

*The Cape Town Argus*  
Cape Town, South Africa  
Saturday, June 3, 1905

### Stage and Show

#### INTERVIEW WITH MISS POWELL

Among the gifts that Miss Maud Powell has inherited from her racially mixed ancestry – she is English – Welsh on the paternal side and German – Hungarian on the maternal – capacity for depth of thought is one and humour is another.

So a representative discovered who called yesterday at the Mount Nelson Hotel, luckily for him at the moment when Miss Powell was about to go over some of the pieces on the programme for that evening.

So ravishing was her playing that the Pressman had difficulty in collecting his thoughts when, between musical silences, Miss Powell kindly submitted to questioning.

One of the incidents that occurred to her during the course of her career was the following:

#### Puzzled

“Somebody told me about an old lady about ninety years of age, decrepit and bedridden, living in a village where I often used to spend my summers. Wishing to do something to give the poor old lady some pleasure, I thought I would go and play for her in her room. I played for her for a long time, played with my whole soul in the music, played as, perhaps, I do not always play in public.

The old lady listened in absolute silence, till finally she turned to a neighbor who was in the room, and through her toothless gums, the while her frame shook with palsy, she breathed the inquiry in querulous, uncomprehending tones: ‘What is all this for?’ I left very soon after!”

#### Birthdays and Bombs

Miss Powell has played in all the great cities of the United States and in most of the important countries of Europe. In St. Petersburg she played before the Tsar, under very curious circumstances. It was at the principal theatre there, and on the Tsar’s birthday. The officials had given instructions that the concert must commence with the Russian national anthem, and must end with it, and if the least enthusiasm was shown by the audience at its playing, the anthem was

to be repeated even unto the third and fourth time. The officials in the theatre all turned towards the royal box and saluted while this was being done, which box was veiled by a curtain. The Tsar was supposed at the time to be out of town. But an official later on told Miss Powell his Majesty had really been in the box listening to the concert, the reason for all this mystery, she concluded, having some connection with the fear of assassination.

Miss Powell is delighted with Cape Town and with the climate. Cape Town, by the way, is delighted with the weather that she has brought along with her. It reminded her, she said, very much of the American climate. The appreciation evidenced by the audience on the opening night was eminently grateful to her, and she accepted it as a good omen.

### **Audiences and Moods**

Ms. Powell had much of interest to say with regard to audiences, to their moods, to the moods of artistes, and so on.

One could often tell, she said, the moment one went on the stage, whether the audience was “sympathetic” in the literal sense of the term, and whether or no one was going to take their fancy by storm right away. Sometimes again an artist will play in a manner that disgusts himself, and yet the audience will be delighted.

It is obvious that the whole question is complicated by the fact that the mood both of the artist and of the audience has to be taken into consideration, and that as regards both these moods, such other considerations as atmospheric conditions and so on, must be reckoned on.

Crowded audiences are always the most enthusiastic, owing to the inspiring of the whole with the feeling of magnetism, or whatever may be the correct term, flowing over and to whose stream each individual has contributed his share.

### **What in His Soul?**

After playing magnificently Dvorak’s “Humoreske,” in which the slightest touches of playfulness served but to throw into greater relief the heart – searching despair of the rest, particularly of the double-stopped passages, typical of the Slav – it breathes in the Russian national anthem even – Miss Powell remarked, “What could have been in the soul of that man to write such music? What was there struggling to find expression? This son of a butcher – an ugly, squat face – course-looking – to write such music as that!”

It was evident from the exquisite interpretation she gave the piece as well as from the moved manner in which she said this, that Miss Powell feels deeply the beauty of beautiful music.

## **Debut and Panic**

She was born in the State of Illinois, and began to learn the violin at the age of seven. Two years later she made an unconventional debut. She had been taken to a picnic, and a string band had been provided for the dancing. After listening for a while to the music, she went up to one of the violinists and murmured bashfully, "if you will lend me your violin, I will play a piece."

He looked shocked, for in those parts it was hardly considered proper for girls to play that instrument. He evidently thought that this was to be a first attempt.

"No, really, I can play," she assured him, and the instrument was handed over.

"I played Dancla's Seventh Air, with what I thought was the marvelous pizzicato with the left hand. All the people came crowding round, and when I stopped and they began applauding a sudden fear came over me at my temerity, and I ran away and was found later on far away in the wood paddling. I can still remember the intense feeling of fear that overwhelmed me when I saw a crowd and heard the applause."

## **Technique and Determination**

Miss Powell has toured the States with her own string quartette. The main details of her wonderfully successful artistic career have already appeared in these columns. To those details may be added the fact that [illegible] Miss Powell exhibits in private [illegible] course a charming personality.

To her evident strength of character may be ascribed that wonderful technique of hers, for, however gifted by nature as regards natural facility in that direction, only great determination could enable any artist to go through the drudgery necessary before such astonishing powers were attainable, as she exhibits.

Miss Powell related the following amusing anecdote. Some man had sent her for approval a violin which he described as a Strad of the rarest order.

## **A Slight Misunderstanding**

Without taking it out of the case she saw the kind of thing it was – one of those German atrocities turned out by the million, not a violin at all, but a fiddle, worth a dollar or two. The thing was packed in a rather large case of deal wood, and Miss Powell had it sent back by the "express boy." After a few days the man wrote to say that his valuable Strad had not been received, "as per your letter."

Miss Powell went down herself to make inquiries at the express office. She inquired for that deal box without avail. Search was made high and low, but no box. At last the manager came towards her with the thing in his arms, and assuming an attitude of deference and in tones almost breaking with sympathy, he murmured, "We had it on ice, madam!"

Needless to say what he thought it was!

Here ended the interview with a wonderful violinist whom all musical Cape Town desire to hear again before she leaves these sunny shores, with which and with whose audiences, she expresses herself delighted.

*From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education*