

MASTERING PROKOFIEV'S VIOLIN SONATAS OP. 56 AND 115: A PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK BRIDGING TRADITIONAL METHODS AND MODERN REPERTOIRE

Lin Niu,* Kyle Fyr

College of Music, Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

Received 21/01/2026, Revised 28/02/2026, Accepted 28/05/2026

Abstract

Background and Objectives: Although traditional violin pedagogy, deeply influenced by the pioneering methods of Leopold Auer, Carl Flesch, and Ivan Galamian, has had a profound impact on string education, its application remains largely confined to the classical and romantic repertoires. Given that the unique harmonic and rhythmic demands of 20th-century modernist music necessitate a modernized pedagogical approach, this study constructs a structured violin teaching framework based on Sergei Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56, and Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115. The primary objective is to systematically recontextualize historical teaching principles to address the specific interpretive and technical challenges of these modernist works.

Methods: This study is positioned as practice-led pedagogical research. To articulate and systematize modern violin teaching practices, the research employs a triangulation approach integrating three distinct sources of professional evidence: detailed score analysis to identify structural and technical hurdles; the synthesis of pedagogical literature from Auer, Flesch, and Galamian; and reflective insights derived from performance practice. This methodology is operationalized through a three-phase iterative process encompassing historical contextualization, comparative technical calibration, and pedagogical synthesis.

Results: The research culminates in the development of a comprehensive, progressive three-stage curriculum: Solo Mastery (Op. 115), Unison Coordination (Op. 115), and Duet Collaboration (Op. 56). The framework successfully translates complex modernist concepts—such as chromatic displacement, intricate rhythmic synchronization, and dissonant counterpoint—into targeted, actionable exercises. By applying Flesch's scale systems for intonation, Galamian's principles for bowing and "critical ear" synchronization, and Auer's relational phrasing for ensemble dialogue, the sequence cultivates technical independence, collective listening, and advanced chamber-music interaction.

Conclusions: This framework provides the first explicit pedagogical framework adapting the historically dominant Auer–Flesch–Galamian pedagogical methods to Prokofiev's modernist repertoire. By shifting the instructional focus from mere mechanical execution to reciprocal peer learning within a social-constructivist

* Corresponding author, email: 50790628@qq.com

framework, the curriculum not only deepens the interpretive understanding of Prokofiev's works but also equips advanced students with the technical resilience and collaborative empathy required for the broader canon of 20th- and 21st-century music.

Keywords: Violin Pedagogy / Sergei Prokofiev / Practice-led Research / 20th-Century Repertoire / Ensemble Collaboration

Introduction

Sergei Prokofiev was a pioneering figure in 20th-century music, contributing seven significant works to the violin repertoire. These works span various forms, including two violin concertos, two violin and piano sonatas, a solo violin sonata, a double violin sonata, and five violin and piano melodies. They vividly illustrate the evolution of his stylistic approach across different creative periods. Among them, the Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56, and the Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115, blend neoclassicism and modernism, seamlessly combining intellectual rigour with emotional depth.

Violin pedagogy in the twentieth century was deeply influenced by the seminal contributions of Leopold Auer, Carl Flesch, and Ivan Galamian. As Kelley Arney observes, the influence and tradition of these three teachers has shaped almost every major violin school worldwide since the early 1900s.¹ Auer's pedagogical approach advocated for the cultivation of expressive freedom through the utilization of demonstration and performance-based learning methodologies. Flesch introduced a systematic, theory-driven methodology that standardized technical training. Conversely, Galamian placed significant emphasis on structured, goal-oriented practice to enhance precision and quality. While these pedagogical approaches have significantly influenced contemporary violin education, their implementation has been predominantly focused on classical and romantic repertoires. The expressive style of 20th-century music had to adapt fully to the unique and radical characteristics of the era, and violin playing styles also underwent dramatic changes.² This research study adapts these approaches to Prokofiev's 20th-century compositions in an innovative manner, offering a fresh perspective on their relevance to today's violinists.

This study translates these requirements into a progressive three-stage curriculum: Solo Mastery, Unison Coordination, and Duet Collaboration. Drawing on comparative analysis and the pedagogical philosophies of Auer, Flesch, and Galamian, a series of targeted exercises and strategies has been designed to address the

¹ Kelley M. Arney, "A Comparison of the Violin Pedagogy of Auer, Flesch, and Galamian: Improving Accessibility and Use through Characterization and Indexing" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2006), 5, https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/music_theses/article/1004/type/native/&path_info=.

² Elias Dann, "The Second Revolution in the History of the Violin: A Twentieth-Century Phenomenon," *College Music Symposium* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40373889>.

interpretive and technical demands of the sonata. While prior performer guides³ and stylistic analyses⁴ exist, none translate these insights into a progressive, multi-format teaching sequence. This study supplies that missing pedagogical architecture by offering the first explicit synthesis that adapts the historically dominant Auer–Flesch–Galamian triad to these two violin sonatas by Prokofiev, transforming them into a cohesive curriculum that simultaneously cultivates technical independence, collective listening, and chamber-music dialogue. In doing so, the framework expands the pedagogical scope of these works and forges an essential link between historical teaching methods and the demands of modern violin repertoire.

Literature Review

This review synthesizes existing scholarship regarding Prokofiev's biographical context, harmonic innovations, and performance practice, ultimately identifying a critical need for a structured teaching methodology that bridges historical violin pedagogy with the unique demands of the modernist idiom.

Historical Context and Stylistic Evolution: The genesis of Op. 56 and Op. 115 occurred during periods of profound personal and geopolitical transition for Prokofiev. David Nice⁵ observes that the Sonata for Two Violins emerged from Prokofiev's years in Paris, where neoclassical influences dictated a return to rhythmic vitality and complex contrapuntal interplay. In contrast, Simon Morrison⁶ elucidates the Soviet cultural constraints under Stalin that informed the 1947 Sonata for Solo Violin. Designed originally for unison performance by students, Op. 115 reflects a forced marriage of educational accessibility and Soviet realism, yet it maintains Prokofiev's signature “wrong-note” chromaticism.⁷ Harlow Robinson,⁸ Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson⁹ further frame these works as essential bridges between the nineteenth-century virtuoso tradition and the aesthetic “second revolution” of the twentieth-century violin.¹⁰

³ Joanna Steinhauser, “A Historical Analysis and Performer’s Guide to Sergei Prokofiev’s Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op. 115” (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2009), https://repository.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=gradschool_majorpapers; Fei Tong, “Performance Guide to Selected Solo Violin Work of Sergei Prokofiev and Krzysztof Penderecki” (DMA diss., University of Georgia, 2021), <https://openscholar.uga.edu/record/4598/files/Research%20Paper.pdf>.

⁴ Richard Bass, “Prokofiev’s Technique of Chromatic Displacement,” *Music Analysis* 7, no. 2 (July 1988): 197–214, <https://doi.org/10.2307/854056>; Sooyoung Kim, “Perspectives on the Symbiosis of Traditional and Modernist Techniques in Four Violin Compositions by Sergei Prokofiev” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2010), https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=ucin1275918892&disposition=inline.

⁵ David Nice, *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West, 1891–1935* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁶ Simon Morrison, *The People’s Artist: Prokofiev’s Soviet Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷ Simon Morrison, *The People’s Artist: Prokofiev’s Soviet Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸ Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography* (New York: Viking, 1987).

⁹ Lawrence Hanson and Elisabeth Hanson, *Prokofiev, The Prodigal Son: An Introduction to His Life and Work in Three Movements* (London: Cassell, 1964).

¹⁰ Elias Dann, “The Second Revolution in the History of the Violin: A Twentieth-Century Phenomenon,” *College Music Symposium* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 64–71, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40373889>.

Analytical and Technical: Scholarly analysis of Prokofiev's harmonic language reveals the specific technical hurdles these works present. Richard Bass¹¹ characterizes Prokofiev's style through "chromatic displacement," a technique that creates unexpected tonal shifts and challenges the performer's intonational stability. Sooyoung Kim¹² identifies a symbiosis of traditional and modernist techniques, noting that the works utilize tonal-modal mixtures and intonation polarization that demand high levels of aural acuity.

While analytical literature is robust, the translation of these insights into the practice room is less defined. Joanna Steinhauer¹³ and Fei Tong¹⁴ offer comprehensive performance guides to Op. 115, focusing on interpretive choices; however, they stop short of providing a systematic pedagogical apparatus for developing the necessary underlying technique. Furthermore, the broader issues of intonation in contemporary music are addressed by John Paul Swoger-Ruston¹⁵ and the collaborative teaching models proposed by Alba Fernández-Barros, David Duran, and Laia Viladot,¹⁶ yet these have not been specifically integrated into a curriculum for Prokofiev's violin works.

The Pedagogical Framework: Despite the availability of technical studies on twentieth-century piano works¹⁷ and broader instrumental curricula,¹⁸ violin pedagogy remains largely tethered to nineteenth-century methods. The proposed model integrates Auer's¹⁹ emphasis on interpretive expressivity, Flesch's²⁰ rigorous precision in scale and system-based practice, and Galamian's²¹ systematic approach to bow control

¹¹ Richard Bass, "Prokofiev's Technique of Chromatic Displacement," *Music Analysis* 7, no. 2 (July 1988): 197-214, <https://doi.org/10.2307/854056>.

¹² Sooyoung Kim, "Perspectives on the Symbiosis of Traditional and Modernist Techniques in Four Violin Compositions by Sergei Prokofiev" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2010), https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=ucin1275918892&disposition=inline.

¹³ Joanna Steinhauer, "A Historical Analysis and Performer's Guide to Sergei Prokofiev's Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op. 115" (DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2009), https://repository.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=gradschool_majorpapers.

¹⁴ Fei Tong, "Performance Guide to Selected Solo Violin Work of Sergei Prokofiev and Krzysztof Penderecki" (DMA diss., University of Georgia, 2021), <https://openscholar.uga.edu/record/4598/files/Research%20Paper.pdf>.

¹⁵ John Paul Swoger-Ruston, "Harmonic Intonation and Implication (Analyses and Compositions): Harmonic Perception and Intonation in the Reception and Performance of Alternative Tuning Systems in Contemporary Composition" (PhD diss., University of Plymouth, 2006), <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1401&context=foahb-theses-other>.

¹⁶ Alba Fernández-Barros, David Duran, and Laia Viladot, "Peer Tutoring as a Tool for Developing the Intonation of Violin and Viola Students in Elementary Music Education," *Music Education Research* 25, no. 2 (2023): 176-189, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2023.2193210>.

¹⁷ Stephen C. E. Fiess, *The Piano Works of Serge Prokofiev* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Vladimir Blok, *Sergei Prokofiev: Materials, Articles, Interviews* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978); Julia Sakiko Reeves, "Gateways to 20th Century Violin Repertoire: Selections from Luciano Berio's *Duetti Per Due Violini*" (DMA diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2018), <https://www.digitalgreensboro.org/record/13900?ln=en&p=Gateways+to+20th+Century+Violin+Repertoire%3A+Selections+from+Luciano+Berio%27s+Duetti+Per+Due+Violini&v=pdf>.

¹⁹ Leopold Auer, *Violin Playing as I Teach It*, 3rd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1980).

²⁰ Carl Flesch, *Scale System*, ed. Max Rostal (New York: Carl Fischer, 1970); Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing: Book One*, trans. and ed. Eric Rosenblith (New York: Carl Fischer, 2000); Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing: Book Two*, trans. and ed. Eric Rosenblith (New York: Carl Fischer, 2000).

²¹ Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962); Ivan Galamian and Sally Thomas, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Mineola, NY: Courier Corporation, 2013).

and mental focus. As Arney²² suggests, indexing the methods of these three masters can improve pedagogical accessibility by applying these traditional tenets to modernist challenges—such as the ensemble teamwork required in Op. 56.²³ Finally, this study aligns with the findings of Emma Allingham and Clemens Wöllner²⁴ regarding attentional focus, suggesting that the efficacy of this pedagogical approach can be validated through modern motor-performance research.

Methodology

This study is positioned as practice-led pedagogical research. Rather than empirically measuring learning outcomes, it aims to articulate and systematize violin teaching practices through reflective performance experience, score analysis, and pedagogical literature.

This study employs a triangulation approach, integrating three distinct sources of professional evidence:

Score Analysis: Conduct a detailed score analysis of Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56,²⁵ and Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115,²⁶ to identify technical challenges.

Pedagogical Literature: Integrate the foundational teaching strategies established by Leopold Auer, Carl Flesch, and Ivan Galamian.

Performance Practice: Use practice-based insights to validate the pedagogical relevance and practical feasibility of the proposed exercises.

The research follows a three-phase iterative process:

Phase 1: Pedagogical and Historical Contextualization

The first phase establishes the historical and stylistic framework for the two sonatas. By examining the pedagogical philosophies of Auer, Flesch, and Galamian, it identifies several traditional principles that can be reinterpreted and applied to modernist works.

Phase 2: Comparative Analysis and Technical Calibration

Through score-based analysis, the analysis highlights challenges in performance, such as rhythmic

²² Kelley M. Arney, "A Comparison of the Violin Pedagogy of Auer, Flesch, and Galamian: Improving Accessibility and Use through Characterization and Indexing" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2006), xx-xx, https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/music_theses/article/1004/type/native/&path_info=.

²³ Helena Gaunt and Danielle Shannon Treacy, "Ensemble Practices in the Arts: A Reflective Matrix to Enhance Team Work and Collaborative Learning in Higher Education," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 19, no. 4 (October 2020): 419-444, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022219885791>.

²⁴ Emma Allingham and Clemens Wöllner, "Effects of Attentional Focus on Motor Performance and Physiology in a Slow-Motion Violin Bow-Control Task: Evidence for the Constrained Action Hypothesis in Bowed String Technique," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 70, no. 2 (July 2022): 168-189, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224294211034735>.

²⁵ Sergei Prokofiev, "Sonata for 2 Violins, Op. 56," accessed January 13, 2026, [https://imslp.org/wiki/Sonata_for_2_Violins%2C_Op.56_\(Prokofiev%2C_Sergey\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Sonata_for_2_Violins%2C_Op.56_(Prokofiev%2C_Sergey)); Sergei Prokofiev, *Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56*, ed. David Oistrakh (New York: G. Schirmer, 1983).

²⁶ Sergei Prokofiev, "Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115," accessed January 16, 2026, https://imslp.eu/files/imglnks/euimg/d/d2/IMSLP31618-PMLP71963-sonate_violon_solo_op_115.pdf.

complexity and intonation stability. This step ensured that the resulting teaching strategies were grounded in the physical and cognitive realities of high-level performance.

Phase 3: Pedagogical Synthesis

The final phase integrates these findings into a robust three-stage curriculum: Solo Mastery, Unison Coordination, and Duet Collaboration. This integrated approach combines specific technical training and interpretive concepts with the identified challenges, creating a comprehensive framework that prepares students for the diverse professional environments of modern chamber music and orchestral performance.

Discussion: Teaching Framework—A Three-Stage Curriculum

The three-stage curriculum—Solo Mastery (Op. 115), Unison Coordination (Op. 115), and Duet Collaboration (Op. 56)—constitutes the core scholarly contribution of this study. As seen in Table 1, these complementary technical features give the instructional sequence a logical structure: Op. 115 is designed to cultivate performers’ foundational individual technique and unison playing skills, while Op. 56 requires collaboration-level cohesion and interaction among these same elements. This progression is not arbitrary; it mirrors the historical shift from Prokofiev’s neoclassical Paris period (Op. 56) to his Soviet-era Socialist realism (Op. 115), while simultaneously mapping 19th-century technical traditions onto 20th-century demands.

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of Prokofiev's Violin Sonatas: Op. 56 and Op. 115

Source: by author

Aspect	Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56	Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op. 115
Year of Composition	1932	1947
Form	Duet for two violins	Solo or Unison violin performance
Movement Structure	Baroque-inspired: slow-fast-slow-fast	Classical: fast-slow-fast
Stylistic Features	Neoclassical influences with contrapuntal textures; Complex rhythmic structures	Socialist realism; A simple, beautiful, and expressive lyrical passage;
Technical Challenges	Precise ensemble collaboration; Dynamic balance	Advanced finger dexterity; Uniform articulation in unison passages;
Pedagogical Value	Enhances chamber music skills; Focuses on tonal blending; Dynamic matching;	Moderately demanding; Develops solo phrasing, technical precision; Suitable for intermediate to advanced students in solo or group settings
Performance Context	Ideal for advanced ensemble training; Fostering robust ensemble performance experience	Suited for recitals and competitions, highlighting individual virtuosity

Table 2 Framework Overview

Source: by author

Stage	Focus	Pedagogical Methods	Skills Developed
Solo Mastery (Op. 115)	Technical independence	Galamian's bowing; Flesch's scales; Focus Of Attention (FOA)	Bow control; Intonation;
Unison Coordination (Op. 115)	Technical Synchronization	Galamian's "Critical Ear"; Objective Listening Exercises	Rhythmic Precision; Collective Intonation; Matching Articulation
Duet Collaboration (Op. 56)	Ensemble interaction	Auer's Relational Phrasing; Galamian's "mental alertness"; Reflective Practice; Reciprocal Peer Learning	Musical dialogue; Dynamic balance

The curriculum progresses logically from individual technical mastery to collaborative ensemble skills. Table 2 outlines the focus, pedagogical methods, and target skills for each stage.

Stage 1: Solo Mastery using Prokofiev's Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115

Focus: Developing technical independence

In this preliminary stage, technical independence is established by performing Prokofiev's Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115 and addressing the challenges posed by modern tonality and bowing techniques. Students must first engage in mental preparation and mindset adjustment, requiring great focus of attention (FOA), which refers to the performer's conscious regulation of attentional focus during practice, particularly in relation to bow control, sound production, bodily awareness, and especially when practicing bowing.²⁷

Moderato

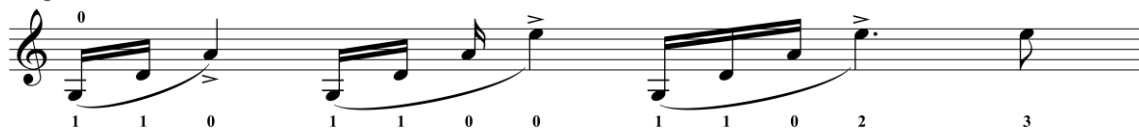
Example 1a Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115, First Movement, mm. 1-3

Source: by author

²⁷ Emma Allingham and Clemens Wöllner, “Effects of Attentional Focus on Motor Performance and Physiology in a Slow-Motion Violin Bow-Control Task: Evidence for the Constrained Action Hypothesis in Bowed String Technique,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 70, no. 2 (July 2022): 168-189, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224294211034735>.

Open Strings

(Right Hand)



Fingering

(Left Hand)

Example 1b Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115, First Movement, Measure 1

Source: by author

Technical Breakdown: In the first movement, rapid alternations between *legato* and *staccato*, combined with frequent string crossings, create coordination challenges (Example 1a). Following Galamian's principles, students should isolate string-change patterns on open strings before reintroducing left-hand chordal shapes, thereby prioritizing bow-arc precision and rhythmic stability (Example 1b).²⁸ It is worth noting that using mirrors reinforces proprioceptive awareness of string height in this regard.

Intonation Navigation: In measures 46-50 of the first movement (Example 2), modernist elements are evident through rapid chromatic shifts, leaping intervals, double stops, and extensive use of the upper register. Systematic scale exercises have been shown to target finger dexterity and intonation.²⁹

**Example 2 Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115, First Movement, mm. 46-50**

Source: by author

Carl Flesch's systematic scale exercises, expanded in Max Rostal's edition to include whole-tone and quarter-tone scales,³⁰ provide the foundation for fluency in the left hand. Together, these resources go

²⁸ Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 66.

²⁹ Caner Kalender and Dolunay Akgül Barış, "Effectiveness of the Teaching Program Prepared to Improve Intonation Skills in Violin Education," *Education and Science* 47, no. 211 (2022): 171-193, <https://doi.org/10.15390/EB.2022.11530>.

³⁰ Carl Flesch, *Scale System*, ed. Max Rostal (New York: Carl Fischer, 1970), editor's preface to the new edition.

beyond mere technical exercises to form a network of analytical connections: they internalize non-traditional intonation relationships at a fundamental level, enabling performers to navigate their instability with precision and expressiveness.

Stage 2: Unison Coordination using Prokofiev's Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115

Focus: This stage explores the correlation of synchronization with listening awareness.

Prokofiev's Op. 115, commissioned for educational use, exists in both solo and unison versions. When performed in unison, the texture renders discrepancies in intonation, timing, and articulation acoustically transparent, thereby encouraging the musicians to correct themselves collectively and learn to restrain individual expression in order to conform to the shared phrasing. This is precisely the essential path to mastering chamber music technique.





Example 4a Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115, First Movement, measure 9, Step 1

Source: by author



Example 4b Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115, First Movement, measure 9, Step 2

Source: by author



Example 4c Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115, First Movement, measure 9, legato with syncopated rhythm

Source: by author

Similarly, the recurring syncopated legato pattern in the first movement (Example 4c) is practiced first in simplified textures (detached first-position) (Example 4a), then with targeted syncopation (Example 4b), and finally in third position at tempo. Galamian's "critical ear" training: Objective self-listening from the listener's perspective forms the foundation of these exercises, enabling students to internalize rhythmic stability and unified tone production.³²

The pedagogical value of the unison version of the Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115 lies in the fact that ensemble principles are woven into the very fabric of the work: every unison passage trains precision, every contrast in texture prompts analytical reflection, and the piece's dual nature encourages students to explore how the performance context itself shapes musical meaning. Now, the students are ready for the interactive dialogue in the duet from Op. 56.

Stage 3: Duet Collaboration using Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56

Focus: Musical dialogue and ensemble interaction

The curriculum culminates as students tackle Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56, a pivotal work that bridges the demands of solo technique with the collaborative imperatives of modern chamber music. Building upon the ensemble listening and synchronization skills established in Stage 2, this stage extends

³² Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 102.

those competencies into the realm of interpretive dialogue and musical interaction. Op. 56, with its imitative counterpoint, chromatic ambiguity, and rhythmic interplay, compels the performers to treat their respective parts as interdependent voices in a lively dialogue, rather than as parallel monologues.

Example 5 Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56, First Movement, mm. 1-6, “chromatic displacement” and intonation difficulties

Source: by author

Example 6 Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56, First Movement, mm. 4-6, the melodic lines

Source: by author

The opening measures of Op. 56 immediately present intonation as a collective problem through chromatic displacement: expected diatonic pitches are shifted downward by semitone, creating non-functional sonorities and minor-second overlaps (Example 5). Imitative, syncopated overlaps further demand real-time negotiation of entries and dynamic hierarchy (Example 6). It stems from two core principles: Galamian’s principle of “complete and constant mental alertness,”³³ along with Auer’s concept of phrasing as a process

³³ Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 94.

of “relief, interrelation,”³⁴ ensures that the secondary material never overshadows the principal line, enabling students to resolve these ambiguities through mutual listening rather than isolated fingering placement.

Violin I: *f - dim. - p - < - ff cantando*

Violin II: *p - p - < > - p - ff sonoramente*

Example 7 Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56, First Movement, mm. 26-30

Source: by author

In the overlapping themes of mm. 26-30 (Example 7), the first violin reintroduces material from mm. 17-19 while the second violin recalls mm. 1-3, each presented with altered dynamics. These frequent shifts necessitate negotiated subordination and dynamic balance, culminating in a climax at m. 30. Through reflective practice, students consciously switch between extroverted and introverted roles based on their assessments, thereby discovering that imitation is not a mechanical repetition but a cognitive process grounded in mutual anticipation.³⁵ This reciprocal peer learning plays a significant role in breaking down practical psychological barriers in music education, such as tension and exclusion, while reinforcing social skills like empathy, commitment, communication, responsibility, motivation, and confidence.³⁶

By reframing rehearsal as collaborative exploration rather than technical training, this pedagogical approach enables students to master transferable skills: intonation grounded in harmonic awareness, rhythmic cohesion achieved through progressive relationships, dynamic balance achieved through deliberate subordination, and an ongoing musical dialogue fostered by attentive listening.

Taken together, this three-stage curriculum forms a unified analytical framework in which technical, perceptual, and cognitive processes are systematically coordinated. This is achieved by separating variables: Galamian’s bowing control is separated from non-traditional intonation relationships; individual precision is separated from collective synchronization; technical execution is separated from interpretive dialogue. This progressive teaching approach not only avoids cognitive overload but also enables students to internalize Prokofiev’s “wrong-note” language as a stable structural feature. Traditional principles: Flesch’s systematic

³⁴ Leopold Auer, *Violin Playing as I Teach It*, 3rd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1980), 161.

³⁵ Helena Gaunt and Danielle Shannon Treacy, “Ensemble Practices in the Arts: A Reflective Matrix to Enhance Team Work and Collaborative Learning in Higher Education,” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 19, no. 4 (October 2020): 419-444, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022219885791>.

³⁶ Alba Fernández-Barros, David Duran, and Laia Viladot, “Peer Tutoring as a Tool for Developing the Intonation of Violin and Viola Students in Elementary Music Education,” *Music Education Research* 25, no. 2 (2023): 176-189, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2023.2193210>.

scales, Galamian's critical ear and mental alertness, and Auer's relational phrasing are repositioned within a new context, satisfying the demands of modernism without sacrificing the intelligibility of lyricism.

The gradual enhancement of acoustic transparency and ensemble interdependence not only fosters technical resilience but also facilitates a nuanced musical dialogue. Ultimately, the outcome is not merely a precise interpretation of the two sonatas, but also the cultivation of the essential skills required to meet the multifaceted demands of 20th-century chamber and orchestral performance. This not only enriches the repertoire available to teachers but also exposes young students to reflections of modern-day musical culture.³⁷

Conclusion

This study bridges a critical gap in contemporary violin pedagogy by recontextualizing the methodologies of Auer, Flesch, and Galamian for Prokofiev's Op. 56 and Op. 115. By integrating a variety of performance forms, the proposed framework significantly advances existing literature. Traditionally, scholarship has either isolated performance practice from systematic technical development or remained tethered exclusively to nineteenth-century romantic repertoire. While scholars' previous studies of Prokofiev's violin works have provided valuable insights into style and interpretation, this research supplies the missing pedagogical link. It transforms complex modernist concepts such as "chromatic displacement", rhythmic ambiguity, and dissonant counterpoint into targeted, step-by-step exercises. In doing so, it shifts the pedagogical focus from mere mechanical execution to the cultivation of profound ensemble listening and reciprocal peer learning within a social-constructivist framework.

Crucially, the utility of this pedagogical architecture extends far beyond the specific confines of Prokofiev's repertoire. The competencies developed through this curriculum are foundational for mastering the broader canon of twentieth- and twenty-first-century music. By stripping away piano accompaniment and focusing exclusively on solo, unison, and duet, the framework forces students to independently generate harmonic context, rhythmic pulse, and dynamic balance. The strategies outlined in this study, particularly the application of Galamian's "critical ear" to collective intonation and Auer's approach to phrasing to conversational interaction, are highly transferable. They equip violinists with the technical resilience and collaborative empathy required to tackle demanding works by composers such as Bartók, Shostakovich, and Ligeti.

To further validate and fortify the theoretical underpinnings of this study, future research should adopt an empirical approach. A longitudinal follow-up study involving pre- and post-learning evaluations would make this pedagogical framework significantly more robust. Implementing this three-stage curriculum with a cohort of advanced conservatory students and measuring outcomes through qualitative jury assessments and quantitative analyses of intonation and rhythmic accuracy would provide measurable evidence of its efficacy. Additionally,

³⁷ Julia Sakiko Reeves, "Gateways to 20th Century Violin Repertoire: Selections from Luciano Berio's *Duetti Per Due Violini*" (DMA diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2018), 16, <https://www.digitalgreensboro.org/record/13900?ln=en&p=Gateways+to+20th+Century+Violin+Repertoire%3A+Selections+from+Luciano+Berio%27s+Duetti+Per+Due+Violini&v=pdf>.

gathering self-reported data on students' cognitive load and ensemble awareness before and after the intervention would empirically demonstrate how systematic exposure to modernist duo and unison playing enhances overarching musicianship.

Essentially, by transforming the rehearsal space into a laboratory for collaborative exploration, this framework not only preserves the legacy of traditional violin pedagogy but actively evolves it. It establishes a critical connection between historical teaching methods and the multifaceted demands of modern repertoire, ensuring that today's violinists are prepared to perform with both technical virtuosity and interpretive authenticity.

References

- Allingham, Emma, and Clemens Wöllner. "Effects of Attentional Focus on Motor Performance and Physiology in a Slow-Motion Violin Bow-Control Task: Evidence for the Constrained Action Hypothesis in Bowed String Technique." *Journal of Research in Music Education* 70, no. 2 (July 2022): 168-189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224294211034735>.
- Arney, Kelley M. "A Comparison of the Violin Pedagogy of Auer, Flesch, and Galamian: Improving Accessibility and Use through Characterization and Indexing." Master's thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2006. https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/music_theses/article/1004/type/native/&path_info=.
- Auer, Leopold. *Violin Playing as I Teach It*. 3rd ed. New York: Dover Publications, 1980.
- Bass, Richard. "Prokofiev's Technique of Chromatic Displacement." *Music Analysis* 7, no. 2 (July 1988): 197-214. <https://doi.org/10.2307/854056>.
- Blok, Vladimir. *Sergei Prokofiev: Materials, Articles, Interviews*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978.
- Dann, Elias. "The Second Revolution in the History of the Violin: A Twentieth-Century Phenomenon." *College Music Symposium* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 64-71. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40373889>.
- Fernández-Barros, Alba, David Duran, and Laia Viladot. "Peer Tutoring as a Tool for Developing the Intonation of Violin and Viola Students in Elementary Music Education." *Music Education Research* 25, no. 2 (2023): 176-189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2023.2193210>.
- Fiess, Stephen C. E. *The Piano Works of Sergei Prokofiev*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994.
- Flesch, Carl. *Scale System*. Edited by Max Rostal. New York: Carl Fischer, 1970.
- Flesch, Carl. *The Art of Violin Playing: Book One*. Translated and edited by Eric Rosenblith. New York: Carl Fischer, 2000.
- Flesch, Carl. *The Art of Violin Playing: Book Two*. Translated and edited by Eric Rosenblith. New York: Carl Fischer, 2000.
- Galamian, Ivan. *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962.

- Galamian, Ivan, and Sally Thomas. *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*. Mineola, NY: Courier Corporation, 2013.
- Gaunt, Helena, and Danielle Shannon Treacy. "Ensemble Practices in the Arts: A Reflective Matrix to Enhance Team Work and Collaborative Learning in Higher Education." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 19, no. 4 (October 2020): 419-444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022219885791>.
- Hanson, Lawrence, and Elisabeth Hanson. *Prokofiev, The Prodigal Son: An Introduction to His Life and Work in Three Movements*. London: Cassell, 1964.
- Kalender, Caner, and Dolunay Akgül Barış. "Effectiveness of the Teaching Program Prepared to Improve Intonation Skills in Violin Education." *Education and Science* 47, no. 211 (2022): 171-193. <https://doi.org/10.15390/EB.2022.11530>.
- Kim, Sooyoung. "Perspectives on the Symbiosis of Traditional and Modernist Techniques in Four Violin Compositions by Sergei Prokofiev." DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2010. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=ucin1275918892&disposition=inline.
- Morrison, Simon. *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Nice, David. *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West, 1891-1935*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Prokofiev, Sergei. "Sonata for 2 Violins, Op. 56." Accessed January 13, 2026. [https://imslp.org/wiki/Sonata_for_2_Violins%2C_Op.56_\(Prokofiev%2C_Sergey\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Sonata_for_2_Violins%2C_Op.56_(Prokofiev%2C_Sergey))
- Prokofiev, Sergei. *Sonata for Two Violins, Op. 56*. Edited by David Oistrakh. New York: G. Schirmer, 1983.
- Prokofiev, Sergei. "Sonata for Solo Violin, Op. 115." Accessed January 16, 2026. https://imslp.eu/files/imglnks/euimg/d/d2/IMSLP31618-PMLP71963-sonate_violon_solo_op_115.pdf.
- Reeves, Julia Sakiko. "Gateways to 20th Century Violin Repertoire: Selections from Luciano Berio's *Duetti Per Due Violini*." DMA diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2018. <https://www.digitalgreensboro.org/record/13900?ln=en&p=Gateways+to+20th+Century+Violin+Repertoire%3A+Selections+from+Luciano+Berio%27s+Duetti+Per+Due+Violini&v=pdf>.
- Robinson, Harlow. *Sergei Prokofiev: A Biography*. New York: Viking, 1987.
- Steinhauser, Joanna. "A Historical Analysis and Performer's Guide to Sergei Prokofiev's Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op. 115." DMA diss., Louisiana State University, 2009. https://repository.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1041&context=gradschool_majorpapers.
- Swoger-Ruston, John Paul. "Harmonic Intonation and Implication (Analyses and Compositions): Harmonic Perception and Intonation in the Reception and Performance of Alternative Tuning Systems in Contemporary Composition." PhD diss., University of Plymouth, 2006. <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1401&context=foahb-theses-other>.
- Tong, Fei. "Performance Guide to Selected Solo Violin Work of Sergei Prokofiev and Krzysztof Penderecki." DMA diss., University of Georgia, 2021. <https://openscholar.uga.edu/record/4598/files/Research%20Paper.pdf>.