

Ricci on Glissando
The Shortcut to Violin Technique

By Ruggiero Ricci

Edited by Gregory H. Zayia

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(Contains the bonus DVD, “Right Hand Violin Technique)

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Reviewed by Jeffrey Solow

A legendary name in the history of the violin, indeed in the history of string playing, Ruggiero Ricci “has played more concerts and made more recordings than any [other] violinist, past or present.” Considering this accomplishment alone, on top of Maestro Ricci’s artistry, anything that he has to say concerning violin playing should be of interest to every string player. The title is slightly misleading; Ricci is not referring glissandos in the usual way that we think of them. Instead, he presents—and supports—the hypothesis that Ludwig Spohr’s invention of the chinrest led to a paradigm shift in left-hand technique: rather than abiding by the current practice of organizing the fingerboard into positions and shifting the fingers and thumb as a unit by moving the arm, in pre-chinrest playing the thumb remained fixed, no shifting was involved, and the left hand “crawled” gradually up and down the fingerboard measuring against a fixed base—the thumb—while the wrist rested against the ribs of the violin. [“The modern style of playing, in which the left hand so frequently changes its position, makes it absolutely necessary to hold the Violin firmly with the chin.a contrivance of my own invention called the *fiddle-holder*, which, after having been used upwards of 10 years by myself, my numerous pupils and many other Violinists, has truly proved its utility...” Violin School, Spohr (1832)] This way of playing demanded exquisite control in navigating the fingerboard via chromatic one-finger glissandos, hence the title. Ricci asserts the likelihood of this technique being the secret referred to by Paganini in his declaration, “There is only one scale and one position.”

In writing this book, Ricci notes that his aim “is not to change the current system”...but “to show that with the invention of the chinrest we lost one of the best features of the old system, the glissando technique—which must be studied if one is to ever acquire true mastery of the fingerboard.” In addition to his historical and philosophical discussion, Ricci provides more than 50 pages of “exercises designed to increase the player’s flexibility, ear training, coordination, and crawling technique...” Miscellaneous Aspects of Technique covers topics largely applicable to all string playing such as shifting, bowing, fingering guidelines, practicing, vibrato, etc., and the master demonstrates bowing techniques on the bonus DVD. As David Oistrakh once stated: “All of us violinists must learn from the magic art of Ruggiero Ricci.”