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## Some examples of twentieth century Russian violin playing on the example of selected performances by David Oistrakh

Olga Kossovich

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SOME FEATURES OF TWENTIETH CENTURY RUSSIAN VIOLIN PLAYING ON THE  
EXAMPLE OF SELECTED PERFORMANCES BY DAVID OISTRACH

by

Olga Kossovich  
Bachelor of Music, Moscow State Conservatory, 2018

An Independent Study  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

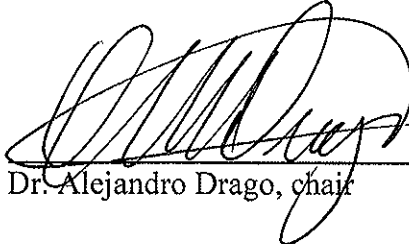
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for the degree of

Master of Music

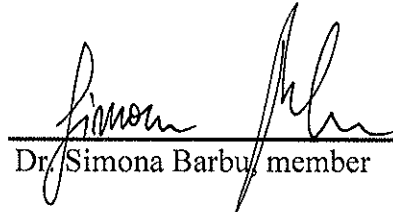
Grand Forks, ND  
May  
2021

This independent study, submitted by Olga Kossovich in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Music from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



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Dr. Alejandro Drago, chair



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Dr. Simona Barbu, member

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Olga Kossovich  
May 5, 2021

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## ABSTRACT

For modern violin performance students, it is necessary to understand what heights we have already reached and through what path violin art needs to develop further. Violinist of the Soviet school achieved unsurpassed quality and ideological excellence, which was indirectly promoted by communism that flourished in Russia. The traditions of the Russian Soviet school continue to develop in students of the great Russian violinists in Europe and America, but it's still difficult to surpass their degree of mastery. The intention of this study is not to emphasize again about the greatness of Soviet violin masters, but to show their differences with great violinists from other countries and find a universal way for the development of violin art in the future.

Through an analysis of various recordings of 20<sup>th</sup> century violinists, it will be clarified how the Soviet type of political structure influenced the development of musical thought, gesture, and technique of Russian violinists. The performing and pedagogical work of David Fedorovich Oistrakh will be considered as the clearest example of the achievements of the Soviet violin school. This work will include three main parts: 1) general analysis of violin school of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 2) the figure of David Oistrakh as the pinnacle of the achievements of the Soviet violin school and 3) the universal development paths of developing the violin art today, which will help us take the best from the past to create a new and modern approach to the violin performing art.

## **Introduction.**

The genius violinist, David Fedorovich Oistrakh, was one of the unsurpassed heights of the performing arts of the 20th century. The study of his performing skills remains one of the most pressing topics of our time. It confronts today's young performers with the task of again and again referring to the heritage of the great master, to delve into the subtle features of his interpretations, to analyze the mechanism of his technical perfection.

David Fyodorovich Oistrakh is a major artistic phenomenon. The formation of his creative personality, his position and the concept of a musician-artist took place under the influence of the ideas of building a new culture of the young Soviet state with its democratic attitudes and political objectives, but also under the influence of the environment around him, in broad communication with talented musicians and listeners, and later - with the best musicians in the world. But always, in any conditions, Oistrakh was able to preserve his individuality, his integral view of the musician, his attitude to sound, which was the essence of his creative life. He generously shared the secrets of his skill with his students, who today are the guardians of his school. However, the main treasure of David Fedorovich's performing heritage are the audio and video recordings of his performances.

This work offers an experience of comprehending the creative personality of David Fedorovich Oistrakh, as well as reading a number of his famous audio recordings from the standpoint of modern performance and those technical, creative, personal problems that inevitably are faced by a young concert violinist.



The object of research in this work is the Russian violin school of the first half - mid-20th century.

The subject of the research is the concert and pedagogical activity of D. F. Oistrakh.

The aim of the study is to show the greatness of D.F.Oistrakh's personality as a musical giant in the aggregate of his human, artistic and performing qualities, which must be guided by and which musicians today must develop in order to be able to achieve at least a level of playing close to him. In this regard, a number of tasks were set:

- to analyze a number of Oistrakh's most revealing recordings in terms of performing interpretation, performing principles and techniques;
- to collect and analyze material covering the pedagogical attitudes and the influence of the personality of DF Oistrakh the teacher, including in conversations with his students;
- to consider the biography of DF Oistrakh from the standpoint of the formation of his creative personality and in the context of communication with a number of musicians closest to him;
- briefly highlight the historical context of the life and work of Oistrakh as the brightest representative of Soviet performing culture;
- try to comprehend the power of the artistic impact of Oistrakh's performing skills through the living testimonies of his contemporaries.

The research methodology is based on the synthesis of general scientific, musicological and performing approaches.

The research base of this work was, first of all, classical and modern domestic works on the history and theory of violin performance. These are the “History of Russian and Soviet violin art”

by L.N. Raaben (Leningrad, 1978), “Methods of teaching violin playing” by V. Yu. Grigoriev (Moscow, 2006), lecture course by G.G. Feldgun “The history of bowed art from the beginnings to 70th years of the XX century” (Novosibirsk, 2006), the Pedagogical heritage of Y.I. Yankelevich” (Moscow, 1993), as well as a number of modern dissertation studies on this topic, in particular, M.V. Martysheva “Timbre field as an integral expressive the coloristic component of the violin sound” (St. Petersburg, 2011). An important place in the study of the creative personality of David Fedorovich, of course, was given to biographical materials collected in a number of publications, from the monograph by I. M. Yampolsky David Oistrakh (Moscow, 1964) and the collection (compiled by V. Yu. Grigoriev) Oistrakh D.F Memories, Articles. Interview, Letters (Moscow, 1978) to the last large-scale book of V. A. Yuzefovich “David Oistrakh: Life. Creation. Personality. Meetings. Conversations with Igor Oistrakh” (St. Petersburg, 2017). Especially close creative relations of D. F. Oistrakh with I. Menuhin prompted to pay special attention to the methodical publication “Six Lessons with Yehudi Menuhin” (Moscow, 2009) and Menuhin's memoirs “Wanderings” (Moscow, 2008). For a more complete coverage of the methodological principles of Oistrakh himself, the author of the work conducted a conversation with Professor A. G. Bogdanyan. A number of foreign sources were also used, among which it is especially necessary to highlight the book by J. Soroker “David Oistrakh” (Jerusalem, 1982).

The main result of the research carried out within the framework of the analytical part of this work was a broader identification and substantiation of the individual performing principles of David Fedorovich than is present in the special literature. The novelty of the work is also determined by the introduction into domestic scientific use of a number of foreign sources and the conversation about the pedagogical principles of Oistrakh with A.G. Bogdanyan, conducted by the author of the work.

The practical significance of the work is due to analytical observations on the specific features of the performing technique of D. F. Oistrakh. The results of the work can be used both in the educational and in the concert practice of students and graduate students, as well as in the lecture course of the History of the Performing Arts.

## **I. Some features of the development of the Russian violin school in the first half of the XX century.**

### 1.1 Concert life in the conditions of building a socialist culture.

“Art should belong to the people” - with this slogan the Great October Revolution radically changed the essence of the attitude to culture. Art turned out to be one of the most important political means, affirming the ideology of the country and educating the masses. Museums, libraries, theaters became available to every citizen of the Soviet Union, and the restructuring also affected concert life. Artists - from very mediocre to the greatest geniuses - now had to raise the cultural level of the people, actively educate those strata of society that until very recently could not be familiar with even the least complex types of art.

Thus, the Soviet reality of the post-revolutionary period (20's) divided concert activity into two main subspecies - concerts of the philharmonic type and popularization concerts. For the second type of concerts, special lectures were arranged to help educate the average working listener. Specially for the workers, reports were read in which they described in detail the program of the concerts. Also, educational conversations were held, which gave an idea of different musical eras, styles and genres. The result of such an educational system manifested itself immediately: not only professionals and enlightened amateurs, but also the simplest listeners began to attend classical music concerts<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Lev Raaben, *History of Russian and Soviet violin art*, (Leningrad: Music, 1978), 131.

The increase in the audience of the philharmonic halls, naturally, required an increase in professional musicians - as a result, a whole network of musical educational institutions was developed in a short time. In the largest cities of the Soviet Russia and in the capitals of the Union republics, new conservatories were opened (by the 1930s there were already about twenty), music schools and schools - thus, thousands of people from the masses received the opportunity to study music free of charge.

In the circle of the domestic violin elite, all these innovations were perceived ambiguously. Already in the first half of the 1920s, there was a clear division: some of the greatest violinists of the era immediately supported the ideas of power (such as L.S. Auer and almost all of his school, L.M. Zeitlin, K.G. Mostras, I.R. Nalbandian), and some did not accept the new system and emigrated (for example, N.M. Milshtein, S. Korguev, etc.). These losses were quite tangible - a certain vacuum arose, which was not filled immediately. That is why the largest pedagogical and performing schools of the Soviet Union were formed closer to the beginning of the 30's.

The perception of Soviet culture changed markedly in the West, in connection with the unprecedented flourishing of Soviet musical life. Indeed, a huge number of talented young musicians showed a great skill, which was especially noticeable against the background of the destruction caused by the civil war. This special skill and musical energy was, it should be noted, largely associated with the confident optimism that was present and especially flourished in the conditions of building the new ideals of the communist state<sup>2</sup>. At least under this slogan the promotion of the country's musical life took place.

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<sup>2</sup> George Feldgun, *The history of string art from its origins to the 70's of the twentieth century. Lecture course for students of the orchestral faculty of music universities*, (Novosibirsk: Novosibirsk State Conservatory, 2006), 466.

Around the same time, a whole group of outstanding teachers was concentrated at the Moscow Conservatory - L.M. Zeitlin, A.I. Yampolsky, K.G. Mostras and others; in Leningrad the most significant figures are V. I. Sher, I. Ya. Zelikman, Yu.I. Eidlin, M.B. Polyakin. National musical traditions are also developing intensively: local violin schools appear in Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine. The most striking can be considered the Kiev, Kharkov and especially Odessa schools; so, from the latter, the school of the great teacher P.S. Stolyarsky, David Fedorovich Oistrakh came out, already at that time beginning an active concert activity.

Since 1924, contacts had been established with foreign performers - Jescha Heifetz, B. Guberman, J. Szigeti and many others visited the Soviet Union. But at the same time, Soviet violinists were gaining world recognition by winning international competitions - for example, the Warsaw G. Wieniawski Competition (1935) or the Eugene Ysaye Competition in Brussels (1937), where Soviet violinists won five prizes at once (Oistrakh - the first, E. Gilels - the third). Soviet competitions are no less important, especially the Pan-Soviet Competition, which was first held in May 1933 in Moscow.

Separately, it should be said about the concert violin repertoire of the Soviet school. At first, in the 1920s, performers were mainly limited to the classics of the 18th-19th centuries: J.S.Bach, L. van Beethoven, I. Brahms, N. Paganini, G. Wieniawski, P.I. Tchaikovsky, A.K. Glazunov, K. Saint-Saens. Only with the arrival of foreign violinists, in particular J. Szigeti, did Soviet listeners learn the First Concerto of S. Prokofiev, Sonata by M. Ravel, and later the music of foreign contemporary composers, for example, B. Bartok, began to be performed. However, the works of Beethoven were especially popular, the style of which corresponded to the heroic moods of the era. It is curious that the violin works of J.S. Bach in those years was performed not so often,

except perhaps for concerts - and suites and partitas practically did not sound, since they were considered unnecessarily difficult for the Soviet listener.

Among the plays of Soviet composers, the plays of D.B. Kabalevsky and R.M. Gliere; Prokofiev's concerts were not performed at all at first. Only closer to the 40s did the concerts of N. Y. Myaskovsky and A.I. Khachaturian. The performance of the latter's concert by D. Oistrakh can be called one of the key events of Soviet musical life - it was from that moment that the "sharp turn" of violin performance towards Soviet music began.

The beginning of World War II significantly changed the established way of musical life. Chamber ensembles - quartets that did not require a piano - came to the fore. It was the quartet groups that, as a rule, most often gave concerts right on the front lines, risking their lives in order to support the fighters. The main concert and theater organizations were evacuated to the provinces and there, in the rear, carried out concert work. During the war, of course, all-Union and international competitions stopped - but as soon as the war was over, the Pan-Soviet competition of music performers was immediately held.

The post-war era turned out to be generous with the great names of violinists - it is enough to list at least L. Kogan, M. Vaiman, I. Bezrodny and many others. It was at this time that the International Tchaikovsky Competition began to be held in Moscow - the main, in fact, music competition of the entire country. This great competition was first held in 1958 and has been held every four years since then.

In the post-war period, important changes began in the concert repertoire of violinists - performers began to turn more willingly to the music of the 20th century, to the works of Soviet and foreign contemporary composers. Both Prokofiev's concerts, Khachaturian's concerts, D. Shostakovich's First Concerto, as well as works by P. Hindemith, I.F. Stravinsky, A. Honneger,

B. Bartok began to be performed. At the same time, interest in early music increased - whole evenings were devoted to the works of A. Vivaldi, I.S. Bach, A. Corelli and other composers of the 17th-18th centuries. The most valuable phenomenon was the collaboration of Soviet violinists with composers - L.B. Kogan, M.I. Vaiman and especially Oistrakh became the inspiration for many contemporary composers; as a result, the performance of newly written, unknown pieces has become a good tradition and almost an obligatory part of concert practice.

Thus, the Soviet violin school, taking shape under the influence of traditions that existed in the 19th century and those innovations that the Soviet era brought with it, developed intensively throughout the first half of the century, constantly enriching the repertoire with works from modern and early music and implementing rich concert life.



## 1.2 Violin school and the political climate of the mid-twentieth century

The political situation in the Soviet Union in the middle of the twentieth century could not but affect the musical society, and most of all, on the fate of its most prominent representatives. Violinists, pianists, cellists, who won Pan-Soviet competitions and traveled abroad to participate in concerts and competitions, automatically turned out to be the “face” of the country, which means they were under constant supervision from the authorities. The winners of such contests became practically national heroes. Musicians who were fortunate enough to gain this status were given many opportunities. It is also important to note that this promotion only took place with select musicians who were politically beneficial. Unfortunately, many talented and gifted musicians did not have the opportunity to participate in the musical life of the country.

The great American violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, wrote in his book “Unfinished Journey”, about his impressions related to aspects of the concert life of Soviet artists, who for many years was close friends with David Oistrakh. Menuhin left several notes describing the position of the leading Russian violinist in the Soviet society. These notes vividly describe how the famous musician had to carry out official orders. This was the case for almost every major performer during the Soviet era. The duties of the musicians included periodically coming to the Kremlin and performing music to entertain important guests. Unfortunately, this was an integral part of the life of Soviet musicians. Menuhin saw in this a parallel with how in different eras famous composers and performers such as J. Haydn, W.A. Mozart or G. Enescu had to entertain guests at courts by performing concerts<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, (Moscow: Colibri, 2008), 95.

The comparison with Mozart and Haydn probably did not come to Menuhin's mind by accident. It is with these masters of the era of Classicism that one can compare the human, spiritual qualities of Oistrakh such as lightness, harmony and self-confidence. And for the same reason, with philosophical wisdom, Oistrakh endured all the difficulties associated with the political situation. He tried not to resist the regime, but without being an active promoter of it.

As a world-class violinist, Oistrakh concertized many countries of Europe and the US. One of such trips, which took place in 1955, was organized by Menuhin for Oistrakh and Khachaturian. Describing all the procedures that go into obtaining the exit permit. Menuhin talks about the fingerprinting procedure usually associated with the prosecution of criminals, about the scrupulous questioning about earnings received for concerts, in a word, about all those tense details that were difficult for the American violinist to comprehend but were quite obvious and normal for a Soviet musician.

Menuhin has tried more than once to secure the same salaries both for himself and for Oistrakh. All his attempts ended in failure: any fees that Soviet musicians received abroad had to be transferred to the state according to Soviet rules. Only after returning to their homeland, the musicians were given their salaries, but in much smaller amounts. Instead of a full fee, the musicians were given other material privileges, such as education and housing. Within the country, famous musicians received the respect and love of the people. Music was one of those outlets that allowed people to forget about reality and completely immerse themselves in the wonderful artistic world. Music helped people find a connection with the past and regain faith in the future. The audience expressed special gratitude to the Soviet musicians, which was combined with an almost religious worship<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, 96.

Another difficult situation in Oistrakh's life was the episode associated with the C major violin concerto by D.B. Kabalevsky. The work owed its fame exclusively to the father and son Oistrakhs since Igor Oistrakh performed it a year before his father, and it was to be performed in 1950 in London at the Days of Soviet Culture music festival. It would be normal to assume that this composition will be played in London by David Oistrakh, who was already world-famous by that time. But in the Soviet highest circles it was decided that Igor Bezrodny, a young violinist and still a student of the Moscow Conservatory, would represent the Soviet Union, who a year later, being only in his third year, would receive the Stalin Prize<sup>5</sup>. Bezrodny with his professor A.I. Yampolsky learned the concert as soon as possible, trying to cope with its technical difficulties, but nevertheless Bezrodny was too nervous in London and played at the concert with tangible technical losses. Consequently, the criticism of both the performance and the composition itself was rather harsh. Moreover, at the next similar festival in France, Bezrodny performed the same concerto, this time in an ensemble with Lev Oborin. But even then, this performance was not successful.

The attempt to replace Oistrakh in foreign performances, presumably, was connected with the investigation of the case of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. However, Bezrodny's double "failure" with Kabalevsky's concert seem to have influenced the higher authorities. Therefore in 1951, Oistrakh was once again allowed to represent the Soviet Union at the Queen Elizabeth Competition in Brussels (the former Izaya Competition), only now not as a participant but as a member of the jury. The first prize was then brilliantly won by Leonid Kogan. After the competition, Oistrakh triumphantly performed the concertos by Bach and Beethoven with an

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<sup>5</sup> The Stalin Prize (Prize named after Stalin) is one of the highest forms of rewarding citizens of the USSR for outstanding achievements in science and technology, military knowledge, literature and art, fundamental improvements in production methods in 1940-1955.

orchestra conducted by Jacques Thibault, and after 14 years since his own victory in this competition, he won the same stage again.

However, the permanent possibility of having concerts abroad opened for David Oistrakh, as well as for other Soviet artists, only after Stalin's death. It is curious what exactly he had to play during the funeral of the leader in the Column Hall of the House of Unions. Of course, everything that was played in those days was listened to by a special commission. Oistrakh was supposed to perform "Melancholic Serenade" by P.I. Tchaikovsky, but suddenly during a rehearsal his playing in the presence of the entire orchestra was interrupted by a man in civilian clothes, exclaiming: "Why are you in such a sad mood here?" Oistrakh had nothing to say to the official, who turned out to be the then secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Council, M.A. Yasnov. As a result, the repertoire had to be changed, and Oistrakh performed Tchaikovsky's Canzonetta, the second movement of the violin concerto. This was the music that was the last performed by Oistrakh in the Stalin era.

Comparing the authoritarian position of power and the admiration of the people, the second was always more important for Oistrakh. This was what helped him cope with Soviet reality and allowed him to continue to engage in making great art.

## 2. Creative portrait of D.F. Oistrakh.

### 2.1 Brief biography.

David Fedorovich Oistrakh was born in the city of Odessa on September 20, 1908. At that time, Odessa was one of the most culturally developed cities in provincial Russia - in terms of musical life, and it could only be compared with Moscow and St. Petersburg. In Odessa, A.K. Glazunov, F.I. Chaliapin and E. Caruso sang, Anna Pavlova and Isadora Duncan danced. Therefore, it is not surprising that this great city became the birthplace of great musicians such as Svyatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels and David Oistrakh.

His father, an accountant, was a music lover. For pleasure, he played the violin and, of course, "introduced little David to her."<sup>6</sup> Mother - a professional singer - sang in the choir of the Odessa Opera House, to which she often took her son with her. At home, Oistrakh pretended to be the main protagonist of his favorite operas. He sang all of them (Carmen, Prince Igor, etc.) and conducted imaginary musicians. From the age of five, Oistrakh began to study with a great teacher, Pyotr Solomonovich Stolyarsky, and he mentioned that "he did not remember in his childhood the time when his violin was not with him."<sup>7</sup>

In 1923, Oistrakh entered the Music and Drama Institute, which had just opened, in the class of Stolyarsky, and shortly after in 1925 he made his first concert trip. Performing in Elisavetgrad, Nikolaev and Kherson, Oistrakh performed, in addition to the traditional program (including

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<sup>6</sup> Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, (Moscow: Colibri, 2008), 95.

<sup>7</sup> Igor Ovchinnikov, "Tsar David." *Russian Life*, no.96 (September-October 2008): 26.

concerts by Bach, Tchaikovsky, Glazunov), Prokofiev's First Concerto, which turned out to be a unique event in Soviet performance of the 1920s.

In the 1920s, Fritz Kreisler had a great influence on the art of Oistrakh, with the performance of which David Fyodorovich observed from his gramophone records and used some of his techniques in his own practice, in particular, glissando, vibrato, portamento. Therefore, Oistrakh probably owes Kreisler's school his abundance of chamber nuances, grace, and a certain ease of play.

In the summer of 1927, Oistrakh met A.K. Glazunov and performed his violin concerto under the direction of the author. In 1928, Oistrakh moved to Moscow, where he had an active touring and concert life, touring with concerts in different cities of the country, mainly in Ukraine and the Soviet Russia. During this period, an important role in his artistic career was played by the victory at the All-Ukrainian competition in 1930, which was paired by Oistrakh's successful performances in Moscow. As a result, he was invited to work at the Moscow Conservatory in 1934. From then and until 1974, he had a continuous pedagogical activity.

In the 30s, Oistrakh won a number of victories: 1935 - I prize at the II Pan-Soviet Competition and II prize at the Wieniawski International Competition in Poland; 1937 - 1st prize at the Ysaye International Competition in Brussels. After the victory in Brussels, King David, as journalists dubbed him, became a national treasure - he could no longer control his own schedule. In a letter to his wife, Oistrakh lists his performances: "I am giving you my schedule. 16th - Liege, 17th - Paris, 18th radio recording in Paris, 19th - concert of all five [laureates - four of the five main winners in the Ysaye competition were from the Soviet Union], 20th rehearsal in the embassy. Between the 17th and 20th I still have to record with the Columbia Orchestra. On the 22nd I return to Belgium again, on the 23rd I play in Antwerp, on the 25th in Amsterdam, on the

27th in The Hague, on the 30th there is some kind of consolidated concert. If you read carefully, you will see that the schedule is brutal, there are almost no free days.”<sup>8</sup>

Oistrakh is becoming popular in the Soviet Union and abroad, rivaling in this, perhaps, with Miron Polyakin. As a result, his playing attracts the attention of composers such as N.Y. Myaskovsky’s in 1939 and Khachaturian’s in 1940, who dedicate concerts to him. The performance of these masterpieces became a kind of culmination in the artist's pre-war activities.

During World War II, Oistrakh actively performed in hospitals, both at home and in the battlefield. In 1942, he played in throughout the besieged city of Leningrad. For his stoicism he was awarded the Stalin Prize.

In the 1946-1947 period, David Fedorovich for the first time conducts a concert cycle "The History of a Violin Concerto", thereby creating a tradition that has firmly established itself in Soviet performance since. Along with traditional classical concerts, this cycle included the then infrequently performed works of contemporary European composers such as J. Sibelius, E. Elgar and W. Walton. Such a unique experience subsequently determined Oistrakh's inalienable quality: the broadest and universal coverage of violin literature from different countries and eras.

After the war, Oistrakh's concert activities took on a worldwide scale. He became closely acquainted with the greatest musicians in the world, everywhere they speak of him as one of the most outstanding violinists of our time. Oistrakh’s fame in these years reaches its climax - "it is difficult to name a European, Asian, American civilized country, where his concerts would not cause wide recognition and admiration of the public."<sup>9</sup> An especially striking event was Oistrakh's

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<sup>8</sup> Viktor Yuzefovich, *David Oistrakh*, (Saint Petersburg: Publishing house Novikova, 2017), 86-87.

<sup>9</sup> George Feldgun, *The history of string art from its origins to the 70's of the twentieth century. Lecture course for students of the orchestral faculty of music universities*, 467.

tour of Japan in 1955. Thirteen solo and symphony concerts were attended by over forty thousand listeners. The success over Oistrakh's performance was atypical for a Japanese audience. "Soviet Culture" wrote about this: "The audience in this country knows how to appreciate art, but is prone to restraint in the expression of feelings: here it literally went mad. The overwhelming applause mingled with shouts of "bravo" and seemed capable of deafening. The audience did not want to leave for a long time. The applause was endless."<sup>10</sup>

Starting in the 1930s, one more moment of excellence for Oistrakh's career occurred in chamber music. At first, these are numerous performances with K. Igumnov and S. Knushevitsky; since 1935 - a permanent ensemble with L. Oborin; in 1941 a trio arose - Oborin, Oistrakh, Knushevitsky, which existed until 1962 (the year of Knushevitsky's death). The trio gave concerts mainly in Moscow and Leningrad. They later went on to perform at the Beethoven celebrations in Leipzig.

Oistrakh was awarded the title of "People's Artist of the USSR" for his services in the development of Soviet musical culture. In 1961, he was awarded the Lenin Prize - the first among Soviet music performers. Oistrakh's degree of worldwide recognition is evidenced by his election as an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Music in London (1959), the Academy of Music of Saint Cecilia in Rome (1960), a corresponding member of the German Academy of Arts (1961), and a member of the American Academy of Arts in Boston. David Fedorovich Oistrakh died on October 24, 1974 in Amsterdam.

From the end of the 1930s until his death, Oistrakh belonged to the well-deserved leadership within the Soviet violin world. He was a true Soviet violinist. He developed along with the Soviet musical culture and deeply absorbed its ideals and aesthetics. At the same time, he was surprisingly

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<sup>10</sup> Feldgun, *Ibidem*, 468.



open to experimentation (including works by contemporary Soviet and foreign composers). Numerous tours of the great violinist across the countries of Europe, Asia and America once again confirm that Oistrakh, while remaining loyal to his country, was a real cosmopolitan inclined to work with musicians from all over the world.

Oistrakh's art testifies to the complete harmony of his spiritual world, to a bright and clear perception of life. But this harmony "never brought Oistrakh into a state of calm, self-satisfaction, causing the inevitable end of the evolution of any artist."<sup>11</sup> Until the very late period of his creative work, Oistrakh remained a seeking artist, eternally unsatisfied with what he had achieved.

Each stage of his creative biography was a new version of Oistrakh. In the 1930s, he was a master of miniature, and the sound of his violin was characterized by lyrics and softness: "At that time his playing was distinguished by grace, refined completeness and polishing of every detail."<sup>12</sup> In the post-war years, Oistrakh became a master of large, monumental forms, without losing the former qualities of fine lyricism. If at first his playing was dominated by "watercolors", then already in Khachaturian's concert he creates an extensive sound palette with deep "velvety" timbres. And in the post-war period, Oistrakh's creative growth was associated with Shostakovich's First Concerto, "during the performance of which his playing acquired symphonic scale, tragic power and philosophical wisdom."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Lev Raaben, *History of Russian and Soviet violin art*, 150.

<sup>12</sup> Raaben, *ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> Raaben, *ibidem*.

## 2.2 Features of the performing style

Yehudi Menuhin writes about Oistrakh as follows: “I immediately fell in love with him. He was not only gentle, devoted, sympathetic, but also a simple, sincere person. He never tried to appear as what he was not, never tried to explain anything, behaved openly, without any ulterior motives, was not shy, was not afraid that he would not be understood.”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps these qualities, along with phenomenal performing and teaching talent, allowed Oistrakh to become a real star of the twentieth century.

Hélène Jourdan-Morange, French violinist and critic, friend of Maurice Ravel, spoke highly of David Oistrakh's playing. He noted that the highest praise from critics is not enough to describe the genius of this musician. She compares the technical aspect of his violin skills to Heifetz but considers the way he uses the technique to be a distinguishing feature. Even the most technically complex passage in Oistrakh's work is aimed at fully serving the musical idea.<sup>15</sup> Almost all his students, colleagues and contemporaries left numerous memories of the great violinist's playing - no one could remain indifferent. In fact, memories and audio recordings that are readily available put together a complete picture of David Oistrakh's skill as a musician.

One of the main qualities of Oistrakh's performing style can be considered remarkably flexible. Oistrakh was subjected to almost every type of composition: there were no genres or composers that he would avoid. He performed concerts consisting of etudes, sonatas and pieces with equal pleasure and skill. Additionally, he performed music throughout various time periods,

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<sup>14</sup> Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, 95.

<sup>15</sup> Elise Jourdan-Morange, *David Oistrakh: Lettres francaises*, (Paris: Hermann, 1953), 2.

such as that of baroque, classicism, romanticism and newly written works. Oistrakh underwent significant transformation through the diversity of his performances.

In the 1930s, Oistrakh was better known as a miniature performer. He played the most popular miniatures with surprising ease and grace. His bow strokes and fingerings were set as role models, and the musical side was carefully thought out. In subsequent years, Oistrakh became a master of large forms. He performed all the major works of contemporary composers. Some dedicated their concerts to him: Shostakovich, Kabalevsky and Rakov. His recordings of the most famous violin concertos are still considered to be the standard view of learning the repertoire. Starting with the famous recording of Khachaturian's concert made in Odessa in 1940, Oistrakh performed and recorded concerts of Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Glazunov, Sibelius, Prokofiev, Bartok, as well as two concerts by Shostakovich. The first stage in the study of these concertos for almost any modern violinist is a thorough analysis of these particular recordings of David Oistrakh.

From a performer of miniatures and classical violin arrangements ("light" concert music), Oistrakh developed into a master of monumental concerts, both technically and musically complex. That is why, probably, Prokofiev, composing his second sonata for violin and piano, consulted with Oistrakh: the composer needed to "adapt" the new work to the instrument, for which he discussed details with Oistrakh in order to give passages the necessary "violinistic melodies".

How Oistrakh managed to create such a large form amazed his contemporaries and remains a mystery to those who can hear him in the recording. The unique scale and wide coverage of the entire work as a whole and the special performing energy comes from the historical context. However, the miniature played an equally important role in Oistrakh's performing life. He

believed that there is often a programmatic in it - narrower than in a large form, associated with color, genre and precise emotional sensations; and in a miniature it is very important to be able to say everything in a short time.

Oistrakh's performing style was partly based on the recitation technique. His playing was, in many ways, similar to human speech in terms of intonation and manner of constructing a phrase. This style property gave Oistrakh's playing a special expressiveness characteristic only of the human voice. This characteristic feature of the Russian-Soviet style has been emphasized by numerous foreign reviewers. Of course, the features of declamation were inherent in many Soviet musicians. But Oistrakh, perhaps, was the first to introduce recitative style into the violin skill. He also supplemented his interpretations of various works in which this was not obvious, for example, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto.

Previously, this concert was performed in a more sentimental and sensitive manner. It did not have the scope that it acquired in the interpretation of David Oistrakh. And it received a more ambitious, "national" character after Oistrakh's performance at the Brussels competition. So happens at the same time it began to spread in the West. Until now, Tchaikovsky's concert is interpreted in exactly that large-scale manner proposed by Oistrakh. This new interpretation generally corresponded to the ideals of the Soviet era and allowed expression of important thoughts at that time, which one could only keep silent in Russia, through the language of music. In general, this courageous national character was developed by other young musicians, including Ya.V. Flier. This interpretation revealed new aspects of Tchaikovsky's concerto. This, without a doubt, breathed new life into the composition. The dramatic actor Nikolai Mordvinov wrote in his diary in 1940: "I am happy that from the deep intimate Tchaikovsky, as the last generation saw him, or rather heard him, a universal, national one grows. In contrast to the

pessimistic, and sometimes slobbering interpretation, the figure of a titan grows, shackled but not surrendered, the figure is not an abstract hero, but a powerful one, possessed by tremendous passions, alive, understandable to us, close.”<sup>16</sup>

One can perceive this opinion about Tchaikovsky's music in different ways, agreeing or arguing with him. But in the context of the era, such interpretation was of great importance: Oistrakh's performance of Tchaikovsky's concert, one might say, sparked the beginning of a whole style characteristic to an entire era. The atmosphere of that time formed new ideas about art. The main goal was to make art understandable and personal to everyone. In this regard, sometimes the desire for simplification led to the rejection of the intellectual fullness of the musical form and language. It was in this respect that the figure of Oistrakh became the clearest example of how two essentially opposite aspirations turned out to be united: speaking in a language understandable to everyone, he, at the same time, knew how to preserve the intellectual content of his art.

Another important characteristic of Oistrakh's style is a sense of proportion, which does not allow excessive sentimentality and vagueness of emotions. The emotionality of Oistrakh's sound always comes only from the content of the work he performs. It has nothing to do with the excitability, fieriness and temperament that is often found in many great masters. Oistrakh does not belong to the artists who choose poetic negligence instead of precision and accuracy of execution. He also did not accept "sluggish sensitivity", the so-called play with the soul. At the same time in Oistrakh's art, despite various dramatic tasks, one can always observe true calm. The great Russian critic Alexander Nikolaevich Serov said that it is directly dependent on the harmony of form and on the complete harmonious possession of all means of art. It is this

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<sup>16</sup> Nikolay Mordvinov, *Diaries*, (Moscow: All-Russian Theater Society, 1976), 89.

calmness in his performance that Oistrakh rises as a great virtuoso and owner of perfect technique.

At times, listeners often hear the thought that violinists tend to care more about the purity of sounds than of the expression of sound. But in Oistrakh's playing, both elements turned out to be organically combined. In addition to the intellectuality of each violin "utterance", which was already discussed, he mastered the accuracy of intonation within the crystal purity of each phrase. In this sense, the most important advantage of Oistrakh was the special "kinship" of the performer and his instrument.

For a world-class performer like Oistrakh, the instrument becomes a key factor. In fact, it turns out to be a continuation of the whole nature of the musician. The embodiment of his talent is completely impossible without an instrument of such a level that would correspond to the performer's giftedness. For Oistrakh, this instrument was initially the Stradivarius "Thibaud" violin of 1714. Oistrakh acquired this instrument in 1955. The instrument previously belonged to the French violinist Jacques Thibaud, from where it got its name. Later, Oistrakh acquired an earlier Stradivarius instrument, the Marsick of 1705 (also named after the Belgian violinist, composer, professor of the Paris Conservatory Martin Pierre Marsick). The voluminous and rather loud sound of the violin was of particular importance for Oistrakh. After all, the great violinist Oistrakh had to play in large concert halls, which sometimes could accommodate 6,000 to 7,000 people. In addition to the loudness in the instrument, timbre coloring was extremely important to him. It was the timbre that particularly attracted Oistrakh to his last instrument.

David Oistrakh played on Marsick until his last days. His most recent recordings were performed on this instrument. A.G. Bogdanyan puts it this way: "The combination of the extraordinary temperament of Oistrakh with the melodious timbre and color of the violin

impressed with the amazing fullness and harmony that everyone who was present at the birth of the extraordinary artistic composition created by Oistrakh noticed. Of course, it is difficult to assess this based only on the recordings, but the talent of a great violinist makes this task possible. Through the prism of time, we are still amazed by Oistrakh's amazing mastery of the great Stradivarius instrument.”<sup>17</sup>

It is possible to complement the impressions of the sound of Oistrakh's violin in the recordings thanks to contemporary reviewers. Isaac Stern wrote about the sound of the instrument and Oistrakh's performing manner as "an even, noble tone, invariably reproduced in all parts of the bow, never forced, never unpleasant.”<sup>18</sup> Evgeny Svetlanov said that he always enjoyed the concerts he performed with Oistrakh. He was amazed by his wisdom and thoughtfulness. It was difficult to find a musician that possessed both an emotional and rational component. A deep study of different musical styles and eras certainly helped Oistrakh make his performances amazing discoveries for the musicians with whom he performed and for the audience.

Bogdanyan says “there is always something Mozartian in the sound of Oistrakh's violin”<sup>19</sup>. I.M. Yampolsky: “In the art of Oistrakh there is a Mozart beginning, the beginning of harmonious truth, a clear, optimistic perception of the world. Oistrakh's thought, like himself, like the sound of his violin, like the movements of his hands, is harmony.”<sup>20</sup> Almost all researchers, colleagues and students of Oistrakh emphasized the presence of features in his

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<sup>17</sup> Elena Safonova, *Slovo o Davide Oistrakhe*. (Moscow: Moscow State Conservatory, 2009), 104.

<sup>18</sup> Viktor Yuzefovich, *David Oistrakh*, (Saint Petersburg: Publishing house Novikova, 2017), 286.

<sup>19</sup> Elena Safonova, *Slovo o Davide Oistrakhe*, 105.

<sup>20</sup> Igor Yampolsky, *David Oistrakh*, (Moscow: Music, 1964), 57.

creative appearance and skill, which makes him akin to the geniuses of the era of Classicism. Nietzsche, in his work "The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music," writes that two opposite categories can be distinguished in culture originating from two ancient deities, Apollo and Dionysus. The Apollonian principle is a sense of proportion, self-restraint, wisdom and peace and Dionysian brings chaos and horror, delight and thrill of intoxication and ecstasy. Following Nietzsche's thought, we can state that Oistrakh was fully an Apollonian musician.

He achieved special purity and clarity of sound not only by technical means. In this regard, he said: "I am trying to fulfill my destiny as an artist and I hope for many more people to discover the rich world of music, which brightens up everyday life. This is what I live for".<sup>21</sup> And this sentence, perhaps, can be called a kind of Oistrakh's credo.

Another unique aspect of Oistrakh was that his music found a direct response in everyday life. He did not have any contradictions with the profession, since his whole personality was a continuation of the artistic essence. In the world of art, it is almost impossible to meet a genius musician with such a harmonious nature as Oistrakh's. "He played the Stradivarius violin, and he sounded like he was born with it,"<sup>22</sup> Howard Taubman wrote about him in *The New York Times*. Such naturalness of performance is possible only when the musician finds in himself a natural need to perform and interpret a musical composition.

Oistrakh never stopped creating. He looked for new ways to the very end, tirelessly experimented and invented. This is what most likely gave his public figure the extraordinary scale and performing force that attracted crowds of violin playing fans to his concerts. And therefore, for many, Oistrakh's performing art became synonymous with the word "perfection",

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<sup>21</sup> David Oistrakh, *Memories. Articles. Interview. Letters*, edited by Vladimir Grigoriev, (Moscow: Music, 1978), 145.

<sup>22</sup> David Oistrakh, *Memories. Articles. Interview. Letters*, 214.



which is confirmed by the words of Raaben: “The violin skill of the artist was perfect. It had both brilliance and showiness, but plasticity, softness, ease prevailed. Oistrakh's instrumentalism was striking in its harmony.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lev Raaben, *History of Russian and Soviet violin art*, 150.

### **3. Analysis of D. F. Oistrakh's performing technique on the example of selected recordings.**

The post-war years in the life of Oistrakh were marked by several general features. Since then, he was almost entirely banned from travelling abroad, except for the Prague Spring festival. Oistrakh actively participated in the concert life of the Soviet Union. In 1946, he opened the cycle "The History of the Violin Concerto". This cycle significantly influenced young Soviet violinists performing the Sibelius Concerto, which had not been performed before, but later became one of the most performed concerts by students of the Moscow Conservatory. In addition, Oistrakh played the Concerts of Elgar and Walton, which also had not been performed in Russia until then (and Walton, who listened to the recording on the radio, wrote a letter to Oistrakh in 1947 with special gratitude for the excellent performance).

All these years, Oistrakh had actively toured throughout the Union. He also worked at the Conservatory and up to fifteen students studied in his class at a time. But the main thing is that he recorded a lot for gramophone records. As part of the Prague Spring Festival in which Oistrakh had taken part almost every year since 1946, he recorded concerts by Prokofiev (No. 1) and Khachaturian with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Rafael Kubelik.

Eight years earlier, in 1938, Oistrakh created one of his best recordings, Tchaikovsky's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Alexander Vasilyevich Gauk. Oistrakh called this concert his favorite and subsequently recorded it many times, with a variety of orchestras, conductors and in different countries of the world. However, the recording of 1938 is perhaps the best not only for the recording of Tchaikovsky's

concerto, but for all the recordings of Oistrakh in general. It was made only three years after his victory at the Second Pan-Soviet Competition of Music Performers and the H. Wieniawski International Violin Competition and a year since he won the Ysaye competition in Brussels. Oistrakh was at the peak of his creative upsurge.

It is necessary to outline here several main features of Oistrakh's style: the first one is the exceptional thoughtfulness and perfection of the musical form. For Oistrakh, there is no difference between a miniature and a large form. Any genre in his interpretation acquires exceptional completeness and integrity of form. The second is the wide range of dynamics that he fully masters that he uses to serve his musical interpretation and phrasing. The third is the ability to overcome any technical difficulties with ease and dignity inherent only to him. The combination of these important features can be seen in detail in his recording of Tchaikovsky's concerto from 1938.

From the first few notes, we can hear the extraordinary lightness and grace, sincerity and virtuosic presentation of the performed material. Oistrakh achieves the real scale of the performance of this concert with the help of thoughtful and very effective phrasing. Throughout the concerto, he demonstrates mastery of this artistic element. Inappropriate command of the phrase often leads violinists to lose the main connecting thread that unites the concerto into a single whole. That is why David Fedorovic's bow distribution gives his interpretation a smooth and fluid feeling that is characteristic of his playing. The rich sounds gradually leads the listener to the main culminations of the concerto.

One of the brilliant examples of the use of dynamics falls on the reprise of the first part of the concerto, namely the secondary theme. After a powerful fortissimo, David Fedorovich uses the technique of light, almost airy legato, which gives a particularly powerful effect. This

technique is especially important in the performing practice of Oistrakh. First, this technique acts on the effect of contrast. Ordinary pianissimo is not what David Fedorovich uses in this topic.

We can hear an almost complete lack of pressure on the string at high bow speed. This allows the sound to receive the necessary “air” and pianissimo to create the special color. Upon reaching the most important notes in this theme, Oistrakh achieves an unusual effect that serves as a reference point for all subsequent movements. It is here that he reduces the bow speed, along with the previous absence of pressure. This creates the effect of a kind of labored breathing and some arrhythmia. This technique is one of the main factors in Oistrakh’s musicality.

Oistrakh’s performance of the most complex passages of the first and third movements with ease and stability is a more difficult task for analysis. It is difficult to discern the level of complexity of the performed passages behind the brilliant skill. However, upon careful study of Oistrakh's fingering and strokes, one can see two main points: the lightness of the fingers of the left hand and the neat articulated movements of the right. The special harmony of these passages is achieved by controlling the force in which the finger presses on the string. This solves the tempo and tension problem that violinists often experience when performing these kinds of passages. Oistrakh's right hand uses the bow very sparingly with a minimum amount of movement. Every time when music requires an energetic rise, Oistrakh does it not through pressure but instead through the breadth of the bow. At the same time, his right hand always remains a stable position to maintain control.

Of the other recordings of Tchaikovsky's concerto made by Oistrakh, one can single out the 1959 recording with the Philadelphia Orchestra and conductor Y. Ormandy. Ormandy was very fond of performing with David Oistrakh. Unlike the 1938 concert, this performance is not so infected with youth and showiness. It rather has a special lyricism and balance.

In the second half of the 1940's, Oistrakh made several recordings, which later became a reference. He recorded for the first time Khachaturian's Concerto. The performance was conducted by Gauk in 1946. This recording also becomes a reference, like the first recording of Tchaikovsky's concerto. This recording is not only an example of the best features of David Oistrakh's performing style, but also an example of one of the best interpretations of this concerto today. The first part of the concerto is filled with nobility and lyricism, despite the very widespread tendency of violinists to play this part with excessive aggressiveness. The beginning of the first theme explores the purity and lightness of the sound, which at the same time retains a powerful and energetic force. This is the feature that is most heard in the violinist's early recordings. The task of preserving the purity of sound is a problem that has concerned more than a generation of violinists. Analysis of this recording can help answer this question. David Oistrakh possessed natural flexibility of hands, which allowed him to play even important concerts almost without acting out. This is one of the natural factors that helped the violinist maintain the energy and purity of his sound. Besides the natural factor, there is also a purely technical aspect. The aspect is created by a competent bow distribution. The main theme is performed by Oistrakh with a short and tight bow. The bow remains on the string, or very close to the string, throughout the entire performance of the main theme and especially in string crossing passages. In addition, he uses the same amount of bow in a repetitive rhythmic pattern and never deviates from this principle. The last point that is important to note is the maintenance of the articulation. This focuses on the emphasis of each note with a clear impulse followed by its subsequent release. Oistrakh implements this principle in almost a fraction of a second. This gives an ideal rhythm and energy that Oistrakh maintains throughout the entire piece.

The second movement is marked by a wide melodious lyricism. David Fedorovich reaches the pinnacle of his skill, which makes this record one of the best. Along with lyricism, Oistrakh's ability to lead his listeners to the most important thematic and culminating elements, without losing a high concentration of sound and energy on secondary material, stands out. It seems that there are no background notes for him. This effect is created from the fact that he treats each sound as preparatory to the next climax. With each note, the tension builds up, but this build-up sometimes happens very slowly, along barely noticeable steps up. The impression of constant development and maximum lyricism is created here. Oistrakh's interpretation of this part is considered to be a reference.

The third movement, along with the first, is distinguished by its virtuosic ease. Oistrakh uses techniques similar to the first part, but the character of the performance is much more sparkling. He brings the technique of the right hand to almost absolute ease, in which it is impossible even to assume that there are technical difficulties in this part. As mentioned above, the use of a short, light bow is essential to this technique. A common mistake of using a deep sound in the main theme makes the performance rather heavy and awkward. Oistrakh complements the combination of a short and light bow with the "breath" of the bow, which will be described in detail from the recording of the double concerto by J.S. Bach.

In 1948, two years later, Nikolai Rakov's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra and the Concerto of Khachaturian was recorded and dedicated to David Oistrakh. This concerto, now rarely performed and undeservedly forgotten, was often performed by students of the Conservatories throughout the Soviet Union. This concerto, along with other of Khachaturian's work, were some of the most popular at the time.

The first part of the concerto opens with a theme based on the tendency to suddenly rise to the higher register of the violin. This concerto has similarities with Khachaturian's concert both in its lyricism and in technical aspect. Oistrakh uses similar techniques in this recording. However, the concerto has a different performing color. The energetic pulsation that was present in Khachaturian's concert is replaced here with an enthusiastic melodiousness. David Oistrakh uses the effect of endless legato to smoothly flow from note to note that unites the whole concert into a single entity. From a technical point of view, the endless legato was executed by Oistrakh flawlessly. To achieve this effect, he uses the weight distribution of his right hand as follows: each time the bow is brought to the tip, he slows down and increases the pressure of his right hand on the string. On the other hand, the weight of the right hand is relieved near the frog. When connecting the bow, the fingers of the right hand are used. The fingers connect the notes between each other with special flexibility and plasticity. These basic performance features unite the whole concerto into a single whole.

Oistrakh re-records his favorite Prokofiev Concert No. 1 in Moscow six years after the Prague recording in 1953. The Prague recording never appeared on sale and was preserved only in the archives. By 1949, the recordings of F. Mendelssohn's Concerto and Kabalevsky's Concert were recorded. D.B. Kabalevsky dedicated his C major Concerto to "Soviet Youth". Although, this concert was supposed to be dedicated to the Oistrakh's, both father and son. It was Igor (in 1948) and David (in 1949) Oistrakh who truly brought Kabalevsky's idea to life, even though the concerto was first performed in Leningrad by Dina Shneiderman. The premiere, which took place on the radio, made no impression on the listeners. The premiere had neither the work of Kabalevsky, nor the embodiment of Shneiderman. However, immediately after the performance in Moscow by David Oistrakh and his son, the concert became popular and was played by many other violinists.

Some of these violinists include the young students at the Central Music School and music schools in other cities.

Playfulness and grace are combined in this recording with a refined and melodious legato. The clarity and lightness of Oistrakh's bow are especially noticeable in this recording. Like the whole harmonious style of David Fedorovich's playing, his spiccato is marked by lightness and grace. Oistrakh always uses the same amount of bow for each note to achieve this effect. This task is not easy because the same amount of bow may not always be used evenly, especially during string crossing passages. A distinctive feature of David Fedorovich's performance is the preparation of the bow for string changes. Another distinct feature is the use of a denser right hand. This is helpful in promoting evenness and clarity of the bow. The reason for this is because as you press the string more firmly, the rest of the strings get closer. Even changing the bow into a staccato feel becomes easier. The graceful spiccato alternates with lyrical episodes, in which Oistrakh's talent as a musician is manifested.

In later recordings, one can single out the reference performance by Oistrakh and Yehudi Menuhin of the concert by J.S. Bach for two violins with conductor Pierre Capdeville in Paris on October 24, 1958. This video allows us to compare the different yet striking talent of two great musicians. When playing in an ensemble, they exhibit an unrivaled ability to blend. At the same time, they exhibit great differences in their style of performance and in sound production methods. This recording clearly shows Oistrakh's right hand and how he uses the "bow breath". This is the powerful impulse that helps the string to receive its overtones and vibration. This technique gives a strong vibration to the string that it begins to reproduce the very "breath".

Vladimir Grigoriev writes: "An important condition is the extraction of a wide ribbon of "pouring sound" from the violin. It is obtained only when relatively large bow is given to the



beginning of the sound. This can be attributed to the impulse of the right hand that provides the so-called "bow breathing"<sup>24</sup>, which D. Oistrakh spoke about. What is meant by the phrase "bow breath" and how does Oistrakh achieve this?

Oistrakh understood that the sound of the vibrating string is a powerful source of influence to the listener. In the recording of Bach's double violin concerto and in many other recordings, we can see how he works with his right hand to achieve this effect. In this regard, several important factors can be identified.

- The first thing that can be noticed is that his hand is incredibly flexible and relaxed. A powerful impulse is always followed by a release. This technique allows the string to vibrate freely and gain freedom in its sound.
- The second point is impulse control. The most common mistake most violinists make when trying to imitate Oistrakh's style is the lack of control during intense movements of the right hand. Without proper control, this leads to the opposite effect. Instead of a free, singing sound, we get a tight and flat sound. This will then lead to a performance with a rough sound quality.
- Third, and perhaps most important, is the manner in which the bow is plunged into the string. We can see a special kind of sound production that Oistrakh uses at the beginning of each music entrance. To create such a sound production is based on the resistance of the bow and string, as well as its density. The important detail here is that, with the right technique, this manner allows the performer to switch consciousness from the mechanical work of the right hand to the resistance of the bow and strings. This will allow the performer to focus on achieving the intended beautiful sound quality.

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<sup>24</sup>Vladimir Grigoriev, *Violin teaching metho* (Moscow: Classic-XXI, 2006), 189.

Another technique that can be noticed in this recording, specifically in the second part of the concerto, is sound thinning. In contrast to what Yampolsky taught when he suggested leaving the bow on the string for about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the duration of the note preceding the pause, Oistrakh demonstrates the removal of the bow at a speed with intense vibration. This makes it possible to achieve a special breathing with each musical phrase and a sense of incessant movement. Stopping the right hand in this case leads to cessation of breathing and interruption of the phrase. These factors can affect the entire development of the piece.

Oistrakh paid a lot of attention to the development of the first and second groups of bow strokes. He worked with his students on a variety of techniques that helped ease the process of mastering the most problematic strokes. Those include staccato, spiccato, ricochet and flying staccato. Although the first group of strokes (detache and legato) are much easier to execute, they form a solid base for the execution of the second group of strokes. According to the testimony of Professor A.G. Bogdanyan, Oistrakh paid special attention to the development of lighter bow strokes. Paying attention to this helped master more complex bow strokes.

One of Oistrakh's techniques is devoted to the study of the staccato stroke, one of the most complex violin bow strokes. It consists of clear impulses that are played with one bow. Its complexity is determined by the violinist to automate the entire process. Otherwise, it may be impossible to control each impulse at such a fast pace. Oistrakh suggested practicing staccato simply by playing the appropriate parts of the legato. This is useful because the student learns the bow distribution in legato and can safely use it later in staccato passages. This is also useful in situations where it is necessary to play a long passage in one bow, because it becomes necessary to calculate each millimeter of the bow used. This practice also allows you to not think about the

difficulties of the right hand until the left hand has mastered the entire passage. This way, one can avoid many problems and can then concentrate solely on the right hand.

Oistrakh taught his students that the most important thing in a bow stroke of staccato is the speed. The speed depends on which part of the hand is involved in the process. We can control the staccato most effectively if we push with the brush. The staccato is then large and reliable. The brush staccato is very useful in mastering the stroke. The other part of the hand that is responsible for this bow stroke is the elbow. The staccato is more virtuosic and brilliant when there is control between the elbow and shoulder.

There is an opinion that Oistrakh did not have good staccato skills. This opinion is based on examples, such as the recording of "Introduction and Rondo-Capriccioso" by Saint-Saens, where he changes the staccato written in notes to spiccato. This unusual stroke is often obtained by violinists who do not know the technique of controlling this bow stroke. That is why there is a natural staccato phenomenon. Therefore, it is important to challenge the opinion that Oistrakh refrained from performing staccato. The record of Tchaikovsky's "Waltz-Scherzo" can serve as confirmation of the falsity of this view. Oistrakh achieves a stroke in this recording, rare even for his own style. It includes features of lightness, flightiness, and weightlessness. This is most clearly heard in the double notes with mordents at the beginning of the work. In the middle section of the piece, during the lyrical climax, the sound of the violin becomes denser and more viscous. This creates a stunning contrast with the extreme parts.

One feature of Oistrakh's performance style is his clear and solid rhythm. As the Austrian pianist Paul Badura-Skoda wrote, "The hallmark of almost all great musicians is solid rhythm. Each time I was amazed again and again at the firmness and certainty with which David took the

pace and kept it, without giving it rigidity or stiffness.”<sup>25</sup> Oistrakh paid special attention to the rhythm when educating young violinists. For him, rhythm was not just the metric basis of a piece. It was a way to convey a certain emotion and a special artistic experience, which made his performance particularly holistic and large-scale. Thus, the recordings of the third movement in the Sibelius concerto or Tchaikovsky's Waltz-Scherzo are examples of how the metric basis is embodied in a conscious and complete artistic concept.

Oistrakh, like many other teachers, spoke about the need to play with the metronome not only when beginning to learn a new piece, but also in the stages close to the final delivery. Often, musicians make mistakes in the rhythm because they are concerned with the musical content. This then leads to fragmentation of the phrase. The fragmentation often arises because of a diligent students over emphasizing technically difficult passages. The work then turns into many separate pieces of music, which interferes with the perception of the entire work of art. Playing with a metronome is underestimated today but is actively encouraged by great teachers such as Mostras, Auer, Stolyarsky and many others. Using a metronome cannot compensate for establishing a natural sense of rhythm, but it can help give students the direction to learn a new piece, as well as encourage “an emotional state” to the entire composition.

All Oistrakh’s techniques mentioned above can be analyzed based on his audio recordings. These set of techniques have allowed him to perform a large amount violin repertoire over his many years as a violin performer. The recordings of his performances are striking in that both the audience during his time alive and modern listeners today are praised equally. It is interesting to

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<sup>25</sup> Viktor Yuzefovich, *David Oistrakh*, 107.

note that in comparison with Oistrakh, even the most eminent violinists of that time, for example, Yehudi Menuhin, lost out of this opportunity.

Shtilman writes about this in his book: “Listening to the recordings made then during Menuhin's concerts, one is surprised at some sluggish reaction of the Moscow public. Today it is quite clear that the majority of the public and even many professional musicians in 1945 did not understand Menuhin's art.”<sup>26</sup> This reaction from the Moscow public is surprising and difficult to explain. Nevertheless, when Menuhin came to the Soviet Russia for the second time in 1962, his performance had a completely different effect. This can be explained by the fact that a new generation of musicians had grown up and felt the need to learn and adopt the musical traditions of the West. They did this to enrich their knowledge in terms of style and other musical traditions. Menuhin's performance style was very different from the usual Soviet type of playing. The Soviet public was not ready for such drastic changes, especially after the war and other upheavals of daily life.

At the same time, Menuhin himself speaks of the experience of playing together with Oistrakh and how it was extremely flattering. Menuhin noted their shared passion for conducting. Unfortunately, only one recording of their joint work, which lasted almost 30 years, had survived. This was a recording of the double concerto by I.S. Bach, recorded in Paris in honor of the tenth anniversary of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). In all other performances, Menuhin carefully preserved them in his memory as an important performing experience. Over the course of these 30 years, they, alongside Igor and David Oistrakh, performed works by Bach and Vivaldi, periodically changed roles.

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<sup>26</sup> Arthur Shtilman, *Famous and great violin virtuosos of the twentieth century*, (Saint Petersburg: Aleteya, 2017), 83-84.

It's rare to see such collaboration and true friendship between two great contemporaries and colleagues. Oistrakh and Menuhin provided several works from his personally dedicated repertoire. It was Oistrakh who brought scores of recently written works by contemporary composers from the Soviet Union, thereby popularizing them. Thus, Oistrakh provided Menuhin with the manuscript of Shostakovich's violin concerto, which “gives the soloist an excellent opportunity to evoke a flurry of applause”<sup>27</sup> so that the whole world could hear his composition. Menuhin many times noted the exceptional kindness of the great musician. “On my first visit to Moscow, I didn't manage to hear him (it is noteworthy that we never performed together in Moscow, although later we played together in a good half of the world's capitals), but despite this significant gap in my 1945 trip, Oistrakh from the very beginning was for me the embodiment of all my Russian-Jewish heritage.”<sup>28</sup> Many have noticed a certain kinship in the performance style of the two great violinists. They were united by the instrument and the same attitude toward music. Menuhin's manner was directed towards a more classical style and Oistrakh into a more romantic one. After many years of cooperation, both musicians learned a lot from each other and their styles of performance. This allowed them to become closer to one another.

Thus, based on the example of the recording of Tchaikovsky's 1938 concert, 3 main features of Oistrakh's performing style were considered: thoughtfulness and perfection of form, a wide range of dynamics and overcoming technical difficulties with ease and dignity. These features were analyzed in order to identify special techniques that David Oistrakh uses to improve them:

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<sup>27</sup> Yehudi Menuhin, *Unfinished Journey*, 96.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

1. Perfection of the musical form is achieved with the help of correctly constructed phrasing.
2. The spectrum of dynamics is accomplished through both the complete absence of pressure on the string and high bow speed.
3. Ease of performance in areas of technical difficulties becomes possible in the absence of finger pressure on the string and minimal movements of the right hand.

In the concert of Khachaturian in 1946, the following performing techniques were considered:

1. Maintaining the purity of sound.
2. Bow distribution and the use of momentum with instant release to preserve the energetic message of the performance.

We examined how Oistrakh achieves the effect of endless legato using the example of the recording from a concerto by Rakov. In the recording of Kabalevsky's concert, Oistrakh demonstrates a brilliant mastery of the spiccato bow stroke, which has been analyzed in terms of technical difficulties. Two more characteristic features of Oistrakh's performance style, including "bow breathing" and sound polishing, were analyzed in detail using the example from the recording of the double concerto by J. S Bach.

After analyzing the most famous recordings of David Fedorovich Oistrakh from a methodological point of view, several methods of controlling the stroke of the staccato were given, as well as a new understanding of the firmness of the rhythm as a way to express emotion.

#### **4. Pedagogical heritage.**

##### 4.1 Oistrakh and his students.

Oistrakh is not only a brilliant violinist but a great teacher and a talented conductor. He was a true musician who never stopped reinventing himself. Throughout his life, he studied from his colleagues and even from his own students. That is why Oistrakh's pedagogical skills are worthy of separate consideration. The outstanding teacher taught at the Moscow Conservatory for exactly forty years. During this time, he trained a whole plethora of violinists, including outstanding masters and laureates of international and all-Union competitions: L. Isakadze, G. Kremer, M. Sekler, V. Klimov, O. Parkhomenko, O. Kaverzneva, V. Pikayzen, S. Snitkovsky, J. Ter-Mergerian, R. Fine, N. Beilina, O. Rat, I. Oistrakh, L. Zaks, L. Isakadze, A. Mikhlin, I. Politkovsky, M. Rusin, A. Bogdanyan, I. Frolov, G. Kremer. Students from many countries of the world flocked to his classes. For example, the Frenchmen M. Bussino and D. Arthur, the Turkish woman E. Enduran, the Australian M. Beryl-Kimber, D. Bravnichar from Yugoslavia, B. Lechev from Bulgaria, Sh. Gheorgiu from Romania, and etc...

A.G. Bogdanyan, a student of Oistrakh, talked about one of his lessons with him. "I came to his lesson to show my work on "Chaconne" by I.S. Bach. After I started playing the first chords, he stopped me and turned on the tape recorder. He then asked me to start playing again. He did not stop me anymore until I finished playing to the end. I was terrified and was sure that I played so badly that he did not have enough words to express it to me. Afterwards, he made a recording to show it to me more clearly. Imagine my surprise when he praised me and said that he made this



recording for himself, to take in some ideas from my performance.”<sup>29</sup> This recollection once again confirms the statement that Oistrakh was able not only to teach, but also to learn incessantly and draw inspiration from working with his students. Oistrakh was open to experimentation.

Oistrakh’s pedagogical activity gave birth to a whole generation of talented violinists, who now continue to pass on his experience, affirmations and instructions to young musicians. It can be said with complete confidence that Oistrakh largely determined the development of the entire Soviet violin school for many years to come due to his immense creative personality.

The formation of an individualistic performance amongst his students brought great satisfaction to Oistrakh. His method of educating young people was based primarily on his own experience and on the principle of subtle analysis. When analyzing a student’s performance, he explained the work in detail, and in the process of learning it, he showed only individual passages that the student failed in. He never constrained the creative personality of his students. When the piece was learned already learned by the student, he avoided showing his own interpretation. Oistrakh attempted to help his students find their own solution. He directed their thoughts to search for the proper phrasing and other nuances.

Speaking about the entire musical art of Oistrakh, the pedagogical aspect cannot be ignored. He treated his teaching work in the most serious way. “This is my creative laboratory, which has a great influence on my performance,”<sup>30</sup> he said. That is why, despite his active concert and touring activities, Oistrakh did not stop working at the Conservatory. Further, he headed the violin department for some time.

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<sup>29</sup> Elena Safonova, *Slovo o Davide Oistrakhe*. (Moscow: Moscow State Conservatory, 2009), 104.

<sup>30</sup> David Oistrakh, *Memories. Articles. Interview. Letters*, (Moscow: Music, 1978), 114.

In Oistrakh's pedagogy, undoubtedly, a lot came from his own artistic personality. Communication with the great artist left a stamp on the students. Not so much in the sense of copying his play but more in terms of its harmony. Oistrakh did not impose himself on any interpretation of works or phrasing created by the student. The personality of the student and his or her individual qualities developed freely. They were not constrained, but, on the contrary, encouraged by this teacher. At the same time, his influence is felt by all students in the simplicity and naturalness of their playing.

This is confirmed by the memoirs of Bogdanyan, in which he speaks of his impressions of David Fedorovich's performance: "While still a student, I and my friends attended Oistrakh's lessons and concerts. I cannot forget the state that each of us experienced when we listened to the play of a great artist. His play bewitched, bewitched. The sounds came to life, played with colors and awakened in our souls other voices, countless echoes. The world was becoming beautiful and spiritual for us."<sup>31</sup>

And one of the most recent students of Oistrakh, Rimma Sushanskaya, recalled her studies with the great violinist: "My first lesson with David Oistrakh passed like a real dream. During the lesson, Oistrakh was very kind to me, but at the same time firm. He demanded a lot from me, but at the same time retained his amazing charm and sense of humor, which made me more and more comfortable. We were working on the Tchaikovsky Concerto and Ysaye's Sonata-Ballad No. 3 at that time, and I think then I learned a lot. David Oistrakh drew my attention to phrasing, using various types of bow handling and fingering techniques, thanks to which the interpretation of the works became fresher and more interesting. Sound production and the technical side were equally important to him - both of these aspects created a musical whole. After each lesson, I felt

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<sup>31</sup> Elena Safonova, *Slovo o Davide Oistrakhe*, 104.

musically filled and tried to analyze in detail everything that he told me. Where is end of quotation?

Throughout our lessons, he treated me very kindly and spoke positively about my performance, which gave me confidence; but at the same time, Oistrakh always made it clear how much work I have to do in order to achieve heights in the profession. He always inspired me very much, so I almost did not notice all the difficulties that accompanied me during our lessons. I was very impressed with how Oistrakh was in love with his violin - he practically did not let go of it and very often showed something on it while explaining certain difficult episodes. Without even acting out, he masterfully performed by heart absolutely any fragment of any concert or sonata. Hearing and seeing this live was simply amazing - and in general, the entire period of study with Oistrakh was an amazing experience. He did not teach his students how to play the violin, but taught how to become a better musician than you were before. That is why all the students in his class became violinists of the highest level.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Rimma Sushanskaya, “My Memories of David Oistrakh,” *Musical Opinion* 45, no.3 (July-August 2008): 24-25.

#### 4.2 Key features of teaching excellence

One of the most important practices in the life of a violinist is the performing embodiment of a musical composition. Oistrakh had a special relationship to the process of familiarization with the work. He suggested the following: “Before starting work on a piece, a detailed and deep acquaintance with it is necessary, of course, if possible, repeated listening to the recording, reading the score, rough playing with the piano. It is advisable to start studying the work directly on the instrument, solving technical problems (fingering, strokes, etc.) when the plan and the idea of execution are already outlined. The above refers to musicians who are mature enough to work on their own; in the student stage, of course, you have to use the ready-made recommendations of an experienced leader. However, the more inquisitive a student is, the sooner he will take the path of independent solution of creative problems.”<sup>33</sup>

In this sense, Oistrakh believed that it was necessary for a musician to have a plan and understanding of the work before starting to study the technical difficulties of the musical text. In his recordings, Oistrakh demonstrates a deep relationship to the musical material in each piece, regardless of its scale and form.

With regard to miniatures, Oistrakh always found interesting ways to explain his point of view to his students. He said that a miniature “is almost always in the past, it cannot be interpreted as a stream of the present, but it should be presented rather as a stream of memories, reflections, experiences of something that has happened. Then the understatement, the exact space of the

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<sup>33</sup> David Oistrakh, *Memories. Articles. Interview. Letters*, (Moscow: Music, 1978) 201.

action, is justified, because here this laconic form, the feeling embodied in the play, leads forward.”<sup>34</sup>

One can draw a conclusion from his own words that there are wide layers of musical meanings about Oistrakh's attitude to works of a large form. Programming, according to Oistrakh, is not as obvious in large form as in musical miniatures. He compared the large form to the flow of life and time. He saw in its philosophy an epic beginning. "It is important here," he said, "first of all to find a conceptual, strategic solution to the whole.”<sup>35</sup> Oistrakh believed that a large form is organized, first of all, by a bright artistic thought: “Everyone will play a miniature, good or bad, but in a large form, developed thinking and understanding are necessary. A violinist is seen in miniature, a musician in a concerto ”.<sup>36</sup>

Oistrakh believed that an experienced and mature musician should share his experiences with younger people. Pedagogical work, he said, is always immensely useful for a concert artist. After all, when a performer deals with talented youth and follows the experience of young musicians, it is often possible to find answers to those questions that cannot be answered otherwise. “Sometimes you see how a student intuitively or consciously solves the problem that you have had to think about more than once. In this way, new experiences are gradually summed up, and, in the end, it has a beneficial effect on their own performing arts. The level of our young violinists is so high that constant communication with them somehow raises oneself. Young people are very empathetic. She inquiringly looks at the work of her teachers, and if you do not want to be left behind, you must persistently strive forward. I am convinced that if my performance, starting from

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<sup>34</sup> David Oistrakh, *Memories. Articles. Interview. Letters*, 174.

<sup>35</sup> David Oistrakh, *Memories. Articles. Interview. Letters*, 174.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

1934, becomes more mature, then pedagogical activity played an important role in this,” wrote Oistrakh. The great violinist worked with enthusiasm. This is amazing even for such a temperamental musician as he was. In the classroom, he was iconic, and his remarks were always valuable.

Oistrakh attached great importance to the education of the culture of sound among students. “Usually, teachers talk about producing a beautiful sound, I would rather talk about the beauty of a violinist's tone. In this respect, I completely agree with Spur: "If a student's ear feels the need for a beautiful sound, then it teaches him, better than any theory, those mechanical methods of bowing, which are needed to obtain such a sound”<sup>37</sup>

Oistrakh believed that the study of a work should be approached holistically. Therefore, one feature of his musical style is the amazing integrity of each form he performs. Many people face this problem because they do not always sensibly assess the complexity of the structure and form of the composition. Oistrakh, on the other hand, has demonstrated an amazing mastery and understanding of musical form. His words in this context are very important: “You can work only after a thorough acquaintance with the entire composition as a whole. Otherwise, it will not be collected later. Knowledge of the text, especially the thematic material, should develop into a specific sensation, a feeling similar to smell. A kind of "flavor" of the play is formed. If you remember him, you will remember the whole play and you will be able to play it after many years.”<sup>38</sup> Also, Oistrakh suggested looking for special ways to solve performance problems: “We need to replay all possible meanings, we need to study all the options, try all the ways, only then on the stage one can surrender to the process of interpretation and get the necessary freedom. After

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

all, on the stage, due to excitement, I will stagger, I need a wide trodden path, and not a narrow path on which I can fall.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibidem. 176.

## CONCLUSION

Summarizing the previous points above, it is important to emphasize the relevance of David Oistrakh's violin art today. The great violinist, who lived in the last century, is not considered by the present generation as a long-gone, forgotten master. His art becomes a role model for very young violinists and teachers. The recordings made by him are in no way outdated. Perhaps this was a result of a special atmosphere created around Oistrakh's name – almost a harmonious musician of the Mozartian type. He remained this way throughout his life.

A lot of articles have been written in many languages about Oistrakh by people around the world. Even monographs, essays and memoirs have been created and are still being created about him. It may seem that it is impossible to find words not already spoken about him by admirers of the talent. However, more and more facets of Oistrakh's talent are being explored and analyzed to this day. This is because he was gifted not only as a violinist, but also as a teacher and conductor. Additionally, Oistrakh became a real reflection, a kind of quintessence of his era. Perhaps, none of the Soviet violinists reflected to such an extent in the entire history of the country's violin art. Oistrakh grew and improved at the same time as the Soviet musical culture, absorbing its traditions and innovations.

In this work, we tried to present and make out the most striking performance features of David Oistrakh. Despite the amount of published material about Oistrakh, not much has been written about his performance in specific details. In this work, an attempt was made to find a solution to the most popular problems in violin playing, such as building integrity of form, working on clarity and quality of sound, and the variety of dynamics. In his work, David Oistrakh achieved an incredible quality of performance of various strokes, such as spiccato and staccato, as well as a



solid rhythm. He not only added new colors and improved the performance technique of certain strokes, but also created a new understanding of structure based on the construction of a musical idea, which gives these strokes a particularly deep and almost philosophical meaning. All of these features have been considered in this work with the aim of using similar principles in modern violin performance practice.

Art can be very different. Sometimes it evokes violent emotions, anxiety, and makes one experience complex and contradictory feelings. However, there is art of a completely different plan - one that calms, pleases, heals mental wounds, and affirms a real faith in life and the future. It was this kind of art that was inherent in David Fedorovich Oistrakh. His skill speaks of the unique harmony of his nature and the spiritual world. He is an artist who strives for perfection and is never fully satisfied with what he has achieved. Nevertheless, he always knew how to perceive life with light and clarity. That is why the skill of David Oistrakh, nearly half a century after his death, remains to be a standard violin practice.

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