

A DAY ON THE ROAD
Maud Powell Relates Experiences That Show What the Musical Artist
Has to Contend with En Route — Another Day and a Contrast
by Maud Powell

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As it Isn't—Except Sometimes

Arrived at 7 a.m. No headache. Had a good night. Train porter intelligent and helpful. Hotel seems good. Breakfast excellent. Bacon curly and crisp—broiled on one side only as requested; eggs fresh and coffee piping hot.

Interesting budget of mail. At 9:30 called up president of the musical club, who seemed bright and enthusiastic. Big house a certainty.

“G” [H. Godfrey Turner, Maud Powell’s husband and manager] went out to see the people at the piano house. They had given two concerts in their salesrooms with a talking-machine to introduce my violin records. Had also sent a machine to the high school, where the pupils were familiarized with the music and the lives of the composers thereof.

At 10:30 newspaper man called, a boy with a bright eye and plenty of imagination. We hit it off admirably and he went away jubilant.

At 12 m. a girl comes to play the fiddle. Protégée of a woman in the club, who is a Maud Powell enthusiast. The girl shows talent, intelligence and industry. She has been well taught, but her instrument isn’t worth \$5, though she paid \$175 for it. I encourage her all I can and try to help her a bit with bowing. How I admire those tense young women who work doggedly through the day, finding the path to some sort of ultimate light, be it ever so dim! This girl will be a helpful influence in the community.

12:45—a few moments in which to open suitcase and trunk, re-arrange the furniture. I put some lovely roses just received in the right place for a happy effect to live with. The room looks cheery when “G” comes back. We go down to lunch, which by good luck turns out better than usual.

See a committee at 2 o’clock—alert, sincere people—then go to the theater to prepare the stage. An understanding stage manager, who is quick to perceive the difference between a concert and a “show.”

“G” and he exchange anecdotes of actors of earlier days and are soon working together in a spirit of comradeship. Everything augurs well for the kind of concert I want to give—one with spirit, or *stimmung*, or magnetism, or whatever it is that puts the artist *en rapport* with his audience and enables him to lift them out of themselves and above their everyday life.

Three p.m., back at the hotel and soon turn in for a nap.

Six p.m., feel as fit as a fiddle. A light palatable supper in my room. After dressing out comes the fiddle. No strings broken; the instrument sounds limpid. My spirits key right up.

From that moment till the final handshake after the concert I am a different creature—happy, exalted. Something emanates from me that influences everything and everybody. Even the gum chewing stage hands stand quietly in the wings, drinking in the music to the very last encore. “G,” my pianist, Francis Moore, and I climb into our cab with shining eyes and sink back content. “It certainly was a lovely concert,” we quote—and laugh.

As It Is—Except Sometimes

Arrived at 8 a.m. Train one hour late. Stupid porter called us forty minutes before *scheduled* time of arrival—an hour too soon. No dining car. Chilly ride up to the hotel.

Slow breakfast—served cold. Coffee awful. Spirits going down to zero. Important letter with enclosures missing. Long argument with hotel clerk, as we know when letter was posted. Same old carelessness.

The clerk has put us in undesirable rooms in spite of our “wire” of yesterday. Said it arrived before he “came on” last evening. Will have to change after the next train goes out. Trunks not here yet.

Must have an interview with the man on the afternoon paper. He’ll probably be young and inexperienced, looking out for something vaudevillian in character. I feel and look like last year’s birdsnest. He’ll want vivacity and piquancy and I’ll be much too quiet in manner and earnest in thought to suit him.

I hope “G” will blow in like a breeze with his English accent and tell an anecdote. If he doesn’t I shall get faint and sick and finish with a headache.

At 12 a girl comes to play the violin. She has traveled two hundred miles to attend the concert. She “burns” with enthusiasm and I smile through my headache as she tells how she carries Kreisler’s and my picture in her fiddle-box for inspiration.

But I doubt. I ask what she is going to play and I quail at the answer— “Meditation,” She has studied my interpretation (!) And has played it “right along” with the tone-reproducing machine.

Then I live through five awful minutes of unqualified misery. The child has no tone, no taste nor musical intuition whatsoever, and plays hopelessly out of tune. What can I say? To tell the whole truth would be useless, as she could not understand. So I speak of her enthusiasm, tell her a little of my own early studies and gently give her some sound advice. Lucky that she is modest and nervous, else I should annihilate her. What a relief when she’s gone!

12:45. Move to another room; nice, expensive room, worthy of M.P.! There is a lovely garage across the way (query: shall I get my afternoon nap?) And around the corner runs a nice trolley line with pretty gongs on all the cars.

The buzz of talking and the sweet-sick smell of tobacco smoke comes up from the office below. Outside the window the mellow voice of the baggage porter is wafted upwards and the musical clatter of lovely, big sample-trunks dropping to the pavement from the baggage wagon rejoices my ear.

The telephone bell suddenly rings (it sounds like a fire alarm, for I have forgotten to mute it). There is a man below who wants to show me his violin, “It is a Stradivarius and has been in the family over a hundred years.”

Would that Strad had burned all his fiddles or thrown them into the sea! This particular one, of course, is not a Strad, nor is it worth a ten dollar bill.

2:20. After an utterly wretched and unnutritious lunch we go to the theater. The only “interior” is a magenta thing that makes one’s soul creep. The place is dirty beyond belief. The stage manager is half drunk and the boys are smoking and spitting.

“G” goes back later and by discreet tipping gets the stage mopped (for the first time in twenty years apparently) and puts down the “runner.”

The piano is placed, the setting goes up. Many details to be looked after. The unpleasant stage manager takes offense at everything that is foreign to his experience.

“All this fuss, for a one-woman show,” he grumbles. And the boys “hang around.”

3 p.m. Back at the hotel. The clerk has no back room empty where I can slip away and have some sleep. I leave strict instructions not to disturb me under any circumstances till 6 o’clock. Am in a fair way to doze off and forget the garage opposite when the telephone bell rings. A woman to see M.P. An old friend of the family. Laid out her great-great-grand aunt or something.

When I am again composed the chamber maid fumbles at the lock and wants to bring in clean towels. Again I try to get forty winks. This time it’s a hall boy trying to show a guest in the wrong room. No use swearing. Supper is late in coming up, is cold, and I try to eat with the sound of a scraping violin, a noisy cornet and an untuned piano pounding out a rag across the corridor.

My dress goes on wrong, my hair is unbecoming, and just as I want to try my fingers on the violin somebody begins “My Rosary” in gloomy sentimental fashion on the “parlor” piano. Nice inspiration for a violin recital!

Routine carries one through, however, or will power or psychic force or something.

But such a day leaves one sick in body and devastated in soul. And the public, the dear, pitiless public, sits outside and does not know. And the last bitter drop is a request from some fool for “Tipperary.” Meantime not an ounce of real nourishment has passed one’s lips for twenty-four hours, and yet strength must be kept up for the next day and the next and the next.

Moral: Don’t bring your girl up to play the fiddle.

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