

# Diploma Exam: Study Guide

For the examination, you will be expected to engage in intelligent conversation about your pieces with the examiners. You need to be able to give extended (i.e. more than just one or two word) answers to questions on the following topics:

- The title of each piece, including any subtitles or identification numbers.  
Did the composer write other violin pieces with this title? In this key?  
Which other composers have written works with this title?
- The key and formal structure (including modulations and treatment of main themes) of each piece. Is there anything unusual about the formal structure?
- Any signs or terms used in each piece.
- The life of each composer (including places of residence, training or other influences, positions held, significant personal events, etc.).
- The repertoire of each composer, with particular focus on violin works, as well as significant works of other genres. Where does this piece fit into the overall violin music output of the composer (is it an early, middle or late work)?
- Characteristics of the composer's style.  
Is this piece typical?
- The period and stylistic characteristics of each piece.  
Is this piece typical of the general style of the period?
- The historical development of the violin.  
If the piece was composed before 1900, for what instrument was it written?  
How would that instrument differ from the modern violin?

To do this, you need to study the score of each piece very carefully, and also research the following areas:

- Composers.
- Musical periods and their stylistic characteristics.
- Development of the violin.

You should use the following sources:

- General encyclopaedias.
- Music dictionaries - *The New Grove* is a very good source of information on the composers' repertoire.
- Text books from your school music courses.
- CD liner notes and concert program notes.
- The internet (but don't believe everything you read!).

# Important points for exam preparation

- Read as widely as you can, and analyse the pieces in as much detail as you can. But don't get too bogged down in small details. Make summaries of the most important things you want to be able to mention (no more than 6 points per topic area).
- Try to show that you understand what you are talking about, rather than just repeating information you have read somewhere. Use your own words if possible.
- Always relate what you have read back to the pieces that you are playing. The music will be in front of you when you are discussing each piece. Use concrete examples rather than abstract generalisations.
- Practise discussing the main features of the form (keys, themes, etc.) of each movement or piece in about five sentences. Be clear about what you think are the most important details to point out. Try to have someone listen to you do this, or else record yourself.

## What should be memorised?

- Bar numbers? The examiners are not interested in you memorising bar numbers - show on the music the passage you are talking about.
- Dates? You should memorise key dates such as composer's birth/death, and if possible the year your piece was written. Other dates, including birth/death of contemporary composers, don't need to be memorised (though they help to put your composer/piece in context, so don't ignore them altogether).
- Cadences? The examiner will probably not ask you specific or detailed questions about the cadences in your pieces. You certainly won't be expected to point out every cadence. But you should be aware of where they occur, because they often mark important structural points or key changes. Cadences provide the proof that the music has arrived in a new key.
- Special chords and harmonic techniques? Even more important than being able to name the chord or technique is being able to explain why it was used. For instance:
  - Chromatic chords like Neapolitan or Augmented 6ths add richness to the harmony, and usually lead to the dominant (or the tonic), so they give the harmony a clear sense of direction.
  - Chords that move in a circle of 5ths also give the harmony a clear sense of direction.
  - Diminished 7th chords might be used to create a sense of drama or mystery.
  - Dominant pedal points create a sense of excitement or expectation.
  - Tonic pedal points clarify the harmony.
  - Suspensions make the music more expressive by creating then releasing tension.
- Older instruments? Unless you are technically minded, you don't really need to go into great technical detail about older instruments. Be able to explain the main differences in construction and tone if you are playing a piece that would have been written for an older instrument. It is only necessary to discuss instruments that relate to the pieces you are playing.
- Repertoire? This is an area that lets a lot of students down. Make sure you have memorised the other important works that the composer wrote for your instrument (try to be able to list at least 6, especially for the major composers). Also be aware of their other important works, particularly for Licentiate students.
- Stylistic characteristics? Another important area that can be difficult. Think about what are the main features that distinguish each piece you play from the others.

# Historical development of the violin family

The violin family emerged in Italy in the mid 16th century. Its chief predecessors were:

- the *rebec* (a bowed instrument, usually with three strings tuned in 5ths, that could be played on the lap or on the shoulder),
- the *lira da braccio* (shaped like a violin, and played under the chin, but having five strings plus two additional drone strings),
- the Renaissance *fiddle* (with five strings, one of which may be a drone).

The violin family developed independently of the *viol* family (which flourished in the 15th to 17th centuries, until it became eclipsed by the popularity of the violin). A consort of viols would consist of treble, tenor and bass (the latter also known as *viola da gamba*), although other sizes did exist (such as the contrabass, or *violone*). Viols are fretted, and held on or between the knees when played. They typically have six strings, with a flatter bridge than the violin's, making chord playing easier. Other differences, when compared with the violin family, include a flatter back, sloping shoulders, and thinner wood and strings. The bow used for the viol is slightly convex, unlike the concave bow now used by violinists.

Early violin makers, mostly based in northern Italy, included Giovan Giacomo Dalla Corna, Zanetto de Michelis da Montechiaro, Gasparo da Salò, Giovanni Paolo Maggini, and, most notably, Andrea Amati (c.1505-c.1576; there are surviving Amati instruments dating from 1564). The tradition was continued by Andrea's sons Antonio and Girolamo, Girolamo's son Nicolo (1596-1684), and Nicolo's students Andrea Guarneri and Antonio Stradivari.

The violins of Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737) set the standard for all future instruments. Their dimensions were slightly larger than earlier instruments, and were less deeply arched in the belly, with wider purfling and bolder soundholes, producing a stronger tone.

During the 19th century, with the rise of the public concert and the virtuoso performer, further small modifications were introduced to the violin to increase its power: the bridge was heightened and its curvature increased, the sound post was thickened and the neck angled back. These, combined with the slight raising of pitch (to A440) since Baroque times, put increased pressure on the bridge, requiring the bass bar (supporting the bridge) to be strengthened. The fingerboard also became longer, to facilitate playing very high pitches.

Gut strings were used on the earlier instruments, which produced a warm, mellow tone. These began to be replaced in the 19th Century by more resilient metal strings, which are thinner and tauter, and produce a brighter tone. In the 20th Century, synthetic strings also began to be used.

The chin rest is thought to have been added by Louis Spohr around 1820.

Early violin bows were convex in shape, like those of the viol. The modern bow was developed in Paris in the late 18th century by François Tourte (1747-1835); it was longer and heavier than earlier bows, and convex.