A Guide for Playing the Viola Without a Shoulder Rest

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A Guide for Playing the Viola Without a Shoulder Rest

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my dearest parents,

San-Kuei Chang and Ching-Hua Lai.

Thank you for all your support and love while I have pursued my degree over the past six years.
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I truly appreciate the director of the dissertation, Dr. Daniel Sweaney, for his advice, inspiration, and continuous encouragement over the past four years. He is a friendly, supportive, and knowledgeable professor. Without his help and effort, it would have been impossible to complete this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

Knowing how to hold the viola is always the first step for not only beginners but also for those that progress to become teachers, professional soloists, orchestral musicians, and chamber musicians. Although there are pedagogy books and articles, these resources only devote a small amount to how to hold the instrument. There are also a number of videos online in which violinists or violists share their thoughts on this topic.

As a violist, holding the viola is a lifetime issue because of the weight, and the variety of shapes and sizes of the instrument. These factors can cause more difficulty than holding the violin which is lighter and has less variety in size and shape. I had been searching for a way to hold the viola comfortably and without tension for many years. I found a comfortable and balanced way to play the viola without a shoulder rest and have been doing so since 2015.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to share my experience on the thoughts of the chinrest and shoulder rest and how I learned to play without a shoulder rest. I hope these ideas will help other violists at all levels if they are interested in finding comfort and balance without a shoulder rest.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Playing the viola without tension is a lifetime issue. How to hold the viola is always the first step for not only beginners but also for those that progress to become teachers, professional soloists, orchestral musicians, and chamber musicians. In some cases, holding the viola can be more difficult than holding the violin because of the weight and size of the instrument. Two years ago, I began to question whether or not it was necessary for me to play with a shoulder rest.

Some players struggle with a shoulder rest and never really feel comfortable playing with one. Their muscles are not free, and they experience unnecessary tension when they are using a shoulder rest. While experimenting with different chinrests and shoulder rests I found a comfortable way to play without a shoulder rest. Through this process, I found that playing without a shoulder rest allows one more freedom of movement. My hope is to try to present a resource with ways to helps other violists at different levels who are interested in learning to play the viola without a shoulder rest.

First, I noticed that many Baroque performance practice violinists and violists play their instruments without a chinrest and shoulder rest. They always seem free of excessive tension in the neck and shoulders. Second, through video observation, I observed some violinists and violists such as Jascha Heifetz, William Primrose, Anne Sophie Mutter, Kim Kashkashian, Pinchas Zukerman, and Itzhak Perlman perform without a shoulder rest.
As a professional violist, I am always searching for the most comfortable way to play the viola without excessive tension, because excessive tension can cause injury over a long period of time. I have tried many ways to ease tension in the fifteen years that I have been playing the viola. I feel that it is important to let our body balance the viola and use the muscles required for playing in a relaxed and efficient way. It might take time to find the most comfortable angle between the collarbone, left hand, wrist, and arm in the beginning, but the idea is to be aware of tension while we are playing and know where the tension is coming from.

There are many pedagogical writings dedicated to how to hold the violin; there has not been much written on how to hold the viola because the viola was not regarded as a solo instrument or prominent voice in orchestra or chamber music until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the Baroque Period, the viola functioned as an instrument that filled in the harmonies; sometimes, the viola could be replaced by another violin in chamber music. For example, the string trio in the Baroque Period often consisted of two violins and one cello instead of one violin, one viola, and one cello.

However, the violin tends to overshadow the viola because of its comparative popularity. Although pedagogy books including *The Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing* by Leopold Mozart, *and Violin Playing as I Teach It* by Leopold Auer devote a section to holding the violin, the lack of viola pedagogy books forces violists to use various methods written by violinists. Even though the violin and viola look similar when played, the viola requires a different approach.
There are more and more videos and resources online in which violinists and violists share their thoughts on this topic. Although these informal guides are beginning to fill a gap that exists in the literature pertaining to viola pedagogy, it is still less common to see violists playing without a shoulder rest.

This dissertation is primarily written for violists who want to play without a shoulder rest. There are two kinds of violists: those that play the viola with shoulder rests, and the those that play without shoulder rests. One way is not more correct than the other. For example, beginners are taught to play the violin or viola with a shoulder rest for two purposes: to help them execute the right posture and hold the instrument easily.

The different models of chinrests and shoulder rests along with their advantages and disadvantages will be discussed in chapter two. I will also introduce how I balance and hold the viola and how I was able to rid myself of bad habits such as vibrato, which caused tension that I feel developed from playing with a shoulder rest. I will present this information in a step-by-step process. This process will show how one can balance the viola without a shoulder rest and how to solve technical issues such as vibrato and shifting in a comfortable and relaxed manner that allows for freedom of movement.

Although I am not encouraging violists to play without a shoulder rest, I am doing this research to help three different types of players. The first kind of player is the beginner who wants to play without a shoulder rest and does not know how to do so efficiently. Beginner students may see world-class players, such as Jascha Heifetz, William Primrose, and Itzhak Perlman, who do not use a shoulder rest and might want to imitate these players. However, different body types require different considerations. Playing the instrument without a shoulder rest without guidance may cause incorrect
posture and movement, which could eventually lead to injury. If players imitate virtuosi without understanding their methods, it may cause injuries to the neck, shoulder, arm, wrist, and/or hand.

The second kind of player is the viola teacher who is already playing without a shoulder rest but does not know how to teach their students. Some teachers played the viola without a shoulder rest when they were a beginner which was very natural for them and never found it necessary to use a shoulder rest during their career. Because they learned this so early they might not be able to give good instructions on how to play without a shoulder rest.

The third kind of player is the player who has already been injured. Understanding the benefits and correct practices of playing without one will help them recover. It may correct their bad habits such as vibrato and awkward playing motions and extend their playing life. I hope this dissertation benefits violists of all ages and levels, whether or not they chose to play without a shoulder rest. I also hope it will create more interest in this issue and lead to more research.

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Articles, method books, and resources such as videos which players can be easily obtained through the Internet discuss how to hold the violin or viola. Although they give some tips for players based on their experiences and ideas for finding the right shoulder rest, it is still not comprehensive.

In the classical period, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s father Leopold Mozart wrote a pedagogy book in 1756, which among other things explains how to hold the violin. In
chapter two of his book *The Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing*, he wrote,

> The violin is placed against the neck so that it lies somewhat in front of the shoulder and the side on which the E (thinnest) string lies comes under the chin, whereby the violin remains unmoved in its place even during the strongest movements of the ascending and descending hand. One must, however, watch the right arm of the pupil unremittingly; that the elbow, while drawing the bow, be not raised too high but remains always somewhat near to the body.¹

In Stewart Pollens’s “*Before the Chinrest: A Violinist’s Guide to the Mysteries of Pre-Chinrest Technique and Style*” by Stanley Ritchie,” he states that Ritchie thinks the violin was held in many different ways when playing without a chinrest. Stewart Pollens mentions,

> By allowing the player to secure the violin under the chin, rather than resting it lightly upon one’s collar- bone (as Ritchie recommends), the chinrest enabled left and right-handed playing techniques to evolve, and with them distortions in performance practice when these techniques are applied to music written prior to the chinrest’s development.²

In Francesco Geminiani *The Art of Playing the Violin*, Geminiani recommended holding the violin below the collarbone. He mentioned,

> The violin must be rested just below the collarbone, turning the right- hand side of the violin a little downwards, so there may be no necessity of raising the bow very high, when the fourth string is to be struck.³

In Paul Rolland’s *The Teaching of Action in String Playing*, he gives readers his ideas about how the violin should be held and the use of chinrests and the selection of the shoulder pad. He thinks a player can use a cloth or pad attached underneath the lower

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bout of the violin with a rubber band. More of his ideas will be discussed in chapter four.

In the article *How to Hold a Violin*, Michael Schallock states that people can hold their violin with a thin pad or small sponge to secure the instrument, depending on their unique body structure. He writes,

> There are very good reasons for having a well-balanced and relaxed posture. There are none for playing tensely and in pain. On the other hands there are good reasons for using a shoulder pad and there are also good reasons for not using one. Where there are differences in opinion and differences in individual students, I believe that we must make rational decisions based upon a clear understanding of the issues rather than following fad or fashion or copying an individual violinist who may be quite different than ourselves or our students.

Violin and viola players need to play with a relaxed posture, so they can play the instrument without pain and stress. Schallock emphasizes that players should find the contact point between their body and the instrument, such as the relationship between the neck, the instrument itself, and the fingers of the left-hand.

### 1.2 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

There are some limitations of this research. First, there is not a cohesive collection of research about how to hold the viola even though there are resources for the violin. Students, teachers, and performers who want to learn about this topic must search through many different sources. Although there are numerous articles and free instructional videos online, clear pedagogical steps of how to overcome the technical and physical challenges of balancing the viola without a shoulder rest are absent from these resources.

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Second, playing the violin and the viola without a shoulder rest is always regarded as a topic of controversy which has existed since the shoulder rest was invented. There are several violin pedagogy books which discuss in general the violin and viola together. Although the violin and viola might seem similar, the methodologies of playing the viola should be separated because of the different character of sound, different size, and weight of the instrument.

Many teachers in the twentieth century discouraged or even forbid students from playing their instrument without a shoulder rest despite that the origins of playing the instrument were without a shoulder rest. It is impossible to claim that one idea is correct because every player has their own way of playing the violin or viola. Some professionals and professors may think that the use of the shoulder rest doesn’t matter when playing the violin and viola. However, as a violist, I spent a great deal of time struggling with whether or not to play with a shoulder rest. I believe that playing without a shoulder rest not only helps many violinists and violists feel more comfortable and play their instrument with more ease.

To sum up, the numerous resources available on this topic make it difficult to synthesize every idea. Many of the online videos come up short in regards to solving technical and physical issues. This paper hopes to provide a good method for playing the viola without a shoulder rest through synthesizing different existing ideas and my own personal experiences.
CHAPTER 2

STRING ACCESSORIES

“Technology comes from human nature.”

— Nokia

The history of the chinrest and shoulder rest reflects the wants and needs of players through time. Like the technology we use today, the instruments that we play and their accessories have evolved and improved over the course of time. This is because of the human desire and need to modify and improve the world accordingly.

Chinrests and shoulder rests have become increasingly popular in the last two hundred years. Drawings of Baroque violinists and violists show them holding their instruments without chinrests or shoulder rests. Due to the increase in technical demands, more shifting, playing in higher positions, and double stops, Louis Spohr invented the chinrest in 1820. Later, during the twentieth century, the shoulder rest was invented, for similar reasons.

Chinrests and shoulder rests not only provide protection for the instrument but also comfort for the player. There are many models of chinrests and shoulder rests available, and just like the brand of string we use, there is no perfect model, so players might not stick to one forever. However, while chinrests are necessary for playing, shoulder rests are not.
2.1 THE CHINREST

Before we talk about accessories such as the chinrest and shoulder rest, it is important to understand the history of them. When Leopold Mozart wrote his book *The Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing* in 1756, the chinrest and shoulder rest hadn’t been invented. The basic idea for the chinrest was invented around 1820 by the German violinist, Louis Spohr. As its name implies, players can rest their chin on it while they are playing. It is used to support and secure the instrument.

The invention of the chinrest changed the way violinists and violists hold their instruments. The way in which players during the Baroque period held the instrument was different than today. Baroque violinists and violists were often playing simple chords and accompanying lines. Painting and drawings from that time indicate that they did not put their head on the instrument. As technical demands increased (shifting, faster passages, and double stops) players needed more support for their instruments. The instrument was then moved to the collarbone and the head was placed on the chinrest to create more stability.

Stanley Ritchie is not only an Australian violinist, author, conductor, but also a teacher. In his book, *Before the Chinrest: A Violinist's Guide to the Mysteries of Pre-Chinrest Technique and Style*, he discussed the playing techniques and the physical aspects of playing the violin.⁶

According to Ritchie, the chinrest would allow the player to secure the violin under the chin while resting the instrument on the collarbone; the invention of the chinrest indeed changed the way violinists hold the instrument. Louis Spohr’s drawings

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⁶ Pollens, “*Before the Chinrest.*”
of his chinrest show that it was a piece of round wood which was installed on the tailpiece (Figure 2.1). The chinrest is constructed with two major parts- the plate and the clamp.

The materials of the plate are made mostly by different woods such as rosewood, ebony, and boxwood. Due to various skin allergies some have been made of plastic and as a result are lighter in weight. The function of the clamp is to secure the chinrest on the violin and the viola; the most commonly seen clamp is called the “Hill-style” clamp. The materials of the clamp are made of metals such as iron and copper with an electroplating surface. However, it can rust from perspiration after many years of use. Some companies use stainless-steel for the clamps to avoid allergic reactions and extend the durability.

Figure 2.1. The Chinrest draft by Louis Spohr

Judging by the different types and shapes of chinrests today, they can be easily classified into three kinds, center mounted, side mounted, and the ones that are between

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7 The image of this product can be seen on the following webpage: https://www.violinonline.com/apvlnshoulder.html
center and side mounted. Decisions about which to use are based on the violists’ body, size of the viola, width of the lower bout, and personal preference. Everyone has a unique body structure which might suit a particular type of chinrest.

There are many different sizes and brands of chinrests. The most commonly seen chinrests today are the Stradivarius and the Guarneri model. The shapes of these chinrest plates are different. The design of the Stradivarius model is much shorter, smaller, and wavier than the Guarneri model. Although, these two models are the most commonly used, they still do not fit everyone.

Choosing a chinrest will depend on the spot where the player places their jaw. Some players prefer to place their chin on the left- side of the tailpiece (side mount), and others favor to locate the chin upon the tailpiece (center mount) or the one between center and side mounted.

The first one is the center mounted chinrest which goes over the tailpiece such as the Carl Flesch chinrest. For example, the Flesch chinrest model which is centered over the tailpiece with the old and new shape of plates. The old Flesch chinrest model made in a paper fan shape; the new Flesch chinrest model made in an oval shape. ⁹

The second one is the side mounted chinrest in which the plate of the chinrest is on the left side of the tailpiece. The common side mounted models are the Stradivarius, Guarneri, Teka (Figure 2.2), Dresden, and Kaufman. The third one is the chinrest in which the plate combines the side and center mounted such as Berber chinrest. ¹⁰

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⁹ The image of this product can be seen on the following webpage: https://www.violinonline.com/apvlnshoulder.html

¹⁰ Ibid.
The SAS and Kréddle chinrests were invented to satisfy the requirements of violinists and violists. There are two sorts of SAS chinrest (Figure 2.3), original and symphony. The height and shape of the plate is made to suit people with varying shapes of jaw. It also comes with four heights with an adjustable plate. The Kréddle chinrest is the fanciest one which I like the most although it is the most expensive. The Kréddle chinrest is fully adjustable not only with the height of the chinrest but also the angle. The plastic plate is really light and can fit all jaw types.
The Kréddle chinrest (Figure 2.4) was invented by Jordan Hayes, an American violinist who graduated from the Eastman School of Music. Jordan won the first prize in Eastman New Venture Challenge in January 2013. He started to design the Kréddle chinrest because there were so many different types of chinrests and he wanted to develop a chinrest that could satisfy any kind of player. The Kréddle chinrest has gained lots of support from many professionals, groups, orchestras, and schools. It can fit any kind of jaw type since its plate can be adjusted in height and angle. It can be easily adjusted to fit the length of one’s neck because of three different settings for the height (Figure 2.5). The plastic plate can be rotated to fit a players’ chin. It is the most unique one I had ever tried; it can almost fit all the requirements of any player.

Figure 2.4. Kréddle chinrest

Figure 2.5. Different height settings
2.2 THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE CHINREST

The chinrest is regarded as the most important accessory for balancing the violin and the viola. A good chinrest affects not only the sound of the instrument but also the physical health of the player’s body. It also provides security and prevents the instrument from falling. A proper chinrest provides a better contact point between the instrument itself and the player’s body—their jaw, chin, and left shoulder.

The height and the comfort of the chinrest are key when violinists and violists are selecting a chinrest. In addition to finding one with a suitable height, for some choosing materials which won’t cause skin irritation is also important. Lynne Denig and Gary Frisch said, “a good chinrest is like a good pair of shoes.”\(^1\) When we are choosing a pair of shoes, we need to know not only the length but also the width of our feet. When we are buying clothes, we have to measure our bodies such as the width of the shoulders, the length of the body, length of our arms, waist, and our legs.

Sometimes shoes are labeled with the same size but may fit very differently due to different measurement in different countries, different companies, and even the same brand of shoes sold in different countries. When we put the correct size on, there is still space between the toes and the tip of the shoes. For example, when I buy a t-shirt in Asia, I have to buy the medium or large size instead of the small or medium size in western countries.

Although the chinrest should fit between the jaw and collarbone, it should still leave some space between the jaw and the chinrest. For instance, it might look nice when you are wearing a pair of well-fitted shoes, but it might hurt when you walk for a long time.

time. Tight clothing might stick on the skin when you sweat. So is the same for a chinrest. One needs to have flexibility to move while playing.

The more a chinrest fills the gap between the chin and shoulder, the more a player’s body and shoulder movement are restricted. Players should always leave a proper space to avoid becoming locked, tense, or feeling uncomfortable. The same goes for the relationship of shoulder rest to our bodies. I will explain more about the shoulder movement in the following chapter.

2.3 HOW TO CHOOSE A CHINREST

Finding the correct chinrest might require a good deal of time and money. Take myself as an example, I had tried six models of chinrests in my life: the Stradivarius, Guarneri, Kauffman, Flesch, SAS, and Kréddle models. In Paul Rolland’s book *The Teaching of Action in String Playing*, he also talked about the selection of the chinrest.

Skin irritations result when the jawbone presses on a high ridge. Therefore, the chinrest should have a low point as shown. The high ridge on the right side of the rest fits inside the jawbone, which pulls it toward the neck for a secure hold. A downward slope of the chinrest directs the chin pressure toward the back of the rest (toward the player’s neck) to provide good leverage.\(^\text{12}\)

Rolland also gave suggestions for the player with a broad jaw, long neck, and short arms. “The player with a larger and fleshy jaw should use a broad, flat chinrest. Its large contact surface enables this player to support the instrument through friction with the chinrest.”\(^\text{13}\) “The player with a long neck requires a high chinrest.”\(^\text{14}\) “The player with short arms usually likes a chinrest which moves the instrument to a position relatively high on the shoulder.”\(^\text{15}\)

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\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
Frisch and Denig is a personalized customized chinrest company by Lynne Denig and Gary Frisch. In their article they cataloged the chinrest into several types of chin and jaw type. They said,

How well a chinrest fits depends also on the jaw shape of each person. The researchers found that there are basically three shapes of jaws, but with many variations even within each category. The three categories that the researchers divided jaw shape into were: bony, or possessing mostly straight lines and very little padding on the jaw bone; in-between, or a jaw line that was not clearly one or the other; and fleshy, or a jawbone that was particularly well padded.16

Lynne Denig and Gary Frisch design chinrest equipment in which they customize the fit for each player based on their chin type and jaw types. They have a kit which can easily measure a player’s neck length and shape of jaw. They also acquainted the views and philosophies in their study based on several jaw types.17 They organized chinrest plates into three different types which will fit the jaw types of players, and they add an extension to the bottom to adjust the height of the chinrest in order to fit the length of the player’s neck (Figure 2.6).

Lynne Denig and Gary Frisch also sampled different groups using their chinrest kits. In their article, they include some testimonials from different groups such as various ages of players and mixed levels of players. However, the violinists which they listed in the article were not convincing for me. The tested players are mostly adults over twenty years old with a few players under 18 years old. Most of them were professional players with well-developed bodies. A lack of research on the ages before twenty and even younger is a gap in the research.

Although, according to “Today’s Dental” which states that the a baby’s jaw is

16 Lynne Denig and Gary Frisch, “Chin Rest Choice.”
17 Ibid.
almost fifty percent of its adult size at birth; children’s occlusions (bites) are already apparent from around 18 months to 2 years of age, and around 6 years of age, jaws are almost 80% of their adult size, with most of the growth occurring in the first four years.\textsuperscript{18} It still cannot be applied to everyone because there are still many possibilities such as different races, genes, and different behaviors which might change the jaw shape.

![Figure 2.6](image1.jpg)

**Figure 2.6. Lynne Denig and Gary Frisch shoulder rest kits**

Different hereditary environment and acquired factors may change the shape of the bone as well. For example, I might change my playing posture and it might lead my jaw to touch a different spot on the chinrest. On the other hand, I used to play with a

Stradivarius chinrest model, but I switched to another type of chinrest because the angle of the instrument changed when I started to play the viola without a shoulder rest.

2.4 THE SHOULDER REST

The shoulder rest is the most commonly used accessory for the violin and the viola after the chinrest and is also used to help secure the instrument. The first shoulder rest resembling the modern day shoulder rest was invented about one hundred years after the chinrest, although scholars have found a picture of the Baroque composer Vivaldi with a mechanism for attaching the violin to his body made out of a rope (Figure 2.7), which could be a precursor to the shoulder rest.19

![Figure 2.7. Vivaldi’s portrait with a rope.](https://pablovioline.wordpress.com/tag/shoulder-rest/)

The shoulder rest has some similar functions and purposes as the chinrest such as filling space between the instrument and the body. The shoulder rest fills space between the back of the instrument, player’s body, and can be used to adjust the angle of

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20 This figure is credit by Pablo Segura, “When the Violin Pad Appeared,” (https://pablovioline.wordpress.com/tag/shoulder-rest).
instrument. The US patent database contains some drafts of the first shoulder rest. The first shoulder rest patent was filed on January 31, in 1882 by F. Becker (Figure 2.8). After his prototype, others designed different kinds of shoulder rests.21

Figure 2.8. Becker shoulder rest22

There are many varieties of shoulder rests available today. There is a website which is called “Violin online” (https://www.violinonline.com/apvlnshoulder.html) where one can find information on most brands of shoulder rests. The most common shoulder rests used today are Kun, Wolf, Bon Musica, Viva La Musica (VLM), Everest and Comford Violin/ Viola Shoulder Cradle. Although this dissertation focuses on how to play the viola without a shoulder rest, some basic reviews of the shoulder rests which players use and their advantages and disadvantages will be shared in the following sections.

21 Ibid.
22 This figure is credit by Pablo Segura, “When the Violin Pad Appeared,” (https://pablovioline.wordpress.com/tag/shoulder-rest).
Kun is the most widely used shoulder rest and it is also the easiest to obtain. Joseph Kun was a music professor and a luthier who began making shoulder rests a few years after he moved to Ottawa, Canada from Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Kun company made the first adjustable shoulder rest in 1972. The first “Original” is the most basic and common Kun. It is made with plastic material. Although this one is very basic and seems like it would be more for beginners or students, some professionals and teachers use one as well.

The second model of shoulder rest by Kun is called “Bravo” (Figure 2.9). The Kun “Bravo” shoulder rest is made with a thick piece of maple wood with two metal feet; it provides a more focused sound, better projection, and warm tone. The sound is much closer to the sound of the instrument when played without a shoulder rest because the body of the Kun Bravo is made by the same material as the back of the violin and viola.

The third model of shoulder rest by Kun is called “Voce.” The body of the Voce shoulder rest is made of carbon fiber with a streamlined design (Figure 2.10). It boosts the violin’s volume, has better projection than the Bravo, and provides a much more focused tone. The biggest advantage of carbon fiber material is that it is very lightweight. Carbon fiber is used more and more often today for shoulder rests, tailpieces, bows, and even instruments.

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24 Segura, “When the violin pad appeared. ”
25 The image of this product can be seen on the following webpage: https://www.violinonline.com/apvlshoulder.html
Kun shoulder rests are designed for fitting a players’ needs. They switched the rubber on the feet from the old model to the new materials for increased protection to the instrument. Some players believe that different materials might alter the tone of the instrument. For instance, the old model with soft rubber feet came in direct contact with the back of the instrument. This rubber often broke when used for a long time. However, they now use a new material which is much stronger and more durable.

![Figure 2.9. Kun Bravo shoulder rest with the new rubber feet](image)

WILF

Willy Wolf made his first shoulder rest in 1963, in Amsterdam. The design of the Wolf shoulder rest is extraordinarily comfortable with a broader and softer pad. In creating his design, Willy Wolf examined and surveyed many different players. He also worked closely with musicians of the Utrecht Symphony Orchestra to find the best way to resolve the physical problems they faced.
There are three models of the Wolf shoulder rest. The first one is the Wolf Super Flexible which is also the first one invented by Willy Wolf. 26 The second one is called the Forte Primo which is the standard model. 27 The body of Forte Primo is similar to the Super Flexible one but it is much wider and longer. The third one is the Forte Secondo. 28 This model is the same as the Forte Primo but with the different body shapes.

**BON MUSICA**

The Bon Musica shoulder rest is popular with beginners to advanced players. 29 It is made and designed in Germany; the shoulder rest is constructed by a fully adjustable body and varying lengths for the feet (Figure 2.11). This shoulder rest is made of Aluminum which helps prevent loss of sound to the instrument. There are seven sizes for the violin and five sizes for the viola (Table 2.1).

![Figure 2.11. Bon Musica with different height settings](image)

The adjustable body length, height and angle of the Bon Musica can provide more options for fitting the players body. This shoulder rest can easily sit on the shoulder.

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26 The image of this product can be seen on the following webpage: https://www.violinonline.com/apvlnshoulder.html
27 The image of this product can be seen on the following webpage: https://www.violinonline.com/apvlnshoulder.html
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
without causing extra effort on a player’s chin and neck; the adjustable height of the shoulder rest feet can be fit to the length of the player’s neck.

(Table 2.1.) List of Bon Musica shoulder rest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Violin</th>
<th>Viola (inch)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Made in Germany</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard sizes</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15”; 15 1/2”; 16”; 16 1/2”; 17”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/16; 1/8; 1/4; 1/2; 3/4; 7/8; 4.4</td>
<td>210; 215; 220; 250; 255; 260; 265; 270</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lengths (mm)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feet angles</strong></td>
<td>110 degrees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials</strong></td>
<td>Aluminum and metal feet with natural rubber covers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parts</strong></td>
<td>Replaceable; can buy most of parts online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VIVA LA MUSICA**

Viva la Musica- Augustin V.L.M. is a company in Europe which makes string instrument accessories such as shoulder rests, chinrests, and the cello endpin rest. This company was founded in 1986. The shoulder rest comes with different names which are decided by the material and the design such as original, compact, artist, professional, viva flex, and the most advanced one called Viva Diamond (Figure 2.12).
The body of the Diamond, Professional, and Artist are made with wood, the others are made of plastic. The website claims that the viva diamond shoulder rest is the world’s best adjustable shoulder rest.\(^{30}\) The newly developed product, viva flex is also adjustable to all kinds of players.\(^{31}\)

Figure 2.12. VLM shoulder rest

**COMFORD VIOLIN/ VIOLA SHOULDER CRADLE**

The Comford violin and viola shoulder Cradle performs how it is named (Figure 2.13). This shoulder rest was constructed with many different types of materials such as plastic and metal with gold or silver. The design of this shoulder rest is similar to the Menuhin pad designed by Yehudi Menuhin in 1962.\(^{32}\) Both the Comford shoulder rest and the Menuhin pad are not adjustable in height.

The plastic one is the lightest of all Comford shoulder rest models. The silver one produces a brighter sound with good projection compared to the plastic and gold Comfort shoulder rest; it is recommended for most violists if their viola has a darker or smaller sound. The gold one is the most popular cradle shoulder rest for violinists and violists.

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because the gold Comford Cradle shoulder rest gives a much richer sound and the overall tone quality is better. For example, the gold cradle provides a warmer sound and better resonance than the silver cradle but the silver cradle projects further than the gold one.

Figure 2.13. Comfort Cradle shoulder rest

2.5 THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE SHOULDER REST

Although shoulder rests have some advantages, there are some disadvantages that players need to keep in mind. The shoulder rest can be a good tool for students or beginners when they are first learning to play the violin or the viola. It might temporarily solve the biggest issue which is holding the instrument correctly and make players feel comfortable. Some players might think playing the instrument with a shoulder rest is necessary because it can extend their amount of playing time and avoid getting injured.

However, if players rely too much on a shoulder rest, it might be harder to adapt to playing without one. Teachers need to observe a student’s playing habits and give good suggestions to choose the right fit and a lighter shoulder rest if they need to use one. For example, some students might need to hold their violin or viola through the help of a shoulder rest if they cannot place the instrument on the shoulder consistently, or if they are too young to understand instructions for playing without a shoulder rest and need
assistance to keep the right motions for playing. Some students may not need to use one when they start to learn the violin; they can balance the instrument well based on their body structure. If doing so, teachers may not need to encourage a student to use a shoulder rest.

2.6 HOW TO CHOOSE A SHOULDER REST

A shoulder rest is similar to a car in that it comes with many different functions and designs. Some shoulder rests provide a very good playing experience such as a warmer tone or a bigger sound that is much more focused. However, you can never find one shoulder rest that fits the need of every player. There are many factors such as the weight of the shoulder rest, the difference in body structure of each player, and their playing habits.

A good shoulder rest needs to fit the player and but leave an appropriate amount of space between the instrument and the collarbone. Players need to be careful to choose a shoulder rest that still allows them freedom of movement between their body and instrument because the shoulder rest that fills the entire gap between the instrument and shoulder (collarbone) is inappropriate. It may restrict motion and cause injury. When playing with or without a shoulder rest, the shoulder muscles are still moving. If the shoulder rest fills all the spaces between jaw and shoulder, the shoulder muscle and shoulder rest will work against each other. A players’ neck, jaw, and even left hand might need an extra and unnecessary motion to adjust the playing posture and eliminate tension.

Regarding the selection of the shoulder rest Paul Rolland said, “There are differing views concerning the use of a shoulder pad. Many concert violinists use only their coat lapels as a pad, some artists use additional padding under their lapels, and some
use external pads fastened to the violin.” He also said, “It is important that children avoid using a large shoulder pad designed for adults. A small pad which does not implicate the shoulder is recommended, a few layers of cloth or rolled washcloth will often provide all the padding necessary.”

A shoulder rest should be selected depending on the body structure of the player. I think one should select an appropriate chinrest first. A shoulder pad or small sponge are recommended. It can partly fill the gap between the shoulder and the instrument without filling the entire space. It can also easily adjust the angle of the violin. There are some websites such as Sharmusic.com which also share their ideas of how to choose a shoulder rest.

Although this dissertation presents ideas for playing the viola without a shoulder rest, I want to share some personal reviews between the shoulder rests I had used that might be helpful for students, parents, or teachers in choosing a shoulder rest if they need to use one. The Kun shoulder rest is very light, but the body of the shoulder rest cannot be adjusted. Sometimes players need to install a soft pad under the shoulder rest in order to fit their body. I tried both the Wolf Primo and Secondo shoulder rest and I felt the Secondo shoulder rest was a much better fit for me than the Wolf Primo one. For me, the curve in body of the Secondo shoulder rest fit the shoulder and collarbone much better.

The Bon Musica shoulder rest is a well-designed shoulder rest which is adjustable and secure but it might give less freedom to the shoulder because of the hook shape that goes over the back of the shoulder. I used the Viva La Musica “DIAMOND” shoulder rest.

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34 Ibid.
rest for couple of months. As I found out, this shoulder rest is very comfortable when playing the instrument for a long time. Compare to other shoulder rests that I had used, it makes the sound more resonant and increased the volume of my viola. When playing the Diamond shoulder rest, it feels very similar to the Kun Bravo shoulder rest. I feel the base of the Diamond shoulder rest is wider and the pad is much softer and thicker. Playing muscles can get tight whether one uses a shoulder rest or not. The softer and thicker pad can absorb pressure from the shoulder and chin to a certain extent. The wavy design of the base and the adjustable feet also provide a better playing experience.

I tried the gold Comford viola shoulder Cradle when I was in high school. This shoulder rest provides very good support for the instrument. The pad of the shoulder rest is wide, thick, and soft. The gold Comford viola shoulder rest gave a much more resonant tone to my viola than the silver Comford shoulder rest. However, this shoulder rest is still not perfect. There are two reasons that I stopped using it.

The first reason is the feet of the shoulder rest and the height cannot be adjusted. The feet open up on the lower bout of the instrument and the height is fixed so the angle of the instrument and the distance between chin and shoulder are restricted. The second reason is that it is quite heavy. For violinists, it might be acceptable because the violin is not too heavy. After I used this shoulder rest for a long time, it caused pain in the shoulder. I personally would not suggest violists play with a metal shoulder rest because their viola is already on the heavier side.
DO WE REALLY NEED A SHOULDER REST?

Do violinists or violists really need the shoulder rest? This has always been a controversial issue. Jeffrey Irvine, viola faculty at the Cleveland Institute of Music, said that finding a shoulder rest is a personal matter for each player; the decision of the shoulder rest is important to the position the viola.36

Aaron Rosand said that the greatest violinists from the past and present do not use shoulder rests.37 According to Rosand, another reason for playing without a shoulder rest is those players who do not use the shoulder rest have a beautiful and particularly personal sound.38 Although there are many world-famous violinists and violists such as Itzhak Perlman, Anne-Sophie Mutter, and Kim Kashkashian who do not use a shoulder rest, they either found their own method for playing without one or they had played without one since they were young.

For example, Itzhak Perlman played the violin without a shoulder rest from a very young age. Anne-Sophie Mutter used a shoulder rest when she was young and later used a small pillow, which made her feel more comfortable. She changed from a pillow to a low rubber sponge and although the height was good, it was extremely uncomfortable.

38 Ibid.
She mentioned that she used to put a piece of deer leather on the bottom of the instrument to secure it. Over time she frequently switched and tried different things to make her more comfortable. She said: “I discovered that playing without anything was actually the ideal solution, but there is no real rule one can apply, because it all depends on the length of one’s neck and the position of your shoulder.” If Anne-Sophie Mutter said playing the violin without a shoulder rest depends on the length of one’s neck, since the viola is heavier and thicker than the violin; why do violists need a shoulder rest?

Theoretically should it not be easier to play without a shoulder rest? Take myself as an example, the violin is the most popular string instrument in Taiwan. Many people begin their musical studies on the violin. I started to play the violin when I was five years old. I went to a Suzuki class where teachers taught us to hold the violin with a shoulder rest. I did not realize why this was necessary.

As I mentioned previously, there are a variety of sizes for the viola. The standard full-size violin is 14 inches; the size of the viola can range from 15 inches to 17 inches or in some cases even bigger such as the Viola Altus used in Wagner’s orchestra which is 18 inches or more. When I was seven years old, I switched from violin to viola. Like most young students, I was playing a full-sized violin with viola strings before officially switching to the viola.

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40 Ibid.
I started to notice a problem when I played a 15 and a half inch viola in high school. The viola I used had a wider and thicker body, it made me feel uncomfortable and I could not easily place the viola on my shoulder. Then I started to look for a new chinrest and shoulder rest to help me support the instrument. However, the varying lengths and widths of the viola can make it complicated for anyone to find a good shoulder rest and chinrest combination.

I began to admire and imitate the way Jascha Heifetz played the violin after I watched his video. I told my violin teacher that I wanted to play the violin like Heifetz and I wanted to play the violin without a shoulder rest because it looked cool and was different than the other kids in my Suzuki class. That was the only reason at the time. I just wanted to play like Heifetz even though I did not know how to do it.

Eventually, I figured out how to play the viola without a shoulder rest. Before 2015, I was constantly switching between different chinrests and shoulder rests and a lot of time and money was spent. Despite all my efforts, I still experienced fatigue while playing the instrument. After observing Jessica Bodner, violist of the Parker Quartet, her liberating way of playing influenced me to think that it might not be because of a problem with the instrument’s accessories but with how one uses their body.

It was then I began to explore the inner workings of my physical body while playing the instrument. Eventually, I conquered the problem and am able to play without a shoulder rest. As the founder of Kréddle chinrests said, “shoulder rests are so twentieth century—it’s time to leave them behind,” violists do not need a shoulder-rest to successfully play the viola.
3.1 DIFFERENT IDEAS FROM THE EARLY 17TH TO THE MIDDLE 18TH CENTURY

There are different ideas in string pedagogy which evolved incrementally over three hundred years in Europe and the United States (see Table 3.1 on page 49 of this document). Considering that the viola was not regarded as a solo instrument at that time, the following discussion will mostly focus on the violin.

There were many different schools of violin playing such as the English violin school of John Playford in the seventeenth century. In David D. Boyden’s journal article “The Violin and Its Technique in the 18th Century” from The Musical Quarterly, he mentioned “the publication of the first English translation of Leopold Mozart’s Violinschule in 1948 has directed attention to violin technique from the eighteenth century and created an auspicious occasion to review the entire subject.”

Mr. Boyden also listed the most important works from the eighteenth century chronologically in order to indicate the methods of violin playing for this period. In the following paragraph, I will list the important educators, violists, and violinists and their ideas regarding the use of shoulder rests and balancing the instrument.

**John Playford**

John Playford (1623 - 1686) was born into a family of publishers and booksellers. He lived in London and was also a composer. The holding position of the violin of many pictures in the Baroque period looks relaxed. In Frederick F. Polnauer’s book Senso-Motor Study and Its Application to Violin Playing, he mentioned G. Beckmann who recognized the body posture of the German school was somehow related to the violin.

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playing of the English school in the seventeenth century. Beckmann thought, “The body posture must be free and the arms must not be placed against the trunk, in order to allow a freely moving fingering with the left hand and a free bow stroke.”42 This would give more freedom to fingers while playing the violin and the viola if the body remains free, and the left arm avoids touching the back of the instrument.

**Francesco Saverio Geminiani**

The Italian violinist, Francesco Saverio Geminiani (1687-1762) was born in Lucca Tuscany in 1687. He was the first violinist to contribute to violin pedagogy in Italy in 1740.43 He published a violin method book *The Art of Playing on the Violin* in 1751.44 Richard Gwilt mentioned that Mr. Geminiani pointed out when a violinist plays the violin, it should be held on the chest below the collarbone and turned to the right side in order to avoid lifting the bow too much when playing on the G string.45 “The scroll should be approximately horizontal with that part of the violin which leans against the breast.”46

**Johann Georg Leopold Mozart**

Leopold Mozart, (1719-1787) the father of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was a Austrian composer, conductor, and violinist. He published his book *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing) in Augsburg in 1756. He described two ways to hold the violin in chapter two of his book.

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43 Ibid., 47.
First, he mentioned that the violin should be held at the same height as the chest.\textsuperscript{47} When violinists hold the violin like this, the bow stroke will be more vertically emphasized.

Second, he thought the violin should be placed at the neck, which looks much closer to the way it is played today. Mozart thought this was a comfortable way to hold the violin (Figure 3.1). The violinists’ chin should be placed in the same eye line as the E string which is the highest string; it will be the A string for violists. Mozart said the elbow of the right arm should not be raised too high while playing the violin because it will cause an incorrect habit. The elbow of the right arm should be kept closer to the body.\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[scale=0.5]{figure3.1.jpg}
\caption{Mozart: the comfortable way of holding the violin\textsuperscript{49}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{47} Mozart, \textit{A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing}, 54.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 54-55.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
George Simon-Löhlein

In the late eighteenth century, the German pianist and violinist, G. Loehlein (1725-1781) declared that the violin should be pressed against and on the top of the left shoulder. Polnauer mentioned that Loehlein thought the violin should not be lifted up or moved while playing and the violin should be turned slightly inward to the body. The left shoulder and the chin should not squeeze the violin so that the violin can be played freely. The scroll should be lower than the left shoulder so that the bow arm will not be raised too high while string crossing. Loehlein also agreed with both Leopold Mozart’s and L’abbe le Fils’ stances on chin placement; the chin can rest either on the left- side or the right- side of the tailpiece.

However, Loehlein said when playing passages which required a lot shifting, placing the chin on the right- side of the tailpiece is better than the left- side. Since the violin is balanced on the left shoulder, it should be adjusted freely depending on the challenges of the piece being played. When shifting on the lower strings, the chin should be placed on the left- side of the tailpiece; on the contrary, when passages with many shifts often occur on the higher strings, it may be easier if the chin rests on the right- side of the tailpiece.

Joseph-Barnabé Saint-Sevin dit L'Abbé le Fils

Modern violin playing position was claimed by the French violinist, L’abbe le Fils, (1727-1803) who said the violin should be held under the chin and be placed on the left-side of the tailpiece. His book Principes du Violon (Principles of Violins,) was

50 Polnauer and Morton, Senso-Moter Study, 51
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
published in 1761, five years after Leopold Mozart’s book. The two main differences between L’abbe le Fils and Leopold Mozart is that Fils thought the violin should be held on the left side of the tailpiece instead of the right side and the chin should be on the same line as the G-string. “The violin should be placed on the collarbone in such a way that the chin rests on the side of the fourth string.”

3.2 DIFFERENT IDEAS FROM THE LATE 18TH CENTURY TO THE 19TH CENTURY

The late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, was a milestone and break-pointing in the history of the violin and viola. Because of the invention of the chinrest in the first half of the nineteenth century and the shoulder rest in the late nineteenth century some aspects and methods of holding the violin and the viola become more uniform. Players had absorbed the ideas such as where to place the instrument and the chin from the past and made the rules much clearer and simple (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3 on page 50 and 51 of this document). The invention of the chinrest allowed violinist and violists to meet the increasing technical demands in the repertoire.

Ludwig Spohr

The German violinist Ludwig Spohr (1784-1859) invented the chinrest in 1831. Additionally, he was a violin teacher who taught students how technique could be easily executed by manipulating the physical aspects of playing. He thought that by incorporating a chinrest, violinists and violists could avoid applying unnecessary pressure onto the top of the trunk or tailpiece. Placing the chin directly on the trunk or the tailpiece may reduce the sound or the vibration of the instrument; it may indirectly affect the tone

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54 Ibid., 50.
and increase the difficulty of violin playing. The first chinrest was made for sitting on the tailpiece. Polnauer mentioned that Spohr thought the lower bout of the back of the violin should be firmly held by pressing the chin on the chinrest when holding the violin. The chin should exert its weight onto the chinrest and the left shoulder should be moved slightly to support the violin. If a player does not use a chinrest, the chin should be placed partly on the left side of the tailpiece and partly on the tailpiece. This will support the violin in two different directions. He also believed that the chinrest gave the most natural angle of the violin and helped the bow arm move in a simple natural way.

**Pierre Marie François de Sales Baillot**

A French school violinist, Pierre Marie François de Sales Baillot, (1771-1842) said that the violin should be placed on the left collarbone, and it should be held with an angle of about forty-five degrees towards the right side. The chin should be placed slightly on the left side of the tailpiece without any pressure; the violin should be pressed slightly against the neck with the left hand.

Players should avoid clamping onto the violin as the chin touches the edge of the violin. From his description of holding the violin, we can tell he hadn’t used a chinrest. Mr. Baillot also mentioned the left-hand position, which indicated where the left hand should be placed while holding the violin. He was also the first violinist who

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56 Ibid., 65.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 60.
recommended using a shoulder pad in 1835.\textsuperscript{61} He thought using a shoulder rest could support the instrument better.\textsuperscript{62} Players do not have to raise their shoulder while playing the instrument.\textsuperscript{63}

**Ole Bornemann Bull**

Ole Bull (1810-1880) was the most famous Norwegian violinist during the nineteenth century. Bull developed his own method of violin playing. Bull’s violin technique was so unique and strong, he was called the Paganini of northern Europe. In 1839 after hearing a concert of Bull, Robert Schumann exclaimed to Clara that he was on the same level as Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840). Ludwig Spohr once said Bull’s left-hand technique was incredibly steady, and he was able to execute very solid chords. The holding posture of Bull was relaxed; the chin and the head were free without placing extra support on the instrument. He thought violinists and the violists should keep their head straight up while holding the instrument. The left arm should turn up and hold the instrument higher than the collarbone and the left forearm should be placed in front of the chest at about 30 degrees. The chin should clamp onto the violin.\textsuperscript{64}

**Joseph Joachim**

There were many important violin educators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Josef Joachim (1831-1907), the originator of the New Berlin

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\textsuperscript{62} Robin Stowell, *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 43.

\textsuperscript{63} Baillot, *The Art of the violin*, 13.

\textsuperscript{64} Polnauer and Morton, *Senso -Moter Study*, 65.
school, Leopold von Auer (1845-1930) the originator of the Russian School, and of course the school of Carl Flesch in Europe (1873-1944).65

Joachim was regarded as one of the most important German violinists of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. He was influenced by many different schools such as the French violin school by Pierre Rode (1774-1830), who was a student of G. B. Viotti (1755-1824), and the Hungarian violin school founded by Jeno Hubay (1858-1937).

The New Berlin School of violin playing is attributed to Josef Joachim and Andreas Moser. They suggested that the chin should be placed on the left-side of the tailpiece so that the head will remain in the same direction, the eye will naturally remain in line of the fingerboard without restraint, and the breathing will not be interfered with.66 The violin should be held horizontally, with the neck of the violin pointing in the direction of the left foot.67

The scroll of the violin should be held parallel which means it should be as horizontal as possible. As with most violin schools mentioned, the new Berlin school agreed that the instrument should be held at about forty-five degrees towards the right side. A shoulder pad or a chinrest can be used to adjust or help the instrument to keep the appropriate angle.68

**Leopold Auer**

Leopold Auer (1845-1930) was born in Hungry and studied violin with Jacob Dont in Vienna. Dont taught him the foundation of violin technique. He also studied with

65 Ibid., 73.
67 Ibid., 72.
68 Ibid., 72.
violinist Joseph Joachim from the New Berlin School in Hanover. Auer once mentioned that Joachim played a very important role in his life. In his book *My Long Life in Music*, he said,

> Joachim was an inspiration to me and opened before my eyes, horizons of that greater art of which until then I had lived in ignorance. With him I worked not only with my hands, but with my head as well, studying the scores of the masters, and endeavoring to penetrate the very heart of their works.... I [also] played a great deal of chamber music with my fellow students.

In the early twentieth century, Leopold Auer (1845-1930) was regarded as one of the most prominent violin teachers in Russia. Auer replaced the famous Polish violinist Henryk Wieniawski at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory in Russia. He taught in Russia for almost fifty years until the Russian Revolution in 1918. After the war, Auer moved to the United States and joined the faculty at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

In chapter two of Auer’s book *Violin Playing as I Teach It*, published in 1921, he mentioned that the early period of violin training would directly influence the later development of the student. He thought the first step to learning the violin is to know how to hold the instrument well. Auer continues by saying that the eyes should be fixed on the head of the violin and the left arm should be placed under the back of the violin.

He said that the violin should not be resting on the shoulder and that using a shoulder rest, pad, or a cushion beneath the back of the instrument is not allowed. The reason being that the player may gain bad habits and rely too heavily on the shoulder rest, and that the violin will lose at least a third of its volume.

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71 Ibid., 32.
72 Ibid.
To select an appropriate height, the chinrest should match the length of the player’s neck, so that the player can hold the instrument easily and without tension.\textsuperscript{73} He thought, “the violin should always be raised as high as possible in order to secure for your hand the greatest freedom of movement from one position to another. This may be accomplished by slightly advancing the left arm toward the chest.”\textsuperscript{74} Auer thought students would find their own way to play the violin by observing the great violinists, and if players held their instrument high enough, it would help their vibrato while playing on the lowest string.\textsuperscript{75}

**Carl Flesch**

Carl Flesch (1873-1944) thought the violin should be placed on the collarbone and also held by the left lower jaw.\textsuperscript{76} In his treatise, *The Art of Violin Playing* (1923), he mentioned that the violin should be supported by the left-hand with freedom while shifting in between positions. In Polnauer’s *Senso-Motor Study and Its Application to Violin Playing*, he mentioned that Flesch said it might be better not to use a violin pad or cushion underneath the instrument, so that it will keep the instrument much closer to the body and allow for easier execution of vibrato. However, players with longer necks might need to rely on a violin-pad.\textsuperscript{77}

In Steffany Ann Shock’s dissertation, *Violin Pedagogy Through Time: The Treatises of Leopold Mozart, Carl Flesch, and Ivan Galamian*. She mentioned that Carl Flesch claimed that lifting the left shoulder should always be avoided in order to keep the

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 32-33.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 33-34.
\textsuperscript{77} Polnauer and Morton, *Senso-Motor Study*, 76
left arm moving freely and a player’s chin should slightly touch the tailpiece without pressing on it. The jaw and collarbone should provide the support for the violin and should keep the left arm in a relaxed status. The function of the thumb of the left hand is to aid the left jaw and the left shoulder in supporting the violin.

**Ivan Alexander Galamian**

Ivan Galamian (1903- 1981) is a Romanian-Iranian violinist who taught many great violinists such as Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, Dorothy Delay, and Kyung-Wha Chung at the Juilliard School. In Galamian’s *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* which was published in 1962, he gave some opinions on holding the violin although he did not mention the viola.

Galamian thought that violinists should play the instrument with an appropriate amount of motion but never exaggerating it. Firstly, it does not look good, and it results in the bow needing to be adjusted while playing. Secondly, it will somehow disturb the playing for the player as well as the audience’s listening experience.

Galamian did not give specific rules for holding the violin. He mentioned that some players might use their shoulder to support the instrument and some will support the instrument by using their left hand, placing the violin on the collarbone, and pushing the chinrest with their chin while shifting between positions. He said that the decision to

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79 Ibid., 23.
82 Ibid.
use a shoulder pad depends on the length of the player’s neck. If players want to use a shoulder pad, it is better to choose one that does not touch the back of the instrument. 83

He also thought that the chin should never be pressed on the tailpiece and violinists should avoid choosing a chinrest which is installed on the center of the instrument. 84 Galamian said that the violin should be held higher. If the violin is raised high enough, the weight of the violin will naturally transfer from the scroll to the violinist’s neck. This would make it simpler to keep the bow on the correct contact point. 85

**Paul Rolland**

Paul Rolland (1911-1978), was a Hungarian violin teacher and one of the founders of the American String Teachers Association; he published a book titled *The Teaching of Action in String Playing*. He thought that the violin and the viola should be placed on the collarbone and that the button of the tailpiece should touch the center of the throat. 86 Mr. Rolland thought playing with or without a shoulder pad depended on the player. He mentioned using a shoulder pad instead of a shoulder rest; “some players use a rubber band to fasten a soft pad or small sponge.”

Paul Rolland also suggested that the shoulder pad, which is designed for adults should be avoided for children; “children can use a thin cloth or pad for adjusting the gap between the left shoulder and the back of the instrument.” 87

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83 Ibid., 13.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 63.
3.3 IDEAS FROM VIOLISTS

Viola pedagogy and ideas that the viola should be played differently than the violin did not come about until the twentieth century (see Table 3.4 on page 52 of this document). I have chosen to include Yehudi Menuhin in this section because he also performed on the viola. William Primrose was regarded as a legendary violist because of his technique. Heifetz and Primrose both played without a shoulder rest. In his student David Dalton’s book, *Playing the Viola: Conversations with William Primrose*, he details many of Primrose’s pedagogical methods.

**Yehudi Menuhin**

Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999) violinist and violist, published a book on his method of holding the instrument, titled *Violin- Six Lessons with Yehudi Menuhin*. He told readers that the term “Hold” is not correct when we play the violin, the appropriate term is “Balance.” He said the word ‘hold’, with its implication of a firm and static grip, can be misleading.\(^{88}\)

Menuhin mentioned that there are only two necessary parts for supporting the violin, one is the collarbone and the other is the left hand. The violin is moved on the collarbone and the left hand moves the violin. He said, “the lightweight of the head on the chinrest prevents the violin from slipping off the shelf of the collarbone.”\(^{89}\)

Menuhin personally prefers to play the violin without a shoulder rest or a shoulder pad. He said the use of a shoulder rest or shoulder pad can cause the left shoulder to feel constricted.\(^{90}\) The shoulder where the left arm joins the body should not be raised; one

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\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.
should keep a relaxed posture while holding or playing their instrument. Menuhin thinks this will help avoid hunching the left shoulder and avoid discomfort and pain.91

**William Primrose**

David Dalton discussed Primrose’s method of holding the viola in the fifth section of his book *Playing the Viola Conversations with William Primrose*. He points out the difficulty in holding the instrument naturally. Although teachers keep telling students to hold the instrument naturally, students seem enchanted and have a hard time to build the good habit. After they get used to the unnatural habit, they start to take it as “natural”92

Primrose said if they cannot hold the instrument in a natural way, they are encouraged to switch their instrument from the violin and viola to cello or piano, because those instruments are played in a more natural position than the violin and viola.93 Primrose did not think that people should give a standard rule on the level or the angles of the viola. Because the size of the viola will decide how high the violist should hold the instrument, it does not matter whether or not the violist holds the instrument at an elevated level.94 He also mentioned that the violin and the viola should be held with the left hand instead of the chin or the left shoulder; players should avoid clamping the instrument because it will reduce the volume of sound and dampen the instrument.95

Primrose felt the positioning of the viola is more important to violists than violinists. Although, there are varying sizes of violas being used, violists should focus on the positioning of the instrument more than the size of them. Primrose said “The size of

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91 Ibid.
93 Ibid., 47.
94 Ibid., 47.
the instrument should never impose a *positioning* that restricts freedom of movement.

Performing on an instrument held at the shoulder is difficult enough without adding to the miseries.” 96

Primrose thought that the length of the neck should not affect how one holds the viola and that it has little to do with holding the viola. 97 He said, “the instrument is held in the left hand like a country music player.” 98 In Part Two of *Violin and Viola*, Primrose said the unnecessary pose while playing the viola is turning the neck to look at the fingers of the left hand; this will add tension and cause pain in the neck. There is no need to hold the viola in front of one as a continuation of the chin; it will pull the left shoulder forward and cause pain in the neck as well. 99

Dalton asked Primrose about accessories such as the shoulder rest and chinrest. Primrose said that he still thinks using a shoulder rest is not necessary. 100 Furthermore, it is expensive to find a fitted one. Primrose thought that the chinrest was just a device to protect the varnish of the instrument. He felt that violists should focus on solving their issues balancing the instrument instead of finding accessories. 101

**Jeffrey Irvine**

Jeffrey Irvine joined the viola faculty at the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1999. He feels that using a centered chinrest will help release tension created while holding the viola. He also thinks there is nothing wrong with using a shoulder rest since he uses one and it is unnecessary to use a shoulder rest if the player feels comfortable without one.

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96 Ibid.
97 Dalton, *Playing the viola*, 50
98 Ibid.
99 Menuhin, *Violin and Viola*, 181.
100 Dalton, *Playing The Viola*, 52.
101 Ibid., 53-54.
Small red cosmetic sponges with rubber bands may benefit some players who have trouble balancing the viola without a shoulder rest. The small sponges are easy to obtain in many drug stores. World-famous violist Kim Kashkashian uses red cosmetic sponges as well.

The decision of finding balance from a simple sponge or a higher shoulder rest will be influenced by the position of the viola. Irvine mentioned that he never felt comfortable when he played without a shoulder rest. He thinks that a violist with a short neck may feel comfortable playing the viola without one.

He thinks the best position for a violist to place their instrument depends on the length of the arms. The player with long arms can hold the viola more out to the left side because it will help the right hand without it being twisted while playing at the frog. The player with short arms can hold the viola a little more in the front.

In chapter three of "Playing and Teaching the viola: A comprehensive guide to the central clef instrument and its music," Jeffrey Irvine thinks students often play with too much tension because the previous teacher had not emphasized this or students have not followed the instructions of their teachers. The first thing he does is to help the student to play without tension. He also mentioned that the tension is mainly coming from three major areas of contact with the viola: the left hand, the right hand, and the neck and shoulders. He thinks “Violists should have their head in an upright and
forward-facing position, at least as much as possible because the more one turns their head to the left, the more strain is put on the back, neck, and shoulders.”¹⁰⁷
(Table 3.1) The early seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century part I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>John Playford</th>
<th>Francesco Geminiani</th>
<th>Leopold Mozart</th>
<th>G. Loehlein</th>
<th>L’abbe le Fils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country</strong></td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position of the Violin or Viola</strong></td>
<td>Should be placed below the left shoulder. The violin should attach to the left chest instead of the collarbone.</td>
<td>The violin must rest just below the collarbone, turning the right-hand side of the violin a little downwards.</td>
<td>The violin is placed against the neck so that it lies somewhat, in front of the shoulder and the side on which the e-string lies comes under the chin.</td>
<td>The chin can be rested on the left or right side of the tailpiece; pressure at the right side of tailpiece is preferred when encountering difficult technical passages.</td>
<td>The violin should be placed on the collarbone in such a way that the chin rests on the side of the fourth string which is the left side of the tailpiece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Instrument</strong></td>
<td>In the medium position with the scroll at the height of the mouth and not higher than the level of the eyes. The instrument should not be held too low.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The scroll must be lower than the shoulder.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shoulder Rest or Pad</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Left Hand</strong></td>
<td>The violin should be supported between the thumb and index-finger.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The violin should rest naturally on the hand without tension between thumb and index-fingers.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The neck of the violin should be held without tension.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table. 3.2) The early seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century part II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ludwig Spohr</th>
<th>P. M. Baillot</th>
<th>Ole Bull</th>
<th>Joseph Joachim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country</strong></td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position of the violin and viola</strong></td>
<td>The lower bout of the back of the violin should be firmly held by pressing the chin on the chin rest when holding the violin.</td>
<td>The violin should be placed on the left collarbone. The chin should hold the violin on the left side of the tailpiece.</td>
<td>The violin should be placed on the collarbone. The left hand should be slightly higher than the collarbone.</td>
<td>The chin should be placed on the left side of the tailpiece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Instrument</strong></td>
<td>As high as possible</td>
<td>The violin should be held horizontally.</td>
<td>Should be held higher rather than lower.</td>
<td>The violin should be held horizontally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shoulder rest or pad</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Depends on the length of the player’s neck.</td>
<td>Use a shoulder pad instead of a shoulder rest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Left hand</strong></td>
<td>Between the middle of the terminal phalanx of the thumb and the middle of the proximal phalanx of the index finger.*</td>
<td>The violin should be naturally balanced between the collarbone and the left hand without adding tension on the head.</td>
<td>The neck of the violin has to be held lightly between the thumb and index-finger.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In Polnauer’s *Senso- Moter Study*, he explained the confusion of the finger position. He said that Auer, Flesch and Baillot confuse the first and third phalanx finger. The first phalanx is usually called third in the violin literature, and the second phalanx is the middle phalanx.
(Table. 3.3) After middle of eighteenth century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Leopold Auer</th>
<th>Carl Flesch</th>
<th>Ivan Galamian</th>
<th>Paul Rolland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position of the violin and viola</strong></td>
<td>Should not be resting on the shoulder.</td>
<td>On the collarbone and be held by the left jaw.</td>
<td>On the collarbone</td>
<td>On the collarbone and the button of the tailpiece should touch the center of the throat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Instrument.</strong></td>
<td>As high as possible</td>
<td></td>
<td>Should be held higher rather than lower.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shoulder rest or pad</strong></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>No shoulder pad or cushion</td>
<td>Depends on the length of the player’s neck.</td>
<td>Use a shoulder pad instead of a shoulder rest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 3.4) Ideas from Violist after nineteenth century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position of the violin and viola</th>
<th>Yehudi Menuhin</th>
<th>William Primrose</th>
<th>Jeffrey Irvine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The chin should slightly press on the chinrest.</td>
<td>The chin should slightly press on the chinrest.</td>
<td>Do not clamp the viola.</td>
<td>Depends on the length of the arms; players with long arms hold more out to the left side and players with short arm hold more in the front.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Instrument</td>
<td>The viola should be held at a natural height or higher which will depend on the weight of the instrument.</td>
<td>The viola should be held at a natural height or higher which will depend on the weight of the instrument.</td>
<td>The viola should be held at a natural height or higher which will depend on the weight of the instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoulder rest or pad</td>
<td>No shoulder rest</td>
<td>No shoulder rest</td>
<td>Depends on how players balance the instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Left hand</td>
<td>Hold the instrument with the left hand and collarbone.</td>
<td>The viola is held with the left hand.</td>
<td>There is no one right way to do this. Some players support the instrument more with the left hand and some support it more with the head.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Country: U.S.A.  
Scottish  
U.S.A.
CHAPTER 4

TO PLAY THE VIOLA WITHOUT A SHOULDER REST

Playing the viola without a shoulder rest could be a helpful way to teach ourselves how to feel the muscle movements of our back, upper arm, and left shoulder. This way, we are more able to adjust incorrect playing posture and avoid encountering resulting injuries.

Tension resulting from a stiff shoulder often appears with violists that use a shoulder rest because of the commonly-taught way to not move at all. To counter that problem, players should focus on the movement of the joint connecting the left arm and shoulder. By doing so, it allows them to adjust when needed which lessens the chance of accumulating tension from a static posture.

Taking off the shoulder rest makes it easier for the player to shift their attention to the problem and to solve it in a more efficient way – similar to getting rid of crutches or training wheels. Once the player feels relaxed in their shoulder, their attention will naturally transfer from the forearm to the wrist.

Previously mentioned in chapter three, Menuhin and Primrose suggest that players should not move their shoulder and the left hand should hold the responsibility of keeping the instrument up. However, I feel that this suggestion creates unnecessary tension while playing; everything feels downward naturally because of Earth’s gravity and I believe there is no exception for the violin and the viola. Playing the viola without a shoulder rest should include not only the left hand but also the left shoulder and arm.
If the viola is only supported by the left hand, it means one will feel its weight mostly on the left hand - which may cause excessive tension in the left hand. Therefore, the player needs the shoulder to be as flexible as possible so that the player may easily shift the balance between the left wrist, left elbow, and left shoulder.

To successfully play the viola without a shoulder rest, ideally, it should be placed at about a 45-degree angle in front of the body (Figure 4.1); however, it also depends on the length of the player’s right arm. To examine the best spot of where to hold the viola, violists should use their fingers on the right hand to touch the left wrist without feeling any unnecessary tension on the right side of their back (Figure 4.2). After finding the best spot, the right hand and the left hand should be coordinated in whichever direction they move the viola.

Figure 4.1. The examination of the best position of the viola
4.1. FOUR DIRECTIONS OF MOVEMENT WHEN BALANCING THE VIOLA

There are four directions that one should be aware of while playing - up, down, left and right (Figure 4.3). The idea of balancing the viola without a shoulder rest is just like riding up and down on a seesaw. The shoulder should play the role similar to a fulcrum. Violinists and violists need an “Up” direction to go against gravity when they are playing the instrument, so that the instrument can be “balanced” on the left shoulder.
The “Up” direction is provided in three points - the left wrist, the left elbow, and the left shoulder (Figure 4.4). Players who use a shoulder rest often restrict this shoulder movement and hinder the largest part of the “upward” motion.

Figure 4.3. Four Directions of movement

The idea of a seesaw seems very simple. As Paul Rolland said, “The greater the distance between the fulcrum and the application of the power, the better the leverage and the easier the work.” Teachers should prioritize this idea with beginners. The figure on page thirty-three of Paul Rolland’s *The Teaching of Action*, he demonstrates the

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importance of the shoulder. When players try to balance the instrument, they need to find the full leverage of the seesaw in order to save energy and to play their instrument easily.\textsuperscript{109}

![Three balance points for supporting the viola](image)

Figure 4.4. Three balance points for supporting the viola

The purpose of switching the points of balance between the shoulder and the left hand is to equalize the weight which varies from the up and down movements while holding the instrument. When the scroll is facing downward, the shoulder should be raised up in a different direction, so that the player’s head and jaw can easily be placed on the chinrest. This will make it easier to balance on the other side of the fulcrum.

There is an exercise to practice lifting the viola up and down before proceeding onto the next pitch. I noticed that Jessica Bodner, who also plays without a shoulder rest, often lifts her viola during performance. She was the inspiration behind this exercise. When we play the viola without a shoulder rest, tension may arise in our muscles. Lifting the viola is a way to remind our body to relax (Figure 4.5).

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 33.
Figure 4.5. Exercise of lifting the viola
Try imagining the whole body as a big seesaw. The fulcrum of the seesaw is at the center of our body (Figure 4.6). When we try to balance both sides of the seesaw, the heavier side should move closer to the fulcrum. When we put the instrument on our shoulder, the bottom of the viola and the left shoulder can be regarded as the pivot point. At this point, the left side of the body should be heavier so that players can think about transferring the weight from the left hand to the left shoulder in order to maintain balance.

The player’s head should stay relaxed in order to avoid pressing the chin or jaw onto the instrument. When the left-hand shifts to a higher position, the shoulder needs to be raised in order to evenly distribute the weight between the hand and the chin. Once one arrives in the new position the shoulder should return to a neutral position. When playing in the lower positions, the shoulder should be relaxed, and the weight of the instrument should be balanced with the elbow.

Figure 4.6. Feeling the whole body as a seesaw
Switching the fulcrum depends on what position one is playing in and the height of the scroll. The purpose of switching the pivot of the balance point between the shoulder and the left hand is to find the smoothest balance between the strengths which come from up and down. There are two exercises which one can apply to feel the movement of both hands.

The first exercise will allow one to feel that the motion of the bow arm is an arch motion (Figure 4.7) while playing a single note on the same string. The second exercise will allow players to keep the bow arm motion (arch) without raising their elbow too high while crossing strings. The open close motion of the viola (left hand) is to bring the viola inward (close) when playing up bow and pull the viola in an opposite direction when playing down bow (Figure 4.8).
When players are playing on the same string or string crossing on the viola, the bow arm moves on an arch plane and the viola moves on a horizontal plane (Figure 4.9). To navigate from the higher strings to the lower strings, the bow arm should reach the chosen string through an arch motion while bringing the instrument inward.

The viola should move against the direction of the bow arm no matter if one is playing on the same string or crossing strings so that the arch motion of the bow arm will not be affected. This will also help with smooth bow changes as well as saving energy when adding weight onto the string. To put it in simpler words, when balancing the weight from both hands, the bow arm will add force from the opposite side of the left shoulder and arm. Think of opening up the viola while playing a down bow and moving inward when playing an up bow (Figure 4.10).
Figure 4.9. The direction of the bow arm and the viola

Figure 4.10. The directions of down bow (Left); and up bow (right)
**First exercise (playing on the same string);**

1. Practice a single note on each string in détaché.

2. Practice open-close motion on both hands.

3. Focus on the bow arm motion (arch motion) first without moving the viola while changing bow (Figure 4.7).

4. Focus on the viola motion (open-close motion) while changing bow.

**Second exercise (string crossing);**

1. Practice open strings back and forth from the lowest to the highest string in one bow.

2. Practice the open-close motion with both hands.

3. Focus on the bow arm motion (arch motion) first without moving the viola while changing bow.

4. Focus on the open-close motion of the viola while crossing strings; think of bringing the viola inward (close) when playing up bow and pull the viola in an opposite direction when playing down bow (Figure 4.8).

5.) In some cases, the elbow will be higher than the wrist such as at the tip when playing on higher strings. (Figure 4.11) The elbow should not be raised too high; always maintain a lower elbow than the wrist while going from the higher to the lower string (Figure 4.12).

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Figure 4.11. The right elbow is higher than the wrist at the tip on the higher strings.
BALANCING OF THE WHOLE BODY

As to the mechanics of pulling a bow while playing without a shoulder rest, Daniel Chong, the first violinist of the Parker Quartet, once said in a master class during the Parker Quartet residency in spring, 2016, that one can think of pulling the bow as similar to cutting a tomato. Coming straight down with a knife onto the tomato will cause it to collapse and get squashed. A more effective way is to slice into the tomato at an angle. Approaching the string with the bow is a similar motion.

If the player is making a string crossing from the C string to the A string they should feel that the distance between the right and left arm has become narrower than the distance of when the bow was on the A string. By doing this, the bow arm can keep its natural route as it proceeds to play any string of the viola. Naturally, each hand will form circles in opposing directions (Figure 4.12). In order to avoid unnecessary weight onto the string, the elbow of the right arm should not be raised too high, especially when...
playing on the lower string. The elbow of the right arm should remain lower than the wrist.

To apply this idea to playing, coordinate the upward motion of the left hand and the ‘slicing’ action of the bow hand to avoid creating unwanted pressure while pulling the string. The coordination of these actions will help you create a balanced contact point which will make it easier to pull a good sound. It will not only help balance the instrument, achieve the best and most efficient way of playing, but also produce a smooth and solid sound.

Playing the viola is like playing tennis. Every motion needs to be completed. For example, when we swing the racket, we need to keep the motion continuing from the lower-back, horizontally and finally to the higher front side. Not only does this provide stability for the racket and ball, but it also prevents the right arm from developing an injury. If a player stops the right arm halfway through the swinging motion, the muscles of the right-arm will have to give an extra amount of effort to go against the law of action and reaction.

**THE BALANCING IDEA OF THE LEFT SIDE OF BODY**

Completing the motion of the left side of the body is the same idea; we need to return the viola back to its starting point in order to maintain a relaxed posture. When we play in the lower positions (such as the first three positions), which I call the natural position, it is the most relaxed and comfortable place when holding the viola. Once we shift from the lower positions to the higher positions, we have to slightly lift up the viola in order to obtain more space between the body and the upper arm; this is how one transfers the weight from one area to another (also known as the transferring position).
However, we need to return from the transferring position back to the natural position while shifting down. This will be the complete process: natural- transferring - natural. In other words, when violinists or violists start to feel tension while playing the instrument, they need to find where the natural position is.

To practice pivot spots between the shoulder, arm, and the wrist - when playing in the lower positions. Keep the scroll of the viola a little bit lower than the original horizontal line of focus and the pivot point should be on the left wrist. When shifting between the first and fourth positions, the pivot point should switch from the left wrist to the elbow and the viola then needs to be raised to its horizontal plane. When shifting above the fourth position, switch the pivot point from the left elbow to the left shoulder so that the shoulder can move a little bit closer to the bottom back of the viola. The contact point between the bottom back of the viola and the shoulder should be as close as possible (Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13. Contact point of shoulder and the back of the viola when shifting above the fourth position
By doing this, the shoulder will give the most optimal amount of support to the viola resulting in a flexible left hand amongst the higher positions of the instrument. By doing this, when players aware of the left shoulder being raised, they will easily relax the shoulder and return to the natural position.

What happens if we incorrectly use the shoulder rest? If we are using a shoulder rest without freeing our shoulder, most of the work will come from the fingers, it restricts the freedom of the left hand and may cause muscle strain. I can easily explain this idea with two exercises. Follow the steps and try to feel the tension in each part of the left hand.

*The first exercise:

1. Use the right hand and press hard on the left shoulder.

2. Do not move the left shoulder.

3. Start to move the fingers as fast as you can.

4. Stop the motion after ten seconds

5. Repeat this exercise three times.

*The second exercise:

1. Keep the left shoulder relaxed and movable.

2. Feel the upward direction from the elbow; still keep the freedom of the left shoulder.

3. Start to move the fingers as fast as you can; slightly move the left shoulder at the same time.

4. Stop the motion after ten seconds.

5. Repeat this exercise three times.
This first exercise simply explains what happens if we are using a shoulder rest incorrectly. Consequently, the left shoulder will feel an unnecessary amount of weight coming from the shoulder rest along with the natural weight of the bottom of the viola. Therefore, the player will utilize the wrist as the essential balance point in order to support the instrument. The weight will eventually cause the viola to naturally become lower than the horizontal level, and tension will form in the area between the wrist and the elbow while the fingers are playing fast passages. In order to reduce tension, players need to find a place to balance between the wrist, jaw, and the shoulder or collarbone in order to counter that problem. This will also help with transferring the weight between the wrist and the elbow.

The second exercise simply shows us how to use the shoulder in order to prevent the viola from slipping. When we place our attention on the shoulder, which is under the viola, the wrist and forearm will naturally relax during playing. In order to keep our instrument at an appropriate height, switching the balanced between the wrist, jaw and left shoulder becomes necessary.

**EXERCISES FOR THE LEFT THUMB**

Let’s bring back the concept of the seesaw. When we are playing on a seesaw, there are different amounts of weight on either side of the fulcrum. In order to balance both sides of the fulcrum, the heavier person should sit closer to the fulcrum in comparison to the lighter person. When we are playing the viola, we should adjust our body and be aware of where our fulcrum is; it will help our body keep a balanced status while maintaining enough stamina throughout the performance.
As mentioned, when playing without a shoulder rest, players have to learn how to switch the balance point between the left shoulder, hand, and elbow. As a result, the shoulder will be regarded as the balance point to support the instrument so that the left fingers will be able to adjust without any tension. This exercise will help avoid fatigue and injuries within the left thumb.

Players can apply this exercise to any piece, scales, orchestra excerpts, and solo pieces by focusing on the minute movements of the fingers. The fingers in the left hand should always feel the motion from the knuckles. There is no need to place the viola’s neck at a specific knuckle of the left hand, as long as the thumb is flexible and free of tension.

1. Take the left shoulder as the balancing point (fulcrum) with the thumb underneath the neck of the viola (Figure 4.14).

2. The left hand should feel relaxed.

3. Find the balance point between the thumb and the other four fingers.

4. Play a two octave C major scale all in first position.

5. The thumb is led by the other fingers while moving.

6. Try your best to feel the motions of the fingers when playing in the lower position, the other fingers should not change formation.

7. Always check the thumb. It should stay relaxed and free while practicing this exercise.

This is a very good method to find the balance point on the left side of the body. When shifting to higher positions, the left elbow should turn inward. Think of the left hand being led from the elbow, wrist, fingers, and then to the thumb. When we twist the wrist to change our hand formation, focus your attention onto the thumb which is led by the other four fingers and keep the thumb relaxed. (Figure 4.15) If not, it will tense up
while playing string crossings and shifting resulting in restricted movement within the other four fingers.

In a master class at the University of South Carolina on October 12 in 2013, violist Sheila Brown also told me once that she had asked her students to practicing pressing down their left fingers while putting the thumb under the neck of the instrument. In order to support the instrument, the student is forced to find a natural balancing point between the left shoulder, left jaw, and the knuckles of the left hand. Once that is found, they will begin to feel the appropriate amount of pressure needed for each finger and will understand that the thumb serves as another balancing point and not as an anchor. It will also help the student feel the weight between the fingers and the left shoulder while maximizing volume.

Figure 4.14. Exercise with the thumb underneath the neck of the viola

Figure 4.15. Thumb led by other four fingers
4.2 PREVENTATIVE MEASURES AGAINST PLAYING INJURIES AND SELF-CHECKING

Players can encounter injuries for reasons due to poor habits when playing. Playing the viola without a shoulder rest is like walking on a single-logged bridge; you have to walk carefully to keep your body balanced in order to avoid falling down and getting injured. String players tend to have pain or injury in areas such as the neck, back, shoulder, hands, arm muscles, and wrists. Rest or physical therapy can lead to recovery but it may not be that simple of a solution. Ignoring symptoms of pain may lead to chronic pain which could shorten the performing career of a musician.

It has been taught that the left shoulder should not move while playing the instrument. However, I have found that this is not always true. Playing the viola without a shoulder rest will encourage players to feel the movement of the shoulder in order to avoid injuries. Additionally, the most important tip on balancing the viola without a shoulder rest is to understand the tension and relaxation tendencies of the left shoulder.

As mentioned in the previous section, shoulder rests provide comfort and physical security for players while playing the instrument. When we are using one, the left side of our body will receive the information from our brain and feel secure. Although this is not wrong, it may cause some problems and unfavorable habits in the future. As Menuhin had said,

The violinist’s enemy is any tightness of hold, whether of fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, head, neck, chest (right or left side), shoulder blades, waist, hips, knees, ankles or feet… These impediments may be due to dietary deficiencies, bad posture, poor circulation, over-eating, stress, fear, tension and bad violinistic habits. And raising shoulders is one of the bad habits while playing the violin.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}, 42.}
In MinJung Cho’s dissertation *Path To Effortlessness: Mauricio Fuks’ Pedagogical Perspectives On The Art Of Violin Playing*, she mentioned, “To examining one’s violin hold is undoubtedly a crucial process for achieving effortlessness in playing, as it involves such centric and intimate contact points between violin and body, besides one’s hand and fingers, such as the jaw, neck, shoulder and upper chest area.”

In her dissertation, Cho mentioned that a false sense of security arises when the instrument is held too tight. “Tightness in the violin hold is mainly caused by excessive physical pressure on the contact points between the violin and the body. It is a very common and strongly habitual activity in playing, and once embedded in one’s muscle memory, getting rid of it requires a great deal of remedial work.”

In Lacraru Emanuela Maria’s dissertation, *Supporting Your Instrument in a Body-friendly Manner: A Comparative Approach*, she brings up how certain players get injured due to their poor habits when playing. Players sometimes are unaware and develop poor habits that lead to tension while playing the instrument. She also refers to the article, “Chin Force in Violin Playing” by Satoshi Obata and Hiroshi Kinoshita, the results show that pressing on the chin rest is a major factor in temporomandibular disorder (TMD).

There is an exercise which is often demonstrated by some teachers which I feel may cause bad habits when holding the violin or viola and eventually become difficult to correct. Paul Rolland said, “Place the instrument on the collarbone with the tail button touching the center of the throat and the left hand in the middle positions. Drop the arm

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112 Ibid., 20.
114 Ibid., 20.
and maintain the support with the jaw. Swing the arms back and forth and sideways to release the tension in the shoulders and to test the support." I feel that this is not an appropriate exercise for students, because it will mislead them to build bad habits. As William Primrose said,

I am totally opposed to the idea of holding the instrument, as so many teachers advocated. They place the viola or violin in that position and then ask the student to drop the left arm and hold the instrument straight out without any arm support. This encourages the bad habit of shrugging the shoulder and clamping with the chin.

Where players place their chin should be taken into consideration as well. The pictures which are illustrated in Mozart’s treatise show that the player places their chin more on the right side of the tailpiece. This is not appropriate for the left forearm, because when violinists and violists hold the instrument towards the right side of the tailpiece, the left arm and shoulder may tense up and twist while shifting in-between positions, while playing in higher positions, or during string crossings.

Violinists and violists should always be aware of their playing posture. It is important to practice in front of a mirror and to always check your posture - this is applicable to players of all levels. Paul Rolland said,

The parents can help the student to establish good position habits and motion patterns by providing a wall mirror for the practice room. To receive the greatest from the mirror, the student should endeavor to pattern his reflected images after the examples of his teacher. Close observation of the form of artist players can be helpful and stimulating.

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115 Rolland, *Teaching the violin*, 72.
117 Rolland, *Teaching the violin*, 63.
Using a mirror along with good instruction of how to move freely is the best practice. Without including good instruction, a student could practice in front of a mirror and imitate the teacher or artist and develop poor habits.

With the advance of science and technology, it is much more convenient for us to use a cell phone or other electronic devices, such as a camera or laptop, to film ourselves while playing the instrument.

4.3 PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF PLAYING THE VIOLA WITHOUT A SHOULDER REST

One advantage of playing the viola without a shoulder is that it benefits the vibrato. Fast vibrato is not always favorable in viola playing. Some violists also play the violin; they should be aware that there are many different ways of creating vibrato - such as with the arm, wrist, and finger. The speed of the vibrato needs to be appropriate to the music. A broader and more moderate vibrato is recommended for violists. The viola articulates slower than the violin. Using fast vibrato will degrade the projection and the ringing of the instrument.

Practicing with the idea of a seesaw in mind can help violists develop their vibrato by freeing the fingers. Practicing the idea of the seesaw can help violists for develop their vibrato by freeing the fingers. Once they can easily switch the balance point, they will become more aware of the usage of certain muscles while vibrating. Additionally, it helps improve their weakest finger for vibrato - the fourth finger.

I started to play the violin with a shoulder rest when I was six. In my first vibrato lessons, my teacher taught me to acquire it through the motion of the fingers. Later, I was instructed to feel the different parts of the left hand and to try to combine the vibrato motion between the fingers, wrist, and forearm. The left shoulder is still an essential point
for playing a natural vibrato. When we are using a shoulder rest, we put our attention on the fingers, wrist, and forearm, it indirectly teaches us that using small muscles leads to using the large muscles. Players are taught to think about using the large muscles to manage the small muscles while moving the bow arm, but they do not utilize this on the left arm when using a shoulder rest. Most violists rely on a shoulder rest because of the weight of the viola but more freedom of vibrato can be obtained from not using a shoulder rest.

4.4 WARM UP EXERCISES BEFORE AND AFTER PRACTICE OR PERFORMANCE

Warm-up and stretching exercises are preferred before and after playing the instrument for players who do not use a shoulder rest because it can help the muscles relax after long periods of playing. Warm-up exercises are not only important for viola playing but also for many other activities. For example, athletes have warm-up exercises before playing their respective sports. There is no exception for playing the violin and viola, because one has to warm up the muscles’ temperature in order to avoid playing injuries - especially for students and orchestral musicians who are required to play their instruments for long periods of time. Violists who play the instrument without a shoulder rest might need different amounts of warm-up exercises than those who play with one. This is because playing the instrument without a shoulder rest requires more bodily motions from the shoulder and the left hand. The following are recommended exercises.

The first exercise deals with stretching the back- it is important to take special care of these muscles as they provide immense support for the body. When one moves the bow arm it starts from the right side of the back and so after playing the violin and the viola for a long time. Players are suggested to engage in a simple exercise, which will
help release tension in the back. For this exercise, find a wall and place the palm of the hands on the wall and turn the whole body until you feel the back and chest muscles are stretching. The horizontal bar is also a good tool for stretching the back and body before and after playing the viola. Be sure that the feet do not leave the ground, and simply hang with both hands from the horizontal bar with the weight of the body until you feel the muscle is stretched.

The second exercise deals with loosening the shoulders: shoulders need to always be relaxed and flexible; it helps players feel their back and upper-arms muscles more easily. Practice loosening the shoulder muscle with your own instrument case. Put both hands on the side of the body with the instrument case. Next, lift the instrument case at a moderate speed. Focus on the shoulder movement and avoid lifting the case with the upper-arm or forearm. The instrument case should always be lower than the elbow. This exercise can help relax the shoulder.

Yoga and meditation can help relax the body and mind. It helps the recovery of our muscles by stretching us physically and mentally; it can help increase strength in very specific muscles and muscle groups. Yoga can also help some players regulate their breathing while playing. Musicians with lower back pain can soothe that problem through practicing yoga. When these muscles are well conditioned, back pain can be greatly reduced or avoided. Practicing yoga consistently can also help our body maintain a good body posture and increase balance throughout.118

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The decision of whether or not to use a shoulder rest has always been a controversial topic in the history of violin and viola playing. There are articles, books, and even electronic resources discussing this topic. Naturally, everyone has their own opinion on what is the most beneficial for the player.

Although many violinists and violists disagree with moving or raising the shoulder while playing the instrument, I think being aware of how to move one’s shoulder is the most important way to successfully play the viola without a shoulder rest. From my own experience and thoughts, playing the viola without a shoulder rest can be a good way to help players learn to relax their body and to avoid injury.

Playing the viola without a shoulder rest will help players to find a way to balance the instrument between the left shoulder, the left wrist, and the bow arm. Once players understand the concept of the seesaw and are able to switch the balance between the shoulder and the left hand, the likelihood of having injuries will decrease. Also, they will clearly notice which muscles are involved. Finding balance and freedom of motion while playing also helps one to have a good posture while playing. Gregory Barnes mentions this in his book, *Playing and Teaching the Viola*, “Good playing posture, both sitting and standing, will enhance future performance.”

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119 Barnes, *Playing and Teaching the viola*, 7.
To sum it all up, this dissertation will give players a basic idea the of varying chinrests and shoulder rests available. Through the culmination of historical concepts, pedagogical research and my own experience, this dissertation shall serve as a guide to help players understand how to play the viola without a shoulder rest.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


