

Exchange
 Boston, Massachusetts
 December 1907

HOW MAUD POWELL FEELS TONE

Maud Powell no doubt is one of the great, very great, violinists, because all the time she has been tearing her own work to pieces and been building anew. She has been adding to her stature as interpreter, and well knows it, for, declares she, “Years ago I played the master concertos, and they had no particular meaning for me, except that they forced me to raise my standard of performance. But today these same concertos take violent hold of everything about me that feels and breathes, and, at times, as I play them, I find myself muttering: ‘Truly there is a God.’ People talk much about correct breathing as an aid to proper singing, but have you ever heard of the breathing that comes when one draws hard on the violin string and the master spirit shakes your whole frame? That *is* breathing, I tell you, such as quickens the pace, then clutches the throat almost to suffocation.”

Miss Powell has just secured, by purchase, a magnificent Guadganini, that can only be likened to a great big, whole-souled, heroic, magnetic personality. It needs no orchestra’s flood for support or for cover of its scratchiness in solo work. It stands nakedly alone, sings with the purest voice ever put into human throat, and is ready with instant response to the tenderest touch of bow.

“You simply can’t appreciate how beautiful an instrument this is,” she exclaims joyously. “Look at its big, broad chest under the bridge. No hollow, caved-in consumptive lines there that tell of the ‘one-lunger.’ Then listen,” rapping the wood with her knuckles, “do you hear that strong, healthy ring? This fellow never knows what it means to be frozen, husky, and hoarse; he’s a big, lusty boy, whom I do love to thrash and beat black and blue, so different from the other violin in the box there, which is best likened to one of those gentle, many-mooded women of the world, who become stubborn, and, for sake of peace, must be cajoled and cautiously wooed.

“Do you know,” Powell said, her voice deepening and slowing down, “that the fine Strads and Amatis of the world have almost reached tone bottom, and that the Guadagninis and Bergonzis are about the only instruments of today that have good, solid bodies? Not long since I was playing one of the most famous of all the Strads. It had cost its owner \$15,000, and he was insanely proud of it. As I started to bow gently, its tones startled me with their strange, weird beauty. Then they excited my nerves, and I began to draw heavily across the low strings, when, to my positive shock, tone power and beauty suddenly vanished. The quality had gone, Heaven knows where, and I was scraping bottom.” — *Exchange*.

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