



The Fantasy Influence in York Bowen's First Viola Sonata

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Abstract

EN: Fantasy, with its roots in folklore and oral tradition, has long inspired artists across literature, painting, and music to delve into imaginative realms, as a way of expressing their ideas. This project explores the characteristics of the fantasy in arts, with a particular focus on music, through the repertoire of British composer York Bowen.

This study is divided into two main sections: an overview of Bowen's influence and style within early XX century British music, and a detailed interpretative analysis of his *Phantasy for Viola and Piano, Op. 54*, and *Sonata No. 1 for Viola and Piano, Op. 5*. The first chapter outlines Bowen's artistic legacy, tracing his influences, compositional style, and the unique qualities that make his works so suited for the viola.

The second chapter applies the concept of fantasy – rooted in mythology and folklore – to the interpretation of Bowen's viola works, encouraging the imaginative and personal process, contrasting with traditional academic performance training, which might limit artistic autonomy.

This project proposes a broader interpretive framework, encouraging the exploration of alternative artistic expressions in Bowen's music, too often limited at lyric expression, due to its extremely romantic style.

PT: A fantasia, com raízes no folclore e na tradição oral, há muito inspira artistas de várias áreas — como a literatura, a pintura e a música — a explorarem reinos imaginativos como forma de expressão das suas ideias. Este projeto investiga as características da fantasia nas artes, com um enfoque especial na música, através do repertório do compositor britânico York Bowen.

O estudo está dividido em duas secções principais: uma visão geral da influência e estilo de Bowen na música britânica do início do século XX, e uma análise interpretativa detalhada da sua *Phantasia para Viola e Piano, Op. 54* e da *Sonata No. 1 para Viola e Piano, Op. 5*. O primeiro capítulo delinea o legado artístico de Bowen, explorando as suas influências, o seu estilo composicional e as qualidades únicas que tornam as suas obras tão adequadas para a viola.

O segundo capítulo aplica o conceito de fantasia — enraizado na mitologia e no folclore — à interpretação das obras para viola de Bowen, incentivando um processo interpretativo imaginativo e pessoal, em contraste com o treino performativo académico tradicional, que muitas vezes pode limitar a autonomia artística.

Este projeto propõe um quadro interpretativo mais amplo, que estimula a exploração de expressões artísticas alternativas na música de Bowen, frequentemente reduzidas à expressão lírica devido ao seu estilo marcadamente romântico.

Key-words

‘fancy’, fantasise, fluidity, ambiguity, amorphous, imaginary, improvisation, legend, myth, romanticise, story, storytelling, syncretism.

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Introduction

Throughout history, the fantasy represented one of the most venerable genres that contributed to the development of the arts, for its rich symbolism that can be observed in literature, painting and, of course, in music. The fascination of the *myth* and the national *legends* transmitted orally has inspired artists to delve into the deep imaginary world created by men from the oldest times, to explain the unexplicable. Growing up in a culture deeply influenced by folklore and bizarre traditions, with a deep sense of spirituality, I have always been fascinated by fantasy tales that my parents or grandparents used to tell us as children, for the magical realms where the action was placed, that stimulated my imagination and my sense of creativity.

The purpose of this project is to give a different perspective over the interpretation and the obstacles we face while discovering ourselves through our passion for music. The paper is structured in two chapters. The first chapter treats the artistic figure of York Bowen in the XX century British music society, his influences and his style in composition as well as its significant contribution in viola repertoire. The existing documentation regarding Bowen's creation is very scarce, most of the publications treating especially the analysis of the Viola Concerto in C minor op. 25 (1907), such as the article *York Bowen Viola Concerto (1907). The Centenary of a minor masterpiece* (France, J. 2007). This article provides some information over Bowen's music in general, and the possible reasons why he never got into the major composer's category, but most importantly, he gives us clues on his musical language to understand his music's essence.

Another document that offers a broader vision over Bowen's life and music is the Musicology Dissertation of William Kenton Lanier, entitled *The Viola Music of York Bowen: Lionel Tertis, York Bowen, and the Rise of the Viola in Early Twentieth-Century England*, published in 2020, at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. This dissertation is a complete documentation of York Bowen's life, music and the influence of Lionel Tertis, that inspired him to compose such a big number of viola pieces, that are all analysed as well. The rich bibliography, containing articles from British music magazines as well as publications about Lionel Tertis' life and legacy, and other documents that are not a part of the public domain in Europe.

Other materials I consulted during the research process consist of articles and radio interviews on Classic FM, discussing York Bowen's music, available on the York Bowen Official Website in UK. For the documentation of the Fantasy genre, I used online sources such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, and other online libraries websites. I also consulted *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of chamber music* (1929) and the *Essays on the History of English Music* of D. Maw (2010).

The second chapter proposes an in-detail interpretative analysis of two essential works of Bowen's viola repertoire: Phantasy for viola and piano op. 54 and Sonata no. 1 for viola and piano op. 5, presenting a different approach in interpretation from the perspective of the fantasy genre, not only limited to music, but also the other branches of arts such as literature, painting or theatre.

While preparing the repertoire for the final recital I have been listening to various recordings of viola players available in the public domain (such as Timothy Ridout, Lawrence Power, Jimin Jang or

Kyungsik Shin) that I also consulted, among others, while elaborating the analysis of the repertoire discussed in the second chapter. A complete list of the recordings I have been listening to during the whole process of learning and analysing the repertoire can be found in the Bibliography section.

Perhaps the biggest realisation I had throughout the process of learning these two pieces of repertoire and discovering the fantasy in York Bowen's music, was that I was free to choose '*what to do*' if I had a convincing argument for '*why to do it*'. In the rigid musical education system where I made most of my formal education, it was expected from the students to play exactly what's written in the score without questioning too much and without trying to find different ways to make it more interesting. Music students were often seen as 'too inexperienced to have personal opinions' about music and were not stimulated by the teachers to be curious about it. We would often be asked to copy the scores of our older peers and play the same bowings and fingerings without making too many changes. We were basically told what to do by the teachers with little to no explanation, other than maybe a technical reason, but nothing about interpretation. When I discovered the repertoire of York Bowen, that was little known and explored by the students in my former school at the time, I was surprised to see an unexplored territory, where no 'expertise' in interpretation existed at the time. I immediately became fascinated by the beauty and richness of this music, and by how well-written it was for the viola. From all the repertoire I had played before, I found Bowen's music the most apposite – both in technique and style – for my needs, so I decided to look more closely at this composer and his music and to approach it for my master's degree project.

The present documentation is not meant to be a traditional dissertation, but rather an artistic project, a practice itinerary that every musician should be able to keep, and all the significant aspects of interpretation discovered throughout the process of learning these two incredible pieces of York Bowen's vast viola repertoire.

Chapter I

I.1 York Bowen: the 'English Rachmaninoff'

York Bowen was one of the 20th century English composers that dedicated a significant amount of their work to promoting the viola, influenced by his stage partner and friend, Lionel Tertis, in a period of history when the instrument was not popular at all, without a pre-existing viola school of playing, and a very reduced consecrated repertoire.

Besides that, he was a highly skilled pianist, and an accomplished organist, violist, and horn player. Rumours say he was able to play every single instrument of a symphonic orchestra, which is why he was able to understand and express what any instrument was capable of. (Ballard, G. (n. d). York Bowen: Biography, a quick overview. *York Bowen*)

Born on 22 February 1884, in London, Crouch Hill, *Edwin Yorke Bowen* was the third son of the founder of Bowen and McKechnie whisky distillers. He began his piano studies with his mother, who quickly decided to enrol the boy at the North Metropolitan College of Music, realising the immense talent of her son. At the age of 8 Bowen moved to study with Alfred Izard, at the Blackheath Conservatoire, winning various prizes, as well as the Erard Scholarship of the Royal Academy of Music, which led him to further studies with renowned professors such as Tobias Matthay (piano) and Frederick Corder (composition). (Pott, (1996) Hyperion Records).

Bowen's time at the Royal Academy of Music was marked by many accomplishments. He won many prizes as a pianist, became a well-known pianist but also learned how to play the organ, the French horn, and the viola (which he considered superior in tone to the violin), while he was making the first steps into his career as a composer.

At the age of nineteen he was invited to perform his *First Piano Concerto* at the Proms under Henry Wood, where Saint-Saens described him as "the most remarkable of the young British composers". After graduating from the Royal Academy of Music, in 1905, he kept appearing as a soloist at the Proms, performing his *Piano Concertos no 1 and 3* under the baton of Hans Richter. He also performed his *Suite in D Minor for Violin & Piano Op. 28*, with Kreisler, to whom it was dedicated. (Ballard, G. (n. d). York Bowen: Biography, a quick overview. *York Bowen*.)

In 1905 Bowen met Lionel Tertis, which led to an astonishing and very fruitful collaboration, who influenced him into writing viola masterpieces, dedicating all of them to the great violist. Bowen became a professor at the Royal Academy of Music at the age of 25, where he worked with dedication his entire life.

In the beginning of the First World War, he enrolled in the Scots Guard, as a French horn player, but he was dispensed for pneumonia, in 1916. Returning home he experienced a deep artistic disappointment, caused by the tragic realities of the time, and the lack of recognition of his work as a composer. The social context of the First World War had influenced the composers all around Europe and beyond to start developing a more progressive language, adopting new musical systems, that Bowen refused to embrace, striving to compose in a way and style that he believed in. (Jones, B. (Presenter). (2008, 22nd September). Interview with Glen Ballard [episode of radio programme]. In Arts Daily programme. Classic FM).

That of course had consequences on his already decreasing popularity: publishers would refuse to print his new works, critics would describe his works as 'old-fashioned', 'too romantic' and so on. As Henry Wood said: 'he never gained the place that he deserved in the English music,' being a victim of the rather snobbish cultural environment of the time. (Jones, B. (Presenter). (2008, 25th September). Interview with Endymion [episode of radio programme]. In Arts Daily programme. Classic FM).

Despite all the critics, and the shadow he lived in during the last 4 decades of his life, Bowen stayed faithful to his goals and passions, actively working as a pianist, composer, and professor at the Royal Academy of Music until 1959, two years before his death.

He was often referred to as 'the English Rachmaninoff', not only for the high technical level as a pianist, but also for the deep romantic musical language and style that inspired Bowen's music. Also, it is interesting that both suffered the same sort of criticism for their denial of progress in their compositional style, even though Rachmaninoff evidently achieved a higher world-wide status as a musician during his life than Bowen ever did.

Other composers like Chopin, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Strauss or Debussy also had a significant role in Bowen's creation for their style and composition technique, which can be observed especially in the piano repertoire, such as *the 24 Preludes* and the *Piano Concertos no. 3 and no. 4*. His passion for beauty and romanticism mixed with a glimpse of impressionism was coming into existence through beautiful melodies, expressive harmonies, mixed with a more pastoral English sentiment, which gave Bowen's music its' true personality. Jones, B.

(Presenter). (2008, 22nd September). Interview with Glen Ballard [episode of radio programme]. In Arts Daily programme. Classic FM).

Bowen wrote a huge amount of music throughout his life. His creation includes symphonic music (4 Symphonies, Symphonic Poem *the Lament of Tasso*, Op.5, - *Fantasy Overture on "Tom Bowling"*, Op.115; Tone Poem *Symphonic Fantasia*, Op.16 etc); piano repertoire (4 Piano Concertos; 6 Sonatas; *Twenty-Four Preludes in All Major and Minor Keys*, Op. 102; *Twelve Studies*, Op. 46 etc.); vocal music (*Four Chinese Lyrics*, Op. 48; *Love and Death*; words by George Leveson-Gower); chamber music, with great significance for the viola repertoire (the 2 Viola sonatas Op. 5 and Op. 6, *Fantasia* in F major for viola and organ (1903); *Fantasia ("Fantasie Quartet")* in E minor for 4 violas, Op. 41; *Rhapsody* in G minor for viola and piano, Op. 149 etc.) and the flute repertoire (*Miniature Suite* for flute and piano, *Miniature Suite* for flute, oboe, 2 clarinets and bassoon, *Soliloquy and Frolic* for unaccompanied flute, Sonata for 2 flutes) and many more opuses, for all types of instrumentation and in all types of genre.

His music is often characterized as 'really pleasurable to play, strong sense of musicality and composition technique, really special music' (Endymion, Classics FM broadcast, Arts Daily, Sept. 2008), due to the high level of understanding and the gift of underlying the very essence and beauty of every instrument's personality. The organic yet complex way of writing for such a large palette of instruments is obvious in any of Bowen's works, making them extremely comfortable and enjoyable to play.

I.2 Lionel Tertis and the legacy of modern viola playing

Known as 'the father of modern viola playing' Lionel Tertis lived most of his life making great efforts to gain a reputation for the most neglected of the stringed instruments, seen as inferior and unworthy at the time. Tertis was born on December 29, 1876, in West Hartlepool, Durham County, northeastern England, to a family of Jewish descent (Russian father and Polish mother). He began studying violin and piano, both in Leipzig (Germany) and London (Royal Academy of Music), and switched to the viola in college, under the influence of Alexander Mackenzie and Oskar Nedbal. He quickly became a very renowned violist and started his crusade, in the hopes of raising the popularity of the instrument (Tertis, L. (1975). *My viola and I: A complete autobiography. With beauty of tone in string playing and other essays*. Crescendo Publishing Company p. 16).

The start of the 20th century also represented the start of Tertis' 'viola crusade': ever since he became a professor at the Royal Academy of Music, in 1900, he began commissioning viola pieces from some well-known musicians at the time, such as Arnold Bax, Benjamin Dale, Gustav Holst, Frank Bridge, York Bowen, William Walton and Ralph Vaughan Williams, that brought significant increase to the viola repertoire.

York Bowen's most significant pieces for viola were also dedicated to Tertis. These are the *Two Viola Sonatas*, Op. 5 and Op. 6, and the *Viola Concerto in C Minor* Op. 25. Tertis and Bowen premiered the two sonatas and gave several recitals with Bowen's pieces and not only, including the *Romance in D for viola & piano*, in and outside the UK, as a part of Tertis' crusade for the recognition of the viola as a solo instrument. Tertis also premiered the *Viola Concerto* on 26 March 1908, at a Philharmonic Society concert in the Wigmore Hall. (France, J. (2007). *York Bowen Viola Concerto (1907). The Centenary of a minor masterpiece* pp.2-3).

Besides the efforts to increase the repertoire by adding new modern pieces, Tertis transcribed lots of works from other instruments, adapting them for the viola, so that he could play them in concerts and recitals. He also transcribed technique methods from violin to the viola, giving the opportunity to young viola students to accomplish a higher technical level. Tertis also composed around ten short pieces featuring or including the viola such as *Three Sketches* for viola and piano or *A Tune* for viola and piano (published 1954).

The first notable critic's review that Tertis received as a soloist was given in 1908, after premiering the Bowen *Viola Concerto*, even though he had established a good reputation as a

recitalist since 1905, when he started his fruitful collaboration with the composer. Critics affirmed on several occasions that Tertis' playing was characterised by 'warmth and variety of tone colour' (Concerts, London Times 38605 (March 27, 1908), p.11) as well as 'remarkable vigour and fine tone' ("Tertis Soloist at Symphony Concert: Viola Player Heard in New Concerto," Boston Globe (December 15, 1923), p. 5).

On another occasion, a New York critic affirmed about Tertis' playing: 'he is probably the most expert of all those who play the viola, with an agility comparable only to that of a good violinist.' (Moore, E. (1923), Chicago Tribune, p. 11). His overall playing was so good that he was often compared to famous contemporary violinists such as Fritz Kreisler or Eugene Ysäye, whom Tertis respected and appreciated.

One aspect worth mentioning when talking about Tertis' fine sound and tone is his instrument. His most famous viola was a 1717 Montagnana (which he used from 1920 to 1937) that he found in Paris, after a series of concerts he gave. The size of the instrument was 17 1/8 inches (43.49 cm), so big that it couldn't fit in any existing case at the time, so that he had to transport the viola into his wife's impermeable coat to London. When he bought the viola, it was found in a terrible state, with no fingerboard, no bridge and no strings. Even so, Tertis took the instrument, since he preferred the larger instruments for the richer sound. In 1937 Tertis retired from his performing career due to a fibrositis in his right arm, most probably caused by using such a huge instrument. Even so, he kept promoting the viola in many ways, teaching, raising money for commissioning new pieces for viola, writing essays on string instruments playing, particularly the viola, and even designing his own viola model (the Tertis model), trying to achieve a 'Golden Ratio' for the viola in a more fitting 16-3/4-inch size (42.5 cm). Tertis, L. (1953). *Cinderella no more*. Peter Nevill pp. 105-114).

I.3 The phantasy, a XX century British music genre

The word 'fantasy' defines a wide variety of concepts. The first and most used is the 'human capacity of creation' or the 'product of the imagination' (<http://dexonline.ro>). In literature the word defines an abstract or imaginary world, which has nothing to do with the reality, but seeks to convey truths about the real world.

The British fantasy genre as we know it nowadays came to a turning point towards the imaginary worlds in the Victorian era, when the majority of the stories used medieval elements such as castles, kings and magical kingdoms, knights, wizards, magic objects (the holy grail, the sword etc.), most of the times the action developing around the conflict between the forces of good and evil, with the good winning almost every time.

Neither in literature nor in arts is the fantasy a subject of any distinct period in history. There are artists from various schools of art, such as Surrealism, Romanticism, Mannerism who produced 'fantastic art' works such as: *Delights* or *The Vision of Tundale* of Hieronymus Bosch; *A Hunting Scene* by Piero di Cosimo; *Witches' Sabbath* by Francisco Goya; *Smaug's Lair*, Tolkien's illustration of *The Hobbit*; *Muse Inquietanti* by Giorgio di Chirico and many others.

In music however, the fantasy is an instrumental piece without a well-defined structure, most of the times borrowing it from a similar musical form like the prelude, the sonata or the Italian 'ricercare' (Hodeir, A. (2007) *The Forms of Music*, p. 38).

A more accurate definition given by the *Harvard Music Dictionary* presents the fantasy as 'the product of the imagination, an ingenious and imaginative instrumental composition, often characterized by distortion, exaggeration, and elusiveness, resulting from its departure from current stylistic and structural norms'.

Historically, the oldest, most similar form to the fantasy is the 'motet' (fr. = word, setting of words), a short, sacred work of music for voices, which is the ancestor of 'ricercare' previously mentioned.

In the XVII century the English composers adopted the fantasy genre – just as that Italians and Germans – and called it 'fancy' connecting it to the ricercare. In the XVIII century Bach uses it as a big prelude, and in the second half of the XVIII century it becomes a 'less rigid sonata' thanks to Mozart. In the XIX century the term fantasy mostly indicates arrangements of different areas of the operas (ex: *Fantasy on themes of Carmen*). (Hodeir, A. (2007) *The Forms*

of Music, p. 38).

In the early XX century, Walter Wilson Cobbett (a successful businessperson and an amateur violinist) conducted a revival of the fantasy as a distinctly British genre, based on the XVI and XVII centuries 'fancy'. Cobbett organised seven chamber music competitions between 1905 and 1920, commissioning the young composers to write fantasy works, giving them specifications in terms of form and style. Most of the times he requested an 'amorphous' structure, meaning 'without a clearly defined shape or form' (Lanier, W. K. (2020). *The viola music of York Bowen: Lionel Tertis, York Bowen, and the rise of the viola in early twentieth-Century England* pp. 52-53).

Bowen won the sixth competition with his *Phantasy for viola and piano* op. 54 (1918) and was commissioned by Cobbett to write another phantasy work (*Phantasy for violin and piano*, Op. 34, 1911). Bowen also wrote: *Fantasia for viola and organ* (1906) and *Fantasia Quartet for four violas* (1907).

The different spelling in every title of the composer's works might have several reasons. The 'phantasy' form is the one preferred by Cobbett for the British genre he was striving to create, which is why Bowen titled these works commissioned by Cobbett. The other forms might have German or French connotations, more common for the musical titles at the time. (Fantasy, Phantasy. (n. d). In *Oxford English Dictionary*.)

Other notable phantasy works of York Bowen are *Phantasy Trio for Violin, Cello (or Viola) and Piano*, Op.24; *Phantasy in F major for Viola and Piano*, Op.54; *Phantasy quintet for Bass Clarinet and String Quartet*, Op.93; *Symphonic Fantasia* op. 16; *Fantasy Overture on "Tom Bowling"* op 115 etc.

Despite Cobbett's tireless efforts to revive the British tradition of the 'fancy', and the interest of the composers that adopted Cobbett's genre, a standard form of the fantasy never emerged, the genre nearly disappearing by the 1950's.

I.4 The phantasy works for viola

Among the large number of fantasies in the works of York Bowen there are three pieces featuring the viola, all of them dedicated to Tertis. They were written on different occasions but all of them served as a contribution in the early years of the viola legacy that Tertis sought to establish.

The first of these works is the *Fantasia* for organ and viola, written in 1903 and premiered in London on February 26, 1906, in the Aeolian Hall by Bowen and Tertis themselves. The piece does not present a stable structure, but rather an 'amorphous' form, as it was supposed to, so that it could fit into Cobbett's phantasy genre that was being promoted at the time. The closest structure to the piece would be the rondo: Intro-A-B-A2-C-Intro-A3. All the three A structures are identical only for about five to six bars before they start developing new material, showing the amorphous structure of the English phantasy genre, (Lanier, W. K. (2020). *The viola music of York Bowen: Lionel Tertis, York Bowen, and the rise of the viola in early twentieth-Century England* p. 53-54)

The combination of the viola and the organ was surely ambiguous for that period, making the piece stay in the shadows for a long time. The technical level of both instruments is not so demanding, which, on one hand, allows the two instruments to show the beauty and richness of their timbre (especially for the viola) but on the other hand it does not arouse the curiosity of the musicians or the public.

The organ part is rather orchestral, making space for the viola to affirm and show its beautiful tone among the richness of colours obtained on the organ, both from imitating different orchestral timbres and changing keys unexpectedly by the chromatic harmonies that Bowen uses with such ease.

The next piece, *Fantasia quartet* op. 41 (1907) is an even more unusual combination than the previous one, featuring a viola quartet, a very rare ensemble only used by a couple of composers in the 19th century before Bowen.

This quartet was written for Tertis to be played by him and some of his most advanced students at the time Eric Coates, James Lockyer, and Phyllis Mitchell. The premiere was held in 1908, in a concert organized by the Society of British Composers at the Novello House. One of the reviews of the concert affirms that "this experiment in tone-colour was completely successful, and the composer's poetical ideas were presented in a sombre but richly varied atmosphere",

showing once again the ambiguity of form and the creative spirit that were required for the revival of the phantasy as a British genre. ("Concerts," London Times 38587, March 6, 1908, p.12).

In terms of structure, the one-movement quartet can be divided into several harmonic sections: a slow introduction in E minor, where all the four violas pass to each other thematic fragments while the others play sixteenth note figurations in counterpoint; a thematic section, passing from E minor to G minor, introducing a sort of development in ambiguous keys, followed by a reprise again in E minor (identical with the opening theme) introducing a short *stretto agitato* to precede the transition; a slow chromatic section, with harmonies changing every bar, and in the end, an extended Coda, consisting of an E major homophonic section, marked *piu lento*, using mutes, a slow calm section, closing up the ambiguous piece. Throughout the whole piece, the range of the four violas is quite restricted, all the voices playing very closed to each other, showing that a rich harmonic texture can be easily obtained even without a low bass line or melodies played in extremely high octaves.

Overall, the Fantasia quartet for four violas was a something of an innovation in the viola repertoire bringing significant attention to the underestimated qualities of the instrument and the new generation of viola players on the rise, thanks to the efforts of the prolific musical figure that was Lionel Tertis, in the XX Century.

The last of the three major fantasy works for viola is the most complex both in structure and technical challenges, making it one of the most famous pieces out of all the viola literature by Bowen. Composed in 1918, The *Phantasy for viola and piano op. 54* was the winner of the sixth Cobbett Competition and had its' premiere on December 6, 1918, by Tertis and the pianist Samuel Liddle ("London Concerts: Wigmore Hall," Musical Times 60 No. 911 (January 1, 1919), p. 37)

The piece became very popular ever since its first publication by Josef Weinberger, in 1997, attracting viola players of different levels, from advanced bachelor students to respected names in the classical music field like Lawrence Power, that published an album with all of Bowen's viola repertoire or Timothy Ridout, the famous British violist that has played most of Bowen's repertoire in countless recitals and music festivals, even the smaller, unknown pieces, as well as other significant XX century British repertoire for the viola.

In terms of structure the phantasy is the closest to a traditional form, being somewhat closer to a sonata, with well-defined key changes throughout the whole piece, compared to the other two

works previously mentioned. Although written in one movement, the piece is obviously divided into three big sections, making it a condensed sonata form. The first and most consistent section develops around the key of F major, presenting the main theme in a slow, meditative introduction, the theme that sustains the whole piece. The middle section is a short slow movement, consisting of entirely new material, with no repeated musical ideas, almost entirely in D flat major. The last section brings back the initial F major key, in a binary form, with two internal units with an ABCA structure.

The mediant-related keys, so frequently used in Bowen's viola works are also observed in the phantasy, although he limits himself to only using D major, D minor and D-flat major besides F major.

From a technical perspective, the phantasy is a preferred choice for the viola players thanks to the slightly reduced size (smaller than a sonata or a concerto) but full of technical challenges and possibilities of expression, exploring the different colours and richness of viola tone.

Although the Phantasy for viola and piano has a more stable structure than the two previous works, there are lots of expressive elements that create the overall free, 'amorphous' character. A more in-detail analysis of the Phantasy will be discussed in the following chapter of the present document, depicting the stylistic elements that define the genre, as well as the artistry of York Bowen's music.

Overall, the three works for the viola have very particular characteristics, given by the different structure, instrumentation and perspective. Nonetheless, there are many common elements to all of them such as the beautiful unique themes of the viola, exploring its' colourful tone, the harmonic changes, the free form, the richness of the musical material, the romantic expressive language and the balanced, chamber music form of every piece that include them into the XX century British genre.

It is obvious that the collaboration with Lionel Tertis had a significant influence over the viola compositions of York Bowen, not only for pushing him to write a big amount of music for the viola, but being an inspiration himself, given the extraordinary musicianship of the legendary violist that dedicated his entire life to the cause of the resurrection of the viola.

Chapter II

II.1 Work structure

Since the pre-existent research on York Bowen's repertoire is slightly reduced, the biggest part of this chapter represents an in-depth interpretative analysis of the *Phantasy in F major for viola and piano* op. 54, that allows a further analysis of the *Sonata no 1 in C minor for viola and piano* op. 5 from a phantasy perspective. The purpose of choosing this repertoire is to discover a different vision on the interpretation of Bowen's music, other than the 'romantic' one, so frequently used because of the lyricism of his music, and to prove that there are fantasy elements in his music that define his style and language and go beyond the criticism he received in his days, for writing too romantically and out of fashion.

I divided the work for the whole project into six steps that helped me in the process of learning the repertoire on a technical and interpretative level, as follows:

1. **Research about the composer**
2. **Research about the piece**
3. **Reading and analysis of the text**
4. **Recordings comparison** (tempo, dynamics, articulations, character, phrasing, vibrato, bowings, sound type etc.)
5. **Practice phase**
 - **Bow distribution:** only the right hand with metronome
 - **'Tuning':** know how to sing the notes, slow practice, understanding the 'geometry' of the music
 - **Coordination:** when there's a lack of coordination, almost every time the left hand is late! Studying both hands separately, and then studying with bow stops in between every note.
 - **Speed:** practice slow and gradually increase the tempo, changing the rhythms and bowings on purpose etc.
6. **Memorisation and mastering the repertoire:** studying small fragments so that the brain can memorise and correct the possible errors that appear on the way. Playing by memory gives more freedom in interpretation.

These practical steps can be applied to any repertoire and is the method I now use every time I start to practice a new piece, but I managed to design a structure of my artistic project based on this practice method, so that I have a clearer vision and work more effectively. These six steps

were incorporated into the two parts of the project: The **Research phase** (where I used the first four of the practice methods) and the **Practice phase** (where I used the last two methods). I also realised a selection of all the information collected in the research phase, using the most relevant details I could find about Bowen's music (which can be found in the First Chapter of the project) as a guideline for the interpretation Phase, explored in this chapter.

The materials used for the analysis of the two works consist of a series of recordings available in the public domain (over 15 recordings of the Sonata op. 5 and about 12 recordings of the Phantasy op. 54) together with my own recordings from the final recital. The recordings I found most interesting for both works are played by Timothy Ridout and Lawrence Power, two of the most brilliant British viola players of our days. In addition to those I also listened to Jimin Jang and Kyungsik Shin's recordings for the Sonata no. 1 and Matthew Lipman and Milena Simovic's recordings of the Phantasy op. 54.

II.2 Phantasy in F major for Viola and Piano Op. 54. Genre contextualization

As mentioned before, the viola phantasy was the winner of the sixth Cobbett Competition, in 1918. The different spelling of this piece, compared to the other fantasies shows clearly that the work was meant to be an entry on the competition, since it was Cobbett's preference for the genre he wanted to revive and spread throughout British musical society.

The piece explores a large palette of colours, expressions and technical challenges, given the unique, lyrical language of Bowen. The amorphous structure of the piece gives the space to create different narratives and tell your own story throughout the music.

A keyword that was emphasized to me from the very beginning of the learning process of this piece was '*fantasize*', which means '*creating your own story*', or '*escape from reality*', and it stayed at the foundation of my artistic research for the whole project. It helped me depart from the basic technical challenges, and once they were solved, engage the audience into the story I was trying to tell.

Since I was already using the analogy of the *story*, I eventually started to make parallels between the fantasy of literature and the music genre, and I was surprised to discover a lot of similarities both in formal structure and lyricism. More than a genre, fantasy is a concept, an expression of the soul' in other words, a story to be told.

One of the fundamental similarities between the literature and music fantasy genre is the **narrative** or **narrativity** of the two genres, described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘a spoken or written account of connected events, a story’. Narrativity is also associated with the *story-telling* concept, which was another perspective I’ve been looking for throughout the process of getting at the core of the piece.

One specific way of practicing was the visualisation of a real fantasy-like story, to be able to find the right character for the piece. Charles Perrault’s *Cinderella*, written in 1697, was the story I found most appealing for the York Bowen Viola Phantasy, given the similar narrative, the presence of the good character (Cinderella, the Godmother etc.) and the evil ones (the step-mother and sisters) and the conflict between them, as well as the fantasy elements like the use of magic for the ball gown, the horse-drawn carriage, also made with the use of power, and the magical shoe, the key element that will lead the story to a conclusion, the typical happy-end result, present in most of the fantasy stories. There are about 340 different versions of the Cinderella story all over Europe, and some versions of the same story found outside Europe, all of them presenting small variations but sharing the same concept, narrative and even characters. It is proof of the deep roots of the fantasy as a European genre, influencing the British literature genre that emerged later, as the fantasy that we know today. (History of Cinderella, (n.d.) In Abilene Public Library, Texas).

All these key elements of the *Cinderella* story can be found throughout the entire *Phantasy*, showing the deep roots of the fantasy in the culture of the people, at the core of the artists’ expression. Although it uses words, sounds, colors or shapes, art is always meant to express something, whether it is a feeling, a desire or a suffering, and in most cases, it is the human expression of freedom and the desire of fulfilment.

I believe that the association between the music and literature genres previously mentioned is a good starting point for building a personal interpretation for such a generous piece in every aspect of it. Next, I will be presenting the evidence to support this idea, and the means to achieve a convincing and engaging interpretation, based on it.

II.2.1 Interpretative analysis

Just like any literature genre, the music genre also has a major base structure and some elements that need to be present, to give life and sense to musical material. In the case of Bowen's *Phantasy* op. 54, although the form is not so strict, it still borrows the typical sonata form structure, more explicitly, a condensed sonata form, in one movement, that clearly show three major parts that serve as the three movements of a typical sonata Lanier, W. K. (2020). *The viola music of York Bowen: Lionel Tertis, York Bowen, and the rise of the viola in early twentieth-Century England* p. 58.)

The work begins with a slow, lyrical introduction in an ambiguous F major, played by the viola, presenting the main theme, which I will be referring to as 'Cinderella's theme', recurring throughout the whole piece. The theme is exposed two times, in the 6/8 pulsation, the piano joining the viola on the second exposition, providing a rhythmical and harmonical support for the melody, marking the beginning of the whole action, in a *siciliana-like* pulse, gradually accelerating to the exposition, marked *Poco piu allegro*.

The very beginning of the theme will be used as a transition on several occasions, not only from one movement to another, but also in between sections, particularly in the first movement of the piece. This is the first sign of a very *atypical* sonata form, since the use of material from the introduction to the transition is not commonly seen in sonata form. The only relatable example in classical literature would be the first movement of Beethoven's *Patetica* Sonata in C minor, with the *Grave* introduction, where the same kind of process is used. (Teodorescu-Ciocanea, L. *Treatise on musical forms and analyses*, Grafoart, pp. 207-210).

The introduction of the *Phantasy* starts in bar 27, still in the key of F major, with the piano presenting a ternary rhythmical motive, and the viola responding with a syncopated motive, changing the pulse into a binary one. This binary-ternary game lends the contrasting character to the lyrical, 'Cinderella theme' from the introduction, almost like the apparition of the negative character (The evil mother and sisters) in a fantasy story. Essentially, the first movement of the *phantasy* is a continuous battle between good and evil, between the lyrical, romantic character of Cinderella's theme on one hand, and the nasty, playful character of the 'Evil mother and sisters', on the other. The differentiation between the two main characters of the first movement is only possible through the realization of the dynamic and agogic elements, and there is an abundance of notations that Bowen leaves for us to explore. The first theme,

presented in the introduction, is marked *Poco andante e tranquillo*, suggesting a calm, meditative atmosphere, in a *piano dolce e poco espressivo* manner.

Every available recording shows the preference of using the C String on the entire Introduction, to keep the same dark colour and richness of timbre, even in the low intensity dynamics. The created effect suggests the mysterious action right away, strengthened by the *crescendi* and *diminuendi* that become wider as the piano joins the viola. The small *accelerando* starting in bar 24 prepares the contrasting theme, but it can also mislead the audience, since it gives the impression of a more dramatic following theme.

The first theme group in the exposition suggests more of a *giocososo* character instead, the tempo being augmented just a little bit (*Poco piu allegro*). Also, the melody consists mostly of quarter notes, appearing for the first time in the piece. Even though there is no articulation written on the score for the quarter notes, I find it more interesting to start the first notes more articulated, with a shorter bow and gradually increase the bow quantity making the crescendo more efficient and the ending of the phrase firmer.

The two complementary melodies have an unstable trajectory and an improvisatory character, very typical in the fantasy genre in music, giving the impression of a constant instability, both for the melodic design and the tendency of the players to go back and forth a little bit with the tempo, which I also used in my own interpretation.

A short transition appears after the conclusion of the first thematic group, in bar 65, consisting of the alteration of the first theme to modulate at the mediant-related key of D major. Another unusual practice that Bowen uses in the second theme group is the variation of the actual first theme, presented in the introduction, which makes that the two theme groups be reversed, showing once again the amorphous form of the phantasy. This whole section in D major is marked *Tempo I (poco piu lento)* and *molto espressivo*, which suggests that the tempo should be slightly slower than the introduction, creating a more intimate atmosphere. The theme in D major starts with an F sharp on the G string, instead on the D string, to obtain a softer, more expressive sound, and at the same time to give space for a gradual accumulation of intensity in sound, as the melody gets to the high register of the viola.

The *appassionato* is marked twice throughout this section, as well as the *tenuto* lines on several notes, indicating the direction of the phrase. For a good execution of this passage, the bow distribution is very important. The tenuto is marked on the third or the last eighth note of the 6/8 bar, most of the times under a legato, which means that the tenuto will be made almost

exclusively at the extreme parts of the bow (either the tip or the frog), therefore, the viola player needs to be very careful with the ‘economy’ of the bow, having a good balance between the quantity and the pressure. In this case, the continuous vibrato can also help to achieve a rounded, warm sound and avoid putting too much pressure on the tenuto notes.

In bar 110 the development of the first movement starts, manufacturing various motives presented in the introduction. In bar 132 however, a new technical element is introduced, an explosive, quite challenging *Risolto* double-stops passage in the high register of the viola, combined with some well-known rhythmical motives from the exposition. The difficulty of this passage is not to run away from the high pitch intervals, even if they are very uncomfortable to play and can make the player feel insecure. Even so, the solution is always to give the notes more space (play longer bows) and articulate the notes very well from the right hand at every interval change.

The development continues in a fortissimo dynamic, without settling around a specific key centre, accumulating tension, always accelerating, until the climax of the first movement, in bar 169. This section is not so difficult technically, as it is from an interpretative perspective. At first it might be seen as a normal fast passage, concluding a section of the piece, but looking from the perspective of the fantasy narrative, this passage gives a completely different significance. The representation I chose for this passage was the moment when Cinderella is running away from the ball, before her magical gown and the horse carriage disappear. This representation helped me suggest the accelerating movement of the passage. Not only because of the marked *accelerando*, at the very end of the section, but because of the structure itself. Over the course of the last thirty bars of the development, the viola plays chromatic ascending sequences, always in fortissimo. The rhythm gets diminished from eighth notes to doubled sixteenth notes, followed by an ascending scale, concluding the segment on the highest note played so far, a high register D flat on the A string.

The recapitulation is the exact repetition of the exposition, in F major, followed by another short transition, directly to the second movement of the reduced sonata. I found it very interesting that this time Bowen chose to repeat the exposition identically in the recapitulation, without making any alterations of the musical material, as he had done in other fantasy works. This led me to think again at the narrative of the *Cinderella*, only to realise that it suits the development of the story as well, since she got back to her poor, unfortunate destiny right after getting home from the ball, taking back her role as a servant and her usual duties, without anyone noticing any change in her behaviour. Having this idea in mind, I tried to play the recapitulation identically as in the introduction, with no phrasing changes at all, to underline the narrative of

the story, although other interpreters choose to make small changes in the recapitulation, to create a different atmosphere, playing more piano, in a calm, conclusive style.

The transition, also inspired by Cinderella's theme, is divided in two segments: the viola discourse, almost like a lamentation, followed by ten bars of solo piano, the only solo of the piano in the entire piece. I imagined this short transition as a small dialogue between Cinderella (the viola segment) and the Fairy Godmother (the piano solo), discussing the events, with Cinderella expressing her sadness for having to leave so suddenly, and the Godmother comforting her, in a caring, kind way.

In the calm, resigned atmosphere generated by the transition, the phantasy is getting into the second 'movement', *Poco adagio*, modulating to the key of D flat major. The whole music material is completely new, even the bar changes from a ternary 6/8 to a binary pulsation of 2/4. This short section has a delicate character, as the agogic and dynamic elements suggest (*pianississimo, dolcissimo, con sordino*), continuing the intimate dialogue between these two characters of our story. Throughout the whole section the piano is carrying the viola, offering a soft harmonic support for Cinderella's lamentations (the viola part), marked *espressivo* until the end of the movement. In bar 259 there is a *poco rubato* when the character changes from a *molto espressivo* to *appassionato*, marking the climax of the movement. The highest note of this movement is another D flat, in the high register of the viola, the same as it was in the first movement, but with a totally different character.

This middle section of the phantasy can be interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on everyone's imagination. Personally, I chose to play it as simple as possible, and, as close to the human voice as possible, to recreate the dialogue previously mentioned.

A hint for me to help create the dialogue, besides the obvious dialogue between the two instruments involved, was the expressive slurs, that are always prolonged over the next bar, giving direction and pathos to the discourse. Besides that, I tried to choose suitable fingerings as well, playing as much as possible on the same string, changing the colour gradually. Since I had to make a lot of shifts to avoid changing the string, I took advantage to make some glissandos as well, for a more *espressivo* effect.

The third and last movement of this amorphous piece, *Allegro vivo*, creates a contrasting atmosphere from the previous two. I could not help but associate this movement with the prince character, from the story of Cinderella, searching for his beloved princess throughout the kingdom. The positive, confident character of this movement is partly given by the return to the bright key of F major, the fast tempo and the short articulation of the notes, totally different from the two previous movements.

The form has a binary structure, ABCA, preceded by a short introduction (mm 283-291) and concluded by a short, triumphal recall of the very first theme, in the beginning of the Phantasy, right before the ‘happy ending’ Coda.

The principal motif in the A section consists of a simple, joyful melody, made up by a mixture of eighth notes and sixteenth notes, that will be developed later, throughout the whole movement. The theme has an ascending character, both for the direction of the melody and the crescendo from *mezzo forte* to *forte*.

The articulation of the short notes is changing over the movement, conferring contrast to the sections. There is a preference for a very short ‘crispy’ articulation of the short notes, regardless of the tempo, but always with a clear direction, from the beginning until the end of the movement. There is a constant dialogue between the two instruments throughout this section, a question-answer structure, suggesting a strong sense of excitement.

The B section (mm. 314-338) modulates to the relative key of D minor, using a motif of the theme in the previous section. Here the character is firmer, the articulations a little longer, some interpreters choosing to play the whole passage in a *pesante* manner, to create contrast, and the dynamic changes more unexpected. Although the score only shows a couple of *fortes*, always *marcato* and some crescendos, the music clearly permits and asks for more diversity. I think Bowen intentionally left this section vague, giving space to the interpreter to create his own picture. The existing recordings show a big diversity in the interpretation of this passage. The bars are structured two-by-two, in the typical question-answer form, with the articulations always changing. This normally comes from reversing the bows on purpose or doing different *legatos*, but also from contrasting dynamics and unexpected accents. There really is no ‘convention’ regarding this section, every recording sounding slightly similar but transmitting a completely different message, and this is exactly what gives the special touch of the piece.

Section C (mm. 339-354) is a short substitute of a development, mixing motives of the previous sections, at the same time preparing the recalling of the A section (mm. 355-373). The rest of this section, even though harmonically it stays in F major, transitions to an explosive recall of the opening theme of the piece, played by the piano part, with the viola playing some figurations, consisting of scales and arpeggios, the expression of extreme joy and release after a long, adventurous journey. This passage, as well as the whole final section should be played with as much freedom as possible, taking the time to play each note, since the tempo is gradually slowing down, with several indications such as *poco piu largamente*, *L'istesso tempo*, *Piu largamente e appassionato* etc. The only exception is a short six bar *Molto allegro* (403-409), beginning right on the peak note of the climax, an F note in the high register of the viola. I

always envisioned this moment as the final encounter of Cinderella and the prince, after his desperate search for her, therefore I tried to enjoy these few bars as much as possible, taking my time to prepare the peak, and not run away like most majority of interpreters do because of the uncomfortable position. Once the climax is done, the *Molto allegro* comes in a fast tempo, the last little contrast of this colourful piece, suggesting, in my opinion, the culmination of joy and extasy of the reunited lovers, and the desire of running away before they get separated again. The last chromatic scale played by the viola in the Coda, accompanying the theme on the piano part suggesting just that, before the three conclusive chords in the home key of F major.

Overall, the *Phantasy* op. 54 by York Bowen is a short masterpiece of emotions, a beautiful love story beyond limits that uses sounds instead of words in the story-telling process. The freedom of structure and harmonic trajectory that characterizes the piece allows the interpreters to create their own story and express it in the most convincing way possible. To me, the study of this piece opened new horizons in the music interpretation area, reminding me that the purpose of an interpreter is to captivate the audience and express emotions and ideas through playing beautifully, not just technically correct.

II.3 Viola sonata no. 1 in C minor p. 18

This sonata is the first large-scale work for viola ever written by Bowen and had a big success from its premiere to this day, even though some critics did not receive it very well for the late romantic style, as well as the “lack of understanding” of the viola. (Concerts, *London Times No. 37712* (May 20, 1905), p. 8). Even so, most of the reaction for the sonata were very positive, highlighting the “great talent and skills” of the composer, as well as the “rational and musicianly manner” of developing the musical material. (London Concerts: Viola Recital,” *Musical Times 46 No. 748*, pp. 403-404).

The premiere of the sonata was made by Bowen and Tertis, on May 19, 1905, at the Aeolian Hall, in London, at the rise of Tertis’ viola crusade, being his first solo recital as a violist, and the first among many fruitful collaborations with Bowen. Other performances of the sonata include a recital with Tertis’ student, J. S. Lockyer on April 3, 1906, a recital of Tertis and Bowen on October 30, 1906, and again in 1917, 1918 and sometime between 1919 and 1921, in Berlin, showing that the duo kept this work as a part of their repertoire all throughout their collaboration. (Lanier, W. K. (2020). *The viola music of York Bowen: Lionel Tertis, York Bowen, and the rise of the viola in early twentieth-Century England*, p. 28-29).

The piece was for sure a big surprise, for the audience at the time, as well as a source of inspiration for other contemporary composers, since it was the first notable large-scale piece ever written specifically for viola, besides the well-known two sonatas of Brahms, that were not even dedicated to the viola in the first place, but served as an inspiration for the elaboration of the two viola sonatas of York Bowen.

The romantic character, the strong discourse and the diversity of colours and moods exposed throughout this piece makes it a fascinating work that every viola player should have in their repertoire regardless of their age or experience.

In my opinion, the technical level of the sonata is very well balanced, not too easy, nor too hard, making it just perfect to explore the endless possibilities of both the interpreter and the instrument itself. I was able to discover some ‘hidden’ aspects of my playing which I could not see before discovering the fascinating repertoire of York Bowen, that deeply resonated with my soul and helped me grow as a musician in every aspect of this profession.

II.3.1 Interpretative analysis

Although I was not aware yet of many aspects of interpretation that I discussed in the analysis of the Phantasy op. 54 (since I first started studying the sonata and then the Phantasy), I realised that my intuition, mixed with the influence of several recordings to which I was listening at the time, unconsciously led me to the same path of interpretation. The idea of a specific *narrative* followed me from the very beginning of the process of understanding this piece, I just didn't know how to concretize it before I started to delve into the Phantasy. Therefore, I will further explain how I transitioned from a very technically limited perspective to an expressive narrative, where I put my emotions to the service of the music, and not vice versa. This analysis will focus on specific moments of the sonata that I found particularly challenging and rewarding at the same time in the context of the 'phantasy', rather than explaining the whole microstructure of the piece. I will only limit my analysis to details that I find relevant to sustaining my interpretative ideas and make it more convincing.

The 28-minute-long standard sonata has a fast-slow-fast structure, presenting some small fluctuations of form in every movement. The key element of the first movement, *Allegro moderato* is the first theme, in the key of C minor, played by the viola in bar three, after the short introduction of the piano. Just as the first theme of the Phantasy, this C minor theme will be the pillar of the whole first movement. The 'fragmented' mysterious character of this theme is made-up by small, interconnected motives, without a stable direction, instead of a linear melody. The very first bars of the piece look more like a succession of musical cells and motives, rather than a solid theme.

Having an unstable character and trajectory, the first theme presents various phrasing options. Although Bowen marks some dynamic indications, the articulation of each motif can be changed depending on the intention of the interpreter, if it maintains a consistency of the musical idea and creates a convincing discourse. In the first bar of the viola part, marked *mezzo forte espressivo*, Bowen introduces the core motif of this movement, repeated identically in the second bar. One general manner which many interpreters choose is to start on the first beat with an up bow, followed by the next two beats down bow, so that they might do a little *crescendo* in the second bar, to reaffirm the motif, and prepare the next one, consisting of a succession of sixteenth notes, having an ascending design, marked *crescendo*, with the notes of the last beat marked *staccato*. This is a very comfortable choice for the first two bars, and gives the viola a chance to start in a very quiet, dark colour, however, the crescendo effect required in the third

bar is not going to be very strong, since the last beat of the third bar will be played starting on the tip, with an up bow, and it might be difficult to make even a small crescendo in that region of the bow, the whole phrase resulting as not very convincing, unless it is played by a very experienced viola player.

It is crucial to understand the structure of the first theme of the sonata, so that we can get an idea of the style and start developing a more personal narrative and really find something to say. I personally chose to start firmly from the very beginning, with a down bow, respecting all the articulations previously mentioned, and gradually passing from *staccato détaché* to the third bar, for a bigger crescendo effect. Even if this is the first exposure of the theme, right in the beginning of the sonata, I like to play it very confidently, as if it would be more of a conclusion than an introduction. This effect resembles to the *in medias res* concept of literature (the practice of beginning an epic or other narrative by plunging into a crucial situation that is part of a related chain of events) which gives us a clue of the narrative of this sonata. In fact, the whole introduction – excluding the second theme – works as a continuous evolution of the few motives of the first theme, making it more like a Development section than an Introduction, as if the beginning of the sonata would not be placing the audience at the beginning of the whole *narrative*, but rather in the middle of the story. (In media res, (n. d.) Encyclopaedia Britannica.) The exposition is also related, as it generally happens in sonata form, and the tendency is usually to make some changes of articulations in some passages, so that the narrative does not become boring and hard to listen for the audience. I preferred not to change articulations, but rather to play everything in a higher dynamic, as to make it more affirmative and sustain the arguments from the first exposition of the music material.

The second theme moves from the dark key of C minor to a warm, intimate melody in E flat major. The contrast between the two themes is evident, looking at the melody, but might result as being challenging in practice. Another place I found particularly challenging was the small transition between the first section of the exposition (the first thematic group) and the second theme. Six bars before the entrance of the second theme (bar 27 to bar 32) the very first motif of the C minor theme is used to create a quick transition from one section to another. The motif is repeated four times, which can be a little bit ‘too much’ if the viola plays it every time the same, considering that the harmonic figures played by the piano only change the chord in the last appearance of the motif. For this reason, many interpreters choose to gradually slow down and change the colour with each repetition of the motif, changing the contact point of the bow with the string closer to the fingerboard, almost like a *sul tasto* effect, and going from the opened D string timbre to the G string, for a more intimate atmosphere that prepares the extremely

lyrical second theme.

The second theme can be played in a slightly slower tempo, since there is not any *a tempo* marked on the score after the *ritenuto*, and this can help to achieve the *molto espressivo* character. Another suggestion would be to diversify the type of vibrato. The slower the theme, the more intense the *vibrato* gets, to obtain a full, round sound. I would also suggest playing the theme mostly on the C string, especially the first four bars of it, and encourage the interpreter to make use of the glissandos for the bigger shifts, taking time to prepare it and to enjoy every harmonic that's in between the bass note of the shift and the destination.

Another essential aspect to be aware of is the relationship between the viola and the piano, playing together, helping each other in creating the story and expressing it to the audience. As we all know, the sonata is, by definition, a chamber music genre, and not a solo piece, accompanied by a substitute for an orchestra. Therefore, it is extremely important to understand how the piano part, especially in Bowen's music, is not meant to create a harmonic and motion base for the development of the other instrument's discourse, but rather an equal partner in the artistic process.

Bowen was an accomplished pianist of his time, and a gifted musician and composer, for his talent of understanding the possibilities of each instrument and making use of all their qualities. He certainly knew the limitations of the viola, comparing to the piano and even to the other string instruments, but was not afraid of it at all, using these limitations more like qualities instead. For instance, whenever the viola plays a theme in a mid-range register, which might not be easily audible from the audience, Bowen is not afraid to write an accompaniment in the same register on the piano, although in some cases it might cover the melody of the viola. Also, the imitation is a technique frequently used by the composer in the elaboration of the score. Whenever the viola plays a motif, the piano repeats it in the next bar, most of the time changing the harmonic trajectory, supporting the viola and gently leading it to new key centres, in the story-telling process.

It is rather fascinating how he manages to create an organic and balanced relationship between the two instruments even in this type of situation, articulating once again the equality of the instruments in the elaboration of the narrative, showing that the purpose of the instruments is to serve the music, and not the opposite.

The development of this movement is characterized by the *harmonic instability*, rarely cadencing in a single key, extending and reusing the motives of the exposition in all types of ways. Throughout this section the character changes several times in a short time, allowing the viola especially to make use of all the qualities that the instrument possesses, playing both fast

and slow passages, high and low range themes, passing from a stormy, adventurous character to extremely sensitive melodies. The interpreter should be ready to take time to explore both his and his instrument's possibilities, being a perfect example of self-growth as a musician.

Personally, my biggest challenge regarding this section was the fragment between bar 102 and 115, right in the middle of the movement, for the very sudden change of character. From a heroic, *fortissimo* passage in octaves, in the high register of the viola, to a subito *piano dolce* melody that rapidly changes into *appassionato* in an even higher register, recalling the second theme from the exposition. At first, I thought I might divide the whole passage in two, practicing each one separately until I solved the technical problems, then find a way to connect them and change characters without breaking the melody in the middle. For the first part of the passage, the obvious difficulty with the intonation initially took my attention, until I realised that the problem was not the wrong placement of the fingers, but the unbalanced weight of the bow on the two strings, which led to the lack of the rhythmic articulation as well. Therefore, I started to practice extremely slowly, to find the good balance of the bow on the two strings, in a piano dynamic, then slowly increasing the tempo. After I got the right balance, I started getting closer and closer to the real tempo, and this solved the intonation problem more than practicing it in the 'traditional' way. Once this process completed, I was surprised to notice I was playing in a character I liked, without even thinking much about it. So, with these ideas in mind, I started practicing the second half of the passage in the same way, trying to find the root cause of the problem, and not treating the surface one. My goal was to create a *dolce* character that quickly changes to *appassionato*, so I started playing the beginning of the theme (which I chose to do in a fixed position) on loop, repeating it without stopping, starting with the bow on the bridge, and with each repetition moving it towards the fingerboard, taking care of the string change as well. This way of practicing helped me explore the different sonorities I could use and choose the most suitable one. Of course, I started practicing *non vibrato* then gradually adding a little bit of it and changing it until I found the one to fit the colour I wanted to create. For the next three bars of the theme, that basically repeated the same melody, changing to the *appassionato* character, I also practiced on loop, but this time I chose to play the melody on the same string for a more opened colour, which led me to use a lot of changes of positions. So, I started practicing extremely slowly, with a *glissando* on each shift, first without rhythm, then rhythmically, playing it on loop, until I was able to find the character I wanted, and keep the *glissando* only in the places where it made sense. Once this second step was completed and I found the character and colour for each passage, I focused on connecting them into a big phrase, suddenly switching from a mood to the other. The only way I was able to do that at the time

was to make a small crescendo on the bar before the piano *dolce*, not increasing the pressure on the string, but the speed of the bow and when I was close enough to the frog, slow down a little bit and quickly make a shift with the left hand, basically playing the same note with two different fingers. It allowed me to naturally and instantly change the type of vibrato to create a different colour and gave me the opportunity to take away any pressure on the bow and start as piano as possible the next bar. This must have been one of the most difficult passages to overcome in the entire movement, and surely required the biggest amount of work, as I would have to constantly repeat the process to keep the reflex in my hands and continuously improve the coordination, but it was, certainly, the most rewarding feeling to be able to play it beautifully and freely, without tension and fear of missing out the point of this crucial moment.

Another passage that presented some challenges in terms of coordination between the left and right hand was from bar 128 to bar 143. The first four bars of the passage consist of an ascending sixteenth-notes motif from the first theme exposed two times, as to make the transition to the climax of the movement. The first time the motif appears there are *staccato* indications on the first two sixteenth notes, suggesting that the best way to play them is with a short down-bow, under the middle section of the bow, for good articulation. The second motif, however, should not be played in the same manner for a couple of reasons. First, the *staccato* articulation disappears, and another group of sixteenth notes is added on the last beat of the bar, with a *crescendo* marked under it, as to accumulate more tension for the climax moment. I played the second motif closer to the tip region of the bow, slowly increasing the speed of the bow, rather than the pressure, for a more organic crescendo, making sure that I would get right at the frog, prepared for the series of accents that follow in the next passage.

From bar 131 to bar 143 there is a typical dialogue passage between the two instruments, with the viola playing on the beat and the piano off-beat. Every beat of the bar is marked by a strong accent that both instruments should play equally in intensity and articulation, constantly increasing the tension. In bar 140 the viola goes from single notes to four notes chords on each beat, but with the same articulation. This figuration appears two times identically. The first time the indication in the score is to play every chord with a down bow, *furioso*, while the second time there is no articulation marked. I chose to play the second time in a normal down-up-down-up succession, connecting every chord with the next one, to diversify the character, going from *furioso* to *pesante*, but with the same energy as the first time. Changing the articulation for the second figuration creates a bond between the previous *fortissimo* character of the climax and the next *diminuendo* calming down the melody, that transitions to the recapitulation section.

The first forty bars of the reprise of the movement are a perfect repetition of the exposition, so

it is preferable to make small changes in terms of dynamics, maybe some articulations, calming down the storm of the development, and suggesting that the story is slowly coming to an end. The second theme also changes from E flat major to the brighter E major key, suggesting a resolution of the conflict, giving the auditory sensation that the movement has ended. But of course, Bowen has another surprise prepared, as he continues to a transition marked *animato*, right after the end of the second theme, rapidly moving back to the same old C minor key, closing the first movement with a resilient recall of the first theme. The very last bars of the movement introduce for the first time a slow *glissando* from the high E note, on the D string, to the central C note, on the G string. The purpose of this *glissando* could be an ironic comment, right at the end, leaving the audience rather intrigued than resilient, suggesting that the story did not come to an end. For the effective execution of the glissando, I started it with the second finger in the seventh position on the D string, and slowly performed the glissando passing through every note I got to the first position and played the C note with the third finger on the G string. Most interpreters would rather perform the glissando with the third finger, as it is more comfortable and natural for the hand, but I chose to play it with the second finger instead, to avoid a sudden break while changing the finger from one string to another and give the impression of a continuous glissando until the bottom note, even with the change of the string, all this process respecting the *crescendo – diminuendo* indication from the beginning until the end of the *glissando*.

Although the technical level of this movement is not very high, the music is extremely well written, full of surprises, and gives the interpreters a lot of space to create and tell a story, easily sharing it with the audience. It is a huge opportunity for the viola players to continuously develop their creativity alongside the interpretation skills, which is why I chose this piece in the first place, while still being a student, keeping in mind that I still have a lot to learn and the fact that you can never know too much about any subject.

The second movement can be described as a slow development of beautiful melodies, on top of some harmonic games, consisting of mediant key relationships and seventh chords, so typical in Bowen's music. From this extremely beautiful and rich movement I will only extract a few characteristics that support the correlation between this movement and the fantasy genre.

In this movement I found a different dimension of the fantasy, an association with the visual arts, rather than the literature. Although it has a normal tripartite structure, the way Bowen develops the musical ideas is very free and mysterious and offers more subtle sensorial impressions than the previous movement. The diversity of agogic elements used (such as *allargando*, *agitato*, *rubato*, *espressivo*, *ritardando* or *accelerando*, *dolcissimo* etc) make the

structure slowly dissipate in the fluid and vast development of the music material. I chose the word **fluidity** as a keyword for this movement, and different images of the water as a guideline for the interpretation. To create contrast with the first movement, I avoided creating an elaborated narrative this time, focusing on the essence of the sound, and how to obtain visual and auditory effects instead. It helped me to think about the purity and perfection of nature, that doesn't need the human touch to exist and function. No wonder why nature was the biggest inspiration of artists from the oldest times and keeps fascinating them until this moment.

In this movement, the viola tends to have more of a soloist role, the piano accompanying it most of the times, creating a magic atmosphere. Therefore, I associated the viola part with the different hypostases of the water in nature, and the piano with the nature itself: the fields, the plants, the sun, the light, the wind, every element that influences the movements of the water.

The first theme, *Poco lento e cantabile*, in A major, is played by the viola from the very first bar, in a slow tempo, suggesting a static image of the water, like a small lake. The piano line is also limited to only marking the harmonic change, not making any rhythmical movement. The calm, intimate *cantabile* melody, is played once more from bar 11, in the mediant key of C sharp minor, in a more fluid manner. The dynamic changes from *mezzoforte* to *forte*, the tempo goes a little bit forward, and instead of a little to no change in intensity throughout the theme, this time the melody is constantly accumulating and losing tension, with *crescendo* and *diminuendo* marked every two bars. The piano part also goes from simple harmonical pillars to a counterpoint-based accompaniment, like a breeze that makes the water move a little bit. Throughout the whole exposition, Bowen keeps surprising us with little unexpected details, meant to impress and move the heart of the audience. A beautiful effect used several times during this movement is the decreasing of the dynamic while the melody slowly goes to the higher register of the viola, that creates a very intimate atmosphere.

The B section of this movement starts in F major, constantly changing to different keys, and changes from the 2/4 beat to a ternary 6/8 beat, suggesting an even more fluid character, more like a river flowing. Every phrase is either an accumulation or a release of energy and tension, while the tempo is constantly fluctuating, creating an ambiguous atmosphere, almost like a constant improvisation. The key element that gives this section an 'amorphous' character comes from the piano part that creates the circumstances for the viola to play freely, allowing it to create different images and moods.

In terms of technical aspects, perhaps the biggest challenge throughout this movement was to create long phrases, and to maintain the tension in the passages marked *agitato* or *appassionato*. What helped me was working the bow distribution and finding the good contact point of the

bow with the string. In the forte, appassionato moments I would play with the bow right in the middle of the distance between the bridge and the fingerboard, if I was in a low position and getting closer to the bridge as I reached higher positions, to give more space for the string to vibrate and obtain a rich sound.

The A section comes again in bar 117, going back to A major, the two instruments playing in a two-against-three rhythmical relationship this time, once again giving us a clue about the motion of the water. After repeating the exact same material of the exposition for the first 28 bars of the reprise, the melody culminates with an agitato passage, almost like a climax for the entire movement, full of tension, marked *appassionato* and later *con fuoco*. I associated this passage with a furious storm, that suddenly turned the whole picture grey and dark. To obtain this effect I tried to make big differences between the dynamics, using a very dense vibrato, highlighting some specific notes, especially the ones marked tenuto, and using glissandos in the descending passage from bar 151 to 161 for a more dramatic effect.

After this last dramatic passage, the ending of the sonata goes back to the initial calm, warm atmosphere, recalling the first theme one more time, played with resilience and grace. I played this passage in higher positions, avoiding the first position, to create a more intimate colour, letting the melody slowly fade away as it was getting to the end.

The third and last movement of Bowen's first viola sonata is a modified rondo-sonata in C minor, with a cyclic use of the material, as it recycles themes from the first two movements, as well as the mediant keys relationships. The whole movement uses a narrative characterised by contrasts, exploring a large palette of moods and colours, from dramatic, furious passages to extremely romantic and delicate melodies, each section suggesting a different step in the narrative. The sudden contrasts between section or even phrases urge me to describe it as a 'beautiful irony', for its playful and childish character, even after a very dramatic statement. This perspective can be a helpful tool for the interpreters, to be able to go beyond the technically difficult passages and create an unexpected narrative that will engage the audience in the artistic process. It might be useful to think of this movement as a theatre play, where the facial expressions (like a smile, a frown look or a silly face) and the articulation of the words (notes, in our case) are key elements for the success of the artistic moment. The narrative I chose for this movement is a basic fantasy structure, the evolution of a main character, put on a series of trials, the action being placed in fictional space and time.

The exposition begins with a recitative-like introduction in C minor, consisting of broken scales that pass through the whole registers of the viola, accumulating tension to prepare the entrance of the first theme that is a reminiscence of the first theme from the first movement. This quick

exposition echoes the ‘in media res’ technique, as I explained in the first movement, placing the listener in the middle of the action rather than the beginning of a story. I tried to play the whole introduction rushing the tempo a little bit, to create a dramatic effect, as it was getting into the first theme. The piano offers a tremolo harmonic base that allows the viola to get out of the rigorous beat. The first theme section introduces and develops some key motives for the whole movement, gradually accumulating tension, as it goes from the *mezzo forte* to *fortissimo*, culminating in a broken chords passage that slowly goes all the way down to the *piano* dynamic, preparing the coming of the second theme. Even though this section appears to be very clear and straight-forward in terms of structure and phrasing, the agogic and dynamic design creates a path for the story to flourish.

One aspect I found very important throughout the movement is the short notes articulations. If they are marked *staccato* or *détaché* I would generally play the non-legato eighth-notes passages very short and articulated, to avoid losing the tempo, which is a big danger on this long and demanding movement, and to create its’ playful character.

Moving forward to the second theme group, it has an ambiguous sonority, since it’s made-up of a calm melody played by the viola on top of a succession of chromatic descending seventh chords, which again can be interpreted as an ironic situation, rather than an over romanticized phrase. I imagine the whole second theme group as an illusion that comes in the way of the main character of a story, as a trial he must face in the evolution process. Elements like *tenuto*, *glissandos* on certain shifts and the strong accents of some notes in the context of long-line melodies clearly show the different character from the first theme group.

I also noticed that the whole movement alternates between three main models: the dramatic, appassionato spirit of the introduction, the brave yet immature spirit of the main character – as presented in the first theme – and the tempting, mysterious character of the second theme. The relationship between these three characters and their succession throughout the movement can be compared to the stages of a fantasy story, clearly showing the evolution of the protagonist, the battle between good and evil and in the end, the victory of the main character. In this sense, the exposition of the rondo-sonata works as the presentation of the two main characters and the already existing conflict between them, the middle part – functioning as a development section – presents the conflict and the continuous battle between good and evil, that eventually has the good character evolve into an accomplished person, capable of resisting the evil, and finally, the mysterious Coda, recalling some of the immaturity of the main character even after the whole maturation process he had to face. only to confuse the audience before the last victorious recall of the two most vibrant themes of the sonata, binding together to finally wrap

up the whole story.

Having all these ideas in mind helped me connect more with the music and try to find the right ways to express my ideas and feelings throughout the musical material. I constantly tried to differentiate the three main characters previously mentioned, although I struggled a lot to do it, since I was not confident enough in my right arm technique, especially when it came to finding the good articulation of the short notes and maintain the flow of the music. I obviously started practicing with and without metronome, I tried to avoid too big shifts, since it would cause my hands to lose coordination, jumping from one note to another while playing a fast staccato passage, so I tried to make many smaller shifts than a big one if needed, and work a lot on the groups of four eighth-notes with two legato to staccato articulations, that I found most difficult, especially if they involved changing strings. For this last problem I would often practice extremely slowly, reversing the bowings, playing all the notes articulated, even under the *legato*, or all of them *détaché*, playing with the bow reversed, holding it from the tip instead of the frog, to work on weight balance, playing while walking slowly through the room to improve the coordination and mental focus and to help my body relax, as it would become extremely tense when these kinds of passages approached. This was more of a mental problem to overcome, since my brain would sense the ‘fear’ of those specific passages and automatically send me into the fight or flight mode. There is still plenty of work worth doing in this sense even today for continuously improving these aspects of the mechanics of playing, but one thing that helped me significantly to distress was switching the focus from the technical aspect of the music to the expressive one. Questions like ‘What do you see in this passage?’ ‘What message do you want to share with your audience?’, ‘Could you compare this passage with an animal or a colour, or anything else?’ helped me put a purpose beyond just the correct execution of the notes and at least enjoy the music myself, which I think is the key when we seek to engage with the audience.

The same kind of issue arrived in every section of this movement, especially in the beginning when I did not have a specific idea in mind, and I was extremely stressed with the technical aspects and the short time I had to succeed in the preparation of the piece. In the second theme especially, it was hard for me to find the tone colour I wanted and diversify it, because I would always stop and work shifts that were not accurate enough and completely lose the phrasing of sight. I only became aware of this aspect when I recognized that I was playing very well but just ‘missing the fantasy’. And that was a turning point for the whole learning process of this piece. I eventually started to find a purpose and put my trust in it, and my playing gradually changed. I started to explore my bow more and find new ways to produce the sound I wanted

just for the fact that I had a real representation in mind. The difficulties I would face with the second theme almost disappeared by taking care of the bow distribution – diminishing the weight I put on the bow for the big dynamics and focusing more on the speed of the bow – and of course, trying to maintain a continuous *vibrato*, especially in the case of the same note repeated several times or when I had to make a shift. Working on a continuous *vibrato* surprisingly helped me keep my left hand relaxed throughout the whole passage, and this way the troublesome shifts became more comfortable to play, so I could finally put my focus more on the bow control than the left hand.

Next, a short Recitativo section makes the transition between the end of the Reprise and the Coda. This is the only Recitativo incorporated throughout the whole Sonata, where the material is almost entirely played *ad libitum* and *molto appassionato*. The transition from the slow tempo that the piano (introduced right after the last notes of the viola in the climax) to an even slower one in bar 308 (*piu Large*) suggest the passing from the *euphoria* felt by the main character after the battle, to a calm, victorious feeling. Next, the viola plays a solo recitativo, accompanied only by some dramatic chords of the piano. This section is like an internal dialogue of the main character, for the structure of the phrases. There is a first statement, with an open ending, followed by a response, with a conclusive character, also given by the viola. This process is repeated in a second phrase, played on a higher note, showing the ascendent trajectory of the melody, and the lightened colour of the viola timbre. One last time viola statement concludes the recitativo and makes the transition to the Coda. I see this short section as a reflection of the main character over his evolution process, from the very beginning of his journey, that might be at the very beginning of the Sonata, until the last confrontation with the evil forces.

The Coda is a Presto section, made up of different motives of the introduction, in a joyful yet mysterious character. The whole section can be interpreted as a traditional dance, on a typical feast, as a celebration of the success, at the end of the story. The viola melody is simple, mostly consisting of eighth notes and sixteenth notes, played *leggiero*, with small crescendo – diminuendo waves, to suggest the joyful dance of the main character and all the possible secondary characters he met on the way and contributed to his evolution. At the very end of the sonata, Bowen combines two of the most vibrant themes of the sonata (the first theme of the first and the third movement) binding together to finally wrap up the whole story. The theme suddenly passes from *piano* to *fortissimo*, in a continuous *accelerando* until the end, as if it would like to resume the whole ocean of emotions expressed throughout the Sonata. The last two *sforzatto* chords simultaneously played by the viola and the piano close the whole sonata in a victorious and joyful attitude.

Another aspect I find essential to discuss in this movement is time management, that has always been a big issue of mine. The reason for that is the bigger size of the third movement, compared to the previous ones. I had difficulties on breaking it into sections and practice one different section at a time, instead of just playing from the beginning every time I would practice this movement and see what problems may rise on the way. Organising my practice was the ultimate solution for me to be able to get until the end of this part, even though I would feel my playing was less confident in any section of the movement than it was in the exposition, which is clearly the one that I put most work into. Of course, after realising this big issue, I started making another mistake which was finding the most difficult passages and practicing mostly those, which again led me to practicing mostly the Coda – and particularly the very ending of the sonata – and not focusing too much on the whole development, which represents more than two thirds of the whole movement. This was one big, practical lesson I learned in a rather unpleasant way, but one I will remember further in life.

Overall, this Sonata is such an inspirational and fitting piece of repertoire for any viola player, at any stage of their career, for its beautiful diversity, for the challenges that push the limits of the player and arouses curiosity, an essential quality for continuous evolution.

Even if the historical importance of this work is still overshadowed by more popular works composed afterwards, this Sonata certainly designed a new path on the evolution of modern viola playing and challenged the composers of those times to approach this persecuted instrument, bringing it to its well-deserved status among the other stringed instruments.

II.4 A comparison of the *Phantasy in F Major op. 54* and the *Sonata no. 1 in C Minor op. 5*

Since we are discussing two works for viola and piano of the same composer, it is easy to find similarities between the two pieces, especially in such a particular musical figure like York Bowen. Compared to other composers of his age he had clearly stayed faithful to the tradition of the romantics, almost rejecting the new music expression and style that began to flourish throughout the world such as the Atonalism of Wagner and Strauss, the Dodecaphony or the Serialism promoted initially by Schonberg, Berg and Webern and many others.

Despite the fashion of modern western society, deeply influenced by the wounds of the two World Wars, Bowen was one of the few composers who remained faithful to their beliefs, and did not want to go with the trends, although it eventually cost him the popularity and the appreciation he had obtained in his early career. Both the Phantasy and the First Sonata share the innate romantic and creative spirit of Bowen, a testimony of his passion for music above all things.

In terms of form both works share similar characteristics, since the Phantasy can be described as a reduced sonata form, and both works present deviations from the classical sonata form. Also, the harmonic language is deeply influenced by the mediant related keys as well as the seventh chords, in the sections where the discourse is established in one key centre, and not rapidly passing from one key to another, as it usually happens in both works, especially in the middle sections of each movement.

Another big similarity is the high lyricism found in both works, expressed by the deep emotional melodies that came out so naturally for Bowen, like the first theme of the Phantasy, enriched so beautifully in the development section, the whole middle part of the Phantasy or the first theme from the second movement of the Sonata. Terms like *molto espressivo*, *appassionato* or *dolce* cannot be missing from any lyrical passage of these two works, giving a clue for the interpreters about the composer's passion. Even though these passages have clear specifications of interpretation, there is always a place for the interpreter to incorporate their own ideas and connect with the music in their own ways. It's no wonder why in many lyrical passages like the ones previously mentioned Bowen often writes a *rubato* – one of the few real characteristics of a fantasy – indicating the freedom expected from the interpreters, to enrich the music even more and give it a personal touch.

The *narrative* character of Bowen's music is also clearly seen in both the Phantasy and the Sonata. It is easy to put his music into words and create a whole complex story from the structure of these two pieces. The musical discourse is constantly moving towards a certain point. The accumulations and releases of tension indicate a constant movement, the motion of a heart that is alive and seeking a goal. Perhaps this characteristic of Bowen's music is what I found most attractive and immediately resonated to my sensitive and curious personality.

In terms of technical aspects, both works present similar challenges for the interpreters, not only in the viola part, but also for the piano. For many viola players the scores of the two works might look not so challenging, since they are very well written and even easy to read at first sight, but after starting practicing them in detail, the violists might be surprised with the quantity of difficulties that start arising. This was my impression with every new passage that I would start to explore. One detail that I found several times in both works was Bowen's tendency to write *decrescendos* on ascending musical lines, especially on the high register of the viola. It might not look like a reason to be concerned at first sight, but it can be quite challenging to achieve in practice.

The natural tendency of a stringed instrument player is to increase the intensity of the notes as the melody ascends, playing with longer and faster bows, to compensate the lower level of harmonics naturally produced by the instrument in the high range, but in many cases, Bowen asks for the exact opposite, perhaps to challenge the interpreters to think outside the box, and find new musical ideas, or maybe to underline the *amorphous* and *mysterious* style of the phantasy – as Cobbett asked for in the Phantasy Competition he founded – although this particularity of Bowen's music can be observed in many occasions throughout the Sonata as well.

Another association I made between the two works has to do with the relationship between the two instruments involved in the interpretation, the viola and the piano. There is an almost uninterrupted dialogue between the two – the thematic material is constantly passing from one instrument to the other – each one having its personal characteristics and complementing the other. This was one of the principal elements of the *narrativity* that I discovered in Bowen's music. If the viola would have been given a more soloistic role in both works, perhaps the narrative would have changed, with a more self-oriented type of evolution for the musical discourse but having the two instruments of mostly equal roles creates more balance and encourages the listeners to see the two players as a *duo*, two companions on the way, sharing

the same story.

With this idea in mind, the interpretation process becomes more natural and simpler, and the story can flow easily, since there is no constant pressure on the viola player to always affirm as a soloist, but rather become a part of the picture, fulfilling its role. No story can come to life without the implication of at least two characters that interact with each other, and even though there's always going to be a main character in any story, his evolution is not possible without the implication of other characters. In the context of both the Phantasy and the Sonata, we might say that the viola takes the main role on several occasions, but it would make no sense at all without the complementing role of the piano, that always carries the viola throughout the way, and gives it the space to affirm, without getting in the shadows at all.

Although there are lots of similarities between the Phantasy and the Sonata, what ultimately gives them the same character is how the musicians present them to the public through their personal interpretation. My choice was to emphasize the fantasy character in both works, and not romanticize the pieces excessively, as others might be tempted when they meet such romantic music for the first time. Having this perspective in mind helped me discover the most fitting technical options in every context and encouraged me to get beyond the standard romantic interpretation of Bowen's music and explore a much wider range of colours and sonorities that the viola is capable of.

Final reflections and discussions

The process of learning any new piece of repertoire almost always represents a challenge for musicians, regardless of their level. It requires a very organized and structured work, effective and constant practice as well as a good historical and theoretical foundation to start building the interpretation. At the beginning I was not aware of the importance of every aspect of practice, and how significantly they change the results. I was so used to resume my practice to technical aspects and lean on my unconscious instinct for the interpretation of the pieces that I almost considered useless reading too much about the repertoire, the composers or the musical influences of the era when the piece was composed. As a grown-up musician, I thought I generally knew the information that I needed to put a piece in context and play it well, but I just never challenged myself to overcome that ‘standard playing’ I was used to and take more out of the music. I was too afraid to connect with the music and put my own heart into it, because my focus always remained on the technical limitations I had, which lowered my confidence significantly every time I had to play in front of an audience.

Choosing to focus on Bowen’s repertoire gave me a clearer perspective over my playing, since it contains exactly what I used to struggle the most with: freedom and imagination. In the past I would always choose a repertoire I knew I could deal with, or let my teachers choose for me. The beginning of the master programme represented for me the moment I started discovering myself and assuming my choices as a viola player, although I was carefully guided by different members of the music community. The process of learning any repertoire began now with putting the music in context and understanding the structure of a piece before learning how to play the notes, and it had a big impact on my playing. Once I had a bit more context in mind and I knew what to look for in the pieces, I began to look at the score with a more critical view in mind, trying to understand what the composer wanted to say with that musical statement, and not only rely on my intuition to play it somewhat correct but not interesting or convincing enough.

Although it was a long process to also put all of that in practice and I cannot say that I completely overcame my old habit of playing mechanically and unconsciously, at least I became aware of the issue, and I started to find ways of getting over it. In this sense, the completely different background and musical approach that I found studying in a different country with extraordinary musicians made a significant difference in my experience as a

musician and guided me towards a totally different path, where I was not just learning to master some musical skills on my instrument, by playing some pieces of repertoire, but rather a storyteller, that was transmitting a message throughout the music he was playing. I no longer had to play in front of a jury to be evaluated, but in front of a real audience that was there to listen to what I had to say, and maybe that was the biggest game changer of my journey as an aspiring professional musician.

Exploring the fantasy genre in all its aspects helped me reconnect with the initial sources of inspiration that led me to the study of music and gave me the proper basis for learning these two pieces of Bowen's that cannot miss from a viola player's repertoire. While reading about this genre I immediately and almost unconsciously started making associations with the fantasy in other fields of art, being able to sketch the pillars of the interpretation even before starting to practice the pieces. This part of the process was important especially in the moments I was not physically able to practice for different reasons, because I was still feeling like I was making some progress, even without having the instrument in my hands, and not feel guilty or hopeless. Once again, the phantasy gave me a refuge in the difficult situations I had to face.

Since I chose to present the written project after I performed the final recital, it gave me a totally different perspective over my work as well as the time of reflection that I needed for the elaboration of this project. Using my own recordings from the day of the recital, as well as the other recordings available online helped me to compare the interpretations, reflect on my choices and understand the pieces on an even deeper level. Writing this project was a process of collecting and reflecting on all the information I gathered during the viola classes, masterclasses, research sessions, discussions and auditions throughout the year and explain how they impacted my learning process and my overall playing in front of the audience, which is the most important aspect to discuss in the context of an artistic interpretation project. Personally, I found this method more useful and fruitful than the traditional one, where the written project is presented before the final recital. Not having to work on both parts of the project at the same time was a big release for me, since I was not in good physical and mental condition to sustain such a large quantity of work, and I am sure I was not the only student in this position. Hopefully this method will be introduced in other music institutions from other countries too in the future, allowing the music students to elaborate their final projects as it serves their purposes best, not having to become overwhelmed by the large amount of stress this type of work requires.

More than the theoretical associations I made between the sonata and the phantasy genre, that helped me improve my interpretation and gave me a broader vision over viola playing and over music in general, I found more important the influence this project had in the internal process of overcoming some difficulties I was facing both technically and mentally. As musicians, and more specifically as instrument players, involved in the performing act rather than the creative process, we can sometimes feel less important or ‘incomplete’ since we only reproduce what other great musicians had the courage and the inspiration to put into ‘words’, like Bowen did so easily, without considering that the most important element for the music to get to the audience is the interpreter. This thought had constantly followed me over the years (especially during the period of isolation when I was taken away even the opportunity to play for an audience) and conditioned me in such a way that I was often unable to find inspiration and a real desire to improve my level of interpretation. The master’s degree project helped me reflect on all these aspects in the life of a musician and clear my mind, understand the importance of the musician in his totality and find the intrinsic motivation to continue this journey.

I believe that every music student enrolled in an undergraduate project is at risk of falling into this mental state and should be able to find a personal way to overcome this issue. Personally, this project offered me the opportunity to reflect on music from very different angles and learn a lot about it and about the beauty of human nature, that is so deeply connected to music.

For the viola players, Bowen’s repertoire opened the path to the recognition of this beautiful instrument, whose warm tone is so apposite in touching the human heart. The Phantasy in F major op. 54, as well as the Sonata no. 1 in C minor op. 5 are two great illustrations of the music’s infinite possibilities of expression regardless of the style and character of the piece, and how easily it can get to touch the audience if played sincerely, for the sake of sharing a story and your emotions, not your own musical skills.

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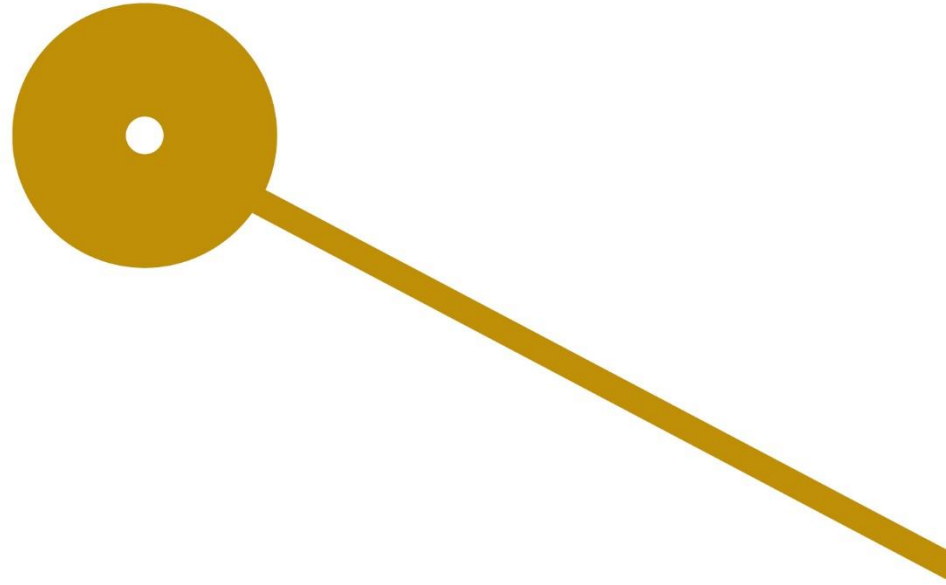
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The Fantasy Influence in York Bower's First Viola Sonata
Madalina-Maria Sogorescu-Herdes