

WALTON, William Turner

Piano Quartet / Violin Sonata / Toccata (M. Jones, S.-J. Bradley, T. Lowe, A. Thwaite)

Notes to performers by Matthew Jones

Walton, Menuhin and ‘shifting’ performance practice

The use of vibrato and audible shifts in Walton’s works, particularly the Violin Sonata, became (somewhat unexpectedly) a fascinating area of enquiry and experimentation in the process of preparing for the recording.

It is useful at this stage to give some historical context to vibrato. As late as in Joseph Joachim’s treatise of 1905, the renowned violinist was clear that vibrato should be used sparingly,¹ through it seems that it was in the same decade that the beginnings of ‘continuous vibrato use’ were appearing. In the 1910s Eugene Ysaÿe and Fritz Kreisler are widely credited with establishing it. Robin Stowell has suggested that this ‘new’ vibrato began to evolve partly because of the introduction of chin rests to violin set-up in the early nineteenth century.² I suspect the evolution of the shoulder rest also played a significant role, much later, since the freedom in the left shoulder joint that is more accessible (depending on the player’s neck shape) when using a combination of chin and shoulder rest facilitates a fluid vibrato. Others point to the adoption of metal strings over gut strings as an influence. Others still suggest that violinists were beginning to copy vocal vibrato, though David Milsom has observed that the both sets of musicians developed the ‘new vibrato’ roughly simultaneously.³ Mark Katz persuasively posits the idea that much of this evolution was due to the beginning of the recording process. In tandem, the increased amplitude and continuity of vibrato was partly responsible for the emergence of frequently audible shifts of position as a mode of expression.

The early music revival, and with it an interest in ‘stylistically appropriate vibrato use’ began in earnest in the middle of the twentieth century and was fully established by the 1960s and 70s, so the present Walton works fall in the period of the full blossom of the continuous (and often wide) vibrato style of playing.

Although Joachim was still alive (just) in Walton’s lifetime, it is difficult to be sure how much Walton was exposed to professional violin playing in his early years other than his unsuccessful lessons as a boy and very occasional orchestral concerts (such as one in 1912 by the Oldham Orchestral Society, which included amongst others works by Wagner, Handel and Sibelius). Occasional concerts featuring the violin at Oxford would, in all probability, have included a mixture of vibrato styles, from ‘sparing’ to ‘continuous’ with many permutations in between. It is likely that many of the early recordings that the composer heard would have been *without* continuous vibrato.

By the time Walton wrote the Violin Concerto for Jascha Heifetz in 1938–39, its dedicatee’s trademark generous vibrato was fully fledged. The opening phrases of both Heifetz and Menuhin’s recordings (the latter with Walton conducting, a point to which I’ll return later), give, within the first few phrases, an encapsulation of what is often, and for the historian somewhat confusingly, called ‘old school’ violin-playing (often associated with fast vibrato and changes of position with audible glissando).

How much the modern performer should aim to recreate the ‘Menuhin style’ of playing when approaching the Violin Sonata Walton wrote for him is a delicate and interesting question, especially when the vast majority of recordings available have been made from his edition, in which

¹ Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (University of California Press, 2010), 96.

² *Ibid.*, 100.

³ *Ibid.*, 102.

there is little distinguishing the instructions of the composer from those of the dedicatee (*see* below).

Specifically relevant to the recording in hand are a number of recordings:

Walton: Violin Sonata: Movement I (opening)

Yehudi Menuhin / Louis Kentner (Menuhin Century, the historic Recordings): fast active vibrato, irrespective of whether piano is in melodic foreground or background – rubato used a medium amount as expressive mechanism.

Max Rostal / Colin Horsley: similar to Menuhin – very ‘old school’ opening, mostly sul G – mainly rubato rather than vibrato used as expressive mechanism.

Tasmin Little / Piers Lane – fast and slightly wider vibrato but varied later in first phrase – rather eclipses the line of the phrase in the opening but the relaxation of the vibrato and its reinstating provide relief.

Yuriko Kamei / Chitose Okashiro: continuous and rather unvarying vibrato.

Daniel Hope / Simon Mulligan: seems to be imitating the old school vibrato and sul G quality, with little rubato but more sense of ‘tranquillo’ than most recordings.

The two older recordings, Menuhin’s and Rostal’s, exhibit the expected fast, intense vibrato and feature the opening on the G string. Menuhin, in documenting the fingerings and bowings that he preferred, confusing the directions of composer and interpreter, suggests to violinists (including me until this project) that Walton would have wanted the start of the opening passage to be played on the G string, necessitating a lot of vibrato to counterbalance the greater bow-pressure needed for the string to ‘speak’. In the new OUP edition, published in 2008, we realise that no suggestion of the G string was made by the composer. While Walton was of course very familiar with Menuhin’s style of playing, the lack of any ‘sul G’ instruction on the one hand and his use of the word ‘tranquillo’ and the dynamic ‘p’ on the other suggest that the composer did not intend the intensity of sound that has become common practice as a result of Menuhin’s editing. Particularly with the long musical lines of the movement, it seems more sensible to save the intensity for the many climactic moments later, and at the very least until the first ‘f’ mark in bar 10 of the work.

Walton was reluctant to give feedback to performers, apparently for fear of offending them, and from a general feeling of gratitude that his music was being performed at all. Simon Rowland-Jones, violist and colleague of mine in the chamber music faculty at the Guildhall School, performed the Piano Quartet in Rome with the composer present. He recalled to me waiting expectantly for feedback with the other performers, only to be told simply ‘I know a lovely restaurant to take you to’. This resistance of Walton’s to outwardly expressing his thoughts on interpretations led to a number of undesirable consequences. After Lionel Tertis’s rejection of his Viola Concerto and Paul Hindemith’s stepping in for the premiere at the Proms, Walton later admitted that he disliked the latter’s lack of creative phrasing and went back to add extra hairpins in the score, which have led to a tendency for violists to overdo the ‘small scale’ markings and miss the overall phrase trajectory. Further down the line, the fact that Frederick Riddle’s interpretation had been enjoyed by Walton led to OUP justifying a considerably edited Riddle viola part in their publication of the concerto, a part which goes against a significant quantity of the composer’s original intentions. Lady Walton told me that ‘darling William often said he wished that performers would bloody well do what he put on the page’ in such circumstances, but never mentioned anything to Riddle, not even when they were recording the work together!⁴

The ‘historically informed performance’ movement has encouraged violinists to think about the use of vibrato in ‘earlier’ music, but it is uncommon to ask oneself, in more recent repertoire, whether vibrato is necessary or even desirable. These days, it is a pivotal moment in the education of a string

⁴ Personal communication: in conversation over dinner in 2006.

player when he or she is able to ‘do vibrato’, and for the most part they then use it pretty much all the time in passages of appropriate tempo, but this may well not have been Walton’s experience or desire. And while he may well have had the sound of Menuhin in mind when he wrote the piece ‘for’ him, it is an oversimplification to assume that he must have wanted this kind of tone all the time.

Much of this now seems obvious to me, so part of my thought-process in the preparation of this recording has been to wonder why it is not so to others. One thing that has occurred to me is that it might have something to do with my current pedagogical perspective as a teacher of chamber music. Though written for (and most often recorded by) a concerto soloist, this sonata is undoubtedly a piece of chamber music, and given its origins in a moment of flux in performance practice, outlined above, this simple fact came to seem to me to have profound importance for its interpretation.

In a string quartet, one of the key methods of ensuring that an audience is clear whom to listen to in a certain passage is to avoid excessive vibrato in the accompanimental voices. This is often done instinctively but generally needs considerable discussion in groups, especially when approaching new repertoire. However, the principle is very rarely applied to duos of a stringed instrument with piano, mostly because the different timbres of the instruments can render it superfluous, but also because the performers recording such works find it hard to ignore their instincts as concerto soloists who rely on the intensity of sound to carry above an orchestra.

Deconstructing, to this small extent, my current musical tastes led to a systematic process of research through practice: only after trying all permutations of what I could discern as viable options, whether intuitively ‘appropriate’ or not, evolving each option to the point where I thought I could make sense of it (and make it make sense), did I feel ready to record the works on the disc.

One of the keys to the evolution of my interpretation was to explore working with little or no vibrato in phrases, and asking the reverse of a question that I often ask in chamber music coaching, ‘how about trying one note/phrase/section without vibrato?’. This became instead ‘how about trying this note/phrase/section *with* vibrato?’. My thousands of hours of coaching of both larger scale chamber works and duo sonatas at the Guildhall formed an essential background to this exploration: when I look back from an autoethnographic perspective, as it were, it seems the origin of my performance preparation methodology.

The approach to the Piano Quartet, too, for myself in private practice and in communicating my exploration to my fellow performers, was of clarifying the texture of the score, often reducing the amount of ‘automatic vibrato’ (as exemplified in our reading of the opening motif of the first movement, at the start of Track 1) and frequently encouraging a transparent string sound in moments where the piano line should be audible or dominant but, in performances and recordings even post-his, is rarely heard as being so (e.g. bars 6–9 of the third movement in the ‘Music at Menlo’ recording) .

What I feel I have ended up with as a result of this systematic process is musical insight that (without wanting to sound pompous) transcends orthodoxy. An important part of this realisation came from working on the ‘Canzonetta’, one of the Two Pieces for Violin and Piano. Walton notes in the piano part that the theme (beginning in b. 5 of the movement) is ‘based on a Troubador melody’ from the 13th century, so I began searching for colours/timbres that might fit this sound world well. Crucially (and in some ways ironically) I ended up using relatively *little* ‘non vibrato’ here, since the sparse ‘strumming’ piano part leaves the responsibility to carry the line to the violinist, and the vibrato helps do that. A lack of vibrato, in other words, is not simply a technique for connoting ‘early music’; it is a response to the demands of musical textures.

In the Sonata, for instance, there are many moments when the intricacy of the piano part's interaction with the violin line is difficult to make clear to the listener, and vibrato (especially wide, fast or intense) encourages the listener to remain oblivious to such subtleties by actively keeping their attention on the violin line. I experimented more than ever previously, thanks to the process of research outlined above, with the relationship between our concepts of bow use and vibrato, and how bilateral transfer (the transfer of a motor skill from one limb to the limb on the opposite side of the body) encourages us to make certain choices in the relationship between the use of the two arms.

The clear citations that I observed in the 'Variations' of the second movement (see below in my brief commentary on the piece) also encouraged me to explore tonal possibilities inspired by the source material – most noticeably in the lilting passacaglia (Variation 7) and the Hindemith-inspired Variation 2. Here the choice of bow contact, pressure and speed, as well as vibrato, were developed in tandem with working through the material by which Walton was influenced with the same historical attention to performance practice as that described here, thus shedding new light on the relevant variations and, crucially, also those before and after – for one of the challenges, I realised, of the Variations movement was to be able to clarify to the listener the unconventional structure of the theme and the incursions of cited material in delineating the variations, while still keeping a bird's-eye view of the trajectory through the movement.

Piano Quartet in D minor (1919, rev. 1921, 1955, 1974)

- 1) i: Allegramente
- 2) ii: Allegro scherzando
- 3) iii: Andante tranquillo
- 4) iv: Allegro molto

Born in 1902 in Oldham, Lancashire, to parents who were singing teachers, he received his first violin lessons aged 7 or 8, with very little success according to him and his family. He later credited the violin as being useful to study for ear training, but said 'I could never organise my fingers and it sounded so awful'. After being accepted to Oxford's Christ Church choir school, he had his second attempt at the violin, equally unsuccessful, and was so dispirited with progress that he refused to practise and his father cancelled the lessons. His piano playing was also described mostly unfavourably, making it even more extraordinary that the Piano Quartet could be so evolved at so young an age.

In the moving 1981 documentary film 'At the Haunted End of the Day', Walton recalls being 14 and having to 'make myself interesting somehow or when my voice breaks I will be sent back to Oldham'. He added 'I was very lucky, I was so damned stupid, all I could do was write music'.

We know from letters and library records that Debussy, Ravel and Schoenberg's music was encountered in score form by Walton around the time of commencing work on the Piano Quartet in 1918 (aged just 16), but the specific stimulus for the work was his meeting Herbert Howells, 10 years his senior, who had been receiving great critical acclaim for his own piano quartet. Much like his decision later to write an opera following Britten's acclaim for his, Walton was spurred on by competition.

Completed in 1919, the work underwent a number of revisions, complicated by getting lost in the post between Italy and England for more than a year, and though it was likely performed in 1919 in an informal setting, and then premiered in Liverpool in 1924, the London premiere (which until

recently was thought to be the very first performance) did not happen until 1929, the same year as the premiere of the Viola Concerto that solidified Walton's reputation as a leading composer. The original manuscript used for the preparation of the first edition is sadly lost, but Hugh MacDonald's 'William Walton Edition' version includes all of the composer's changes, some of which were suggestions by pianist Kinloch Anderson, who made the first recording.

Walton described the piece also as his 'first composition to show any kind of talent; it was written when I was a drooling baby but it is a very attractive piece'. Many features hint at the characteristics of the mature Walton style, despite the dizzying array of suggested influences by commentators: Howells, Elgar, Vaughan Williams, John Ireland, Bridge, Brahms, Fauré, Ravel, Stravinsky – but this is most definitely Walton! The premiere received mixed reviews, perhaps partly because of the expectation of the 'Walton style' being based on the works that had appeared in the interim, including *Façade* and the overture *Portsmouth Point*. Amongst the many notable characteristics of the work are the rhythmic drive and (admittedly) Elgarian melodies of the second movement, the lack of direct repetition of themes, the composer's first fugue, and the melancholic lyricism of the third movement, which also includes an unusually direct 'borrowing' of some measures from Ravel's song 'Le martin-pêcheur'.

The fourth movement is structurally very unusual and provoked many suggestions of influences – primarily Stravinsky in the piano writing and rhythmic qualities, and Bartok's *Allegro Barbaro* that Walton had studied shortly before working on this movement. This movement also received the greatest quantity of revisions over the years, including modifying the fugue theme, the revised version hinting at the rhythm that drives his First Symphony's striking opening.

Sources

- the original manuscript composed in 1918/19, lost in the post, found and then lost again;
- a second version revised at some point before the first performance in Liverpool in 1924;
- a third version, mainly changed by pianist Kinloch Anderson sometime between 1950 and 1955;
- a fourth version, incorporating Anderson's changes and some other minor alterations by Walton, published in 1976;
- Hugh MacDonald's critical edition for the William Walton Edition published in 2008, incorporating all of the composer's known alterations and some corrections of obvious errors that originated from the very first version.

Errors/inconsistencies/ambiguities/observations

Movement 1:

32: last quaver in cello originally E/B a tone higher than marked, corrected by OUP but not Walton

81: piano part originally has an accent on fourth beat, possibly an error

226: viola fourth note originally written G, corrected in WWE,⁵ but could work harmonically with either note

Movement 2:

21: accents in violin and viola omitted in previous editions

62: violin crescendo moved later than originally marked to be consistent with the other instruments' version of the themes in WWE

107: entry of viola literally 'mf' but logically within the dynamic left by the other strings from their diminuendo

162: piano part RH third note should logically be accented in keeping with the pattern surrounding it

182, 186: it is assumed that the entries of the theme are all 'pp'

⁵ William Walton Edition, vol.19, Chamber Music (Oxford University Press, 2008).

195: note the difference in articulation and dynamic from the parallel section in b.84 – deliberate or mistake?

200; ‘ff’ in notes by Walton though omitted in previous editions.

Movement 3:

1: note the reference to the piano part of the central section of Ravel’s song ‘Le martin-pêcheur’, as well as the influence in terms of piano ‘spread’ chords and general harmonic world

4: spread of piano chord added in WWE to match that in the parallel place in b. 37

5: one edition has staccato dot on the first viola pizz., omitted in WWE, though in 38 both pizzicato notes have that articulation

6–9: although dynamics may not obviously clarify, the melodic line in the piano part relies on the sensitivity of the strings not to dominate with expressive counter-melodies

61: interesting, clearly deliberate differences in dynamics that should be brought out to clarify Walton’s intentions but are easily unnoticed if not exaggerated

63: awkward and curious cello double stop needs subtle handling to not stick out, especially when the resolution to b. 64 is back to a single note

69: *agitato* probably should be interpreted as character not tempo or it is impossible to convey the intricate details of the parts, particularly in relation to articulations and cross-rhythms, and since this passage is followed by an *accelerando*

78: B natural in piano RH unclear in previous editions as to whether it should be this or C (one semitone higher). in WWE it is left as a B.

100: voicing – viola last three quavers should lead in phrase and dynamic to the violin part in 101, ideally giving the illusion that the line continues in the same instrument

105: notice the curious ‘cross-fade’ dynamics in strings

108: voicing – third quaver in violin passes to viola and back for the last quaver of the bar.

Movement 4:

37: third quaver of bar, viola part in previous editions was E instead of F – seems obvious it should match violin part

43: original expression mark was ‘*espress., calando*’, but assumed that Walton here (and in other early works) used ‘*calando*’ in place of ‘*cantando*’ in error and corrected in WWE

59: curious placement of ‘*a tempo*’ in the second bar of the phrase – needs careful judgement not to do too much of the *rall.* in b. 55

107: theoretically piano is still in ‘ff’ while strings drop to ‘p’: can be interpreted as a deliberate effect or (more likely) missing dynamic in piano since the latter then has *crescendo* in 108 to ‘ff’ – often solved by inserting ‘fp’ into the piano part at 107

136: for practical reasons and rhythmic continuity, play grace notes before the beat although it seems to be visually on the beat in editions

155: note that in the first edition the fugue subject was without rest in the first bar, with the first note of each half bar repeated 3 times instead of twice – this was probably the most significant fundamental revision by Walton in the second edition

155: suggestion of practicing fugue themes simultaneously to ensure articulation consistency

197: Walton originally wrote staccato dots on the viola and cello pizz. in this bar

211: 4th note in cello originally G (tone below marked note), corrected in WWE

296: ‘*cantando*’ marked instead of original ‘*calando*’ (see above)

357: curious combination of instructions, with ‘p subito’ almost impossible on downbeat of 357 for strings, also marked ‘*rit. e dim. molto*’ that suggests ambiguous dynamic choices that are difficult to combine, especially with piano entry already in ‘pp’. Most natural solution is to drop but not too extremely at 357 and leave room for *diminuendo*.

Toccata for Violin and Piano (1925)

Improvvisando

The Toccata for violin and piano (1925) is often referred to as being in the same category as Walton's early string quartet that he asked to be removed from publication shortly after its first performance. Walton recalled that the style of the early quartet and Toccata 'was too impersonal, and didn't come naturally', and a review of the quartet in *The Times* suggested 'some passages might be rewritten with a view to making the work more grateful for the strings to play'. Neither piece was performed again in his lifetime – the Toccata had to wait 67 years – until 1992! Walton, in this 'experimental' period, had been studying scores by Satie, Schoenberg, Sorabji, Strauss, Stravinsky, and Busoni, as well as Mozart string quartets.

Constant Lambert described the Toccata as 'a rhapsodic also work showing traces of the influence of Bartok and even Sorabji'. Whilst a fascinating departure from the style we associate with Walton, it also displays elements in his compositional technique that are developed further in later works. The heart of the work has an extraordinary beauty and lyricism; some sections hint at the incredibly detailed markings of articulations and dynamics that border on the impossible; the cadenza sections that hint at some passages in the Violin Sonata (including the same *improvvisando* instruction to performers; the impractical but striking virtuosity that hints at the writing in the Violin Concerto for Heifetz decades later.

Notes:

There have been two editions, though curiously the preface to the WWE edition states that it is the first.

Edition 1: edited by Christopher Palmer, published 1997

Edition 2: WWE, not printed separately but only as part of the bound WWE Chamber Music edition
Additionally the holograph score is part of the Koch Collection in Yale University Library.

General notes:

The violinist is advised to perform from the piano score to facilitate the huge ensemble complexities.

Crucially, the performers should view the instruction *improvvisando* as applying to the entire work as a *modus operandi* in terms of the feel of the work, not just to the opening section, while still respecting the composer's very specific markings in certain sections.

There are many differences between the two editions, the WWE clearly closer to the original intentions of the composer. These include notes (albeit partially justified by the ambiguity of how far accidentals carry on in long improvisatory sections with infrequent bar-lines and often dotted bar-lines) and many articulation changes, and also the slurring of groups of notes.

Specific notes:

5th 'dotted bar' (all within bar 1), 32nd notes have no slur in first edition but are all slurred in WWE. Also unclear here what the duration of the 'poco rall.' should be;

4: first edition omits the 'doubled' notes marking

15: third pitch in violin part E in first edition instead of F

57: start of the fugue section – recommended 'Sul G' for violin until b. 60, and allowing piano fugue through at start of b. 59 to clarify fugue to the listener

67: piano 4th note originally B but corrected later by Walton to D as in WWE

76: for violin in this section, at the tempo marked by Walton the bowings are very restrictive; suggestion to modify in least noticeable places retaining the character and sense of line

110: pencilled 'rall' in autograph, probably written by Angus Morrison, the first pianist performer of the work, rather than Walton

114: first edition does not correct the second G of the bar to G natural (clearly an omission by Walton)

145: violin cadenza – almost impossibly detailed dynamic hierarchy in places, presumably to encourage the performer to bring out as many voices as possible; also care needs to be taken over varying the many commas in the cadenza to avoid them becoming too formulaic

146: no slur in violin, different from b. 2 (omission by composer?)

163: in the manuscript the lowest note of the chords on the third beat of each of these bars has been deleted in pencil – perhaps at the request of the violinist who first performed it?

Two Pieces for Violin and Piano (1951)

6) i: Canzonetta

7) ii: Scherzetto

While the 'Two Pieces for Violin and Piano' were published and premiered in 1951, two years after the Violin Sonata, both had been written in some form before the sonata was conceived. The *Canzonetta* and *Scherzetto* connect with Walton's other extraordinary output – film music. He once described himself at a crossroads as to whether he'd become 'a film composer or a real composer' at the time of writing the Violin Concerto, but he managed to be highly accomplished at both.

The material from the *Canzonetta*, the first of the Two Pieces, is based on a troubadour melody from the 13th century. It appears in the Laurence Olivier film *Henry V* for which Walton wrote the score, performed on flute and harp, but only for 16 seconds. The nature of the themes in the *Scherzetto* hints at the same kind of style, and this movement had appeared in an almost identical form as a solo piano piece, now lost, between its conception as potential film music and the current form as a violin/piano duo. The main theme also contains a characteristically Walton-esque marking, *leggiero e piccante* ('light and spicy'), and the pair of pieces was dedicated to 'Vivien and Larry', Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier, who were great friends of the composer and his wife Susanna and frequent visitors to their home on the island of Ischia.

The Scherzetto was proposed at the last minute as an additional middle movement of the Violin Sonata, but was never officially added to the work – meaning it must have been completed already in 1949.

General notes:

The original manuscript is lost

There have been two editions:

1951 OUP

2009 WWE edited by Hugh MacDonald

Specific notes:

Canzonetta

The figuration in the piano part suggests a lute, or harp-like quality that can be emulated to some extent by the pianist. Although the material appears only fleetingly in the film of *Henry V*, the performer can take inspiration from this context.

The Troubadour melody is from the 'Chansonnier Conge', a 13th-century manuscript of troubadour songs housed in the Bibliothèque National de France in Paris. This specific song is 'Amours me fait comencier Une chancon novele'.

In the 1951 edition, the first page of this movement includes the footnote ‘based on a Troubadour melody’

37: piano LH has a missing rest on the first beat of the bar in the old edition, suggesting that a note was missing at some stage of composition or editing

51: violin part suggests a harmonic in the separate part but not the piano score

51: con moto only appears in the piano score in the original edition

70: similarly the harmonics here are marked ‘I, II’ in the violin part only

72: the last two notes are separate in the WWE but slurred (as the previous bar) in the older edition.

Scherzetto

Important to clarify to the listener accents/non-accents in both parts

63: last note in violin is G in old edition, E in new edition – both can work but the G seems to make more harmonic sense given the presence of the Eb in the piano on the same beat

82: missing last semiquaver in violin part in old edition – corrected in WWE

125: curious ‘a tempo’ marking despite the only previous marking being ‘marcatissimo’ in the piano part – perhaps a practical reminder after the virtuosic request of ‘sul G’ seemingly by the composer for the violin in b. 118.

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1949)

8) i: Allegro tranquillo

ii: Variazioni

9) Tema: Andante (1:08)

10) Var.1: a tempo poco più mosso (1:26)

11) Var.2: quasi improvvisando (2:27)

12) Var.3: Alla Marcia molto vivace (1:01)

13) Var.4: Allegro molto (0:37)

14) Var.5: Allegretto con moto (2:08)

15) Var.6: Scherzando (0:32)

16) Var.7: Andante tranquillo (2:27)

17) Coda: Molto vivace – Presto (1:00)

The conception of the Sonata for Violin and Piano was a typically fortuitous one for Walton – a chance meeting, probably on a train, with Yehudi Menuhin in Lucerne in 1947, shortly after he had completed his second String Quartet. Walton was in need of money to help with the costs of medical treatment of his great friend Viscountess Alice Wimborne in Switzerland at a time when there were strict limits on how much money could be taken out of Britain; Menuhin offered 2,000 Swiss francs as a commission for a work for him, suggesting a sonata for him and Louis Kentner to play.

After a brief stint on the work, the film score for Olivier’s *Hamlet* and Wimborne’s death delayed his progress. He resumed in June 1948, finished in August 1949, and it was performed first in Zurich in 1949 and then in London – in the unlikely venue of Theatre Royal, Drury Lane – by Menuhin and Kentner. The dedication of the work is to the performers’ wives, who were sisters. Walton wrote on the score that ‘the composer is indebted to Menuhin and Kentner for the many suggestions they have made in preparing this work for performance and publication’, but many of Menuhin’s editorial suggestions confuse technical and musical instructions and have resulted in many decades of misunderstanding of Walton’s intentions, particularly in the use of commas intended as a technical instruction for a clear string crossing and misinterpreted as musical hiatuses; happily these are corrected and clarified in the recent William Walton Edition.

The first movement's ingenious structure and lyrical themes lead to an original and striking coda in which the bell-like piano chords are interwoven with thematic snippets in the violin. This movement also demonstrates Walton's masterful metamorphosis of thematic material in both meter and harmony.

The second (and last) movement is a Theme and Variations – the composer's first. The Cello Concerto, Second Symphony and 'Hindemith Variations' followed suit, and Walton is said to have been very happy with this movement, and remarked on the benefits of the use of theme and variations meaning that it can serve the function of several movements in one. An unusual feature is the use of a 12-tone row – perhaps a throwback to his 'experimental phase'. Walton hit back at critics after the lukewarm reception to the London premiere, where he was accused of being old-fashioned: 'perhaps I should have made more orthodox use of my tone-row....that would have learn't 'em.....' He later used this device in a much bigger scale in the Second Symphony. Amongst the variations are clear influences: Var.1 (opening of track 10 on the Walton disc) from Hindemith's Viola Sonata op.11 no.4 (11 bars after fig. 5 in the second movement); Var.3 (track 12) from Schumann's 'Märchenbilder' (opening of second movement, 'lebhaft'); Var.7 (track 16) from the opening of the composer's own 'Touch her soft lips and part' from his score to *Henry V*.

General notes

Sources:

Holograph score – Walton Archive, Ischia

Menuhin's original violin part

OUP edition, 1950

WWE, 2009 (ed. Hugh MacDonald)

Some revisions were made after the first performance in Zurich but before the first London performance, but the only significant ones were to add three bars to the Coda of the second (and last) movement.

Structure:

Movement 1:

1–66 Exposition

67–172 Development

173–227 Recapitulation

229–271 Coda

Movement 2:

Theme: 8-bar opening phrase in Eb minor, repeated (partially, with intervallic variety) a semitone up, extended slightly; piano RH then played a 12-tone sequence twice (using only descending 4ths and semitones), ending on the tonic

Var. 1: marked 'tranquillo', sparse and probably influenced by a variation in the second movement of Hindemith's Viola Sonata op. 11 no. 4. Piano line is based on the accompaniment to the Theme. Piano solo section begins and ends a semitone higher than in the theme

Var. 2: A throwback to the Toccata with instruction 'quasi improvvisando', using intervallic tension reminiscent of the Violin Concerto. It might be useful to think about Pablo Casals's concept of 'expressive intonation' here. Exploring, for instance, some 'close semitones' in this emotionally charged variation gave me insight into the connection between emotion and intonation choices; see also the 'passacaglia'-like Variation 7.

Var. 3: 'Alla marcia', probably influenced by the second of Schumann's *Märchenbilder* for viola and piano. Note the martellato figure in the piano that previews the next variation's figuration.

Var. 4: Unison variation with many detailed articulation markings, based only on the twelve-tone row, not the opening section of the theme

Var. 5: Pizzicato accompanying a fluid piano theme played mostly in octaves, often considered to have been influenced by a similar texture in Schubert's 'Trout' quintet

Var. 6: 'Scherzando' variation based only on the first theme, no trace of the 12-note series; somewhat overmarked in terms of articulation and dynamics – barely possible to convey these adequately at the tempo marked by the composer

Var. 7: 'Gondoliera'- style writing with a strong hint of 'Touch her soft lips and part' from Walton's score to *Henry V*. The piano coda morphs in to:

Coda: based on the 12-note sequence, building to a final Presto in which hints of the intervals from the original theme emerge, ending with emphatic unison.

Specific notes:

Movement 1

Menuhin-derived commas (removed in WWE): 19, 22, 25, 55, 91, 101, 113, 120, 124, 128, 199, 252, 266, 267: these appear to have been marked as a technical suggestion in Menuhin's violin part for a 'clean string crossing and re-attack of the bow' but ended up being added to the piano part and assumed in all recordings until post-WWE ones to be musical instructions, therefore breaking up the phrase and making the task of keeping the sense of line and overall structure (a particular challenge in this first movement) extremely difficult

2: note the six notes making up the first violin entry which appear frequently in various guises through the movement.

25: seventh beat, accent in violin added in WWE to match piano articulation

26: accent on violin note (instead of staccato dot in first edition) changed in WWE

50: note the characteristic use of the interval of 7th so familiar in Walton's music, as well here as the use of the dotted rhythm that also defines one of the variations in the second movement.

51/52: last note of figure in violin – in autograph staccato for first two entries but corrected to accent in WWE

54: piano part, third beat slur extended to match other comparable figures (in first edition only covering 3 notes)

75: 'mf' in violin from autograph not in first edition

97: tenuto lines over last seven notes in violin part, in autograph but not in first edition

166: IV marked in violin part in autograph but not first edition

187: 'meno forte' in violin part in first edition – thought not to be from WW

223: violin notes 1,5,9; accents in autograph but not in first edition

266: 'p' under third note (at peak of crescendo) in violin in first edition.

Movement 2:

Menuhin-derived commas (removed in WWE): 72, 156, 159, 160, 171, 172, 265 (see note above)

50: hairpin cresc. In violin part in WWE in autograph but no in first edition

89: 'con moto' in piano part in autograph (not in first edition)

221: violin, 2nd note – tenuto line in autograph (not in first edition)

246: violin, 2nd note – accent

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