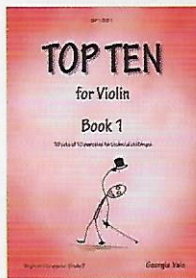
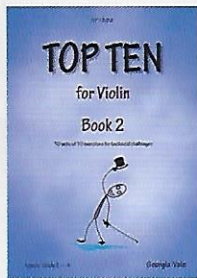


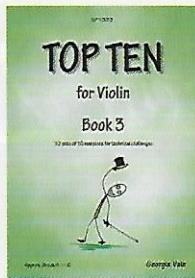
Top Ten for Violin, Books 1–3



Book 1
Georgia Vale
Spartan Press
Level up to Grade 2
ISMN 979-0579983316
£8.95



Book 2
Georgia Vale
Spartan Press
Level Grade 2–4
ISMN 979-0579983323
£9.95



Book 3
Georgia Vale
Spartan Press
Level Grade 4–6
ISMN 979-0579983330
£9.95

As a great enthusiast for Simon Fischer's volumes on violin technique, I was delighted to have the task of reviewing these three volumes. According to the information on the back cover, Georgia Vale studied with Simon Fischer for a period, and the influence in these volumes is clear. However, Georgia has very skilfully translated general principles and specific exercises from Fischer and others, often aimed at older and much more experienced pupils, into a format suitable even for the youngest learner.

The presentation is extremely clear, with clean, clutter-free pages. Off-putting lengthy explanations are entirely avoided, and instead there are a few succinct comments in the form of hints, for example, 'mordants – finger flicks', and 'ricochet – drop the bow onto the string and let it bounce'. These serve as a reminder of demonstrations and verbal explanations given by the teacher during the lesson.

Each book is divided into groups of ten short exercises (even in book 3, many are a mere two lines in length). Nine of the exercises cover aspects of both left and right hand technique, with the tenth (always called Top Ten) usually

drawing together a number of the aspects covered. The brevity of the exercises makes them easily memorable, and also opens up the possibility of pupils improvising or composing their own versions to aid understanding. Catchy titles fire the pupil's imagination and not only make the exercises appealing, but also easy to refer back to when similar techniques are encountered in other repertoire (I particularly liked 'Walk like a Lizard' for left-hand finger independence).

Vale's experience as a teacher and understanding of how pupils' minds work is shown in frequent challenges such as 'How slow can you go?' to develop slow bow speed: with metronome ticking on 60, 7–9 beats is 'ok', 10–12 beats is 'very good' and 13+ beats is 'expert'. My pupils were immediately motivated to see if they could achieve expert status! In some exercises there is even a place to write in your 'personal best'.

Techniques covered are surprisingly numerous: in Book 1, there is much focus on left-hand agility, finger independence, flexibility, and a loose left thumb as well as specific techniques such as harmonics and shifting. There is also detailed help

with bowing, such as all kinds of string-crossings, bow control and division, lifting and landing, dynamic contrasts, spiccato, retakes, tremolo, colle, accents, hooked bowing and swapping between pizzicato and arco. Book 2 develops left-hand pizzicato and offers help with vibrato, double-stops, chromatics, third position, stopped harmonics and three- and four-note chords, various bowing patterns, martelé, stopped bows, ricochet and soundpoints. Book 3 includes single-finger scales, double-stop scales, half position, second position, extensions/contractions, grace notes, mordants, trills, left-hand pizzicato, 'fast-fingered' chromatics, unisons, diminished 7ths, and up-bow staccato.

Vale explains that she intends these books to be a 'framework for study rather than a manual of technique'. This means that exercises on a specific technique, such as vibrato, for example, are dotted around throughout the books so it is not especially easy to compile a list, although the exercises themselves are excellent. However, rather than spending an intense period of lesson time and practice specifically on one technique (which in any case, never exists in isolation), working through these books in their entirety enables pupils to receive a mixed diet of highly palatable exercises.

These volumes are uniquely placed to be a central resource for any teacher who understands the importance of preparing the techniques involved in playing the violin for the young learner, in a timely manner. As such, I believe they are one of the most significant contributions to beginner repertoire in recent times.

SARAH GREINIG