

## REFLECTIONS ON PERFORMING A CADENZA BY MAUD POWELL

I have been an admirer of the violinist Maud Powell since 1987, after having read a magazine article about her which included a reprint of her own cadenza for the Brahms Violin Concerto.<sup>1</sup> It seemed odd to me that as a music student I was never exposed to the work of Maud Powell (1867-1920). Obviously, Powell was a major player on the American and international music scenes, and a pivotal figure in the history of violin playing.

My curiosity simmered until a few months later, when I received copies of Powell's biography<sup>2</sup> and her recordings--dating from 1904 to 1916--which have been reissued on compact disc.<sup>3</sup> At that point, it was only a short hop from curiosity to total fascination.

Maud Powell's biography reveals a world-class musician worthy of admiration and emulation, a most elegant role model. For me, she has become a mentor *in absentia*. She was dignified and gracious, yet tenacious and triumphant in the face of pervasive discrimination against women artists of her time. Her wonderful recordings demonstrate an awesome technical command of the violin, but always in the service of compelling musical expression.

One of the great privileges of being a performing musician is the opportunity to "get into the head" of a composer by performing his or her music. Seeking this access, I dug up the reprint of Powell's cadenza which I had filed away, and read it through on my violin. Now that I knew so much more about her, it was a touching experience to read her manuscript. Powell's calligraphy is legible, but obviously written out for her own use.

From the Baroque period through the early twentieth century, it was common practice for performers to compose their own personal cadenzas for concerto performances. In composing her own cadenza for the Brahms Concerto, Maud Powell joined a list of distinguished violinists who had already done so, notably Joseph Joachim (1879), Karl Halir (1895), Hugo Heermann (1896), Edmund

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<sup>1</sup> The ViolExchange, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1987).

<sup>2</sup> Schaffer, Karen, Maud Powell: Pioneer American Violinist. Arlington, VA: Maud Powell Foundation; and Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> The Art of Maud Powell: A "Victor Immortal" (3 Compact Discs). The Maud Powell Foundation, MPF 1-3.

Singer (1889), Franz Ondrizeck (1900), Leopold Auer (1903), and Henri Marteau (1904).

Powell's cadenza is a lovely, well-crafted gem. Considering her formidable technique, it is not surprising that the cadenza presents considerable technical demands, including fingered octaves, chromatic glissandi, trills, and all manner of double stops. The cadenza is not, however, merely a hollow virtuoso display. The musical content is convincing, with thematic material from the concerto proper presented in an improvisational style. As in her many tasteful arrangements for violin and piano (all unfortunately out of print), Powell never abandoned lyricism or classical proportion.

One oddity about Powell's cadenza manuscript is the abrupt way in which it begins, seemingly in the middle of a phrase. When played as written, the cadenza sounds strangely as though the first measure is missing. Because the manuscript is clear and complete in every other respect, this apparent omission is puzzling. However, the answer to the puzzle lies in the history of Powell's own musical education.

Maud Powell's last teacher was the great German concert violinist and pedagogue, Joseph Joachim; she almost certainly learned the Brahms Concerto in his studio. Joachim's connection with the Brahms Concerto is well known: the work was written for, and premiered by him, and it was his cadenza which was published in the original edition. In fact, Joachim's continues to be the standard cadenza performed to this day.

Powell apparently began her cadenza with the opening measure of her teacher's cadenza as a starting point. This can be demonstrated by appending Joachim's first measure onto the beginning of Powell's manuscript; the introductory phrase then takes shape and makes perfect sense. Perhaps this was a musical nod of recognition toward her esteemed teacher. In any case, once that opening Joachim-like flourish is intoned, Powell's cadenza takes its own musical direction entirely.

Recently I publicly performed the Brahms Violin Concerto with orchestra, and included the Powell cadenza; it was received with interest and delight by colleagues and audience members alike. It is moving to realize that until that performance in May 1995, her cadenza had probably not been played since Miss Powell's death in 1920.

I will perform Maud Powell's cadenza again next February and I hope many times in the future. Bringing a fine "new" cadenza which audiences have not heard before, to a beloved repertoire staple such as the Brahms Concerto provides a fresh perspective for both soloist and listeners; introducing audiences to Maud Powell is a privilege.

A sense of sisterhood and communication with a kindred spirit develops through preparing and performing the music of a person you admire--it is very rewarding. Reactions from listeners indicate that some of that pleasure is shared with others through public performance. When the composer is from a bygone era, the experience comes as close to time travel as any of us will likely enjoy in our lifetime! Always accompanying this thrill is a solemn and compelling responsibility, to present the work in the finest context possible, and with all the passion and commitment that Maud Powell exemplified throughout her distinguished career.

Rhonda Frascotti

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## Cadenza by Joseph Joachim

Appending the first measure of this cadenza to the "top" of Mand's cadenza yields a satisfactory phrase. (2<sup>nd</sup> measures of the two cadenzas are identical).

The musical score consists of ten staves of music in G major, 2/4 time. The notation includes various dynamics, articulations, and performance directions:

- Staff 1:** *singando*, *dimin.*, *p*, *lu.*
- Staff 2:** *marcato*, *ten.*, *cresc.*, *sempre f*
- Staff 3:** *ten.*, *dim.*, *ten.*
- Staff 4:** *espressivo*, *p*, *sf*, *dolce*
- Staff 5:** *poco rit.*, *p*, *in tempo*
- Staff 6:** *cresc.*, *p*, *f*
- Staff 7:** *cresc.*, *f*
- Staff 8:** *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*, *sf*
- Staff 9:** *sf*, *f*, *con brio*

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Rhonda Frascotti is a native of the San Francisco Bay Area, where she began violin lessons at the age of seven. She studied at The Eastman School of Music, with Zvi Zeitlin, at the Indiana University School of Music with Franco Gulli and James Buswell, and at the College of Marin with Charles Meacham. She holds Master's and Bachelor's degrees in Violin Performance from these institutions.

Mrs. Frascotti is currently a Principal Violinist with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, and has been a member of that orchestra since 1984. She has also served as Adjunct Lecturer in Violin at Denison University, and Associate Instructor of Violin at The Indiana University School of Music.