

Pierre Baillot, Violon Method, by Citizens Baillot, Rode, and Kreutzer, Members of the Conservatoire of Music, Written by Citizen Baillot, Adopted for Teaching in This Establishment (1802)

The [*Méthode de violon*](#) by Pierre Baillot, Rodolphe Kreutzer, and Pierre Rode left a lasting impact on the pedagogy of the instrument. Commissioned by the Paris Conservatoire upon its establishment in 1795, along with thirteen other instrument treatises, its purpose was to establish a model of teaching on unified principles. The works' conception was entrusted to three violin professors—Baillot being tasked with the actual writing—who took the trouble to consult earlier works before composing their own. Finished in 1802, the *Méthode* was to become an obligatory resource for the violin students of the institution. It was equally intended to be introduced in the provinces; notably, it was imposed on the branches of the Conservatoire established from 1826. The text consists of two parts, treating respectively of the “Mechanics of the Violin” (pg. 5) and “Expression and its Means” (pg. 158).

The first and longer part includes a series of scales in all the keys and seven positions, underpinned by a bass contributed by Luigi Cherubini, and then *Fifty Studies on the Scale* composed by Baillot. By contrast to the other Conservatoire method-books, such as that for the piano [written by Jean-Louis Adam](#) or for cello [by Baillot](#), no musical examples from the repertoire are offered to illustrate the theoretical explanations. Also omitted are the principles of solfège, standard in pedagogical manuals, as well as illustrations of the posture of the musician and the way of holding the instrument, though in this respect the *Méthode* is in line with the other treatises published in France at that time.

Though the title may not say as much, the *Méthode* is an elementary work. It was not designed to train the violinist all on its own, but rather to serve as a supplement and complement to the teaching of a professor. The early Conservatoire, by contrast to its modern-day role, took on beginners. If certain chapters of the treatise, such as the one devoted to bow-strokes, might seem a little scanty, the work must be considered in a context predating the virtuosity of the 1830s. It helped to establish certain practices, such as that of resting the chin to the left of the tailpiece; whereas instructions had formerly differed from one work to the next, subsequent method-books unanimously prescribe this technique.

The second part (“On the Means of Expression”, “On Sound”, “On Movement”, “On Style”, “On Taste”, “On Poise”, “On the Art of Interpretation”) expounds humanistic and philosophical ideas into which no pedagogical text on the violin had previously ventured. Referring frequently to Rousseau’s *Dictionnaire de musique*, the authors disclose precious information on certain elements of the oral tradition governing contemporaneous performance: taste, the concept of art, timbre, the ideal of vocality, differences in playing style according to genre (sonata, quartet, concerto). It was not enough that the student become “skilled in the mechanics of the Violin”: “expression opens to [the musician’s] talent a career with no limits other than the sensations of the human heart” (pg. 158). The emphasis falls on the necessity of transcending the “mechanics”, of using them as a means and not an end. This part, completely unprecedented in earlier method-books, would go on to inspire many a subsequent pedagogue.

In a France in which violin classes struggled to gain a foothold in the provinces as late as the 1830s, the *Méthode* offered teachers a resource bearing the prestigious stamp of the Paris Conservatoire—just like the internationally renowned virtuosi and pedagogues nurtured there. It was no doubt for this reason that the treatise enjoyed such a long career as a reference work, disseminated in numerous neighbouring lands and translated a number of times. Its popularity is reflected as much in the references to it in later treatises as in the fact that it continued to be distributed and reissued across the nineteenth century, in French and other languages, even as far more complete methods appeared, in step with the development of instrumental technique, such as Baillot's *Art du violon* (1834).

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