in 2001 in which Milan’s colleague, prof. Dodson very positively comments on Milan coming to Oberlin.

“Oberlin is pleased to welcome Professor Vitek to its string faculty. His career has been illustrious in both performance and pedagogy. Our students will benefit greatly from his presence. “⁸

⁸ Oberlin Conservatory Magazine Home: Violinist Milan Vitek Joins String Faculty

Otakar Sevcik

Otakar Sevcik was born 22nd March 1852 in Horazdovice. His father, Josef Sevcik, studied at the Prague Organ School under Robert Führer. He was also educated in violin playing by Wilhelm Happ. ⁹Otakar's mother was Josefa Sevcikova, born Pflanzerova. Otakar was introduced to the world of music by his father. When he was five years old, his father started teaching him to sing. At the age of seven he was fully capable of sightreading any music and singing it. He also started playing the piano at the age of seven. ¹⁰

After all this proper preparation, he started playing the violin-also as seven-years-old. At the age of nine he played his first solo performance where he interpreted Kalivoda's variations. In 1861 he started studying at the Academic Highschool in Prague, while singing in choir of Krizovnický klášter. Despite his father's disapproval, he decided to concentrate all his energy fully on violin playing at the age of fourteen. He started studying at the Prague Conservatoire, financially supported by Ferdinand Flamminger. ¹¹

During the first couple of months at the Prague Conservatoire he was led by prof. Antonín Sitt. Later he was taught by Antonín Benewitz, who helped him improve significantly within a year. He was able to play Paganini's caprices at a very young age.

In 1868 he was introduced to the famous violinist Ferdinand Laub. On 21st July 1870, he had the final concert of his studies at the Conservatoire where he performed Beethoven's violin concerto D major op.61 with a cadenza by Josef Joachim. (skola4) Dr. Ludevít Procházka referred to his concert in magazine "Hudební listy":

"Violin, prof. Benewitz . He always has many students in his studio and many of them make a very good name for themselves. Today, he can also proudly present the astonishing skills of his students to the public. There are 14 students performing in total. Otakar Sevcik from Horazdovice (who played Beethoven's concerto) made the best impression not only by his excellent technical qualities, but also the artistic ones. His beautiful, always clear, and concrete sound mirrors his soul overflowing with emotions and his artistic aspirations. He overcame technical obstacles almost with playfulness and ease, especially Joachim's cadenza was brilliant. If the audience wasn't told

⁹ Mojzís Otakar Sevcik a česká houslová škola, page 4

¹⁰ Nopp, Profesor | *Otakar Sevcik-Zivot a dilo*, page 22

¹¹ Mojzís, *Otakar Sevcik a česká houslová škola*, page 4

not to show any reaction because of pedagogical reasons they would surely thank for his performance by thunderous ovation.”¹²

His studies in Prague were followed by him accepting a position in Mozarteum Salzburg, both as a concertmaster and a pedagogue. His solo career continued: for example, one of his important concerts took place on February 13th, 1873, in Vienna, Bösendorfer hall, and it was followed by a very positive critique written by Eduard Hanslick. In the same year he was offered a concertmaster position in “Prozatimni divadlo” in Prague by Bedrich Smetana which he also accepted. Not long after he became concertmaster in Komische Oper Wien where he was alternated by his very good friend Josef Hellmesberger.

In 1874 Sevcik left Vienna, after realizing that he was not happy anymore with the repertoire played by the Komische Oper Wien. At that time his source of income was a series of concerts in Czech cities, where he played together with a cellist Děpolt Krečmann, his good friend who used to be his colleague in the Mozarteum orchestra in Salzburg.¹³

He didn't stay long in his homeland because the same year he became the concertmaster in the Charkov National Opera. To his disappointment, the opera wasn't fully established yet. Performances took place in rooms not adequate for their purposes. These were hard times for the young, twenty-two-year-old Sevcik. He didn't stay long and with the help of his cousin, Samarin, he left for Moscow. He had a series of concerts in spas and smaller cities.

1st September 1874 he became a professor at Kyiv Conservatoire, however, he continued his career as an interpret giving performances in Moscow and St.Petersburg.

In 1877 he started working on his books about violin technique. In 1881 he finished his *Opus 1*. book. His success as a violin professor was enormous. In 1892 he finished *Opus 2*. He was also offered the position of the director of Kyiv Conservatoire under one condition: that he would convert to Orthodox Christianity. He refused and returned to the Czech Republic.¹⁴

Between the years 1892 and 1903 he was a professor at the Conservatoire in Prague. One of his most famous students from this period was Jan Kubelik.

¹² Nopp, Otakar Sevcik-Život a dilo, page 25

¹³ Nopp, Otakar Sevcik-Život a dilo, page 29

¹⁴ Mojzsis, *Otakar Sevcik a ceska houslova škola*, 4

Not only was Kubelik a proof that Sevcik's methods led to excellent results. He also became a world-known pedagogue. However, Otakar's days as an interpret slowly ended. His last official performance took place in the Rudolfinum in Prague in March 1893 where he played Henri Viextemps' first violin concerto in E major.

In 1900-1901 his other famous students, Jaroslav Kocian and Marie Hertsova, finished their studies with a great success. He became the head of the string department of the conservatoire and his teaching method became the official method of the institution. His books about violin technique were published by Bosworth Publishing House.

Although Sevcik left the Prague Conservatoire in 1903 it definitely didn't mean the end of his pedagogical career. He moved back to Písek and started teaching students on a private basis. In 1909 he accepted a professor position at the Academy in Vienna. To keep his connection to Czechia he commuted to Vienna from Písek once a week. He still had a lot of students from abroad who kept coming to him to Písek. He also created a summer masterclass there. Even Alexander Glazunov sent him a letter once, asking him to accept one of the students of St. Petersburg, Efrem Zimbalist, with the request to accept him to the summer masterclass.¹⁵

In this period of his life, he had an enormous number of great students from all around the world. Everyone wanted to study with this master of violin playing and pedagogy. In 1920 Otakar Sevcik accepted the position of director at the Ithaca violin school, and he taught there for a year and a half before returning to Czechia. He celebrated his 70th birthday in 1922 with a concert organized for him in Obecni dum in Prague. In 1923 he went to teach to Chicago and New York. After his return he resumed working on his methodologic books in Písek, while he continued teaching students privately. In 1931 he went to the US for the third time, he was teaching in Boston and New York.¹⁶

In 1933 he didn't listen to his doctor's advice not to travel because of his poor health and went to teach at the Guildhall School of Music in London. Traveling wasn't very good for his health, and he died not long after, on January 18th, 1934.

¹⁵ Nopp, Otakar Sevcik-Život a dilo, 43

¹⁶ Mojzis, Otakar Sevcik a ceska houslova škola, 6

Summary of Sevcik's methods

To have a better understanding of why and how Sevcik discovered his method I would like to cite an article he wrote in 1901 addressed to a journalist from the "Dalibor" newspaper.

*"Dear Mr. editor,
You asked me to describe the origin and development of my violin methodology books.*

In 1870 I finished my studies. After my first public performance in Salzburg, I realized that I must still work very hard to achieve technical perfection. I repeated practicing all the material that was used to teach at the Prague Conservatoire at that time, but my technical limitations still didn't disappear. I couldn't afford to search for contemporary methodology; therefore, the only option was to write various exercises that would help my fingers by myself.

My work on this subject would never reach its size if I didn't, by coincidence, go abroad, because of teaching, and if I didn't happen to have an eye defect that made me live in unbearable pain for 21 years. Creating technical studies made me forget the enormous pain and was the only source of light and happiness in my life in those miserable times. It took me thirty years to finish the work." ¹⁷

First, he started with the left-hand technique. He collected all his material and created *Opus 1. The school of Violin Technique*, consisting of four books:

Book 1: Exercises in 1st position

Book 2: Exercises in the 2nd - 7th positions.

Book 3: Exercises on the shift combining the various positions

Book 4: Exercises in double, triple, and quadruple stoppings, pizzicato, and harmonics.

Later he created exercises for the right hand, which was the basis for his *Opus 2. The School of Bowing Technique* which consisted of six books that contained 4000 various bowings. It took Sevcik 12 years to finish this book. (1880-1892) ¹⁸

¹⁷ Nopp, Otakar Sevcik-život a dilo, 38

¹⁸ Vymetal, Otakar Sevcik, a jeho houslova metoda, 36

The school of bow technique was followed by its second part, *40 Variations Opus 3*.

Opus 4, *Expansions of the Fingers* was published in 1999, it was only accessible for Sevcik's purposes as a manuscript until then.

Opus 5, was a study of Dont's 24 caprices

Opus 6, *School for Beginners* consists of 7 books focused on various aspects of violin playing. A revolutionary aspect of this book is undoubtedly its chromatic nature. Instead of practicing in scales, Sevcik is teaching exercises in four different tetrachords of one kind at a time, which prevents confusion in where to place the fingers.¹⁹

Opus 7 is named *Preparation for Trill Exercises and Development in Double Stopping*.

Opus 8, *Changes of positions and preparatory scales studies*, gives a violinist ease and freedom in vertical movement on the fingerboard.

Opus 9, *Preparatory Exercises in double-stopping for the violin*, contains 58 short exercises in thirds, sixths, octaves and tenths transposed to various tonalities from C major.

Opus 10, *Czech Dances* is mostly famous for one of the dances "the girl with the blue eyes" a technically demanding piece based on a Czech folk song.

Opus 11 *School of intonation on a Harmonic basis* was published in New York 1922.

Opus 12-15 are named *Virtuoso schools* and are used in advanced level of violin playing.

Opus 16, *School of Interpretation for the violin* consists of 45 studies on various pieces.

¹⁹ Nopp, Otakar Sevcik-život a dílo, 131

Sevcik also wrote many studies on important concertos and other works for violin to achieve technical ease and perfection to be able to perform a piece musically.

Opus. 17 – studies of H. Wieniawski concerto d minor

Opus. 18- studies of Brahms D major violin concerto

Opus. 19 – studies of Tchaikovsky violin concerto D major

Opus. 20 - studies of Paganini concerto D major

Opus. 21 - studies of Mendelssohn violin concerto e-minor

Opus 25 - studies of Joachim's cadenza to Brahms violin concerto D major

Opus 26- studies of Kreutzer Caprices, studies of Dvorak concerto a-minor

Josef Vymetal describes in his book, *Otakar Sevcik and his violin method*, what makes Sevcik methods revolutionary. He refers to the fact that Sevcik's methods develop all technical aspects of violin playing simultaneously, so the student isn't developing only in one direction.

The transition between different levels is smooth, Sevcik isn't jumping from an easy exercise straight to a difficult one but adds many steps in between.²⁰

Stepan Suchy, a student of Sevcik, described difficulties that can arise while using of Sevcik's methods.

“Many teachers complain that teaching according to Sevcik's methods isn't easy. It's natural because there are no universal rules to use his methods. It differs every time depending on individuality, abilities, and skill level of students. It's up to the teacher and his pedagogical skills to find a way how to apply Sevcik method to each student.”²¹

²⁰ Vymetal, *Otakar Sevcik a jeho houslova methoda*, 35

²¹ Vymetal, *Otakar Sevcik a jeho houslova methoda*, 38

Summary of interviews with Milan Vitek's former students I.

While Malin Broman (studied with MTV.) in 1987-1995) Per Enoksson (studied with M.V. in 1978-1982) Václav Dvořák (studied with M.V. 1997-2000) and Nikolaj Znaider (studied with M.V. in 1984-1994) don't remember the details of his teaching for the most part, interviews with them still provided valuable information and are worth mentioning. For more detailed description of his teaching, I will later present interviews with students that studied with him more recently. I found many similarities in the interviews with my respondents. Malin Broman and Nikolaj Znaider even used exact same words independently, when they both described Milan's personality as warm, intelligent, and genuine.

All respondents agree that Milan was giving each student extra care and was very generous with his time. "We could feel that the job of a violin teacher was very enriching for Milan and he was very enthusiastic about it, he gave us a lot of time and energy." Mentioned Malin Broman. Per Enoksson mentioned that he realized how lucky he was to have studied with Milan for four years before coming to Juilliard school of music, because the teachers in Juilliard did not take care of the students in the same way as Milan did. He described Milan as very hardworking, giving his students extra lessons all the time even in the summer. Nikolaj confirmed this with saying that he cared deeply about his students and everything he was doing. Václav Dvořák was even given extra piano accompaniment lessons secretly paid by Milan.

Not only he invested time and energy into his students, but he had also very family like approach. This was also confirmed by Per saying that he is dear to everyone who has studied with him. Malin says that he was like an extra father for her, and she owes him a big part of her life. Nikolaj describes him as not only a teacher, but also a friend, family member who couldn't be missing even at family events.

Very important aspect of his teaching is an ability to motivate students the best way possible. Václav Dvořák felt that every lesson motivated him to practice for the next lesson. Malin mentions that there was very positive atmosphere on each lesson and that Milan required a lot, but he believed that you can do anything. Per says that when he studied in Copenhagen students had tremendous respect of him, but nobody was frightened by him. "He had a philosophy that even when you get somewhere, you always have somewhere to go and how to develop more, but you can learn in a good way, you don't have to punish yourself for that. There will be always something,

you can learn every day and it's not good to be negative, because you will never get there, but you can still have a good life. "Nikolaj claims that Milan helped him to build him a very good discipline, but in a very warm way. He made a promise that he would practice every day two hours, when he was 9.

Milan Vitek often uses additional analytical exercises based on technical problems his students struggle with. Malin Broman confirmed this fact by telling me that when she wasn't able to play a passage in a concerto, he would make an exercise for her which was even harder than the passage so when she returned to the original part of the piece where she had had difficulties, it would feel very easy. Per Enoksson added that he had to adjust his bow arm when he studied in Copenhagen and Milan gave him also many helpful exercises to change the way he used his right arm. Nikolaj remembers that they played many Sevcik and Flesch exercises, but "in a fun way".

For Milan it's also important that his students are not only blindly listening to his commands, but also know why he asks them to do what he asks them to do. Per said that Milan knew exactly what each student needed and made students be aware of what they were doing and why. He was also concentrating on the way his students were practicing. Per says he was even listening behind the door when they practiced if they were efficient or not. This made him know how to help students to develop.

Václav Dvořák mentions that his teaching was mostly based on experience and intuition, he wasn't trying to make a great method that was suitable for everyone, but on the contrary had a very individual approach to each student. Nikolaj says that he had a very good knowledge of psychology and used it in his teaching, he helped everyone to be the best version of themselves."

To summarize all the people interviewed mentioned his generosity of time, his family-like approach and endless enthusiasm while teaching.

Interviews with students of Milan Vitek II.

Nanna Treu²²

1. When and where did you study with Mr. Vitek, how did you get to about know him?

At a masterclass at my Suzuki music school when I was 15. Then later at the academy in Copenhagen where he teaches once a year. He then invited me to his Litomyšl masterclass, and I moved to Oberlin to study with him 2017-2019.

2. How was it to work with Mr. Vitek, how did he influence your development as a musician?

He didn't only teach me so much violin he also taught me how to think as a musician - gave me a perspective on the mental side of being a musician. Of being a human being. I wouldn't be a violinist without the lessons he taught me.

3. Did you go deep into the aspect of practising during your lessons, did you have to change something about the way you practised during your studies under him? Did you discuss the matter of slow practise?

This is the focus of Mr. Vitek's teaching and why his teaching is so important and sometimes different from other teachers. He takes the time to practice with you - and teaches you how to practice. To be your own teacher and to be efficient and knowledgeable about what you do and how you overcome challenges.

4. Did you overcome some technical obstacles thanks to Milan?

Intonation and spiccato.

5. What pieces did you study with him? Did he give you some short exercises to solve certain challenges in the pieces you studied? Can you name an example?

²² Treu, Nanna, Biography

Sibelius concerto. The way Mr. Vitek practice double stops is so helpful.

6. Did you discuss practising intonation with him?

Yes - he is really focused on this.

7. Did you get into the matter of memorising a piece? Did he give you some advice?

I studied after the Suzuki method as a child, so I have never experienced difficulties with memorising. But I know he helps students with it. And he demands playing by heart.

8. Did you have to work on some bad habits you had to remove? Can you describe shortly?

My bad habits have been moving too much while playing and turning my wrist a bit weird when playing by the froche. Mr. Vitek was persistent and kept noticing it and patiently kept working on it.

9. Can you describe Milan as a teacher? How did you feel on lessons?

Mr. Vitek makes you feel more empowered. He gives you the tools to improve and he believes in you, always. He is always on your side and you can trust him. That makes you relaxed and therefore able to learn quickly from him during lessons - even when he is pushing you.

10. Did you discuss the aspect of sound and its production? Did he have some advice about it?

Being relaxed and let the weight of the bow arm be the sound. Sound hasn't been my biggest issue - we focused more on other technical challenges.

11. Did you feel motivated after lessons with Milan Vitek?

Always. He is great at pushing you a lot while carrying you through it and doing it with a smile. So even after the toughest lessons you felt motivated.

12. Did he give you some advice on how to spend the time outside of a practise room so it can benefit you as a musician? (going to concerts, listening to music, working out)

Yes. He is very focused on only practicing 5 hours a day and then studying the score, exercising, mental training etc. to be able to get the most out of your practice session.

13. How did he approach making mistakes, if you made any, did he help you build up some confidence?

Mistakes doesn't matter. You can't live without making mistakes. If you learn from them, it is okay.

14. Did he help you prepare for some important audition/competition/concert?

Yes, auditions for schools and recitals.

15. Did you go through some Sevcik exercises? Did you play them systematically or just when you needed to focus on a certain aspect according to your repertoire?

Just when I needed a specific exercise for a specific task.

16. How did you approach a new piece when you started playing it on lessons?

Slowly and confident and correct. And studying the score carefully.

17. Do you have something else on mind about Milan you would like to mention?

He is the best teacher in the world - not only because of his knowledge but also because of his patience, his effort for every student he meets and his positive and loving spirit. No one can leave a lesson with Mr. Vitek without feeling inspired - in music and in life.

Elisabeth Castro Greenberg²³

1. When and where did you study with Mr. Vitek, how did you get to know him?

I studied with Milan at Oberlin Conservatory from 2010-2015 (ages 17-22), and I also attended his Litomyšl Masterclass in the Czech Republic in summer 2014.

2. How was it to work with Mr. Vitek, how did he influence your development as a musician?

He was an extraordinary influence and important guide for me not only in my musical journey but my development as a young adult. He inspired me to own my voice, be more confident, own up to my mistakes, and be bullish to improve myself. He would say with a smile “No, the music is not hard, it’s a challenge!”. He also always said to me that I had to have joy in my music and be optimistic. That every note is music, every moment is a gift. It was so moving and wise and shaped my worldview during those formative years.

3. Did you go deep into the aspect of practicing during your lessons, did you have to change something about the way you practiced during your studies under him? Did you discuss the matter of slow practice?

We did discuss how to practice optimally and how to structure practice, but not in depth. I think for me, our lessons were really a model for how to practice, and I learned a lot from our weekly workshopping. I think he would often be the one pushing me to not give up. “Do it again, do it again”. We would work on a short passage, and I would apply those steps to the rest of the page.

4. Did you overcome some technical obstacles thanks to Milan?

Certainly, I believe my performance skills and musicality improved greatly after working with Milan. He also really helped me with how to break chords smoothly and how to sustain longer musical lines.

5. What pieces did you study with him? Did he give you some short exercises to solve certain challenges in the pieces you studied? Can you name an example?

²³ Taste of Talent, Elisabeth Castro Greenberg

I studied many big pieces with him, including Vieuxtemps Concerto, Mendelssohn Concerto, Dvorak Concerto, and the Sibelius Concerto. We also did several sonatas, including a few Brahms sonatas, Faure, Janacek, and Ysaye.

He did give me several short exercises, including Paganini and other etudes to help me with challenges. He always said, “everything must be musical - even scales, even etudes”, and I had to also memorize everything. “Only then the music will come!”

6. Did you discuss practicing intonation with him?

Sure, good intonation was non-negotiable. Especially in my early years we would spend sometimes the majority of my lesson playing chords and listening for intonation. He made his standards very clear - it must be in tune!

7. Did you get into the matter of memorizing a piece? Did he give you some advice?

I was naturally very good at memorization, so he didn't share advice on how to memorize as mentioned above, though, he asked me to memorize absolutely everything because my challenge was getting out of my own head, so memorization allowed me to be freer.

8. Did you have to work on some bad habits you had to remove? Can you describe shortly?

My left pinky was very weak when we first started working together, and I often let it curl up into my hand while using other fingers. He helped me work on strengthening it by focusing on hand framing (by doing lots and lots of octaves) and practicing vibrato.

I think I would also give up too early when things were hard, and he was insistent on continuing on, that I could do it with more work.

9. Can you describe Milan as a teacher? How did you feel on lessons?

Milan was an amazing teacher. I believe he was very intuitive and changed his style to suit the student. He often used humor and fantastic metaphors to make his points. In lessons I felt very safe and supported, but also pushed to be my very best.

10. Did you discuss the aspect of sound and its production? Did he have some advice about it?

This was our greatest focus. He worked with me constantly on sound production, intensity, and quality. He had me sing my part aloud to find the line, he would even sing with me. And he talked to me a lot about where in the bow I would be playing a passage and how much bow I was using.

11. Did you feel motivated after lessons with Milan Vitek?

Yes! I would always walk away with a sense of clarity and energy to keep working.

12. Did he give you some advice on how to spend the time outside of a practice room so it can benefit you as a musician? (going to concerts, listening to music, working out)

Sure! I was a double degree student, and he was very supportive of me expanding my mind outside of the practice room. He encouraged us to attend concerts, lectures, and to exercise frequently so our bodies were strong enough to handle the athleticism of violin-playing.

13. How did he approach making mistakes, if you made any, did he help you build up some confidence?

When I made mistakes, I think his response depended on the kind of mistake. Mistakes that came from a lack of focus or discipline were not tolerated, and he would call me out right away. But small mistakes he was understanding about, especially when we were workshopping something new or he had just given me a new direction to incorporate. He got to know his students very well and knew what they were capable of.

Even so, I felt safe to make mistakes and take risks in our lessons, which was important for me. He would often sing loudly along with my playing and wave his arms to encourage me to give more to the phrase and be more confident. I responded well to that!

14. Did he help you prepare for an important audition/competition?

Yes, he helped me prepare for a few different competitions, often taking extra time to give me more lessons or help look at the recordings I made to ensure their quality. He was very dedicated and generous in this way.

15. Did you go through some Sevcik exercises? Did you play them systematically or just when you needed to focus on a certain aspect according to your repertoire?

Yes, we would pull out exercises as needed for the pieces I was learning.

16. How did you approach a new piece when you started playing it on lessons?

I don't really remember. I think it was on me to come up with my first pass at what I thought would be the right bowings and fingerings. Then I would come in for my first lesson on the piece, and he would gently correct me. I will say he even had a high standard for the first lesson on a piece of music. I sometimes would slack off with the first lesson, thinking "well it's my first time with this piece, we're starting from scratch". But he knew what I was capable of and would communicate disappointment if my first attempt was too poor.

17. Do you have something else on mind about Milan you would like to mention?

I just want to mention that his guidance and support were so important to my musical development and general wellness in the conservatory. I sustained a violin-related injury early on - in my first 6 months at school. He was so supportive and drove me to a few doctors appointments to see specialists who could help (I didn't have a car). He was patient and kind, and after my wrist surgery and taking a long time off of violin, he stuck with me in the recovery. He helped me have the confidence to keep on and I ended up coming back stronger than ever and earning my degree. I am forever grateful to him for his dedication and encouragement.

Amie Weiss²⁴

1. When and where did you study with Mr. Vitek, how did you get to about know him?

I studied with him at Oberlin Conservatory from 2001-2004 and 2 summers at Litomyšl International Violin Course.

2. How was it to work with Mr. Vitek, how did he influence your development as a musician?

He influenced me enormously by guiding me toward autonomy, showing me how to approach any score or violinistic challenge in a methodical, logical manner. At the same time, his magnanimity of spirit, vivacious curiosity towards things great and small and deep attention towards the sublime in all aspects (from mundane work to interpretation) were also transformative. Studying with him was a continual invitation to excel musically and psychologically -- and to relish the pursuit of excellence.

In this vein, his dispassionate judgment and emphasis on the work rather than the current condition of a piece is a telling approach of his that remains with me always: after playing through an entire movement or piece, no matter how the performance went, he would say thoughtfully "Alright," and then: "Let's work!"

3. Did you go deep into the aspect of practising during your lessons, did you have to change something about the way you practised during your studies under him? Did you discuss the matter of slow practise?

Yes absolutely, this was one of the most revolutionary features of studying with Milan. From those years, I took away a firm confidence about how to approach any challenging passage or score, no matter what genre. I don't know how he managed, while sticking rather punctually to his hours, to work in such minute detail through every kind of repertoire. He demonstrated and invited me to try a myriad of incredibly logical ways to practice any possible technical issue.

I believe this approach is why his students sound very different from each other -- this truly fosters autonomy and artistry, as it allows his students to

²⁴Helicon artists, Amie Weiss

successfully develop their own particular voice. I think this is also why we often saw huge transformations in students within a year of joining his studio.

4. Did you overcome some technical obstacles thanks to Milan?

Definitely yes, due to the above.

Another component to add is that Milan seemed fearless to me. He seemed to find useless and unhelpful the typical insecurities musicians grapple with -- this was infectious and opened new possibilities in my mind. I began to realize what a drain on energy it was to focus on my shortcomings and to strive for a more dispassionate approach. Extremely influential in my own teaching now!

5. What pieces did you study with him? Did he give you some short exercises to solve certain challenges in the pieces you studied? Can you name an example?

Among others, I studied solo Bach, Ysaye, Berio; Sibelius, Szymanowski, Britten, Korngold concerti; Beethoven sonatas, Paganini, other études and many contemporary pieces. There were always short exercises. As a specific example, for double stops, we often worked on moving from one to another extremely slowly, never letting the fingers lose a point of reference or jump from position to position. Focus on the bow and how it helps the left hand. Always approach from a note or two before, as how to arrive and depart well were the keys.

6. Did you discuss practising intonation with him?

Yes, often, even with de-tuned strings!

7. Did you get into the matter of memorising a piece? Did he give you some advice?

I recall him saying that through correct and sufficient practice pieces should be memorized without effort.

8. Did you have to work on some bad habits you had to remove? Can you describe shortly?

The worst habit was probably a lack of full vision on how to practice effectively! Everything else fit into that... It took some time after studying with Milan, but I did come to understand how to approach any score, whereas before there were many mysteries: some technical passages came with practice while some remained messy and I couldn't figure out how to improve them.

9. Can you describe Milan as a teacher? How did you feel on lessons?

Amazing. Milan managed the razor's edge between expectations of absolute mastery -- expectations reinforced by his impressive demonstrations -- great patience (if he saw effort) and enormous belief in the student. It was remarkable also to see that this was applied to every student within the studio, whether very compliant or rebellious.

The first question he ever asked me was "Why do you want to play the violin?" and continued to refer back to my answer throughout the years. I felt deeply supported with a horizon of possibilities that were up to me to realize. As a student, I felt the lesson with Milan was very intense with utter concentration necessary throughout.

10. Did you discuss the aspect of sound and its production? Did he have some advice about it?

Yes, absolutely: of course bow distribution, points of contact and a rich, singing projection. We worked on this particularly in scales.

Even more important was probably his questioning the reason for the sound and expression behind it. It doesn't look like much to write down, but the question I heard him pose at a masterclass once -- "Are you shining?" (if you know him, picture in his deep voice) -- was incredibly moving and had everything and nothing to do with sound. "Here, you must shine!"

11. Did you feel motivated after lessons with Milan Vitek?

Motivated, amazed, frustrated, inspired, grateful, worried, insecure, joyful, encouraged, discouraged, enlightened -- the typical ups and downs of a young musician -- but always deeply appreciative and grateful to be his student. Not a lesson transpired without reinforcing my deep love for him!

12. Did he give you some advice on how to spend the time outside of a practise room so it can benefit you as a musician? (going to concerts, listening to music, working out)

A bit verbally, but more than that, this was made clear by his (what I would describe as) rapturous appreciation of life and of everything I saw him come into contact with and his true, kind attention to all.

13. How did he approach making mistakes, if you made any, did he help you build up some confidence?

He did this in different ways, such as:

"Ok, let's work...!" -- after having given absolute attention to my performance -- no judgement otherwise and clearly relishing the work. It was wonderfully freeing and placed the emphasis on what to do rather than what I had done.

"It's very interesting work!" (said about tackling many of the most intractable issues)

"It's not a problem, it's a challenge."

"There's nothing to fear!"

Simple, well-timed encouragement and affection when needed.

And then, just occasionally, a "That's great!" when things improved.

14. Did he help you prepare for some important audition/competition/concert?

Yes, all of the above. In these cases, he would give me extra lessons, opportunities to run-through beforehand and was extremely encouraging.

15. Did you go through some Sevcik exercises? Did you play them systematically or just when you needed to focus on a certain aspect according to your repertoire?

I honestly don't remember! I have an abiding admiration for Sevcik and studied his exercises as a child and after conservatory, but I am not sure if Milan and I looked at any together.

16. How did you approach a new piece when you started playing it on lessons?

He usually asked me to learn an entire movement or étude the first week, then have it memorized at the second lesson. I don't recall whether or not he provided fingerings and bowings beforehand or afterwards -- I'm inclined to think afterwards, since he often liked students to come up with their own solutions, if they worked well.

17. Do you have something else on mind about Milan you would like to mention?

A kind, sublime, momentous force in my life. Just a beautiful human being. I keep his voice in my mind and music, draw on his wisdom, positivity and relishment of life itself. The relationship with him gives me courage as a musician.

Summary of interviews with Milan's recent students II.

As I supposed after studying Sevcik's method more specifically in one of the chapters of my thesis, Milan was using Sevcik's exercises only when his students were struggling with some specific challenge that he wanted them to work on to make them play certain repertoire with ease.

Milan himself was creating exercises that improved the way his students practiced. These analytical exercises were very similar to Sevcik's studies on different pieces Opus. 17-26. Elisabeth mentions that he often showed her exercises on a certain passage at the lesson, and she was supposed to apply it on the rest of the page later in her practice room. Amie Weiss mentioned that he showed her a „myriads of incredibly logical ways to practice any possible issue.”

All my respondents agreed that practicing was a centre of focus of Milan's teaching. He often took the time and patiently practiced with them on lessons to show them the right way to do it. Especially important was his encouragement and trust.

All respondents wrote that he was very focused on practicing intonation with his students. Nanna Treu mentions that especially his way of teaching how to play double stops in tune was very beneficial. Amie Weiss goes deeper in this matter by describing the process in depth.

“As a specific example, for double stops, we often worked on moving from one to another extremely slowly, never letting the fingers lose a point of reference or jump from position to position. Focus on the bow and how it helps the left hand. Always approach from a note or two before, as how to arrive and depart well were the keys.“

As Amie Weiss mentioned, Milan wanted his students to memorise majority of pieces they were playing. He required them to go through a movement of a piece in one week, work on it on a lesson and on the next lesson, the following week, he wanted them to play the piece by heart. Amie also remembered him saying that "through correct and sufficient practice pieces should be memorized without effort.“

Neither of my respondents had problems memorising a piece, maybe this was also caused by Milan requiring them to play by heart already on a second lesson on a piece. Both Elisabeth and Nanna confirmed that Milan wanted everything to be played by heart.

Nanna refers to achieving a good sound production according to Milan as "being relaxed and let the bow arm be the sound" Both Elisabeth and Amie mentioned the connection between human voice and imagination of the sound. The sound had to be "singing and shining" They also discussed with Milan how to achieve this idea with the right sounding point and bow distribution.

I would summarise Milan's mindset about mistakes in a following way: Mistakes are na act of the past, and we have to learn from them not to repeat them again in the future, but we should not carry on a shameful feeling because we made them. It's important to feel safe to make mistakes and take risks, especially on lessons. "There is nothing to fear, let's work."

My respondents had different habits to get rid of. Milan's strategy is to often remind the student about this unwanted habit in a persistent way, but with a lot of patience. Even when they felt that they wanted to give up, he persuaded them and made them believe, that they could overcome it with a little more work.

According to Nanna, Milan recommended a very focused practise, but not longer than five hours a day, so his students would have time to also study the scores, exercise, do mental training to be able to get the most out of their practise. He also encouraged them to attend concerts and lectures frequently.

Description of work process on the first movement of Poulenc violin sonata with Milan Vitek

I would like to describe one of my lessons with Milan Vitek on first movement of Poulenc violin sonata which took place October 15th, 2022.

(The violin part with marked fragments explained in this section can be found in the attachment section at the end of the thesis)

1 – I was advised to practise pizzicato with the bow to have a better idea of where to put my fingers

2 – first time: mostly working on intonation of following group of thirds, each third on one long bow, slowly transitioning to a faster tempo step by step, being reminded to keep the sound quality while increasing the tempo

2 a – concentrating on only marked two thirds (2a) practicing the connection between these two notes that I still didn't play in tune, analyzing the core of the problem, realizing, that I have to imagine better that the note f on the d string by first finger is only a half note distance to the second finger on a string, horizontally speaking, so there is no need to jump and drastically change the position of the left hand as used to do before

2 – second time: going back to 2, being encouraged to listen and have positive, helpful ears, and carefully concentrate on both intonation and sound while increasing tempo while playing the original bowings

3a – working on the right sound, practicing intonation slowly, being asked to articulate better

3 – working on note c, recommended to vibrate more and a bit wider followed by discussion about the piece in order to have the right character (sonata was composed in 1942-1943 as a tribute to Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca, who was assassinated by Nationalist forces at the beginning of Spanish Civil War) being asked which recordings I listened to, after responding I listened to Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Josef Suk, and others I was asked to listen to a recording of the sonata with Renaud Capucon and other French musicians. Later we talked about premiere of the sonata, which took place 21. June 1943

performed by Neveu Ginette and composer himself in Paris, I was supposed to find out if there is a recording available.

3a – practicing connection between the two first notes of the group of sixteen notes, slowly increasing tempo while keeping sound and good intonation

4 – Milan's advice was: "Every piece has its own spirit and our goal as interpreters is to find it. You can create a connection with the spirit by playing it slowly, discovering each interval with its importance, how they speak. It is crucial to listen to the intervals in a very slow tempo."

4a– practicing the connection between g and e-flat by playing the g on an upbow, repeating it on a downbow and on the same down bow sliding to the e, followed by upbow e-g, repeating this step couple of times, trying to realize and feel the motion, ideally breathing out on the downbow.

5 – I was told to play the last three notes very powerful as the peak of the phrase.

5a – I wasn't able to play this passage in tune, so I was asked which way I put the fingers on the string. The conclusion of our discussion was that I was trying to put all the fingers at the same time which was unnecessary and more difficult. Later we worked on repeating only the high b flat (fourth finger), slowly sliding to the d-flat on d string (first finger) and I was reminded to relax the fourth finger while putting the first finger on the string. After this step we practiced the transition from the first finger (d-flat), turning the arm towards my violin before to placing the fifth played by the second finger, relaxing the first finger while putting the second. I was asked to practice the whole passage this way, focusing mostly on having very secure feeling while placing the first finger. "If first finger is secure, everything will be in tune" I was asked once again to have a smoother transition step by step from slow to the original tempo.

6 – the last note of the accentuated eight notes was corrected to be slightly longer, not dotted as I played before.

7a – In order to play 7a fragment in tune and with a clear sound, I was asked to play it in first position, it helped a lot to the quality.

7 – I was advised not to lift the bow in the sixteenth break between start of seven and 7a, to not having to play too close to the frog, which would make the sound sloppy and uneven.

8- is an analogical place to 7, also not a good idea to lift the bow in the sixteen breaks.

9 – we spent a couple of minutes on practicing the right intonation of the pizzicatos with using slow bow strokes.

9a – we practiced the transition between these two double stops, especially positioning the third finger in relation to the fourth finger, keeping the fourth finger (b-flat) on the string, while repositioning the third finger from e-flat to c, to realize the distance fully and knowing exactly where to put the third finger.

10 – Milan’s words: “you have to realize it in fingers and your mind, the mind has to tell the fingers the right impulse where to move, it’s very important”

11 – I was given the advice to start the trills immediately.

12 – this was one of the places that took us very long time, I was told to play more pronounced and not to play double stops when there aren’t any, to achieve this I had to move the contact point of the bow (where the bow meets the strings) further from the frog, under the middle of the bow, also closer to the bridge.

13 – first, I was asked to repeat the first double stops (two bow strokes) to have a better sound, after repeating this a couple of times I was supposed to play only the first and third double stop of the bar a couple of times to have a better sound idea and better feeling of the phrase, later to add the double stop in the middle of these two notes, but not to compromise with the sound clarity.

14 – Milan recommended to vibrate every note of the phrase to keep a continuous melodic line.

15 – I was asked to correct intonation of the b in the end of this bar.

16 – I was reminded to keep the espressivo character of this phrase, not losing the tension and intensity.

16a – I was asked to keep a continuous vibrato to keep the intensity.

17 – first, it was recommended to me to practice this passage in double stops (first two and other two notes sounding together) with a very slow bow speed, later I was asked to play it in original bowing, but in a slower tempo, concentrating on articulation of each note, I was also told to keep the length of the last eighth note, but to place the main importance and weight on the first note of each group, I was also reminded not to use too much bow.

18 – I was advised not to use too much bow on each eighth note, so it doesn’t sound scratchy.

19 – I was told to read better what’s written in the score and start spiccato, widening the bow and doing more legato towards the end of the whole passage.

20 – I was asked to do more accurate character, as if something very depressing was happening in a real piano dynamic, also to not put any extra accents on the notes of this passage, but still have better sound quality on each upbow.

-later we were also working on the intonation, b flat was mostly too low, I was asked to temporarily replace b flat with a c for practice reasons, to gain a better orientation on the finger board and then just to play a tone under the c to hit the right spot for the b (to have the right shape and frame of the arm)

-to obtain a better colour, I followed the advice to play harmonics on the g.

21 – I was recommended to play second finger instead of the open string on the second of this fragment.

22 – for Milan's taste is a very good idea to add a glissando in between the two notes of this fragment.

23 – on the other hand I was advised to do a glissando only once in this part of the piece.

24a – this group of notes was very difficult for me to play in tune Milan's advice was: -to have more weight on the e string

- not to stretch the fingers, but change position fully

-not to lift the bow while doing the transitions in between the notes

-practicing only two double stops at a time

24 – I was recommended to follow the line of the phrase, the bigger the interval is, the more importance it has.

-I was reminded not to lift the bow between the notes and not to use too much of the bow.

24b – I was asked to practice this place analogically to 24 a.

25 – I was reminded to play the sixteen notes short and fast to achieve the right character.

26 – this part was supposed to be played with more playful character “singing and dancing on the strings”.

27 – This was one of the challenging places:

First, I was asked to play in much slower tempo, but to have the “Rude” character as it says in the music, to achieve this I was advised to play almost sul ponticello, very close to the bridge with a shorter bow stroke, using the middle part of the bow. I was asked to avoid hitting other strings to keep clarity of the sound and not to play double stops where they are not written.

I was also recommended to use the wrist of my right hand more actively and keep my elbow in the height of the d string. Milan was very patient even when it didn't sound ideal after these changes and created a little exercise for me,

which consisted of repeating only three notes: a-on g string, d on a string and f on d string, while having very grounded feeling of the right arm not lifting the bow from the strings at all and having left hand ready with all three notes. I was asked to do a little homework and practice the whole passage accordingly.

28 – I was told to play the final three notes of this phrase as articulated as possible and practice them first in slower tempo and slowly speeding it up while keeping the same clear articulation.

29 – I was asked to change a fingering to second and third finger-first double-stop and first and second finger-second double-stop so I could achieve better intonation and sound quality.
I was also reminded not to lift the bow between each stroke and use a shorter part of the bow on the shorter note.

30 – Milan suggested to use the thumb for the pizzicato to have very even sound on all the notes of the cord, especially not having too weak g string
I was advised to practice this part in double stops and arco.

31 – I was told to keep the forte dynamics all the way to the end, had to correct intonation in the b in the third bar of the fragment (had to push it lower) and I was also asked to break the cord faster on the third last bar.

General thoughts regarding my playing from Milan:

“Practice slowly so your fingers don’t go faster than your thoughts. Your mind has to be one step ahead and tell the fingers what to do. You have to add more steps in between slow practice and practice in tempo, the process must be smooth, and you have to add speed gradually.”

Reflection on the description of the work process on the first movement of Poulenc violin sonata with Milan Vitek

The analysis of a lesson, maybe more of a practice session, with Milan was very useful. First, he let me play through the piece, which gave him an overall perspective on what to work on and how to use the time. It gave me also a chance to find out what phase of the process the piece was at the moment and how long journey I have to go to be able to interpret it at a concert with confidence. After a playthrough, he pinpointed 31 fragments of the piece and assisted me in improving each place until he noticed that I understand the process and can apply given method to analogical places or to the rest of a certain passage.

Often, he made me practice only a connection between two notes in a very slow manner and would analyze position of my hand or the amount of tension or relaxation in my muscles until I did what he was trying to explain to me. He didn't allow me to practice a bigger part of each fragment until I was able to play the core of the problem in a confident, not fearful way.

I would say the main aspect of his teaching is that he patiently insists on fixing a problem, until the student understands the process, and if the understanding doesn't come, he just adjusts the way of explaining or analyses the problem on a deeper level to be able to fix it. I find this way of teaching very inspiring.

He teaches each student to understand how to do a certain improvement mindfully and what to think about to later be able to automatize these technical aspects and be able to focus on the music only.

The lesson was reflecting my own way of playing and challenges of my development at that time, however, the structure, work process and overall principles can be applied to other kind of problems that violinists often go through.

We also discussed the piece, when it was written, who it was written for, who played it for the first time, how to interpret it in an authentic way which can be achieved by reading the score very thoroughly. Milan wanted me to listen to many recordings to get inspired and especially to get to know how the piece is played in the country of its origin, never to copy other interprets. The goal was to understand better the circumstances and get into contact with the "spirit of the piece" that is necessary to be discovered to be able to play the piece in a very informed way. Listening to recordings surely helps to speed up the process and is useful, but maybe we should also sometimes try to depend only on the music and our knowledge about the composer and the epoque of his life, and not to get distracted by interpretations of other musicians.

Discussion

Writing a biography about Milan Vitek's life was very enriching. I got to know what he experienced and what made him become the interpreter and pedagogue he is now. It was interesting to see what circumstances made him choose the life journey he followed. There was one period of his life that he refers to as the most demanding. It was during the years 1972-1974 when he was a member of the Czech quartet in Canada, a host professor at McMaster University in Hamilton and a concertmaster of Hamilton Symphonic Orchestra at the same time.

He was very well prepared for this time already from his study years. Among all the things I found the most inspiring were the sightreading sessions with his pianist friend Marco Hondas. This made them go through a lot of works for violin and piano with a lot of joy and compassion and certainly allowed them to speed up the process of studying new pieces. However, it was mainly his teachers that had the most influence on the efficiency of his practicing. All Milan Vitek's teachers studied with the famous violin pedagogue Otakar Sevcik, therefore Milan's way of practicing is related to Sevcik's exercises and teaching methods. Analysis of Sevcik's teaching methods, interviews of Milan's students and analyzing the way he worked with me personally during my lesson helped me to confirm the deep connection between Milan Vitek's and Sevcik's methods and their use. Milan often creates short exercises for his students that are very similar to the analysis of various pieces in Sevcik's studies *Opus 17-26*. For example, analyzing the problem, trying to separate the right and left hand to simplify and automatize the tasks before assembling these two aspects together, repeatedly practicing very short fragment of a certain passage to first solve the core of the problem and later adding the notes prior and following the fragment. He also teaches his students to apply this approach in their practice. Milan often uses Sevcik's methodology books to help students overcome certain obstacles.

Milan gives a lot of attention to practicing intonation with his students. He invests a lot of time in working on this issue, trying to teach each student to be very mindful and conscious about their every movement and to start from a very slow tempo, practicing only the connection between two notes or double stops at first, then slowly speeding up the process and gradually adding more notes of a passage.

Since sound and intonation are connected he never allows his students to stop thinking about the quality of their sound while practising intonation and gently and patiently reminds them until they automatize thinking about the sound every time they play. He often mentions the idea that the sound of the violin should be singing just as a human voice can. Bow distribution and sounding point makes a big impact on sound and intonation so he teaches his

students to always consider this aspect too. He also claims the bow arm itself is the sound, which in my opinion is a very good metaphor because you can never achieve a singing sound with a stiff arm.

Making mistakes should be allowed, but trying to avoid repeated mistakes is of course advisable. The student should feel safe to make a mistake, but we should view mistakes as a message to our future selves about what we can do differently. We should never get sad or frustrated with ourselves just because we make mistakes, because that only stops us from improving.

Milan encourages his students to change their bad habits in a very persistent but also patient and encouraging way. He has a lot of trust in his students and tries very hard to make his students trust in their abilities and skills.

Milan required all of his students I interviewed to learn a piece by heart at a very early stage of studying the piece. He required even etudes to be played by heart. This way his students can simply train how to learn to play a piece by heart and figure out the best way to do it with assistance of Milan Vitek.

Milan advises his students never to practice more than five hours a day and to use the rest of the time for exercise, for mental training to be able to make the most of their practice hours. Studying the scores, background, and time epoque the pieces were written in is as important as practicing itself. Milan recommends listening to as many recordings as possible, especially listening to interpreters coming from the same country as the composer. He also encourages students to participate in other lectures and visit concerts often.

The answer to my main question (How to practice efficiently and stay motivated as a violinist?) would be to never allow ourselves to lose focus. We should be aware of every movement we are doing. We should always start practicing only small fragments (the core of a certain phrase that is challenging for us) in a very slow tempo until we are confident enough to add more notes to the phrase and speed up the tempo. The key is not getting frustrated with ourselves when we make mistakes because that would only keep us from improving. We should also aim to practice not only for perfection but also for having a good feeling and being confident.

Critical afterthought

The thesis confirmed a connection between Otakar Sevcik's books analyzing various pieces and Milan Vitek's exercises he creates for his students. A further step would be to compare Milan Vitek's and Otakar Sevcik's way to create these exercises, find a correlation and describe possible principles of use.

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Attachment

2
Скрипка

СОНАТА

Редак. Ф. ПУЛЕНК (1899—1963)

1 Allegro $\text{♩} = 120$
pizz.
ff

2 2a
arco
sec

3a

3

4 4a
ppp

Text

5 5av
arco
ff

6
pizz.
du taton

3 z 5 IV

17 Скрипка

p

18 *ff* *ocultant*

19 *f* *spiccato* (4)

11 Le double plus lent

Скрипка

25 *a tempo* Saus ralentir **6** Strictement tempo I

26 *arco* *mf*

17 *ff* *rudo* 27

28 *mit* *emporté* *Text* 29 *Sp.* *sec.*

18 *p* *doux* Exactly au tempo I sur la touche

30 *pp* *très doux* *pizz.*

19 *arco* *f* *très expressif.* 31 *largement arpegé*

Saus ralentir Strictement en mesure *fff* *très sec*