

INSTRUCTIVE POSSIBILITIES OF THE TALKING MACHINE FOR VIOLIN PLAYERS

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The advantage of music study abroad consists chiefly in the endless opportunity afforded of hearing good music and plenty of it, on all sides, morning, noon and night. In other words, the living example of class-room precepts is found at every turn. This makes “breathing” music a daily, almost hourly, habit. This is the essence of what is called musical atmosphere. I, personally, owe as much to the musical “atmosphere” of the small town in Kane County, Illinois, where I lived as a child, as I do to the excellent piano and violin teachers I had. The musical mother, the music-loving father, the stern old German professor, who conducted the orchestra of eighteen pieces in which I played “first fiddle,” and who was organist in a prominent church, where he introduced Sunday song services (to the temporary scandal of the community, be it said, for the “collection” was taken at the door in advance!) but where I was trained to play solos with the big sound of the organ in my ears (excellent preparation for future solo work with orchestral accompaniment) – these factors created the all-important musical atmosphere for my breathing. Before I was twelve years old I had heard Camilla Urso, Ole Bull, Wilhelmj, Remenyi, while my teacher, Billy Lewis, as he was affectionately called, a magnetic and temperamental player of no mean technical ability, played at me and with me and for me, until I imbibed some of his very soul. Here were “living examples,” considerable in numbers and in influence. How many children in this country, even today, have similar advantages?

But there is one new and powerful factor in our musical advancement today, which is scarcely taken at its true valuation – that is the talking machine. Here are your “living example” and class-room precepts combined. Appreciated as a purveyor of entertainment these tone reproducers have hardly been accepted with due seriousness as educators. Here is much of the very best in music brought to our very doors, to the home, to the conservatory and even to the school class-room. Here is a very real semblance of musical atmosphere to command.

There is no doubt that *personal illustration* benefits the student as much as, if not more, than all the explanatory talks in the world. For this reason the attention of violin students should be called to the enormous advantage to be derived from listening to the records of the best artists. Wonderful as it is to play for this almost uncanny machine it is still more amazing to hear it repeat one’s own performance note for note, with gradation of tone, subtlety of expression and technical point of bowing or fingering. It is verily a unique instructor. Now if the artist himself can find instruction and delight in listening to the recorded work of his fellow-artists, how much more valuable must be those same records to the mere tyro in music. To the students who, isolated musically and often unable to find opportunity to study with a teacher of genuine ability, these records are, one may almost say, indispensable. To such a student records of the standard

violin solos, obtainable now in great numbers, are a revelation. Indeed, the perfection with which these Victor machines record a performance is almost beyond belief. Those who wish to ascertain the tempo and style of a solo, its individual characteristics, effects and interpretative possibilities, cannot get a surer teacher. In addition let me mention that such a machine record represents a teacher who is ready to play a given solo at any time the pupil likes and as often as he likes. Many attractive and well-made pieces have been played for the Victor by “red seal” artists, small pieces that are well-nigh perfect models of style and technical accuracy for the student to copy. Every student likes to have a few pleasing solos at his command to play for the pleasure of friends. It gives him confidence, too, to know that his work is in good taste, that his interpretation is authentic. Nowadays he can have his “reference library” of violin pieces right at his elbow, and can consequently present his solo with an authority born of knowledge.

Would that some great philanthropist would generously make it worth the while of the Victor Talking Machine Company to allow red-seal soloists to play selections from the great mass of literature that students want to and ought to study for *real violin schooling*. I refer to such numbers as movements from Rode, Kreutzer or DeBeriot concertos, or sections of the old Italian Sonatas, for example. Some of the more important exercises, invaluable to finger and bow technique, could be included in the student list. The number of buyers of this class of records would, however, be so limited, commercially speaking, that one could hardly expect a big company to waste its capital by putting them upon the market. Certainly the Victor Company has conferred such a tremendous artistic benefit on the community at large and such an unprecedented financial benefit on the artists themselves that it behooves us not to complain but I am nevertheless of opinion that the time will come when it will be feasible to prepare such a library of records for the use of serious students. They will be a real boon from the pedagogue’s point of view as well as the pupil’s.

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