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## A DIDACTIC APPROACH BETWEEN MUSIC AND HISTORY: MILITARY IMAGES IN EARLY 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY VIOLIN CONCERTOS

The itinerary between music and history, which I am about to describe, develops on different, but intersecting, levels: on the one hand, it leads to reflect on how knowledge can be acquired and new educational perspectives can be opened in school settings, through the analysis of musical forms of the past, by creating a connection between the imaginary of students and elements of European cultural history. On the other hand, the paper exemplifies ways for a possible didactic approach, which are basically designed for secondary school classes, but can also be useful, as far as the method is concerned, for teachers of other school levels. The main theme, as mentioned in the epigraph, is the representation of military images in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century concerts for violin and orchestra.

A didactic suggestion for the concerned teachers would be to introduce a preliminary explanation of the notion of 'military music' before moving on to the itinerary itself. In its long, two-way tradition, this notion involves both the pieces that aim to depict battles or combats, and wartime music in the narrow sense of the word, whose purpose is to organize the movement of soldiers. This premise will have to be concise and aimed exclusively at providing a general introduction to the topic, and to the practice of connecting the world of music to that of the military, both through rhythmic-harmonic-melodic language and through the use of specific wind and percussion instruments. There is no scarcity of examples of this (from which to pick for listening, analysis and commentary activities), also by famous composers, from *Bataille de Marignan* by Clément Janequin to *Wellingtons Sieg* by Ludwig van Beethoven.

The actual itinerary starts from a specific historical period, spanning the years between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup>, a time in which military music flourished, especially as a consequence of the French Revolution. It is from this cultural *milieu* that comes a good part of the war-themed compositions that became so popular in those years. The fife and drum corps, as we know, became increasingly important in the everyday life of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, so that soon enough the spread of this new musical taste and the increasing use of military instruments had an impact on the orchestral settings and on the writing for the symphonic orchestra.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Many critical contributions can be useful for an in-depth study of these topics: on the music of the French Revolution see, among others, A. DE PLACE, *La vie*

Let us now narrow our focus on the musical genre chosen for our itinerary: the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century violin and orchestra concerto, analysed in its relationships with the historical-cultural context of the time. Within this background, Parisian compositions appear particularly significant, as Maiko Kawabata has shown in her essay “Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance: Power, Military Heroism, and Gender (1789-1830)”, which is the main reference work used for building our itinerary.<sup>2</sup> The violin and orchestra concerto of French origin did play an important role in the musical codification of military-themed images. The genre started to emerge towards the end of the revolutionary decade (1789-1799), the period to which we can ascribe some of the concerts of Giovanni Battista Viotti and of his pupil Pierre Rode. The rule of Napoleon was a time of flourishing for the French concerto, so that between 1799 and 1815 the three best pupils of Viotti repeatedly tried their hand at composing and performing violin concertos: Pierre Baillot wrote eight of them, Rodolphe Kreutzer eleven, and Rode himself eight more. These works helped fashion the heroic image of the virtuoso violinist that later prevailed in the decades after the French Revolution. This season also saw the emergence of the association between the figure of the violinist and the idea of heroism, power and virility. Alexandre-Jean Boucher (Paris, 1778-1861), today almost entirely forgotten, was a well-known virtuoso at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when he could boast the heroic title of “Napoleon of the violin”, also on account of his slight resemblance to the Corsican leader.

Boucher used to precede his performances with a show in which he embodied Napoleon, taking the emperor’s typical postures: the haughty way in which he rested his hand in his jacket, how he wore his hat, or sniffed tobacco.

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*musicale en France au temps de la Révolution* (Paris, Fayard, 1989), and B. BRÉVAN, *Musica e Rivoluzione Francese: la vita musicale a Parigi dal 1774 al 1799* (trans. D. Zazzi, Milan, Ricordi, 1986; original edition *Les changements de la vie musicale parisienne de 1774 à 1799*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1980); on the tradition of bands in the Italian area, readers can refer to the useful studies of Antonio Carlini (“Les ‘bande’ dans l’Italie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle”, in *Les sociétés de musique en Europe 1700-1920. Structures, pratiques musicales et sociabilités*, ed. by H. E. Bödeker and P. Veit, Berlin, Berlin, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2007, pp. 401-429; “‘Lo strepitoso risonar de’ stromenti da fiato & timballerie’: modalità e modelli della musica pubblica a Venezia ed in Italia negli anni della Rivoluzione francese”, in *L’aere è fosco, il ciel s’imbruna: arti e musica a Venezia dalla fine della Repubblica al Congresso di Vienna*, ed. by F. Passadore and F. Rossi, Venice, Fondazione Ugo e Olga Levi, 2000, pp. 473-505).

<sup>2</sup> M. KAWABATA, “Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance: Power, Military Heroism, and Gender (1789-1830)”, *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music*, XXVIII, 2004/05, pp. 89-107. For more contributions on the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular French, concerto, see among others B. R. SCHUENEMANN, *The French Violin School: Viotti, Rode, Kreutzer, Baillot and Their Contemporaries*, Kingsville, Lyre of Orpheus, 2002; and B. SCHWARZ, “Beethoven and the French Violin School”, *Musical Quarterly*, XLIV, 1958, pp. 431-447.

Only after this “miming action” would Boucher start his musical program. The ritual made him very popular as an eccentric virtuoso violinist, to the point that in some circles he was even more admired than Paganini.

Boucher’s attitude took to extremes what was already a widespread trend, a culture shared by artists and their audience, in which the violinist offered an image of military valour. In their performances, virtuoso violinists introduced explicit references to visual and temperamental elements associated with heroism and war: they waved their bows like swords, as if to command troops of orchestra musicians, thus recalling the memory of ancient and modern battle leaders, variously identified by reviewers as Scipio, Alexander, Napoleon of the violin, or similar epithets. Paganini himself represented a version of heroic violin playing that was closer to the military sphere rather than to Romantic aesthetics. In other words, this virtuoso technique pointed to a military-inspired idea of superman, whereby the performative acts of the individual-leader could be read not so much as transcendental projections into the absolute and the metaphysical, but as the commanding actions typical of a military leader.

As an example we can take the words of a London reviewer commenting a Paganini performance: “with the tip of his bow he set off the orchestra, in a grand military movement, with a force and vivacity as surprising as it was new”.<sup>3</sup>

Another famous violinist of the Italian school, Gaetano Pugnani, had been described in similar terms by Giovanni Battista Rangoni: “Il dominait dans l’orchestre, comme un général au milieu de ses soldats. Son archet était le bâton de commandement, auquel chacun obéissait avec la plus grande exactitude”.<sup>4</sup> It is crystal-clear that the military “power” of the virtuoso violinist was seen as coming more from the bow, associated with a cold steel weapon, than from the violin itself – and that, in the relationship with the orchestra, it was this element that set the solo violin apart from the virtuosos of all other instruments: compared to the older Baroque model, the new bow type, with its inward-curving, instead of convex, line that narrowed towards the tips, actually recalled the shape of a sword or sable.

After pointing out the importance of the visual and gestural aspects in the building of a heroic-military image of the violinist, what needs to be emphasised is the fact that this martial aura did not originate in the

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<sup>3</sup> The review, written by a Mr. Gardiner of Leicester, is quoted in PH. J. BONE, *The Guitar and Mandolin: Biographies of Celebrated Players and Composers*, 2<sup>a</sup> ed., London, Schott, 1972, p. 266 (cfr. KAWABATA, “Virtuoso Codes” cit., p. 101).

<sup>4</sup> G. B. RANGONI, *Saggio sul gusto della musica, col carattere de’ tre celebri suonatori di violino Nardini, Lolli e Pugnani*, Livorno, T. Masi, 1790, Italian and French parallel text, p. 63 (anastatic reprint, Bollettino bibliografico musicale, Milan, 1932).

performance spectacle alone. It was also intensified by musical elements peculiar to the pieces performed. Military *topoi* were a defining feature of the violin concerto genre, and they were very widespread in other musical forms, too, from opera to military orchestras themselves.

As far as the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century violin concerto is concerned, these heroic codes were usually confined to the first movements, although final movements sometimes harked back to military *topoi* through the wide use of trumpets and percussions (at any rate, it should be remembered that not all three movements of a concerto were performed in sequence at that time). Some concertos explicitly stated their military character in their titles: from the “Allegro marziale” of Concerto no. 3 by Paganini, to the *Concertos militaires* of Paul Alday *le jeune* and Karol Lipiński, down to the *Concerto héroïque* of François Prume. An analysis of the first movement of Lipiński’s op. 21 Military Concert helps determine the main linguistic traits that are employed to conjure up military images, announced by the tempo indication “Allegro marziale”: the pointed rhythmic figures that pervade the whole movement, the intensive use of *sforzati* on the downbeat, the ascending line of the first theme with interval patterns based on root notes, fanfare rhythms (e.g. meas. 20-23), rapid groups of notes on the upbeat (e.g. meas. 24-27), and an instrumentation that emphasizes the role of the percussion and brass sections (see in the appendix).

What should also be pointed out is the major role played, in this context, by the entrance of the soloist, or ‘sortita’ (exit):<sup>5</sup> the virtuoso starts with a sforzato on repeated thirds, in the usual march-like pointed rhythm, and then reaches the highest regions by wide interval leaps or rapid flights of notes which, starting from the lowest sounds, quickly take off to the most far-out regions of the keyboard. The result is a highly physical, energetic violin playing, which characterizes not only the entrance of the soloist in Lipiński’s piece, but actually defines a good part of the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century violin concerto repertory – even in famous concertos like Beethoven’s in D major. Even the sweeter mood, which usually characterizes the second theme, and relies on the instrument’s cantabile expressiveness, can somehow be read as a soft aura of sound which, like a contrast medium, serves to better highlight the brilliant military inspiration of the opening virtuoso playing. The same principle of contrast governs the relationship between the soloist and the orchestra: a comparison with the mass of the other instrumentalists serves to emphasize more strongly the valour and power of the virtuoso, so that a performance of

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<sup>5</sup> “The crucial moment for establishing the nature of the tutti-solo relationship is perhaps the solo’s entrance at the beginning of the first solo sections” (J. R. STEVENS, “The Importance of C. P. E. Bach for Mozart’s Piano concertos”, in *Mozart’s Piano Concertos. Text, Context, Interpretation*, ed. by N. Zaslav, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1996, pp. 211-236: 224); cf. also J. KERMAN, *Concerto Conversations*, Cambridge-Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 61-64.

these pieces with piano accompaniment only would inevitably trivialize and weaken their original meaning.

Finally, it should be noted how the terminology of violin language itself, which spread all over Europe through French manuals in use at the Paris Conservatory, frequently refers to a military semantic domain: clear examples of this are words or expressions like ‘arco’ [bow], ‘vibrato’,<sup>6</sup> ‘martellato’ [hammered], ‘spiccato’ [marked], ‘picchettato’ [tapped], ‘strappato’ [torn], ‘mordere la corda’ [biting the bow], ‘sparare’ [shooting] (usually describing an instrument with a very immediate and intense sound).

After this exploratory stage, which focuses on aspects of performance, technique and instrumental writing, we can move on to give an interpretation of this musical phenomenon according to a broader historical-cultural perspective, which also allows us to make a clear, specific inter-disciplinary reference to one of the most significant moments in Western history. As we mentioned, the magnificence and rhetoric of these concertos was intended to celebrate, through the violin, individual *leadership* ability in an age of great social upheaval.

The martial attitude of the French concerto, its bellicose tone, strong realism, overwhelming passions, pomp and grand style, can be viewed as a reflection of the social and cultural change which was taking place at the time, and which included the very meaning of the notion of ‘military’, since society itself was being structurally reorganized from its very foundations.<sup>7</sup> Thus the military theme of the French concerto drew from the musical language of the Revolution and of its related opera production. Opera theatres in those years staged musical dramas that praised the virtues of individual heroism, celebrating the new Republican ideals (e.g. *Lodoïska* by Luigi Cherubini, 1791, or *Horatius Coclès* by Étienne Nicolas Méhul, 1794). Viotti and his pupils had several contacts with this *milieu*, and with opera composers such as Cherubini and Méhul, which shows that they were able to keep pace with the composition trends of that time, which promoted the Republican spirit through patriotic songs such as the Marseillaise (e.g. *Denys le tyran* by André Grétry, 1794), or by evoking martial atmospheres with the help of marches and fanfares. We should also not forget that Viotti, Rode, Kreutzer and Baillot directed the Paris Opéra at several stages in their career (Kreutzer also

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<sup>6</sup> In the Italian lexical tradition the term ‘vibrato’ had a completely different meaning from the one it has now: it was employed, as late as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as an adjective, not as a noun; it described a technique of the bow, not of the left hand, and meant ‘marked, strong’. On this topic, and in general on late 18<sup>th</sup>-century violin terminology and the influence of the French school, see L. AVERSANO, “Terminologia violinistica tra Sei e Settecento”, in *Tra le note. Studi di lessicologia musicale*, ed. by F. Nicolodi and P. Trovato, Florence, Cadmo, 1996, pp. 23-56.

<sup>7</sup> B. SCHWARZ, *French Instrumental Music between the Revolutions: 1789-1830*, New York, Da Capo Press, 1987, p. 70.

composed many opera scores). This led to a certain affinity between opera and violin performances: in depicting the best qualities of the French nation, the French concerto was a product of the spirit of the Revolution, a blood brother of the early works of Cherubini and Méhul.<sup>8</sup> The affinity was also physical, since the usual venue for violin concertos in the years between 1790 and 1800 was the stage of opera theatres, and the common practice was to end theatrical shows with a piece of instrumental music by a famous virtuoso.<sup>9</sup>

After showing how to connect specific elements of language and of musical interpretation with general topics in political, social and cultural history, let us take another step forward by way of a conclusion. As stated at the beginning of this article, the final destination in our itinerary consists in extracting educational value from the historical-cultural aspects discussed so far. In other words, we should focus our attention on what young students today can learn from the study of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century violin concerto, beyond historical and musicological knowledge. The aim, therefore, should be to present learners with a reading of musical works, and of the context in which they were performed, which is informed by a pre-eminently pedagogical perspective, one that pertains to the education of the individual, within the sphere of ethics and of ideal reference values. This is not a simple task, but there are a couple of good strategies that teachers can apply. The first one consists in showing students how the ideals which underlie the military-style violin concerto, and which are rooted in the culture and background of the French Revolution, are actually metaphors of a utopian vision pursued by many young people, more or less consciously – the desire to change the world, to push the conventional limits imposed by society. The emphasis can also be placed on how the orchestra, which the violinist has to face, constitutes the very pre-condition for validating the heroism of virtuoso himself: in other words, only through a comparison with the community, in the form of a dialogue governed by rules shared and respected by everybody, can the full affirmation and recognition of the individual's values be guaranteed.

Finally, in the classroom setting teachers can initiate a discussion of the notion of 'virtuosity' itself, beyond its specifically musical aspects:<sup>10</sup> on the one hand by emphasising the more specifically political and social elements inherent in the leadership model proposed by the soloist, thus introducing such ideas as

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<sup>8</sup> A. SCHERING, *Geschichte des Instrumentalkonzerts bis auf die Gegenwart*, Leipzig, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1905, p. 169 (cit. in KAWABATA, "Virtuoso Codes" cit., p. 98).

<sup>9</sup> DE PLACE, *La vie musicale en France* cit., p. 24 (cf. also KAWABATA, "Virtuoso Codes" cit., p. 99).

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Kerman (*Concerto Conversations* cit., pp. 61-81) identifies three key elements in instrumental virtuosity: bravura (technique), mimesis (the ability to imitate nature, in particular the sound of the human voice), and spontaneity (abilities associated with ornamentation and improvisation).

sovereignty, domination, and conquest;<sup>11</sup> on the other hand, by highlighting its ethical basis (inherent in the etymology of the term ‘virtue’), evoking notions of merit, capability, discipline, and total devotion to an ideal goal.

In this perspective, the task of the teacher lies in adding depth to the didactic work, simultaneously acting on the historical-cultural and educational level, by transmitting knowledge that can usefully contribute to the process of building the personality of students as individuals and citizens.

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<sup>11</sup> For a state-of-the-art study of this aspect, see M. KAWABATA, *Paganini. The ‘Demonic’ Virtuoso*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2013, in particular pp. 76-95. The volume, centring around the figure of Paganini, also brings into play other categories that are key in interpreting virtuosity, such as Eros and the demonic, which can be useful for teachers who, in relevant didactic settings, intend to discuss this topic in an expanded perspective, also including philosophical analysis.

I erste } II zweite } III dritte } IV vierte }	<b>Militär-Concert</b> von <b>C. LIPINSKI.</b> Op. 21.	I première } II seconde } III troisième } IV quatrième }
▢ Herunterstrich ▽ Hinaufstrich		▢ Tirez } ▽ Poussez }

**Allegro marziale.**

*Tutti.*

Violine.

Pianoforte.

Stich und Druck von Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig. V. A. 1333.

Appendix – KAROL LIPINSKI, *Concerto militaire* op. 21, 1<sup>st</sup> movement, meas. 1-122 (transcription for piano and violin).



A

ff

fp

fp

fp

B

ff

V. A. 1333.

(continuation)

The image displays a musical score for piano and voice, organized into five systems. Each system consists of three staves: a vocal line at the top, a piano right-hand line in the middle, and a piano left-hand line at the bottom. The key signature is D major (two sharps), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings like *mf*, *ff*, and *f*. The piece concludes with the instruction "V. A. 1333." at the end of the fifth system.

(continuation)

*sf* *sf* *sf* *ff* *sf* *sf* *C* *sf*

*sf* *sf* *sf* *ff* *sf* *sf*

*pp* *fp* *pp*

*cresc. poco a poco* *cresc.*

*f* *f*

*p* *p*

V. A. 1333.

(continuation)

The musical score consists of five systems, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The key signature is D major (two sharps). The first system shows a vocal line with a melodic line and piano accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines. The second system begins with a section marked 'D' and includes dynamics like *ff* and *sf*. The third system features a more active piano accompaniment with sixteenth-note patterns. The fourth system includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *p*, *f*, and *ppp*. The fifth system concludes with a *ritard.* marking and a final chord. The score is identified as V. A. 1333.

(the end)