

WOMEN AND THE VIOLIN

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There is no good reason why women should not play the violin, it having been proved that they are capable of attaining as high a degree of proficiency in that accomplishment as are men. Women are especially qualified by nature to be interpretive musicians. They are endowed with fine sensibilities, have keen intuitions and are subtly sympathetic. They, therefore, have a special faculty for discerning a composer's meaning and spirit, and for merging their own individuality in an interpretation according to his idea.

The reasons for the choice of the violin as an instrument for women are many. It is not only the most perfect of all instruments, ranking second only to the human voice, but it is also the most graceful, both in itself and its manipulation. That the proportional number of successful women violinists is small is not because woman is not endowed with a poorer quality of talent than man, or that she is inferior to him in talent or equipment, but is rather due to the fact that she rarely takes up the study of the violin with the intention of making of it a life work. She regards it usually as a temporary occupation to be abandoned whenever she shall assume the duties of wifehood and motherhood. This means a lack of earnestness and thoroughness, and of intensity of purpose, essential to the achievement of success and vital to its accomplishment.

But even these essentials would be of no avail without the requisite musical talent together with adequate physical endowment. Musical talent means, at its least, a perception of tune, a sense of rhythm, and especially when applied to the violin, the absolute essential of a true and sensitive ear, capable of cultivation to an appreciation and distinction of the nicest differences of pitch and tone color.

The requisite physical qualities are perfect health, strength and endurance--conditions imparted by a good constitution. Strength and endurance are necessary, for the many long hours of daily practice are both a great physical tax and an intense intellectual and emotional strain. The hands must be strong, supple and properly shaped for the handling of the instrument. They should be rather broad, having a wide span between the thumb and forefinger. Long fingers are not a disadvantage, especially if they thus overcome their usual accompaniment, a narrow hand, but the moderately broad hand with fingers of medium length and thickness is the better.

The instrument should be placed in the hands of the beginner at an early age--between six and nine years, according to the child's size and strength--so that the little arms and hands may gradually adapt themselves to the difficult positions while the muscles and sinews are still soft, pliable and adaptable.

The mere manipulation of the violin is so difficult that it demands, in the beginning, an almost undivided attention. This the child can give only after having acquired the rudiments of music: a knowledge of the tone intervals in scale and melody combinations, the simpler keys and their scales, also the simpler time values, together with the representations on the treble and bass clefs of these tone and time relations. These may be learned at the piano six months or a year before the violin is taken up. Piano practice should be continued with the violin study, although the work of the latter should occupy the greater part of the student's time. As the pupil advances she should begin the study of the theory of music, as thereby she not only gains a knowledge of the science of music but also derives great benefit from the mental training which such study gives.

The selection of a violin for a beginner is second in importance only to the choice of an instructor. A good instrument is a necessity for the production of a good quality of tone and for the education and training of the ear, but it is a mistake to put into the hands of a young player a violin of very great value, as a child can neither produce from such an instrument the best that is in it, nor appreciate it sufficiently to give it proper care. A good bow is also a necessity. Both violin and bow should be kept with great care and attention. Both should always be wiped off after use, and all traces of rosin dust removed. The violin should be wrapped in a handkerchief of soft silk before being placed in its leather or wooden case. The case with its precious burden should be kept in a room of moderate temperature and dry atmosphere, extreme cold and dampness being deadly foes to a violin's well-being. When exposure to cold or dampness is unavoidable a silk-lined wrap of eiderdown flannel should be used. The bow should never be rosined violently, as much friction causes the rosin to melt and consequently clot. The surface of the rosin should be kept flat and smooth, and not worn in grooves. While a very valuable instrument, such as "one of the old master's," worth from eight hundred dollars to four thousand dollars, is not a necessity to the beginner, a good instrument is absolutely essential.

The best instructors are, of course, desirable at all periods of the pupil's development, but they are indispensable at the beginning, when the foundations of all future endeavors are being laid.

The amount of daily practice must, necessarily, vary according to the nature of the child's talent and intelligence. It is of paramount importance that she work regularly and that she imbue her practice with a healthy, hearty spirit. Regularity of hours, combined with intelligent, thoughtful effort, achieves very much better results than savage, intermittent spells of practicing, or than countless hours of happy-go-lucky, absent-minded "fiddling." From two to three hours' practice every day is sufficient for the little child, while an average of four hours for the older worker will suffice. To this, however, may be frequently added an hour or two of ensemble playing.

The position to be assumed during practice hours, at least when the student is not walking to and fro, is one in which the weight of the body is thrown equally on the two feet. A sitting position is to be used occasionally so that the pupil will feel at ease in playing chamber music, for which a sitting position is the only correct and usually the only possible one. The position to

be acquired for solo playing before an audience is that in which the weight is thrown on the right foot, which should be somewhat in advance of the left. Most teachers will instruct pupils to throw their weight upon the left foot, but I have found, from practical experience, that throwing the weight upon the right foot is much better. This leaves the left side relaxed, giving advantageous freedom to the left arm, hand and fingers, for the manipulation of the finger-board, while to the right arm, through the firmness given the entire right side by the body's weight, are added greater power and vigor for the wielding of the bow.

Practicing should be done occasionally before a mirror, where one can watch the position and detect errors of manipulation; one even listens more critically, the image seeming like another player, whom it is always easier to criticize than one's self. The pupil should seek every opportunity to hear good music, and especially to hear the great violinists. To hear a master in his art is indeed a liberal education and of value equal with instruction and daily practice. To hear even a mediocre performer is sometimes valuable as a lesson in what not to do. Music of all grades, classic, romantic and popular, and of all nationalities, German, French, Russian, Scandinavian, etc., should be heard and played, to secure catholicity of taste. Of course the greatest amount of time must be given to classics, for above all must a love for the best and purest be inculcated. The student should also be encouraged to play with other students, and with musicians when possible, to the accompaniment of the piano, or in duets, trios, etc., of different combinations of instruments. The training derived from this ensemble practice is of inestimable value. The performer's sense of rhythm is thus developed. She learns to yield herself to other instruments, and the relation of one instrument to another, while her intonation becomes more acutely correct and she in every way gains in courage and consequent facility of expression.

The student should learn to memorize her music. Her repertoire will thus be always available. She will, when not confined to the printed sheet, give more thought to the content of the music and its reproduction, thus learning to play with greater freedom and authority. The pleasant effect on the listener will also be enhanced. Moreover, should the student go to Europe for further study she will certainly command greater respect and attention than she would were she a "slave to her notes."

Excellent teachers and the best of music are to be found in America, and pupils can secure the best instruction in the world in this country. But the musical atmosphere is lacking. To get this, to be surrounded by busy, ambitious fellow-students, to escape the home and social duties, to have no mistress save art, to hear more music--not better music but more and at less cost--in short, to be in a musical atmosphere conducive to profitable work, and much of it, the student must go abroad. It is in Germany, to my mind, that the embryo musician will secure the best musical foundation. There she will acquire breadth and virility of style, earnestness of intention and truth of sentiment. Before completing her work, however, the young worker should get from the French or Belgian teachers a knowledge of their exquisite finish and polish, grace, smoothness and delicacy.

I do not believe that a pupil should remain too long under the guidance of teachers. Ordinarily eight years of uninterrupted work will suffice. As the budding artist develops in mind and character, independent study, together with the technique already attained, will secure an

individuality of expression. By means of incessant mental and physical effort the technique or mechanism of the art will become so much a part of the performer that she will be able to give unhampered thought and attention to the meaning and mood (that is, to the interpretation) of the composer's work. The growing artist must give her individuality of expression every opportunity for development. Work independent of the teacher will tend to the cultivation of a critical judgment, while the performances and interpretations of others will assume a new and personal interest. She will watch her own work more closely, experimenting with awkward passages and difficult phrasings, learning thus how and what to select in order to achieve the best.

Women are daily becoming more serious in their motives, more earnest in making their studies something to outlast their girlhood. It is to be expected that the near future will see them availing themselves more and more of the opportunities which are before them as violinists. The concert stage is as open to them as to women singers. The field of instruction is naturally theirs, as they are usually more sympathetic and conscientious than men, and they possess, moreover, an intuition maternal in its nature, in the treatment of young minds and in the imparting to them the rudiments of any art or science. Their art opens, thus, various professional doors. For those women to whom it is merely a delightful accomplishment their art may be of as perfect proportions and development as is their love for it. Thus they may not only secure the selfish pleasure of enjoyment but also give to others many moments of exquisite delight while adding perceptibly to the music and musical atmosphere of their country.

The value of amateur musicians and their work was never more evident than at present. Already scores of towns in the United States have their music clubs of amateurs who, meeting fortnightly or monthly, study and interpret the works of the great composers. Generally a desire to hear better performances than their own leads to the engagement of artists, who give vocal and instrumental "recitals," and thereby open the minds and stir the intelligence of their listeners, still further raising their standard and increasing their enjoyment and appreciation. They, on their part, encourage the artists by their interest, inspire them with their attention, and by their patronage make their art existence possible. They create musical centres which are far-reaching in their influence, and which promise much for the future development in our country of the divinest of all arts--music.

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