

MAUD POWELL

WHAT ONE'S ART SHOULD MEAN

Courtesy of H. Godfrey Turner

Pathfinder (Washington, D.C.)

October 3, 1908

It is a very gratifying thing, in these days when the great majority of us are engaged in a hurly-burly scramble for the dollar and what it will bring, to hear some clearer note sounded, to see someone who is authorized to speak uphold some loftier, nobler standard, of endeavor. Miss Maud Powell is now the world's leading woman violinist. Yet, in a recent magazine article, she speaks with the modesty of the true artist who sees in himself an instrument rather than an object. Miss Powell was a Washington girl, her father, Prof. Wm. B. Powell, having been for years the able head of the District of Columbia schools. Speaking on the always interesting question as to what is required for success, she observes:

“Talent allied to intelligence and determination is not to be despised. It is sufficiently rare, but it is not that God-given divine fire we call ‘genius,’ a gift accorded only to the elect! Genius is a law unto itself; it surmounts difficulties over which mere talent must plod step by step. It “arrives” and cannot explain its methods. But, unfortunately, genius often lacks the balance-wheel of common-sense. It falls by the wayside, consumed by its own fire. Talent is more sane and, I may add, achieves where genius fails. The girl with talent, or even genius, has nothing to do with greatness or success until her studies are completed. But day by day she may and, indeed, must excel in her task; that is to say, she must do it better than the average—her standard must be head and shoulders above the normal.

“Long before a girl of the right caliber has completed her studies, she should have received the baptism of her vocation—the words ‘fame’ and ‘greatness’ should have disappeared, to be replaced by truth and art. She must be a worshiper of the thing itself. Her ambition should no longer be to excel but to deliver the message of the musician. Her own greatness should count for nothing beside the greatness of her art. It never occurs to me to ask myself if I have achieved greatness or fame, but I do realize with a thrill of wonder and delight that after long, long years of praying and fasting in the temple, I am able to deliver the message of my art to hungry and thirsty souls.”

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