



VIOLA

Anything Violins Can Do...We Can at Least Try

Kreutzer for Viola

by J. David Arnott

Last issue I wrote about a set of scales by William Primrose specifically designed for viola playing. Thank you to those of you who contacted me about the work—it is always nice to know that one is being read. This column shall be devoted to some pedagogical music borrowed from the violin world to be played on the viola, specifically the 42 *Studies* of Rudolphe Kreutzer (1766-1831). Kreutzer was born in Versailles to German parents and spent his life and career in France working consistently both before and after the troubles.

Kreutzer studied with Anton Stamitz (whose brother Carl at least left us a decent viola concerto) and possibly with Viotti as well. Though best remembered for his 42 *Studies*, he also managed to write 40 French operas and 19 violin concertos, and 15 string quartets. He held several major positions playing and teaching including professor of violin at the Paris Conservatory. In addition, Kreutzer was immortalized in Leo Tolstoy's moralistic novel, *The Kreutzer Sonata* (worth googling if not reading, though definitely nicht für kinder).

The 42 *études ou caprices* are first found in an 1807 edition and were written to demonstrate the capabilities of the recently perfected Tourte model bow which was coming into vogue at the end of the 18th century. How many violinists get through their studies without playing at least a few Kreutzer etudes? Did you play all 42 of them? (Sadly, I did not.)

In the world of viola today, there are three editions listed for sale on the SHAR website, one of which (Kalmus) is unavailable at the moment. There is a Ludwig Pagels (b. 1861) International Edition, a

Kalmus Edition (does anyone know who edited this?), and a Walter Blumenau G. Schirmer Edition. Ludwig (also known as Louis) Pagels transcribed a bunch of violin etudes for viola, though little information about his life seems to be available. Blumenau played with the Boston Symphony and the Detroit Symphony for many years. He died in 1967. In addition to these editions, there are several viola editions available for free through IMSLP: one by Angelo Consolini (Ricordi), one by H. E. Kayser, and an abbreviated version by Hermann Ritter (just 32 etudes are included in this).

Which of these etudes would be most beneficial for your students? Which of them could be attempted and possibly mastered with a minimum of supervision? Clearly any student headed for a life in music should consider all of them—but what about your average student? If you could pick a half a dozen to give your medium students, what would you pick? When I think about my students and the problems they have with their orchestra parts, I dream about spending rehearsal time playing Kreutzer etudes together to fix everything. Actually, I would be happy if they all played a scale once in a while—but dreams are OK too. Imagine trying to pick one exercise for the improvement of each of the following areas: bowing/articulation, shifting, tone, intonation.

Certainly #2 could be assigned along with possibly a two-octave F major scale and a quick demonstration of a couple bowing variations each week (ask them to record you on their phones if they are permitted in school). There are several opportunities to employ second and third position too. Another possibility would

be #5, which could also be performed in 3 sharps (A major) instead of 4 flats (A flat minor) as an easier alternative.

An excellent and accessible exercise for improving shifting is #11. It is accessible because much of the exercise (though clearly not all) can be tried in first position before attempting the fingering system required. It is also possible to look at this example in $\frac{12}{8}$ to aid in compound meter playing.

My students always seem to have issues with playing at slow tempi. Though #1 is difficult when one attempts to play the challenging fingerings suggested in some editions, just working through this at slower than 50 to the quarter note in first position will help them with sustain and hopefully bow division as well.

Intonation, of course, comes into play in each of these examples. Using a tuner app on computer, iPad or smartphone is the new reality—but showing students how to use such tools is also necessary.

In closing, it has come to my attention that there isn't anybody who remembers Jack Benny or the fact that his schtick of playing Kreutzer #2 was once loved and understood even by millions of Americans. Let us remember please that he played the violin, he apparently loved Kreutzer, and that he lives on through YouTube.

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