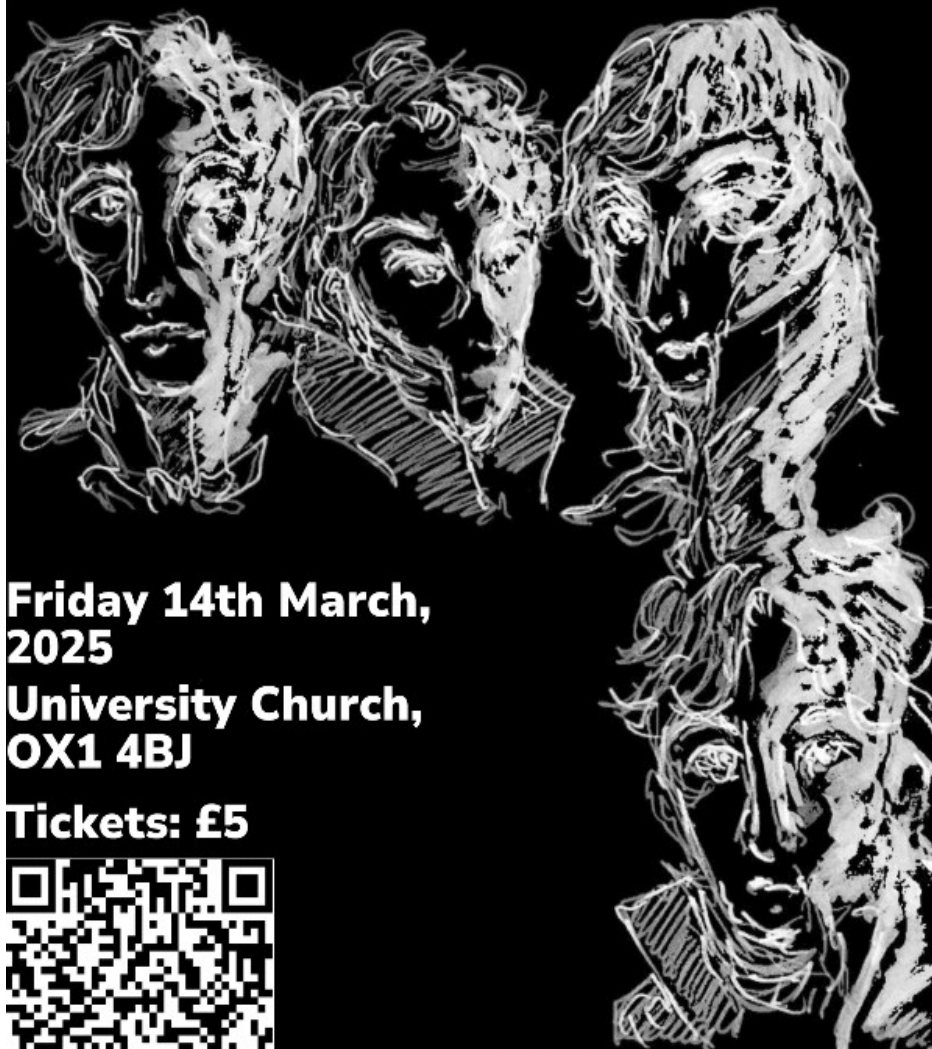




**les
quatre
fabuleux**

**VIOTTI
BAILLOT
RODE
KREUTZER**



**Friday 14th March,
2025**

**University Church,
OX1 4BJ**

Tickets: £5



**[www.ticketsource.co.uk/
vocatio-responsio](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/vocatio-responsio)**

PROGRAMME

FIRST HALF

Giovanni Battista Viotti (Sardinia, 1755 – London, 1824)

Concerto No.26 in B \flat Major

1. Allegro con un poco di moto
2. Andante più tosto adagio
3. Allegretto con moto

Pierre Baillot (Paris, 1771 – Paris, 1842)

Concerto No.3 in F Major

1. Maestoso
2. Andante
3. Rondo. Animé

SECOND HALF

Pierre Rode (Bordeaux, 1774 – Aquitaine, 1830)

Concerto No.7 in A Minor

1. Moderato
2. Adagio
3. Rondo con spirito

Rodolphe Kreutzer (Versailles, 1766 – Geneva, 1831)

Concerto No.19 in D Minor

1. Moderato
2. Andante sostenuto
3. Rondo

VOCATIO:RESPONSIO

Looking to make a difference in the way classical music is consumed, Vocatio:Responsio is a project-based ensemble working in the University of Oxford currently directed by Samuel Oliver-Sherry, a second-year undergraduate music student from Merseyside studying at St Anne's College. The ensemble will usually give two concerts per Oxford University term, operating on intensive rehearsal weekends with musicians specially invited to suit the needs of each programme. This is our fourth (and most ambitious) concert this season.



As a performing ensemble, Vocatio:Responsio's main emphasis is on devising unique and compelling programmes that invite audiences to engage with wider musicological discourse within the familiar context of a performance setting. With its Latin name literally translating to 'Call:Response', the aim is to break the staunch barrier between performer and audience, creating an informal space for anyone to join in with musical discussion and immerse themselves as part of the concert experience.

Samuel Oliver-Sherry



I am currently into my second year reading music at St Anne's College, formerly studying violin with St Anne's alumna Dr Alberto Sanna, and originally from Liverpool. I was the concertmaster of the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (LPYO) in the 2022-23 season, working alongside professional conductors such as Robin Wallington and Andrew Manze, and was formerly involved with the Liverpool-based charity Early Music as Education (EMAE) since its inception in 2017, working both as an orchestral member in its flagship ensemble as well as a tutor in its Beginner and Intermediate programmes.

In Oxford, I have enjoyed a plethora of musical opportunities, and has given much to the university's music society: my role as concertmaster of Oxford University Philharmonia takes up most time, but I've also made regular appearances with Oxford University Orchestra and Oxford University Sinfonietta, and look forward to my appointment as principal second violin for Oxford Concert Orchestra in April. I am also the orchestral leader for the St Anne's Camerata, working primarily with director Dr John Traill (also one of my degree supervisors) and the Castalian String Quartet (the Hans Keller Quartet in Residence at the University of Oxford) as well as guiding some Oxford Conducting Institute workshops.

When not playing violin, I am also a pianist, still studying with Tom Kimmance and working towards my ARSM diploma, and a self-guided organist that enjoy accompanying services at my local parish where home (invariably getting the notes right). Believe it or not, I even find some time for hobbies in 'normal life': I have four beautiful border collies, who essentially control mine and my mother's life, but I speak for both of us that we wouldn't have it any other way. Plus, I have the misfortune of supporting Everton FC (that's my father's "guidance" for you), though fortunately our form has picked up under new management – #COYB

First Violins

Ella O'Shea (*orchestral leader*)
Belle Worster
Tejas Krishnan

Second Violins

Oliver Laxton
Wing Hei Woo
Lina van Hunen

Violas

Elizabeth Dallosso
Nick Raptakis

Cellos

Grace Farrell
Celeste Pan

Flute

Chiara Federico

Oboes

Jingyang Zhang
Angie Ho

Clarinets

Rufus Edwards
Sanjay Gudi

Bassoons

Louise Hayden
Thomas Li

Horns

Benedict Scott
Abi Sleep

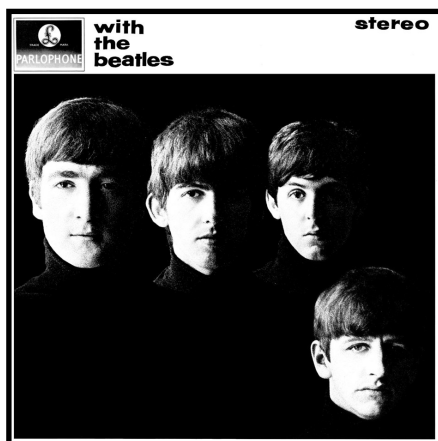


PROGRAMME NOTES

N.B: for those new to Vocatio:Responsio concerts, I would typically say these notes live in a type of lecture-recital format. However, the concert is already two hours long, and I have lots to say about this repertory, so to prevent from going on any longer I will put them in a written format instead. Do still read it though, as it may help you understand why we do some of the things we do.

I want to start my commentary on this evening's programme with a note on the concert's poster, expertly designed by my good friend and fellow St Anne's music student Wing Hei Woo (who is responsible for all the other amazing publicity Vocatio:Responsio has enjoyed this year). Fans of popular music might find it recognisable, and factoring in both the title of this concert ('The Fab Four' in French) as well as my background as a Scouser should all but confirm that theory. The design is effectively a parody of the cover from The Beatles' famous 1963 album, *With The Beatles*, with a pencil drawing of each violinist in tonight's concert replacing one of the four band members.

I very much understand that, for a variety of reasons, this comparison appears rather misguided. Obviously, the cultural relevance of these groups in today's musical climate are worlds apart: one is a selection of obscure nineteenth-century violinists from France, while the other is the most widely recognisable band to ever grace the earth. Especially when there are other "rock-star" figures to choose from in this time period that are much more culturally prevalent (think Franz Liszt and Niccolò Paganini causing audience hysterics for their talents and appearance), it's totally reasonable that one would suggest that I've made the wrong choice of personnel here, at least on the face of it.



And yet, perhaps the strangest thing about this comparison is the fact that I've made a group, or collective, of nineteenth-century "composers" in the first place. Especially motivated by nineteenth-century Germanic scholarship and its philosophical influences, we tend to think of so-called "Romantic" era composers as individual geniuses, transcendent and divinely-inspired in their work, and striving to express greater truths within their music. The aptly described 'composer-celebrity' begins to emerge most notably through Beethoven, but is then a normalised culture in the mid-nineteenth-century for all composers (even those long dead, such as J.S. Bach who

is posthumously recontextualised as a national hero by Mendelssohn and others). By contrast, while the idea of a compositional collective is relatively new, I'm fortunate enough to be a musician (not composer thank heavens) for one in Oxford called *Brickworks*, it doesn't really exist in the nineteenth-century in favour of such individualism in styles, cultures and so on.

So, here I am claiming not only that these four obscure, practically irrelevant “composers” (Viotti, Baillot, Rode and Kreutzer) should be understood as a compositional ‘group’ as well as individual figures, but as a foursome they should stand alongside the most trailblazing cultural icons of the twentieth-century?!



Viotti (t. left)
Rode (b. left)

Baillot (t. right)
Kreutzer (b. right)

I'll return to this second point later, but firstly I want to discuss the relationship between these four violinists. It starts with **Giovanni Battista Viotti's** extended stay in Paris beginning in 1782. After tours with his teacher Gaetano Pugnani, his tour in Paris was his first solo tour, and the first concert appearance he gave (one of his own concertos in Le Concert Spirituel, 15th March 1782) made him an overnight sensation, instantly heralded as the premier violinist in all of Europe by those in attendance. Viotti remained in Paris for a decade, forced to leave as the French Revolution started to take more radical turns, but his legacy was monumental especially as a teacher.

In particular, one of Viotti's favourite pupils in Paris was **Pierre Rode**. Rode travelled to Paris in 1787 and probably performed in front of

Viotti reasonably soon after his arrival: apparently, Viotti found the boy so talented that he charged him no fee for lessons. Rode very much inherited his teacher's style, and quickly established himself as a leading musical figure in Paris, with several notable appearances during a week of concerts in April 1792 where he presented five of Viotti's violin concertos, including two premieres — these works became the backbone of his repertory, and eventually models for his own concertos as we shall see later.

Another item in one of these programmes was a duet with **Rodolphe Kreutzer**. Other than influence, of course, Kreutzer has no formal connection with Viotti: rather, he was initially taught by his German father Jean-Jacobe Kreutzer (a German musician in the royal chapel) and Anton Stamitz. Kreutzer's made his debut in the Concert Spirituel series by playing concertos by Stamitz, and in 1784 he premiered his first violin concerto having started performing other more small-scale compositions a couple of years prior. His financial responsibilities became very challenging due to the untimely death of his mother and father within a year of each

other, but sponsorship by Queen Marie Antoinette and the Comte d' Artois (later Charles X) allowed him to continue as a professional soloist and maintain his reputation.

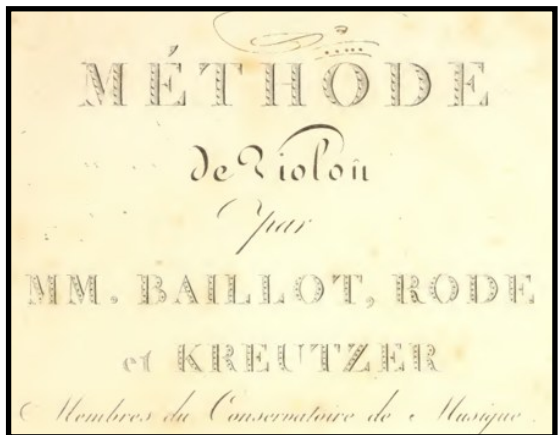
In the audience of Rode's concerts in 1792 was his former desk partner in the Orchestra of the Theatre Feydeau (a placement awarded by Viotti), **Pierre Baillot**. Born into a non-musical family, Baillot was first taught by an Italian violinist called Polidori, then at the age of nine, he was placed under a French teacher named Sainte-Marie. As we shall soon discover, it was Sainte-Marie who gave Baillot much of the stylistic qualities that he is remembered for, especially an exactitude of style. When his father died around 1783, Baillot lived in Rome studying with Pollani, under whom he made rapid progress and soon began to perform in public.

So, the year is 1795. Viotti is no longer in the country due to political matters: as a foreigner and former violinist for Marie Antoniette, he was unliked by the French people, and the new political values of the French revolution had dispersed the aristocratic support that Viotti's career had been built on. Such political difficulty forced many of Viotti's students and followers to leave Paris and as a consequence it became harder to sustain his violin method. Baillot, Kreutzer and Rode responded to this by building their careers among this new socio-political frame, and became the principal violin tutors at the newly-established *Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris*. The CNSMDP (as it shall be known hereafter) was the first secular institution dedicated to music training and founded by Bernard Sarette.

Central to the CNSMDP was that its famous publishing company encouraged the dissemination of course methods compiled by the instrumental faculty. And so, in 1802, the conservatoire commissioned a treatise on violin playing to be compiled by its three major teachers, Pierre Baillot, Pierre Rode and Rodolphe Kreutzer. This coordinated system of teaching violin provided France with a significant advantage over in

terms of establishing its own unique, national violin technique. Of course, it is one that is significantly inspired by that of the Italian Viotti, and these methods allow for the preservation of Viotti's methods and techniques in spite of the distaste surrounding him in this new political climate.

Before I go on to analyse some aspects of this (and other) treatise compiled by these violinists, a word must be given to the political situation at the time and how it very much influenced performance aesthetics. All four of our protagonists not only lived



during the French Revolution, but were trying to form successful careers as touring artists as well (Viotti, of course, more established than the other three purely due to him being older than the others, but still experiencing the same struggles as those at the start of their professional lives). Making it as a solo violinist at this time is a precarious balancing act between the bourgeoisie and the aristocratic ventures, because while the aristocracy is being disseminated, its values don't vanish overnight. Their bourgeoisie ventures, especially that of Rode, Bailiot and Kreutzer, included touring Europe as virtuosi, running a musical publishing business, and teaching in the Conservatoire: within this, their artistry still had to comply somewhat with that of aristocratic aesthetics, such as an adherence to the popular musical forms popular and a desire to continue working in the service of Europe's nobility.

Viotti's twenty-sixth concerto in B♭ Major is the only concerto in tonight's programme written directly during the French revolution (composed somewhere between the years of 1793-97, published much later in 1808), and is also the only concerto that pre-dates the *Methode du violon* publication in 1803. This is very much worth bearing in mind, for while it certainly lays the framework for much of the aesthetics we hear (and the influence of Viotti in the music that follows is very obvious), it is stylistically far more reserved than the others, leaning greater into the galant sound. It is worth remembering that Viotti was a contemporary of Mozart, and personally knew both Haydn and Beethoven too: this blew my mind when my teacher Alberto Sanna (who also happens to be from Sardinia where Viotti was born) made me realise this!

So how is it similar to the others? Perhaps mainly in its structure do we find the most striking connections: the first movement is very expansive and brings out the most varied characters in the solo violin. More so in any other movement, the first movement of all of tonight's concertos draws a distinction in the solo violin writing between what we distinguish as "cantabile" and "bravura" playing: the 'cantabile' is characterised by a lyrical, more melodic approach, where the difficulty for the soloist is engaging with phrasing and musicality; the 'bravura' engages the more technical demands of execution, where the soloist can show off fast playing with a range of techniques. Below, I've highlighted what I mean by this with an excerpt from the second subject: the **brown** indicates 'cantabile', the **purple** indicates 'bravura' (I use lots of other colours in this commentary, so excuse the rogue colour choices).

The image shows a musical score excerpt from Viotti's 26th Concerto in B-flat Major, second subject. The score is divided into two sections: a 'cantabile' section highlighted in brown and a 'bravura' section highlighted in purple. The brown section features a melodic line in the violin with a brown background. The purple section features a more technically demanding passage with a purple background. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'cres - - il - f' and 'p con espress.'

As you can see, the primary theme of this passage is less technically overt, but more musically expressive, where the challenge is maintaining a good tone quality and giving a strong sense of phrasing. This then launches into a virtuosic section that features double stopping as its main technical difficulty, especially passage work in thirds (something of a staple in Viotti's concertos). This is just one example where a formal unit has bipolar characters between 'cantabile' and 'bravura', something that occurs throughout the first movement.

The second, slow movement is very lyrical throughout, and since this is a concerto in the major mode, this movement is in the relative minor (G Minor). In all four concertos this evening, the slow movement is in a different mode to the first movement. However, the formal structure of the movement is in a rounded binary form: the first 'A' section is in G Minor, but the second 'B' section is in the parallel G Major, before the return of a truncated 'A' section back in G Minor. Only the Kreutzer concerto does not follow this pattern, and indeed Rode's concerto (where the slow movement is in C Major) follows this pattern but in opposite direction, where the 'B' section is in the minor key. The 'B' section and the returning 'A' section are clearly marked in the parts as *majeur* or *mineur* depending on context, and I interpret this as a character marking in the same way as one might see adjectives in the score, where something fundamental changes in the mood of the piece.

The third movement is always very jovial and bouncy, and characterised by dotted rhythms as a dance-like signifier. In addition, the last movement is a rondo form, which means that structural checkpoints are marked by the return of the first theme, first presented in the solo violin, but is then transformed by the orchestra into its next section. This concerto is particularly notable, for the second slow movement ends by transitioning into the third movement without a pause.



The image shows a musical score snippet with three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Minore.' and features a melodic line with trills and slurs. The middle staff has a section highlighted in orange, labeled 'Allegro con moto.' and 'Solo'. The bottom staff is labeled 'Tutti' and features a rhythmic line with dotted rhythms and slurs. The score is written in G minor, as indicated by the key signature of two flats.

So, it's clear that all of the following concertos adhere to this structure that was pioneered by Viotti throughout his compositional input. However, let us pause once again to consider our historical context: at the turn of the nineteenth-century, France (and Europe at large, for that matter) is operating in a post-revolutionary world. The old enlightenment philosophies have become outdated and musical performance has become a far more public affair, taken out of the chambers of aristocrats and into the larger, purpose-built concert halls that house all kinds of spectators. Music has entered a public sphere, and if touring virtuosos want to stay popular and relevant, they too have to enter it. How they do this, of course, is by looking at the popular

market and finding tropes that are of current cultural significance to incorporate into their work (much like the way in which the pop music chart changes according to public taste).

At this time in France, it is the military and the sounds of protest: the music of marching bands was recognisable to virtually any audience as a popular part of everyday life in major cities; the torrent of revolutionary songs hollered and whistled in the streets of Paris as well as the strains of music spilling out of dance halls, cafes, theaters, fêtes, concerts and so on. Naturally, composers of this time incorporated such topics into their music, but for virtuoso composers an extra narrative could be born from this. I'm referring to the performative concept of



Boucher (left)



Napoleon (right)

imitating Napoleon himself, yielding their bow like a sword and commanding their orchestras into battle. One violinist did this better than any other, Alexandre Boucher, because he actually looked like Napoleon (and obviously Boucher ran with this narrative in his performance, impersonating him before playing 'like him'), but this was an aesthetic compositionally present in concertos.

Take **Rode's seventh concerto in A Minor** as an example, surely the most famous of the four concertos in this evenings programme. The first movement is unashamedly militaristic in quality, with a very strong and driven character throughout the opening tutti section. The soloist enters in a more subdued, 'cantabile' manner before a cadence takes us into the *majeur* for the second theme. Here, the solo violin towers over the strings with long notes in the higher register, while below this the strings play sharp, aggressive staccato notes that transform into dotted rhythms. Quite literally, however uncomfortable it may sound to our modern ears, this passage is supposed to indicate an army leader commanding its army generals marching, and with the historical context behind it, it's rather difficult to imagine it any other way. In other words, the violinist is Napoleon and the orchestra are his troops.

Or what about the first movement of **Kreutzer's nineteenth concerto in D Minor**, which is consistently punctuated by battle cries where the orchestra is divided. Throughout the opening movement, the military trope can be identified by aggressive, fortissimo dotted rhythms in the bassoons and horns that are answered back by the full orchestra, as if to mimic the commands of battle. This is a particular example where the soloist acts more as a mediator between the two groups, especially when this trope is used in transition between sections of the solo: here, the violinist is presented as peace-maker, as he calms the tension between groups and moves out of the dark minor mode and into the major for the secondary theme.

Military tropes are present throughout the concertos by Rode, Kreutzer and Baillot in this programme and beyond, but where performatively speaking does this come from? Primarily, it comes from the new way of performing the dotted rhythm by using what is now called a 'hooked bowstroke', a down-down up-up bowstroke. As we will demonstrate many times this evening, the distribution of the bow in absolute proportion with the rhythmic values creates a visual demonstration of order, control, and regularity. It is also a very rigorous movement: especially in the example of the Rode, one must demonstrate a fast bow stroke, which lends itself into the visual trope of bow-as-sword.

This fast bow stroke is often referred to as the *martele* bow stroke, and features extensively in the bravura sections of **Baillot's third concerto in F Major**. Tonight, because the concert is being recorded (as with all our Vocatio:Responsio events), this performance will be an historic world-first recording of any Baillot concerto: it is a real travesty that it has taken so long for this to materialise given Baillot's status as one of the pioneers of modern violin playing, but nevertheless we are excited today to be creating history. The *martele* stroke is a short, on-the-string movement that is indicative on Baillot's own execution-heavy technique, and a very performative example of the rigour of such bravura playing.



So, it's this idea of virtuosity as power that is so vital to the other concertos, and is what marks the change in aesthetic from Viotti's concertos during the French revolution. No longer bound by aristocratic expectations as a restrictor for income, composers can rely on the public aesthetics as a way to show themselves off, to highlight their own excellence on the violin. Let it be remembered that these concertos are self-representative, written for the composer themselves to perform with whichever orchestra had commissioned their appearance, so these militaristic, leader-like representations are purely to promote themselves as players.

It's interesting, however, that most of these technical bravura passages engage the right hand far more than they do the left. Yes, fast scales and double stops are difficult, and very often incorporated in this music (indeed, more so in the Viotti than the rest), but nowhere near to the same degree as varying types of bowing. This is where, at long last, my narrative blossoms. I am arguing that this type of music is performative, theatrical and visual in aesthetic, with the visual far more attractive than the sonic. Much like in pop and rock performance of today, every movement is hyperbolised and engaged to full potentials, and it is this that distinguishes the

French school from any other tradition of violin playing.

Baillot's third concerto exercises this perhaps the most overtly of the four concertos, though they all have very similar moments. In many cases, he is specific on when the violinist is supposed to lift the bow off the string, sometimes by explicitly marking a rest, or in other case having large-scale string crossings from the first to the fourth string. The third movement has many examples of this particularly in the more experimental C section (in D Minor and D Major, following the second return of the main theme), and the movement is extremely exaggerated and physical. The photo on the left, Jimi Hendrix doing a huge guitar strum, is what I would compare such a moment to! As the violinist goes into his big impressive solo, he wants the audience to see it and know it, and that's exactly where the physical element of movement and gesture comes in. It's a blend of power/authority, but also showmanship/bravado.



Think of the stage presence of Freddie Mercury, lead singer of Queen, as an example of this. I always look at his monumental performance at the 1985 Live Aid in the old Wembley Stadium as an example of such command. Especially the call-and-response section where he sings a phrase, and the crowds upon crowds of people sing it back to him matching his intonation, timing, energy, all of it. There's a specific moment in the rondo of **Viotti's twenty-sixth concerto** that makes me think of this, first coming in after the first long tutti, where the violinist plays a phrase and the strings (in unison) answer back with the same rhythm. Compositional interplay of soloist against orchestra is also very present in these concertos, and another example of showing off the principal violinist, the one that is outstanding from the rest, so-to-speak. In this example, the soloist dictates the orchestra, much like Mercury dictates the crowd.

My final comparison is in the slow movements of the **Baillot** and **Kreutzer** concertos, which end with a written out cadenza by the composer that is without accompaniment, a planned solo that sounds improvisatory (not like in the Viotti



where the cadenza is completely improvised). This is much like the moments in popular songs that usually only exist in performance, not recording, where an impromptu (yet totally planned) guitar solo stops the flow of the structure altogether in order to show their own virtuosity away from everything else and impress the crowd. They are the sole

focal point for the audience, there is nowhere else for them to direct their attention, and that allows the soloist to exert their control, command and authority in the most overt and extroverted manner.

This emphasis on dictatorship, control, power and authority is largely the reason why this music of the nineteenth-century French school is not studied and not played any more within professional settings. With the likening to Napoleon, the connotations of military and rigour, as well as the blatant undertones of [white] masculinity, of course this is a purely outdated aesthetic, and while I play into this storyline for the purpose of narrative, I do not in any way shape or form agree that this aesthetic is correct in my personal views. So why promote it then? Given the absolutely remarkable, revolutionary and trailblazing work that the RETUNE festival has done over the past two years in promoting under-represented composers from a variety of different backgrounds (of which I had the great pleasure of playing in myself this year, a programme of Samuel and Avril Coleridge-Taylor with Oxford University Chorus), why would anyone choose to go back to such an obscure, outdated tradition of performance instead?

Well, to that question I would probably answer with the same question towards popular music. Why are figures like Freddie Mercury and John Lennon, who frequently used their masculinity to command and dominate their audience, still such cultural icons in the twenty-first century? And, better still, why is their ability to dictate and own a stage the very aspect of their performance technique so adored and heralded by people today? What I am arguing through this concert, essentially, is that this music and this mode of performance in nineteenth-century France is a historiographical necessary for the understanding of performance studies beyond it.

Perhaps with exception to Pietro Locatelli, who's cadenzas are very virtuous and impressive in showing off his technique, there is no real implication of such a physical, visual display of technical prowess. Usually, in the eighteenth-century, virtuosity and bravura is achieved sonically, I'm thinking here of Locatelli's extension of the fingerboard to include higher notes, Vivaldi's rapid semiquaver sequences in the left hand, or Biber's scordatura tuning which 'magically' and 'mysteriously' produces new timbres on the string. Never before, though, has virtuosity been so physically displayed through excessive movements. In a similar vein, never before is the imagery of a commanding violinist so apparent, with the orchestra's function not just being subordinate or accompaniment in these concerti, but also actually as followers, disciples to their leader (the military/soldier connotations emerge again). This performance ideal, stemming from the cultural socio-political contexts of nineteenth-century France, is the genesis of the performance practices we've grown so accustomed to in popular performance — the only thing that is dropped, really, is the political connotations of Napoleon and so on.

Essentially, I think from a historiographical perspective, we need to know our history. Artists like Elvis Presley and The Beatles were trailblazing in pioneering new sounds and reaching new heights as artists, this is very true, but as performers they are nothing new. And now, you know who started it, and why it was started.