

# 14 The violin – instrument of four continents

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No other musical instrument has until recent years been so widely used among all classes throughout the world as the violin. One reason, of course, is quite simply the musical perfection of the instrument – its sonority and flexibility in the hands of musicians anywhere, especially, with its capacity for clean and strongly rhythmic articulation and its penetrating tone, its suitability for the performance of dance music of all styles. At the time of its invention dance musicians throughout Europe were playing a variety of bowed string instruments from the *gue* (probably a type of rectangular box zither) in Britain's northernmost islands, to the rebec-like *lira* of Greece. Such musicians, professional and amateur, looked favourably on the newcomer: first, they must have found the violin an improvement on their own instruments and, for the most part, they could readily transfer their bowing and fingering techniques to the violin. Secondly, there must have been some status attached to an instrument which found favour in courts and homes of the wealthy, even though in those *milieux* the violinist was often considered to be a professional musician of rather low rank.

Outside Europe the adoption of the violin can further be seen as an index to the expansion of European influence over the centuries. Wherever they went colonists and traders took violins with them and, as often as not, encouraged indigenous musicians to learn to make and play them. Because we know that professional violinists were seen as low-class providers of dance music compared with the more genteel amateur players of the viol family, we are not surprised to learn, for example, that the early white settlers in North America preferred to teach their musically talented black slaves to play the violin for them so that they themselves were spared the task and were free to indulge in what became at times a passion for social dancing.

Though the violin seems to have appeared in most corners of Europe by the end of the sixteenth century, its indigenous predecessors survived in use alongside it for centuries and this makes establishing a chronology for the diffusion of the violin somewhat difficult. For one thing there is

often a confusion of terminology, so that when one comes across an early mention of the use of violins one often cannot tell if this is simply a rather loose reference to any kind of bowed instruments. The Romanian folklorist Tiberiu Alexandru, in discussing the adoption of the violin among Romanian peasants, quoted by way of example the account of an army officer stationed in Oltenia during the period 1718–30. The officer noted that the natives were fond of dancing to the accompaniment of violins, flutes and drum – but continued by describing the violin as being made of a half-pumpkin covered with parchment.<sup>1</sup>

Conversely, the names of local indigenous instruments were often transferred to the violin proper. The best known example of this is the term ‘fiddle’, which for centuries in the United Kingdom, Ireland and North America has been used as a synonym for the violin and is still in use today to distinguish between those ‘violinists’ who have learned the playing style and repertory of classical Europe and ‘fiddlers’ who play a local dance or dance-song repertory with a very different style. Their instruments are identical; it is the style and repertory which is different.

Alexandru also drew attention to three other important aspects concerning the diffusion of the violin: first, whenever it was taken up by the common people they usually transferred to it a playing technique learned for earlier indigenous bowed instruments. (Alexandru added that such technique was generally despised by scholarly practice no matter how suitable it might have been for the particular musical and social context in which it was used.) Secondly, he noted that, despite its very perfection of form and tone as an instrument for the classical European tradition, it was often not adopted into other musical traditions without some modifications to suit local musical preferences and techniques. Examples are the addition of sympathetic strings (as in the case of the *keman* of south-western Moldavia and the *hardingfele* (or Hardanger fiddle) of western Norway); the tying on of a fret part of the way up the fingerboard so as to raise the overall pitch of a violin to that of the instrument it was replacing or accompanying; and the making of modifications to the bridge. Thirdly, Alexandru pointed to the great variety of non-standard tunings, which was not simply a result of ignorance of any need for standardisation. Different tunings were selected to facilitate the execution of special melodies, or for reasons of sonority when playing in certain keys or modes. Some of these features will be considered in more detail when specific traditions are discussed in the sections that follow.

## European popular and rural traditions

### *Central, Southern and Eastern Europe*

In addition to providing dance music, stringed instruments in South-Eastern Europe and many parts of Asia have found much favour for accompanying the singing of epic songs, presumably for centuries, and it is one of the virtues of the violin that it can be played resting along the left arm or propped against the chest, leaving the player free to sing (if he chooses) while playing. Most epic singers accompany themselves in this manner, providing instrumental preludes, postludes and refrains which allow them to rest their vocal chords and to recall or re-compose the next set of lines. This is true for gypsy singers of southern Romania as well as for the famous *guslari* (epic singers) of Yugoslavia, Albania and Macedonia, though here the *gusle* or *lirica* (in Greece the *lira*) has co-existed alongside the violin until very recently. Birthe Traerup, writing of the music of a Muslim country wedding in Kosovo, southern Yugoslavia has described how the singers used a violin, tuned to a rather lower pitch, to provide such accompaniments as well as to play for dancing, which was interspersed among the periods of singing.

Singing to one's own playing on stringed instruments was once probably far more widespread. This is suggested by the remarks of the French historian Brantôme, who wrote most unappreciatively of the crowd of Edinburgh musicians who one night in 1561 serenaded Mary Queen of Scots during her visit to Holyrood Palace, playing on 'The nastiest of fiddles (*méchants violons*) and little rebecs, which are as vile as they can be in that country ... and accompanying them with the singing of psalms'.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike in Northern Europe, where it was often played on its own, in South-Eastern and Central Europe the violin has long formed part of a great variety of ensembles. In Bulgaria, southern Romania and Greece the clarinet is often the principal melody instrument, with the violinist doubling the clarinet line in a heterophonic and highly ornamental manner and continuing to accompany the clarinettist while he sings. Plucked lutes and a drum usually complete the ensemble.

In these areas, too, Alexandru reports the occasional use of the *keman*, a violin modified by adding one or more sympathetic strings. In rural Turkey itself the *keman*, the local name for the ordinary violin, is played vertically on the knees like the older *kemençe* (sometimes called the 'Black Sea fiddle'), which it has been replacing. Often the violin or clarinet has replaced the shawm in the *davul zurna* (drum and shawm) duo once common in the regions of Turkish influence. The gypsy combination of violin and *gardon* is a notable example: the *gardon* resembles a small double bass (often rather ruggedly constructed), but its strings are tuned in fourths and fifths (or octaves) and, lying over a flat

Ex. 37

♩ = 168-176

Violin

Gardon

simile al fine

Violin

Violin etc.

bridge, they are beaten rhythmically, all of them simultaneously, with a short stick. Sometimes, as in Ex. 37, pizzicato on one string alternates with the louder beaten sounds – a clear parallel to the playing of the large *davul* with a thick beater in one hand and a thin switch in the other.

Central Europe is the area where European classical traditions have had a greater influence on the dance music of both peasants and lower-class townspeople and here one finds combinations of string bands (including first and second violins), often accompanied by zithers of the plucked or hammered type and with the more recent addition of instruments such as clarinets. The clarinet seems to have been steadily replacing bagpipes throughout this region. East Central Europe, Hungary especially, is also the area where the gypsy musicians reign supreme as violinists.

Sárosi relates in detail how the violin became a favourite instrument of the professional gypsy musician during the course of the seventeenth century; as early as 1683 ‘nearly every Hungarian nobleman has a gypsy who is a fiddler or locksmith’. As in many other parts of Europe, this was a time when the church in Hungary looked with disfavour on the violin as no more than the instrument of the devil – ‘I would have all the violins found in every town and village, and, cutting them in two, hang them up on willow trees, and the violinists who play the dances would be hung up by their legs beside them.’<sup>3</sup> But in spite of such strictures gypsy musicians took to the fiddle with great zest as a means of earning a living; in any case, they were often tolerated as persons somewhat outside the law as it applied to ordinary townsfolk and villagers.

During the eighteenth century gypsies formed the personnel of regular theatre orchestras in some towns of Hungary and Austria but the average dance ensemble was often little more than a quartet, with two violins (one playing the *kontra* – accompanying part), a cimbalom and a bass.

## Ex. 38

♩ = c. 116

Violin

Viola

Bass

etc.

Some band leaders won considerable fame: Károly Boka (1764–1827), a more classical player than most, ran a large band of twenty to twenty-four players. It was reported that 10,000 people attended his funeral and about his playing it was once remarked, ‘This man does not play the violin: he speaks on the violin.’<sup>4</sup> The significance of such a remark only became apparent to me after listening to a Hungarian village fiddler playing a programmatic piece in which he imitated the frustrated cries and words of a shepherd who has lost his flock. Franz Liszt wrote enthusiastically about the imaginative improvising of gypsy violinists. Both Liszt and Joachim enjoyed making music with them at times, and after one such occasion Joachim remarked that ‘never had his mood been so stirred by a musical performance as by this’.<sup>5</sup>

Gypsy bands made no use of notation – which could have inhibited the imaginative improvisations of the leader – and their harmonic idiom was not based on classical functional harmony. In central Transylvania, for example, the second instrument, the *kontra*, is often a three-stringed viola which is given a very flat bridge so that by double or triple stopping the player can bow a continual succession of consonant triads, often in root position and with the occasional seventh, while the bass player provides a root to the harmonies (Ex. 38). Because of the degree of improvisation in the performances and because the lower parts are regarded more as a kind of additional rhythmic texture (with the *kontra* player often playing between the bass player’s accented beats), there are often ‘discordant’ and ‘illogical’ progressions. Their rural clients were in any case rather indifferent to harmony and, indeed, when they made their own music, the rhythmically beaten *bourdon* (or drone) of a *gardon* sufficed.

### Northern Europe

In Poland, Ewa Dahlig has documented the gradual replacement of a variety of types of fiddle by the modern violin, which is now the most widely used folk instrument.<sup>6</sup> The *złobkoci*, similar to the rebec or kit, continued to be played in the region of the Tatra mountains until this century. Attempts have been made to revive its use recently. The *mazanki* may well have been a Polish modification of the violin and was used for playing along with a bagpipe. It was similar to (but smaller than) the violin and was generally carved out of one piece of wood; it had only three strings, tuned about a fifth or more higher than the top three strings of the violin. One leg of the bridge was longer than the other and passed through a hole in the belly to rest directly on the inside of the back. The turn of the twentieth century witnessed the gradual replacement of the *mazanki* by a violin with an artificial fret. This latter served as a nut near the middle of the fingerboard and facilitated playing in the first position but in a higher register (up to a ninth at times) required for playing with a bagpipe. The *suka* was replaced by the violin as late as the period 1920–39, but not before its shape had been considerably influenced by that of the violin. It had a bridge like that for the *mazanki* and was traditionally held vertically and its strings stopped with the finger nails (suggesting perhaps a link with older bowed-lyre playing traditions of Scandinavia). Another type, the *skrypze złobione* ('hollowed violin') is one of many instances of locally made imitations of the violin, which, like the *suka*, *mazanki* and *złobkoci*, were eventually rendered obsolete by the ready availability of cheap factory violins. Some of these predecessors of the violin have been taken up again by modern 'folk revival' groups and serve as a symbol of Polishness. One can even hear them played by Polish exiles in London.

Violins were known in many parts of Scandinavia by the early seventeenth century and, as in many other parts of Northern Europe, were to become the chief instruments of the people. The lush valleys of south-western Norway saw the flowering of a particularly beautiful refinement of the violin in the form of the *hardingfele* (Hardanger fiddle). This instrument has retained the flat bridge and fingerboard and short neck of the Baroque violin but, like the *viola d'amore*, has four or five sympathetic strings which are led through a hole in the bridge and under the fingerboard up to an elongated pegbox. Many of these instruments are given rich inlaid and painted decoration.

The *hardingfele* is a solo instrument *par excellence* and has a large repertory of older dance-tune types including the *springar*, *gangar* and *halling* as well as bridal marches and other listening pieces. Unlike the more four-square structures of the newer violin dance repertory, *hardingfele* pieces make use of short, frequently repeated motifs, often widely separated in pitch level, and there is much melodic ornamentation,

Ex. 39 from 'The Kivle Maidens I', gangar after Johannes Dale, Tinn, Telemark

double stopping and use of intermittent drones. Ex. 39 is taken from the principal five-volume collection of the repertory, which contains notated specific settings said to have been handed down (aurally, of course) from famous earlier exponents of the tradition. This piece is one of seventeen *hardingfele* tunes freely arranged for piano by Edvard Grieg (*Slåttar*, Op. 72).

The tradition, like other violin-playing traditions in Scandinavia, is full of vitality today, encouraged by fiddlers' societies and competitions. *Hardingfele* players learn specific settings of tunes originally handed down aurally, and they deliberately cultivate a more traditional type of intonation in which a 'neutral mode' (one whose third and seventh degrees are neither major nor minor, but somewhere in between) is frequently used. Over twenty different *scordatura* tunings have been identified.

In Scotland and Ireland the violin vies with the bagpipe and harp respectively to be regarded as the principal traditional instrument for each country. Both countries have large and, to some extent, overlapping repertoires – they include the earlier pre-nineteenth-century dance-tune types such as reels, jigs and hornpipes and the later quadrilles, waltzes, and polkas – but the two national playing styles are relatively distinct. Within both countries there is also evidence of considerable regional differences in playing style, but the influence of radio and the recording industry are tending to produce more homogenous national styles. Fiddle playing in the Shetland Islands is still regarded as one of the most distinct and liveliest traditions. Initially it was the skill and the high

degree of participation by the menfolk of the islands that earned it this reputation. With traditional fiddling now being taught in schools throughout the islands, skills and enthusiasm are as great as before, but women players outnumber the men.<sup>7</sup>

In both Scotland and Ireland solo playing was the norm until comparatively recently. Interest in the individual settings and playing styles of musicians forms an important part of the aesthetics of traditional fiddling, and this is even more true now that fiddlers play less for dancing and more as chamber musicians. In Scotland one style of reel playing, named after the valley of the river Spey, gave rise by the early nineteenth century to a separate genre of reel known as ‘strathspey’, whose sharply pointed rhythms (including much use of what is popularly known as ‘Scotch snap’ – that is a pair of notes the first of which is extremely short) suggest origins in the rhythms of the Scottish Gaelic language.

The violin proved popular among all classes of Scottish society (they shared essentially the same repertory), but the love of the leisured classes for dancing, especially during the eighteenth century, saw a profusion of published collections of fiddle music that included many new compositions, not all of which were dance tunes, however. Out of the strathspey dance, the slow strathspey evolved as a recital piece which, with its delicate and at times florid ornamentation, is regarded today as a true test of skill for the Scottish violinist. Ex. 40 demonstrates the highly stylised manner in which the slow strathspey ‘Madam Frederick’ (by William Marshall, a famous eighteenth-century fiddler-composer) was performed by Hector MacAndrew.

One of the most influential of fiddler-composers was the flamboyant James Scott Skinner (1843–1927) the son of a traditional dancing master. As a boy Skinner received classical violin training in Manchester. He then returned to Scotland to continue the family profession, but became more a recitalist, including in his repertory many of his own pieces. His playing survives on disc today, inspiring many more ordinary fiddlers to emulate him.

Fiddlers’ societies are active throughout Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia and the ‘folk revival’ of recent decades has further seen the fiddle repertory taken up by mixed ensembles that include guitars, free reed instruments, whistles, bagpipes and drums (for example, professional folk groups such as The Boys of the Lough in Scotland and The Chieftains in Ireland).

## **North America**

The earliest colonists of the Americas almost certainly took their musical instruments with them, and the violin has been the most prominent instrument in North America for domestic entertainment at least since



Ex. 40 Slow strathspey: 'Madam Frederick' by William Marshall, as played by Hector MacAndrew, Aberdeen. Transcribed by P. Cooke from School of Scottish Studies archive film, 1973

The image shows a musical score for a slow strathspey. It consists of six staves of music in treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. There are several dynamic markings, including accents (V) and slurs. The word 'heel' is written above the first staff, and 'heel V' appears above the second and fourth staves. A '3' (triple) marking is present above the second and fifth staves. The score concludes with a double bar line and the instruction 'slower ---' below the final staff.

the early eighteenth century. By this time colonists could afford to begin to cultivate social and artistic activities, among which dancing, as in their mother countries, was one of the most favoured pastimes. The eagerness of colonists to encourage their black slaves to become competent on the fiddle so that they could play for them has already been mentioned. At times the musicianship of one's slave was highly valued – hence the appearance in local newspapers of advertisements like the following: 'RUN AWAY . . . A Negro Man about 46 years of age . . . plays on the violin and is a Sawyer'.<sup>8</sup> The violin, with the banjo (an instrument of African origin) and some type of drum or tambourine, became their prime form of instrumental music making. Black fiddlers played for their white masters and for their own kith and kin, sometimes both in the same evening: 'The negro fiddler walks in and the dance commences. After they have enjoyed their sport sufficiently, they give way to the negroes, who have already supplied themselves with torchlights and swept the yard. The fiddler walks out, and strikes up a tune: and at it they go in a regular tear-down dance; for here they are at home. The sound of the fiddle makes them crazy.'<sup>9</sup>

Eileen Southern's history of the music of Black Americans<sup>10</sup> is replete with such accounts from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Presumably the slave fiddlers learned the standard dance repertory of the white settlers – jigs, reels, waltzes, quadrilles, etc. – though we know

nothing about what they might have played for their own people's dancing. Even in the North, which saw the growth of large cities during the nineteenth century, the fiddle was for a time still king of the dance. Southern reports that every hall in the notorious 'Five Points' area of New York (a ghetto slum) was 'provided with its fiddler ready to tune up his villainous squeaking for sixpence a [dance] piece'. By the 1860s, however, the piano was discovered to be less expensive to use in such halls, for it could replace fiddle, wind and bass fiddle, but in the dance halls of the South, in New Orleans for example, the so called six- or seven-piece 'string bands' that included a couple of clarinets or violins, cornet, trombone, string bass, guitar and drums, continued to flourish. Nevertheless, by the end of the century the violin was on the way out, for in the crowded and noisy city dance halls wind instruments were better heard than violins; and after the Civil War, as Southern pointed out, Blacks were free to play any instrument they wished after decades of confinement to fiddle and banjo. The violin became less and less conspicuous in the newer dance bands, though the early jazz period spawned some excellent jazz violinists. In country areas the violin continued to be valued, as recently collected oral testimony now in the Library of Congress at Washington vividly illustrates: 'One day I see Marse Thomas a twistin' de ears on a fiddle and rosinin' de bow. Den he would pull dat bow 'cross de belly of dat fiddle. Something bust loose in me and sing all thru my head and tingle in my fingers. I made up my mind right then and dere, to save and buy me a fiddle. I got one dat Christmas, bless God! I learnt and been playin' de fiddle ever since . . . Who I marry? I marry Ellen Watson, as pretty as a ginger cake nigger as ever fried a batter cake or rolled her arms up in a wash tub. How I get her? I never get her; dat fiddle get her . . . De beau she liked best was de beau dat could draw music out of them five strings . . .'<sup>11</sup>

Whites did not leave all the music making to their Black slaves. In eighteenth-century Charleston, Carolina, any young gentleman was 'presumed to be acquainted with Dancing, Boxing, playing the Fiddle & Small-Sword and Cards',<sup>12</sup> and lively regional traditions of fiddle playing survive up to the present day in Canada and the USA. Though the violin is no longer the prime instrument for dancing, its repertory of tunes for square dances lives on amongst fiddlers who play for their own pleasure and who join together, like their counterparts in Scotland and Ireland, to hold regular competitions or group playing sessions in fiddlers' societies. These various regions have their own distinguishable styles, ultimately derived from the main ethnic groups who colonised these areas, though there was also much acculturation.

Linda Burman-Hall's study<sup>13</sup> suggests that greater cultural isolation in the more rural South led to the persistence of stronger traditions of fiddling there. She identified four basic sub-styles of Southern fiddling: the Blue Ridge style – to be found in an area parallel to and east of the

Appalachian mountain chain, the southern Appalachian style (along the line of the mountains), the Ozark mountain style and the western style typified by the fiddling of Texas and Oklahoma. Her descriptions of these styles read very much like descriptions of traditional Scottish and Irish fiddle playing, which perhaps only goes to show how imprecise words are for describing differences of performing style. She mentions *scordatura* tunings, neutral intonation, inflected pitches, bowings slurred over accents and much use of open strings as occasional drones. All of these features were often brilliantly demonstrated by the more virtuoso fiddlers singled out for exposure when, from the late 1920s, the popular record industry began to take an interest in hill-billy music, and styles such as that of The Bluegrass Boys became popular far outside their native areas.

There seems, however, to have developed an important difference between the fiddling of the Americans and that of the Scots and Irish 'back home'. Both sides of the Atlantic initially shared the same four-square dance repertory, but in the New World there is a strong aurally transmitted tradition of variation-making during the performance of such tunes. This is, I suggest, the result of the African influence on fiddle style. For African musicians the varied repetition of their short musical patterns within the framework of the pattern is the norm, and Black fiddlers probably have given the same kind of treatment to the short tune structures of the colonists – there is little evidence that in the eighteenth and nineteenth century the Scots or Irish practised much variation-making even though the essentially aural nature of the transmission of the repertory would have allowed for it. Since those times greater familiarity with 'standard' settings has tended to inhibit tendencies for improvisation.

### Latin America

Though various types of accordions are increasingly replacing it (as is, indeed, the case throughout the world), the violin is in widespread use all over Latin America, along with guitar and harp, all three being introduced by the Hispanic colonisers from the very beginning. Among Cortes's companions who sailed from Cuba to Mexico with him in 1519 were six musicians, including one Ortiz, who was an excellent viol player and who lost no time in setting up his own music academy. In Mexico particularly, the Hispanic colonisers were amazed at the speed with which the local Indians took to learning their music and the Church was at times embarrassed by the number of competent instrumentalists and singers eager to contribute to Christian worship (so as to better themselves economically as much as spiritually). The first Bishop of Mexico had instructed his missionaries (Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian friars mostly) to teach music wherever they went 'as an indispensable aid in the process of conversion'.

In Mexico the first cathedral orchestra was founded in 1554 and twenty years later was considerably augmented, including fifteen viols *da braccio* among the various classes of viols used. We can assume that violins themselves were adopted equally readily. They were certainly in use in the orchestra a century later, and in Paraguay the Jesuit José Cardel reported that around 1730 every small town supported thirty to forty musicians including up to half a dozen violinists. Stevenson<sup>14</sup> notes that the Mexican Indians proved to be very ready to learn the skills of instrument making, so it is not surprising that a large number of locally made imitations of the violin were in use. However, Baumann considers that some of them, such as one-string fiddles, are not really debased versions of violins but of Afro-Arab origin; he further suggests that the use of the name *rabel*, for numerous three-stringed instruments in use in Chile, Guatemala and formerly in Panama, indicates Spanish-Arab provenance.

During the last two centuries the genteel, stylish salon music brought over by later colonists permeated all levels of the colonial and mestizo communities. The repertory consisted of minuets, *contradanzas*, polonaises, mazurkas (commonly called *varsovianas*), polkas and the *cotilio* – a remnant section of sets of tunes for *las cuadrillos* (the quadrilles). The ensembles also tended to be modelled on those of the salons of Spain and Portugal, with pairs of violins, playing often in parallel thirds, supported by guitars, *charangos*, other types of plucked lute and a harp or other bass instrument. Since 1900 other European instruments have joined the ensembles. For instance, the popular *mariachi* (from Fr. *mariage*) ensemble of Mexico often consists of up to three violins, two trumpets, *guitarron*, rhythm and other guitars. The violin-playing style is typified by the playing of the El Ciego Melquiades ('The Blind Magician'), who uses vibrato, some slides and occasional harmonics, backed as always by a vigorous plucked accompaniment.<sup>15</sup> Hispanic instruments also found their way into the ensembles of rural Indians themselves. The Yaqui for instance use violins and harps together with older instruments such as scrapers, water drums and flutes. In Inca bands the harp provides a strong string bass for the melodies of flutes and violins,<sup>16</sup> and the Zarabandas ensembles in the central and north-eastern highlands of Guatemala use strings in a similar way. Lastly, Belzner has reported an unusual example of syncretism among the Macunar Shuar of Ecuador, where the violin has become a shaman's instrument and important in curing rituals. It is held vertically and is not fingered – rather it is played somewhat like the musical bow it has replaced.

### **The Arab world, South and South-East Asia**

We have read that the bow originated in the Turkish-Arab world; indeed, while the violin was evolving in Italy and Germany many different

bowed instruments not only were in use in the Arabic world but had spread further east in company with Arab trade (for example, to South-East Asia, China and Japan). Trade also took the Western violin to the East and in Iran, Syria and North Africa, it was found to be ideally suited for the improvisation of *maqams*. Hormoz Farhat, writing on the music of Iran, has commented that the violin is now hardly thought of as a foreign instrument, being 'so well suited for Persian music'.<sup>17</sup> Until very recently in many parts of these areas, the violin was held vertically for playing in the same way as the *rebab*, often resting on or between the knees. In the classical 'Andalusian' orchestras of the Maghreb and in the more Europeanised orchestras of cities like Cairo, Arab musicians have more recently adopted the classical European hold for the violin.

Nettl considers that differences in playing style and use of the violin between musicians of the classical Iranian tradition and those of the Carnatic tradition of South India serve to exemplify basic differences of attitude towards Western influence. The violin's rapid adoption in Iran along with Western solistic tendencies suggest to him a basic compatibility with Western music, whereas in India the violin was only slowly absorbed into a strong, viable musical tradition – a case of modernisation of instrumentation rather than westernisation of style.<sup>18</sup>

Although reportedly introduced to the princely courts of Malabar on the west coast by followers of Vasco da Gama some three centuries earlier,<sup>19</sup> the violin was only accepted into the Carnatic tradition after Balasvami Dikshitar (1786–1858) and his pupil Vadivelu gave it an accompanying role in the classical music of the court of Travancore at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> For classical Carnatic music it is usually tuned d–a–d<sup>1</sup>–a<sup>1</sup>. This is nearer to viola pitch than violin and a viola is sometimes preferred, for it produces 'a deep melodious and agreeable sound perfectly suited to male musicians'.<sup>21</sup> Absolute pitch, however, is dependent on the preferred pitch of the soloist; as accompanists, violinists 'shadow' the soloist, echoing each phrase and following the soloist wherever he or she goes, in a kind of perpetual canon.

Originally the violinist's left-hand technique was two-fingered, modelled on the technique of the *vina* (though today, many players have explored and adopted four-finger techniques). With the violin locked firmly between the player's neck and left ankle as he/she sits cross-legged, the left hand is able to move freely around the fingerboard introducing the slides and wide shakes (*gamakas*) of many kinds which are essential to the proper performance of an Indian raga. European-style vibrato is avoided.

The violin is beginning to find favour as a solo instrument in the hands of virtuosos such as L. Subramaniam.<sup>22</sup> In North India, while violins have yet to be adopted into classical performance, they form an indispensable section of the modern Indian film, radio and television orchestras. Bandyopadhyaya considers the violin today to be one of the most

popular and common instruments of the bowed type in India, but it occurs rarely in Indian folk ensembles except for a genre of popular rural theatre known as *jatra* in Bangladesh, and for accompanying Odissi dance, and occasionally in ensembles for genres of devotional vocal music known as *thumri* and *ghazal*. Violins are now manufactured in large quantities in the sub-continent, particularly in Bengal.

The Portuguese took violins not only to Goa, on the Indian sub-continent, but also further east to Burma, Malaysia and Indonesia, where, not surprisingly, local names for the violin (e.g. *biola*) resemble the Portuguese name for the violin – *viola*. Here also Catholic missionaries seem to have taken active steps to give training in the playing of European instruments, and as early as 1689 in Djakarta wealthy families had their slaves learn European instruments. In one instance a trio of violin, harp and bassoon is reported to have provided music at meal-times.<sup>23</sup>

In less European settings the violin seems to have been slowly taking over the role of the *rebab*, or the shawm, both of them an earlier importation from the Islamic world, in a variety of small *gamelan* ensembles. Earlier this century the ‘Gamelan Gandrung’ of the Banyuwangi district in West Java included two violins tuned near to viola pitch, which played along with a drum and gongs of different sizes.<sup>24</sup> An even greater mixture of instruments is used for the Batavian theatrical dance genre called *Lenggo* in which Malay songs are heard accompanied by three *robanas* (frame drums), a couple of violins and a Chinese moon-lute.<sup>25</sup> Other ensembles where violins are used betray Western influence in their names, beginning with the term *orkes* (from orchestra). *Kronchong* (*keroncong*) is the name given to popular westernised Indonesian music, whose instrumentation seems to have been continuously changing. In the port of Melaka, Malaysia, the violin used to partner the accordion and indigenous gongs. Kunst reported the use of mandoline, guitar, violins and ukulele for such music in 1951,<sup>26</sup> and today saxophones, trumpets and electric instruments have displaced most of these.

Such a survey as this is bound to be uneven, not only because of its extreme brevity but also because studies of musical change are much rarer than those dealing with the characteristics of supposedly more stable musical traditions (and in any case can never keep pace with the rate of change). The violin music of some large and important countries, even of some continents, has been ignored completely – for instance fiddle playing in Australasia, or some of the more acculturated traditions in southern Africa, or the use of violins in the *ta-arab* music of Swahilis along the east coast of Africa.

What the future is for the violin outside the academies and concert-halls that foster our Western classical tradition is anyone’s guess. As an instrument of popular Western dance its days already seem over. First

came the free-reed instruments such as the accordion, and now a wide range of 'electrophones' form the core of ensembles in dance-halls throughout the world. The development of electrified violins – normal violins fitted with contact microphones – was much needed in these contexts just as the now obsolete violins-with-horns of Augustus Stroh were a necessary invention in the early days of recording. It would be wrong, however, to overlook the determination of small groups of enthusiasts (in Europe and North America especially) who continue to take up the 'fiddle'. The older traditional dance genres they perform have in many cases taken on a second existence, and with regional or national cultures under threat, their fiddling is a symbol of their identity. For many more, the fiddle is valued for sustaining an attractive repertory of much-loved melodies.