



VIOLA

What is RISM and How Does it Relate to Me (and the viola!)?

by AJ Isaacson-Zvidzwa

First off, what is RISM and how does it relate to me?

“The Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM)—International Inventory of Musical Sources—is an international, non-profit organization that aims to comprehensively document extant musical sources worldwide: manuscripts, printed music editions, writings on music theory, and libretti that are found in libraries, archives, churches, schools, and private collections. RISM’s over 1.4 million records can be searched at no cost through the RISM Catalog and RISM Online. RISM was founded in Paris in 1952 and is the largest and only global organization that documents written musical sources. RISM records what exists and where it can be found.”

So, what does that mean? It’s a *massive* database of documented

music. It takes some time digging, but there are oodles of pieces of music waiting to be “discovered” and brought to life. It’s frequently thought there is a lack of historical repertoire specifically for viola. RISM is an incredible resource to find extant repertoire for viola (or any other orchestral instrument!). My primary base of knowledge is 18th-century viola concertos, so I will draw on examples from that.

Where can RISM be found?

<https://rism.info>

What do I do if RISM is in another language?

Select English! (Figure 1)

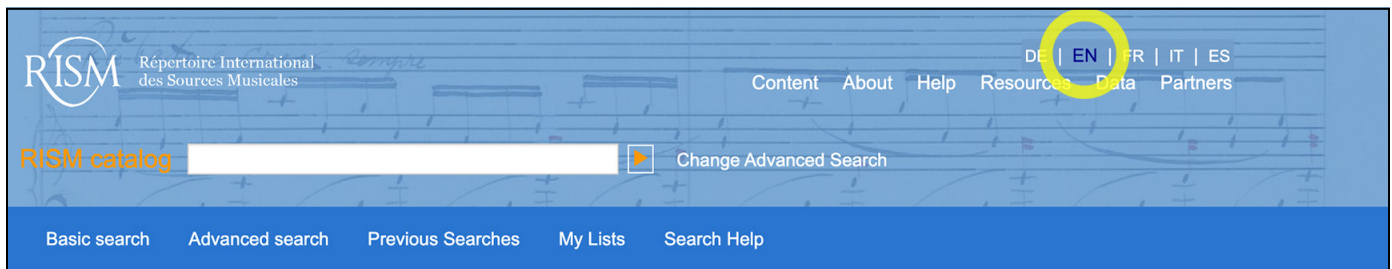


Figure 1 — Select English to translate the page.

How do I search for repertoire?

The abbreviations for the string family instruments are:

- Violin: vl
- Viola: vla
- Cello: vlc
- Bass: cb

The complete list of abbreviations can be found here: <https://opac.rism.info/main-menu-/kachelmenu/help#c56>

To search for a viola concerto, go to advanced search, put “vla” for scoring and “concertos” for genre. (Figure 2) To search for a chamber ensemble, use the abbreviations listed above to specify the

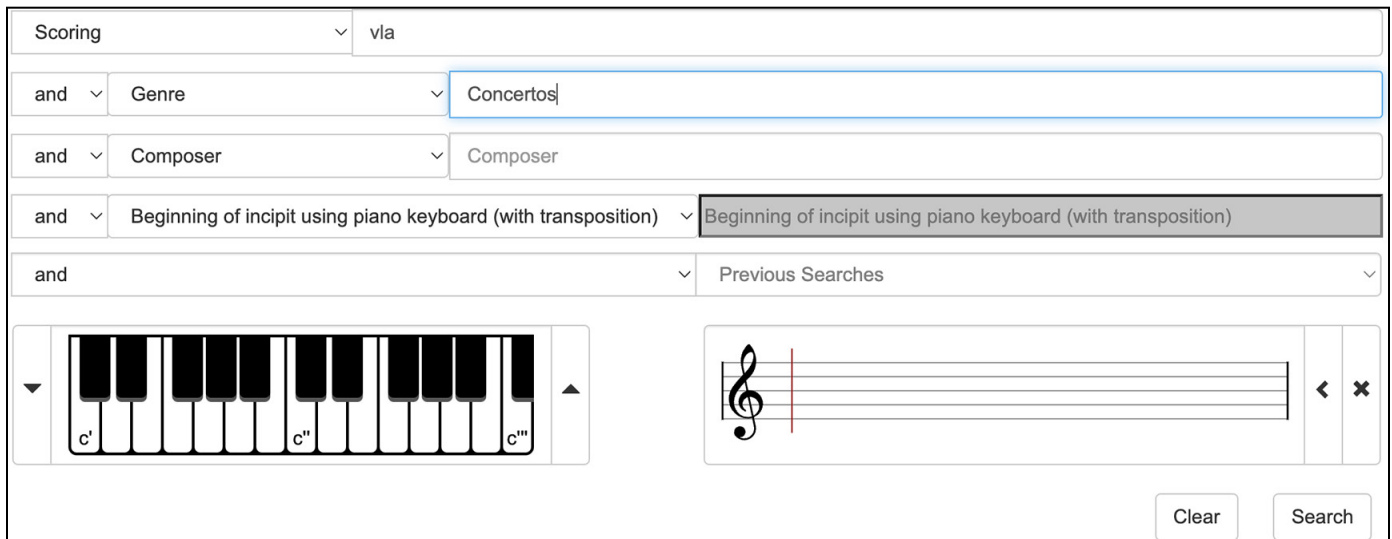


Figure 2 — Searching for Viola Concertos.

instrumentation. The search terms for some common ensembles are as follows:

- String quartet: vl (2), vla, vlc
- String quintet (2 violas): vl (2), vla (2), vlc
- String quintet (2 cellos): vl (2), vla, vlc (2)
- String quintet (with double bass): vl (2), vla, vlc, cb
- Piano trio: vl, vlc, pf

If you find a score that's not already digitized or published, and are interested in looking at the manuscript, each RISM entry will have the library sigla of where the manuscript can be found. A library sigla is an abbreviation assigned to an institution. A full list of sigla can be found here: <https://rism.info/community/sigla.html>

I've written to institutions and have had scores digitized for me. One thing I wish someone would have forewarned me is that correspondence in other parts of the world use a much more formal tone than is typically used in the States.

For example: Viola Concerto by Anton Fils

I chose this example because it highlights what can be found on a RISM entry. This piece is not published, but the manuscript has been digitized by the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin, Notenarchiv, Berlin (sigla D-Bsa).

I took a screenshot of the entry for this viola concerto. (Figure 3) If you click on the composer's name, information on them will pop up. (Figure 4)

Fils, Anton <1733-1760>

Concertos in D major

Other title: Konzerte, Vla Conc Cor 1 2 Fl 1 2 Ob 1 2 VI 1 2 Vla B, D-Dur

e View Online ▾

Work information

Scoring summary: vla, orch
Genre: Concertos

Source description

Title on source: [vla princ, title page, f.1r:] Concerto I. [corrected into "4"] | [incipit] | Viola Principale | Violino. Primo | Violino. Secondo | Oboe e Flauto Primo | Oboe e Flauto Secondo. | Viola | e | Corno Primo | Corno Secondo. | Basso. | del Sigr: Filtz.

Material:

- 9 parts - iSol: vla, vl 1, vl 2, vla, b and vlc, ob and fl 1, ob and fl 2, cor 1, cor 2 - 4f., 2, 2, 2, 2f., 1, 1f., 1, 1f.

Manuscript copy: 18.4q; Berlin; Watermarks: "I C S"? (undeutlich); 36 x 22 cm / 34,5 x 21 cm
 Copyist: [Copyist Paestrina II \(Blechsmidt\)](#); Copyist: [Copyist J. A. Hasse VI \(Blechsmidt\)](#)
 Notes on material: Moderne Bleistiftfoliierung: 1-16.

Further notes

Scoring: iSol: vla, vl 1, vl 2, vla, vlc, fl (2), ob (2), cor (2), b
Notes: Die Streicherstimmen von Copyist J. A. Hasse VI; alle weiteren Stimmen von Copyist Paestrina II. Stempel Konservatorium Kiew, Stempel Archiv-Museum Kiew.

Publisher

Provenance

Shelfmark (olim): ZD 1567f; [D II 1567 / 1611]

Library (siglum) shelfmark: Berlin, (D-Bsa) SA 3010

RISM ID no.: 469301000

Last update: October 16, 2022

Figure 3 — Search results for Viola Concerto by Anton Fils.

Fils, Anton

<p>Name: Fils, Anton (1733-1760)</p> <p>Gender: Male</p> <p>Nationality: Germany</p> <p>City: Eichstätt, Mannheim</p> <p>Profession: Cellist, Composer</p> <p>Descendant of: Fils, Johann Georg</p> <p>Literature: MGG Filtz, Anton (Fils; Filz; Fielzt) [1730c-1760]</p> <p>DEUMM/b Fils, Johann Anton (Filtz; Filz) [bapt. 22.09.1733-1760]</p> <p>MGG[2]p Fils, Anton (Filz; Filtz) (Johann Anton) [bapt. 22.09.1733-1760]</p> <p>RISM A/I Filtz, Anton</p>	<p>RISM A/I suppl. Filtz, Anton</p> <p>Grovej6 Filtz, Anton (Fils; Filz) (Johann Anton) [1733-1760]</p> <p>RiemannLj1[3] Fils, Anton (Filtz) [bapt. 22.09.1733-1760]</p> <p>Grovej7 Fils, Anton (Filtz; Filz) (Johann Anton) [bapt. 22.09.1733-1760]</p> <p>EitnerQ Fils, Anton (Filtz; Filtz; Filz) [1733c-1760]</p> <p>RiemannLj1[2]p suppl. Filtz, Anton (Johann Anton) [1733-1760]</p> <p>RiemannLj1[2]p Filtz, Anton (Fils) [1730c-1760]</p> <p>MGG suppl. Fils, Anton [1733-1760]</p> <p>Other Name: Fielzt, Anton</p> <p>Fils, Antonin</p> <p>Filtz, Anton</p>	<p>Filtz, Antonio</p> <p>Filtz, Johann Anton</p> <p>Filx, Anton</p> <p>Filtz, Anton</p> <p>Filtz, Anton</p> <p>Pfülb, Anton</p> <p>Philtz, Anton</p> <p>Fils, Johann Anton</p> <p>GND: https://d-nb.info/gnd/118687212</p> <p>VIAF: https://viaf.org/viaf/24801562</p> <p>WKP: https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q63908</p>
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Figure 4 — Details for composer Anton Fils.

Now for the most fun part of RISM! When you search for a piece, you can “narrow results” to digitized sources only. (Figure 5)

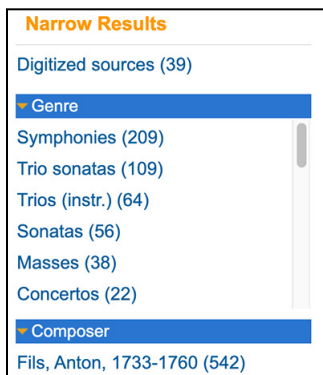


Figure 5

Fils is shown in Figure 7.

To conclude, because truth is stranger than fiction, I will leave you with this story of our dear composer Anton Fils: Anton died

at the young age of 26. He had a habit of eating spiders where he “[assured] horrified observers that spiders tasted like fresh strawberries.” Legend has it he died from eating a poisonous spider.



Figure 6

AJ Isaacson-Zvidzwa, violist, violinist, composer and historian, has a BM in viola performance from Augsburg University. She has published in the Journal of the American Viola Society, the American String Teachers Journal, and has lectured at the International Viola Congress. For fun, she is editing an eighteenth-century viola concerto by unknown composer Georg Schultz for its first publication. She has taught in an El Sistema inspired program and with the Eden Prairie String Academy. As a composer, her collaborations include members of the Minnesota Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and the Artaria String Quartet. †

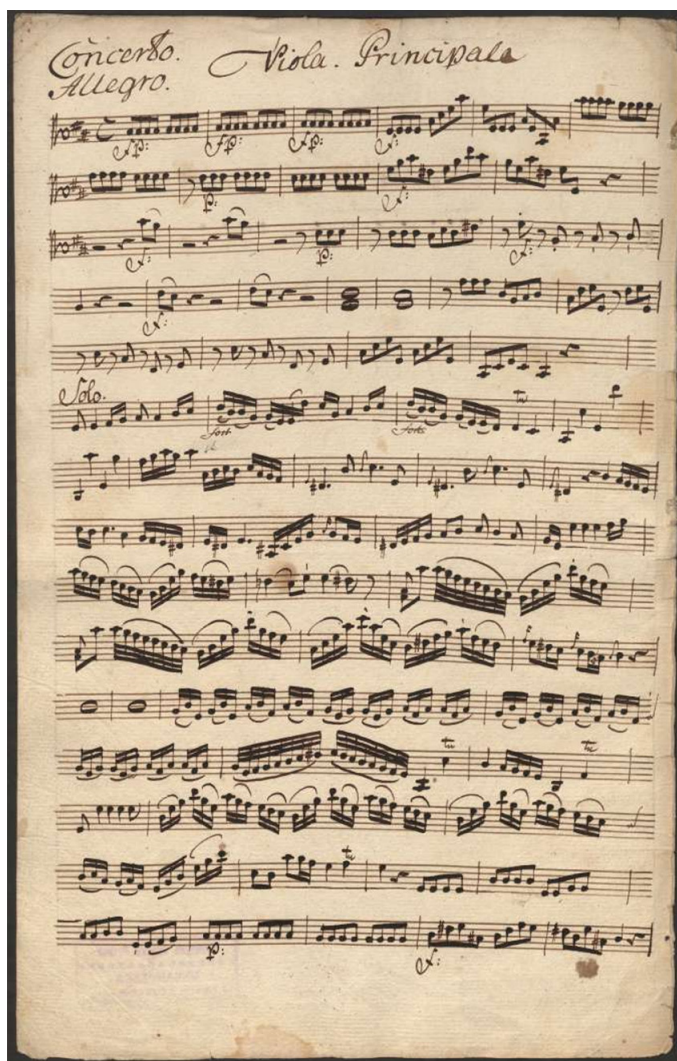
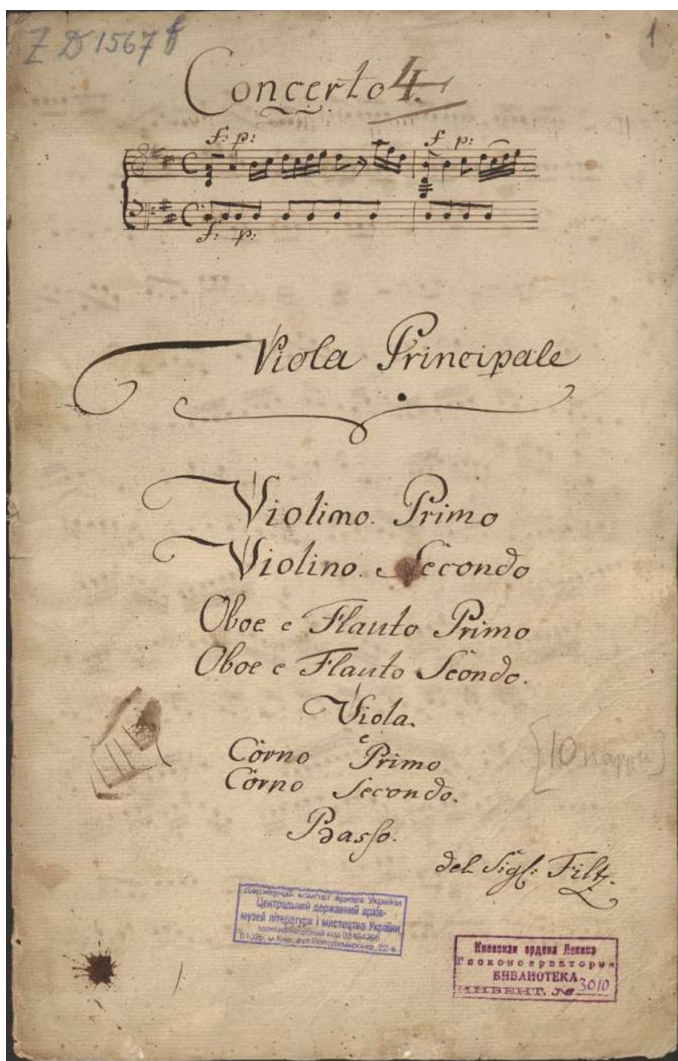


Figure 7 — Viola Concerto in D Major by Anton Fils — cover and first page