

Violin Playing For Women
by Maud Powell

The Ladies' Home Journal
Philadelphia
February 1891

There are three essentials necessary to violin playing for a woman: musical talent, health and application. The first is God-given; and unless a girl possesses perfect physical strength, she can never endure the extremely rigorous practice necessary in such a training – a training which requires from two to four hours of practice daily, standing with a violin in position, in order to acquire even ordinary execution; and from four to seven hours, to attain to the highest artistic excellence. For a girl in good health the training is most beneficial if the position held during practice is the correct one. For then the shoulders are so thrown back that the lungs and chest secure proper expansion and development. As standing motionless, for even the space of five minutes, is so intensely wearying, the usual methods of practicing should be while quietly and gently walking about. This calls into play all the muscles of the arms and back. The exercise tends to impart a graceful carriage, a flexibility and grace in the use of the arms, wrists and hands, and a roundness and firmness to the flesh of the arms.

“But may I not sit to practice?” I hear some would-be student ask. You may indeed; but it is not wise to make a habit of so doing. The draperies of your gown are apt to entangle your bow and the position thus taken is not one of equal freedom or grace. Women do sit in *ensemble* playing, *i.e.*, trios, quartets, etc., but for ordinary practice and solo work the standing pose is the better one.

So much for the second essential, which seems to have led very naturally into the third and last – application. In addition to the fatigues caused by the long hours of practice and study – back of which must be a genuine love for the work – devotion and sacrifice are necessary. Many social pleasures must be denied, and intense must be the application of the girl who would become proficient.

And to her who would become a professional *artiste*, let me say with “Punch” when addressing those about to marry – “Don’t.” The life is one of such incessant work – at least to the true artist – of nervous strain, of such denial and loss social life, of home and family, that the rewards are but lightly to be weighed against it.

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

Anecdotes
The Musical Courier
New York
Wednesday, November 18, 1891

I had a charming letter recently from that very talented violin artist Maud Powell, whose art is I'm happy to say, becoming daily more matured and polished. In it she relates some of the funny and curious things that happened to her last summer, but I will let her tell the story herself, which she does delightfully:

“During my sojourn in the country this summer,” she writes, “I was in the habit of studying and practicing in a little cottage which had long stood uninhabited and labeled ‘For Rent.’ The sound of my instrument and the open doors and windows, so long closed, attracted the attention of the passers-by, especially children, whose curiosity frequently led them to make tours of investigation. So one morning it chanced that my practice was interrupted by the entrance of two ragged little urchins, the elder one nearly lost to view in a copious pair of trousers, held in place by a piece of string, his shoulders partially covered by remnants of a shirt whose color was quite unrecognizable through the dirt. He was a hero, however, in the eyes of his smaller companion, who regarded him with undisguised wonder and admiration, and evidently considered it a great privilege to be in his company.

“The ‘hero’ began immediately to pour forth a volley of questions, one of which was:

“‘What ye workin’ there for? Don’t ye know how to play yit?’

“He probably thought, not unlike many older and more cultivated people, that one must work until he reaches a certain point called ‘playing,’ when further practice becomes unnecessary.

“Fancy such conditions and all they imply!”

“Other questions were: ‘Why don’t ye give a show here?’ and ‘I s’pose ye’ve been all over the world and played in lots of shows and circuses, hain’t ye?’ Thinking a description of my tour with Gilmore’s Band might please him, I prefaced my intended remarks by the question whether he had ever heard of Pat Gilmore and his famous band. His answer was startling: ‘Naw,’ said he with a disinterested drawl, and then his eyes brightened with eager curiosity, ‘Say, air ye acquainted with a fella down there in New York named Jack the Ripper?’

“Poor Pat, such is fame!”

“At another time I was visited by a little barefooted Negro lass, who walked in uninvited, sat down, surveyed me calmly from head to foot a moment and then without waiting for me to stop playing (I was working on the Bach Chaconne) she asked me, in the cold, critical tones

assumed by the musical manager when the trembling aspirant for fame and riches stands before him 'on trial,' whether I could play 'Annie Rooney.'

"I played for her one of Sarasate's Spanish dances. When I finished she remarked with mild approval, 'That's a good tune. I like the plunk, plunk, plunk' (three pizz. chords). Finally I told her if she would dance I would play her a jolly good jig. So for several minutes the little black feet twinkled merrily to the classic rhythm of 'Irish Washerwoman.' The next morning, while I was at work, she slipped in very quietly, laid a single Hollyhock flower on my table and as quietly departed."

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Violin Playing for Women
by Maud Powell
Musical Record, 1893

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

**COMMENT ON AMERICAN COMPOSERS
BY
MAUD POWELL**

In 1896, addressing the Minneapolis Ladies' Thursday Musicale, which sponsored a concert in honor of their local musicians, Powell wrote:

“Our American painters produce few large canvases for the reason that they are not marketable. In a somewhat like manner our American composers produce few large symphonic works. In the midst of strife for bread and butter it is a wild venture to spend time, energy and even money on a symphony, a suite or a concerto that is almost sure to be shelved after one or two performances, or more likely without any performance at all. In the majority of cases the shelving is deserved. Why? Because the young musician has had little or no opportunity to make practical tests in instrumentation; he has had no chance to hear his ideas literally translated into sound.¹ Cannot our women, who have worked so nobly and with such wide-spread influence for the advancement of music, extend their field of action in this direction, giving the young composer opportunity to hear actually, in orchestral presentation, and not in groping or more often too flattering imagination, the tone-creations of his own brain?”

This comment was published in the program, along with comments by Amy Beach and H.E. Krehbiel.

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

¹ Program, MPS Archive.

WOMEN AND THE VIOLIN

by
MAUD POWELL

**Published in *The Ladies' Home Journal*
February 1896**

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.

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

REMARKS ON MEMORIZING

By Maud Powell

The Violinist
1907

Some musicians visualize the score as they memorize, others get the composition by ear almost unconsciously, still others pack away the matter in their brain cells by rote, i.e., repetition and sequence. The chief things are thought, work and determination.

One should understand the composition structurally, harmonically and aesthetically before beginning to memorize. A good plan is to practice mentally, away from the instrument, associating the correct fingering, the right speed and tonal quality with each note as it is played. Also remember the relation of each note to the whole phrase and the relation of each phrase to the whole musical structure.

Rely on repetition till the fingers move subconsciously in spite of nervousness or temporary aberration of the mind. Before playing a composition in public, try it on the dog—otherwise long-suffering friends. In any event, if you decide to learn a piece, no matter how short or unimportant, learn it, that's all, and don't give up till you've got it.

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

*Maud Powell's Submission to George Grove, at his request,
for inclusion in Grove's Dictionary of Music
Typed Manuscript 1906*

MAUD POWELL

1868. [*1867 is correct*] Father, well-known American educator and author
—English-Welsh extraction.
Mother, of German-Hungarian extraction. Non-professional musician and composer.
1881. (Leipzig) Diploma and public appearance at the examinations at the Gewand Haus (With orchestra).
1882. (Paris) Examinations rigid, especially for foreigners. There were but six vacancies in the violin classes and among the eighty applicants of all nationalities Maud Powell was the first to be chosen Dancla's interest manifested by a weekly private lesson.
1883. Concertized in England on advice of Leonard, friend and master of Herr Schradieck. Tour in provinces with Jose Sherrington. Appeared in London at St. James' Hall, Princes' Hall, etc. Commanded to play before the then Princess Louise at Kensington Palace.
1884. Met Dr. Joachim who showed much interest and advised a year of study in Berlin, where he placed her in his classes at once, waiving the six month registration rule and the preparatory class drudgery experienced by most young pupils.
1893. Played as representative American violinist at the World's Exposition in Chicago at the Symphony concerts also at the Women's Musical Congress, where she also read a paper on "Woman and the Violin".
1894. Organized the Maud Powell String Quartet with [which] she toured extensively through the States.
1903. Engaged by Sousa as representative American violinist to accompany him on his European tour of thirty weeks.

Miscellaneous.

Has produced many novelties in her native land and has done much to encourage native composition.

American Concertos produced:

Harry Rowe Shelley

Henry Holden Huss

Revived the Tschaiikowsky concerto that had not been played since the days of Dr. Leopold Damrosch.

Introduced the Dvořák concerto at the New York Philharmonic—(Anton Seidl, Conductor) -- under the personal supervision and inspiration of Dr. Dvořák then resident in New York.

Saint Saëns Concerto in C major.

Lalo Concerto in G minor.

and

Arensky Concerto also had first American hearing at her hands.

On November 30th– December 1st, 1906 she will produce the Sibelius violin Concerto at the New York Philharmonic, Wassily Safonoff, Conductor.

1905. Tour of 40 concerts in South Africa with own Concert Company.

1905-1906 United States.

Original Typed Manuscript

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

Maud Powell and South Africa

The Commercial Appeal
Sunday morning October 28, 1906

New York City, September 28, 1906

My Dear Miss Jefferson:

As one of my hobbies is photography (would that it took less time, and that the chemicals were less messy for violin fingers to work with, then I would become more expert!) it may interest you to see some of the pictures I took while on my recent tour in South Africa.

On the way out from England we stopped at St. Helens, that magnificently lonely island-prison of the great Napoleon. This beautiful Canova bust in purest Carrara stands on a pedestal, placed between the windows in the death-chamber, where stood the bed on which the Emperor lay so long in agony of mind and body.

Longwood House, long ago stripped of all household furniture or other evidence of Napoleon's occupancy, now reverberates only to the sound of the occasional visitor's footsteps on the bare boards. The one saving grace is the little English garden of which one gets a glimpse through the bedroom windows, and which is kept up by the old French caretaker and his English wife. The poor woman, grown almost inarticulate through years of isolation on the lonely mountaintop, showed, however, that her heart still beats with sweet human sympathy, for at parting she shyly handed up posies of old garden flowers, plucked from the little plot which she had cultivated so lovingly.

Among the first impressions of Cape Town, where we landed on South African shores, was of Table Mountain, rising sheer 4000 feet from sea level, a giant rock, awful and forbidding, but impressively beautiful in its silent grandeur. The little view I got of it was from my balcony at the Mount Nelson Hotel.

At Kimberly we were conducted through the diamond mines. The cars of this little train are locked safes, containing diamondiferous soil. If you and I could share the wealth of this precious trainload, we could buy many jeweled chess boards and "Strad" fiddles and still have something left over for a rainy day.

The picture of the bridge in course of construction at Kronstadt is an illustration of an amusing definition given by a small Boer child of a river, viz: "a piece of dry ground under a bridge!" Which is not far wrong after all, at any rate during the long South African dry season.

We gave our concert in Ladysmith at the town hall – you can see our poster outside – the tower of which has never been restored since the "relief."

The falls are Howick Falls, near Pietermaritzburg, 365 feet high. Unadvanced as they are in South Africa, struggling with the terrible climate and a race problem hardly less terrible, they have nevertheless had forethought and artistic sense enough to preserve the falls from the water power fiend. They stand there or rather fall there, in serene and refreshing beauty, apparently conscious of the protecting arm of the law.

The last picture, that of the basket, shows how we landed at East London (at the south coast). There is no natural harbor and the water is so rough and the fires so treacherous, that only small tugs may reach the peaceful waters penned in by two monstrous breakwaters. The descent in the basket to the deck of the tug was disturbing, but as we made for the break water, headed as it seemed straight for a terrible stone wall, I held my breath and fully believed I should never draw another stroke of the bow. But we suddenly rose on a giant swell, which lifted us clean out of our course, and then we found ourselves steaming into safe water between two huge masses of masonry. I should not like to repeat that experience.

It was at this same East London that I had a distracting time with breaking strings. The air was heavy with moisture and at the concert, before I had fairly gotten under headway in my first solo, snap went the E string! While I was replacing that the A string broke. I got the violin strung up again, however, and was congratulating myself that all would end well, when the trouble simply began all over again. My second instrument was useless because of more broken strings, so in desperation, I resorted to the Paganini variations on the G string, my accompanist vamping the piano part. This brought down the house so for an encore I gave the Bach Aria arrangement also on the G string.

I am often asked about South African audiences. They are exceedingly well-behaved in the matter of listening, but the Boer element is rather noisy in its demonstrations of delight, resorting to stamping and whistling for applause. Most of the English settlers are money-seekers who care more for amusements than the fine arts, but in every town there is a nucleus of music – hungry exiles for whom it is a delight to play.

The Kaffirs, of course, are not allowed in any public gathering (indeed they are not allowed at large after 9 o'clock at night) but frequently when practicing in the hotels I discovered a dusky native listening stealthily just outside my door, or glued to a spot on the pavement in front of my window, apparently fascinated by the unaccustomed tones of a violin.

And that reminds me of an incident that occurred in Ellensville, N.Y., one summer, when I practiced in a large empty house near the hotel where I was staying. I often noticed a young barefoot Negro girl who loitered about when I was studying, apparently drawn by the music. She slipped into the house one day, and presently I found her just at my elbow ready with questions and criticisms for it seemed she liked certain pieces in my repertoire better than others. She also vouchsafed the information that she could dance, whereupon I begged her to trip the light fantastic toe for my benefit, saying that I would play for her. To my intense surprise, she danced delightfully to the measure of the music. But when I praised her achievement, she merely grinned and then added, "You doan play's good as my 'ma!" But evidently she did not treasure this up against me, for the next day she returned and tiptoeing into the room, she laid a single hollyhock

flower on my music desk, then flew out of the house and down the path, as if ashamed of her little display of sentiment. Ada is dead now, but I have among my most treasured souvenirs a pencil sketch by E. L. Henry, the well known artist, which is a likeness of my dark-skinned admirer. Leaning against the door jamb in an attitude of listening absorption while the figure of a woman within is faintly perceived playing the violin.

With pleasant recollections of our meeting, believe me, sincerely yours,
Maud Powell

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

MAUD POWELL'S STEINWAY PIANO TESTIMONIAL

**from *Portraits of Musical Celebrities*
New York: Steinway & Sons (1915)**

January 21, 1906

Not only is the Steinway piano the ideal solo instrument for virtuosi, but it is equally beautiful in chamber music and for accompaniments. Its marvelous possibilities of touch, the "blending" qualities, the singing tone, the ultimate and even pianissimos, and that wonderful bass, sustaining and satisfying, place it in a class apart and quite above and beyond comparison with other pianos.

MAUD POWELL

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

Joachim and His Vanity

Saturday Night
Detroit, Michigan
November 23, 1907

Maud Powell adds a good one to the list of Joachim anecdotes:

That Joachim had an overweening love of adulation is perhaps but natural; at any rate, his position was unquestioned, and he had for so many decades been the recipient of so much hero worship of extravagant nature that it is not to be wondered at that he would upon occasions resent and reprove some of the impertinent and uncultured Americans who forced their unpleasant personalities upon him. One young, aspiring boy with plenty of money and more assurance, upon being asked if he had ever studied with Joachim, replied coolly that he had had one lesson only. He called at Joachim's apartment to ask if he might hope to be enrolled as pupil. Joachim replied that the young man would have to first learn many things before he would even hear him play and first of all he must learn to have respect for a man in his position, learn to address his superiors with a due sense of humility, and, for instance, not to walk into a room ahead of an older person whom even then he addressed as his possible future master. The young man assuredly had a lesson from Joachim, but it was not a violin lesson.

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