

**CHAT OF AN ARTISTE**

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**Miss Maud Powell, Violiniste with  
Gilmore's Band, Tells of Her  
Study Abroad.**

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**She Thinks America Has as Fine Teachers  
as Europe, but Not the Musical  
Atmosphere**

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**Young Girls Had Better Stay at Home and  
Study Music then to Go Abroad With-  
out a Chaperone.**

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Of the thousands in the audiences which attended the Gilmore band concerts in the Auditorium and sat entranced under the witchery of the violin bow of Miss Maude Powell, the pretty young violiniste who accompanies Gilmore on his present tour, probably few knew that Miss Powell is an Illinois girl and received all her early instruction in violin-playing in Chicago.

"Yes, I remember my days of study in Chicago very well," Miss Powell said yesterday, at the Auditorium hotel. "I was born in Peru, Ill., and removed from there to Aurora, Ill., with my parents when I was 2 [actually 3] years of age. I commenced to study violin playing when I was 9 years old, making weekly trips from Aurora to Chicago to study with Prof. Lewis, who is still teaching here. I will not disguise the fact that I hated the violin at first, not from a musical standpoint, but because it brought down on my childish head the ridicule of my young companions in Aurora. It was a country town; male violin players were rare, and it was an absolutely unheard of thing for a girl to play the violin. When I walked along the Aurora streets the little boys would jeer at me and say: 'There goes the gal that plays the fiddle.'

I persevered in spite of the ridicule, however, and trudged from the depot to my teacher's office rain or shine, every week for four years. I am told that Prof. Lewis makes life a burden to his pupils by pointing out the example of my perseverance to them. 'Miss Powell never missed her lesson for rain,' and 'Miss Powell always practices faithfully,' is his constant refrain.

**Studied Four Years in Chicago.**

"I commenced studying the piano at 8 and the violin at 9. For four years I studied under the faithful tuition of Prof. Lewis in Chicago. During these four years I laid the foundation for

my later advancement. My practicing during that period averaged from two to three hours a day, and many were the days I got up at 6 a.m., so as to get in my full practice for the day. I was going to school during those four years. When I was 13 years old my parents were so pleased with my progress that they decided that I might become an artiste of some note. They therefore decided that I should go to Germany. Leipzig was the objective point, as my parents considered it to be the greatest music center in Germany. It cost my parents a great sacrifice to give me the advantage of a few a years of European study, because it broke up our family for years. Papa remained in this country while mamma went abroad with me, and has never left me since. I entered the Leipzig conservatory and studied for a year under that great master of violin playing, Henry Schradieck. My American teacher had done his work so well that I had nothing to unlearn, as far as I had gone. I passed a good examination for admission to the Leipzig conservatory, and the professor then took such an interest in me that I frequently had opportunities of playing at the evening recitals of the pupils. During my stay in Europe I practiced every available minute. I never practiced less than from four to six hours daily, and it oftener ran to seven or eight hours. The rest of the time was filled up with going to concerts and recitals and in studying other branches of music.

“After a year in Leipzig I went to Paris for a year to get some of the polish of the French school. I was one of thirteen out of eighty applicants who passed the examination for admission to the Paris conservatoire. My teacher there was Dancla, whose name is a household word with every student of the violin, owing to the immense number of studies and short pieces he has written for that instrument.

### **Well Received in London.**

“I did not play in public in Paris, and after a year there I went to London. I kept up my practicing there, but took no lessons. In London I received a number of engagements to play and had excellent success. It is my experience that Americans are warmly received and appreciated by London audiences. At least it was so in my case. I played on one occasion for Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne at Kensington palace. I had an invitation to play for the Prince of Wales on one occasion, but as it happened I had a good engagement for the same evening to play at a concert, I let the honor go and took the engagement, declining the prince’s invitation in the approved American style. From London I went to Berlin to study a year with Joachim, and then I came to New York, making my debut at one of the philharmonic concerts, where I played a violin concerto with the Thomas orchestra.”

“What other American violinists of note studied in Europe, Miss Powell?”

“There were a number. Dora Becker was a Texas girl. She went to Berlin, studied under Joachim, and is now a successful concert soloist in New York city. Madge Wickham went from Cincinnati to Berlin. In Cincinnati she was a pupil of Prof. Jacobsohn, who is now the violin professor of the college of Music of Chicago. Miss Wickham had great talent and made wonderful progress, but she married and that terminated her career as an artist. Blanche Newcomb of Cleveland studied the violin in Germany. Nettie Carpenter studied in Paris and has been a successful concert violiniste since her return to New York. Geraldine Morgan of New

York was also a successful student of the violin in Germany; also Miss Nona Stach of Washington city studied in Brussels.”

“We have many excellent young violinists in Chicago. What is your advice to them if they wish to reach the higher walks of the art?”

“I should advise them to go to Germany. I consider the German school of the present day the greatest in the world. Of the German schools the one presided over by Joachim in Berlin is the best in Germany.”

### **Good Teachers in Chicago as Anywhere**

“The great advantage of a few years of instruction in Germany is the musical atmosphere one finds there. As far as the mere teaching goes, you have as good teachers in Chicago as there are in Europe, but musical advantages here are far inferior. To give you an idea of how thorough the instruction is there I will state that while I was in Berlin I had every week three violin lessons, one harmony lesson, one orchestra lesson, one trio lesson, one piano lesson, and one quartet lesson, besides going to numerous concerts, recitals, and music lectures. It is this atmosphere of music which counts in a student’s advancement.”

“Is the violin naturally a lady’s instrument?”

“Why not? Ladies, as a general rule, have more delicacy of touch and a finer organization than men. This is reflected in their playing, and a lady’s tone on the violin is usually very beautiful and delicate. Then it is a very graceful instrument--I mean it admits of the display of much grace in playing it. It shows Hogarth’s line of beauty to the greatest advantage. The girls are beginning to find this out, and it is the commonest thing in the world to see girls with fiddle cases trudging along the streets of Boston and New York to and from their lessons. There is no instrument like the violin for the education of the ear and the development of musical ability.”

Miss Powell deserves the greatest credit for the remarkable success which she has achieved in the musical profession. She is undoubtedly one of the best half-dozen lady violinist in the world. Of her future career Miss Powell said, laughingly:

“I do not intend ever to marry--at least that is the way I feel now. Art is a jealous mistress. She will not tolerate a divided allegiance. Sarasate, the great violinist, never married. Camilla Urso, the great violiniste, although she has been twice married, told me I must never marry. ‘My child,’ she said, ‘if you find that you are ever becoming too fond of the society of any young man run away and do not see him. An artiste ought never to marry.’ As she said this in the presence of her husband it was, no doubt, slightly embarrassing to him.”

### **Girls Should Be Chaperoned Abroad.**

Returning to the subject of American girls studying violin playing or any branch of music in Europe, Miss Powell said: “They ought not to go alone. Young ladies can not go on the street

alone, even in the daytime, with perfect safety. I never went on the street alone once while I was in Europe. A young lady is very apt to be made uncomfortable by being accosted if she does so. My mother was with me all the time I was in Europe. Better stay in this country and study if you have no one to go with you.”

Miss Powell’s father was formerly superintendent of schools at Aurora. He is now superintendent of schools of the District of Columbia, and is very proud of his talented daughter. Her uncle is Maj. Powell, the well-known explorer and scientist of Washington, D.C. Miss Powell lives in New York city and has her hands full of concert engagements. She is quite a beautiful girl, with large, brown, poetic eyes, and a countenance full of the fine sensibilities of an artiste. She was delighted to get to Chicago and see the well-remembered scenes of her girlhood.

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

**Excerpt from**  
*The Evening News*  
**Chicago**  
**Friday, March 6, 1891**

**WHEN ASKED TO ‘TALK’**

When asked “to talk” this morning Miss Powell replied that talking was not at all her forte. “I can talk well enough with my fingers,” she said, archly raising her white hands, “but words--why, when I first made my debut an interview was a torture second only to thumbscrews. I had nothing to say--what could I have to say? I was only a girl. I could only smile.

“Oh, yes, we stay in New York during the season. There is so much there to fill one’s artistic life, but now I am not sure that we will not come to Chicago since Theodore Thomas is to be here. I do not understand how New York could let him go--unless, indeed, neither he nor New York was strong enough to resist this westward current. Everything seems coming to Chicago.

“Camilla Urso was my inspiration,” she said. “I heard her when I was 9 years old, and then and there she and her art became my ideal and idol.”

“And does she still seem so great to you?”

“Yes, yes; she is a great artist,” she replied, with enthusiastic allegiance.

“The violin is studied a great deal of late by the young girls, but it is an instrument whose study demands so much physical endurance and so much of one’s thought and life that few are willing to make the sacrifice that it entails. That is why there are so few violinistes.”

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

*Detroit Free Press*  
May 12, 1891

**AN AMERICAN GIRL**  
**Entertaining Chat With Maud Powell, the Great Violinist.**

“You bet!”

Maud Powell, the violinist with the Gilmore combination, is a dainty little lady with soft brown eyes and the most shapely hands imaginable. Her fingers are long and delicate and are suggestive of great sensibility.

Miss Powell’s exclamation, given above, in response to the question as to whether or not she was an American girl, came with grace and naturalness. Her full statement was this:

“Am I an American girl? Yes, indeed. And a western girl, too. In fact, I almost feel like saying in response to your question, ‘You bet!’”

“Why is it, Miss Powell,” was asked, “that, relatively speaking, there are so few successful lady violinists!

“When compared with men?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, well (this with a touch of earnestness), I presume, primarily, that it is because women have too long held themselves in abeyance, so to speak. That is to say, they have never been obliged to make their own way in the world. Hence their accomplishments have always been more or less pursued as a diversion; hence, too, with but superficial success.

“But women are branching out now in all departments. Becoming more and more self-reliant. they [sic] find they can win their way as well as men can.

“Violin playing among women has become quite an extensive enterprise. In Europe the number of women students is on the increase from year to year.

“In Boston it is quite a sight to see the girls flocking along the streets carrying violin cases. Our society girls all play the violin nowadays. You see, it gives them a chance to show off their fine arms and the graceful curve of the waist. They play the harp, too, but to my...more expressive, in...instrument in the wor.... [to my mind there is no more expressive instrument in the world.]

“What women lack in strength in their playing, they more than atone for by lightened grace and delicacy of expression.

“There is some talk of starting a ladies’ orchestra. No, I would not take charge of any such enterprise, for that would necessitate my giving up my art. I love the violin dearly, and after years of faithful service to my violin I find it entering more and more into my best life.”

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

*Minneapolis Journal*  
probably April 1893

**LIKE HUMAN BEINGS**

**Violins Have Decided Dispositions, Says  
Miss Powell.**

**“TRUE ART IS ITS OWN REWARD”**

**Is the Way She Voices Her Ideas in Regard  
to an Artistic Career--A Virtuoso  
Off the Stage.**

Miss Maude [sic] Powell, the young woman who has so delighted St. Paul and Minneapolis musical people with her marvelous power over the violin, was seen Saturday at the Hotel Ryan, St. Paul, by a Journal reporter. She appears, at close range, not as the great artist, but as a most charming and intellectual woman, whose youth has as yet felt no blight from the wearing cares of travel and public life. She has had enough of praise and adulation to turn the head of a less sensible girl, but the true artist nature within her has caused this to fall from her unminded. She seemed very tired and, in answer to the question whether playing the violin was an exhaustive exercise, she said:

“Yes, more so than the piano, I think, for one works against gravitation and hasn't the force from the shoulder.” She also spoke of the nervous exhaustion. “One wills to do certain things with the fingers and this tension is kept up all through the performance. At the close comes the relaxation, and this letting down is a good thing, too, for it rests the mind and makes it indifferent to the petty irritations going on constantly around one.” She spoke of Paderewski's manner at the piano and away from it, believing his listlessness in company the secret of his success at the instrument.

“Art,” she said, “is its own reward. It is the ability to get at the kernel of a truth and interpret it, which gives the artist the reward of his patient practising and toil. The applause of an audience is the assurance that he has been understood. One grows to almost feed upon it.”

Miss Powell then told a story of her appearance in Vienna. It was the second night and the audience had grown acquainted with her. On her appearance it rose en masse and cheered, calling out “bravo” and other enthusiastic expressions. At the close of the number, dozens of persons came to the front of the stage and handkerchiefs were waved all over the house. Not satisfied with this, as she went to the green room many followed her kissing her hand and pouring adulation into her ears. She had felt the fire of genius as never before and played in her best mood. But it was the reaching of a new standard on this occasion which gave her the most

pleasure. American audiences seemed cold on her return home in contrast with the enthusiasm of these Austrians.

When asked what she regarded as the greatest art, she replied that there was a difference existing between music and the others which made it impossible to compare them. "Music expresses," she said, "the subjective emotions, while painting, sculpture, literary, are all reproductive of objective life. To me it is wrong to interpret music as the singing of birds, the howling of a tempest and so on; it is but the emotion which these things inspire which is poured forth in sound, the language of the soul."

"Do you think the violin the most fitting instrument to express this language?"

"I think it is, next to the human voice. The chords of the throat are more perfect than the violin. The perfect voice is a rare gift, however. Singers and violinists have many debates as to whether the violin or the throat is the easiest to care for. But the perfect voice touches the human nature in a finer and more powerful way than the music of the violin."

"Have you used the same instrument long?"

"The one I am using now I was lent by E.J. Delahanty, of New York, a collector of violins, about four years ago; it is an Amati. Yes, I think one acquires a strong attachment for an instrument, and it is true, to me at least, that they seem to have an individuality and a human nature. Strange, but this affection come through its faults. It gets cranky, you know, and has moods. If it is exposed to the cold it shrinks into itself and refuses to sing, to respond. Again, if it is taken into a room where there is warmth and brilliancy it expands and becomes as happy and tractable as possible. Sometimes I wear out its spirit by over practice, and sometimes by neglecting it, it becomes cold and sullen. I can't reason this out; I know it by a feeling and a sympathy."

"What do you think of women as violinists?"

"I see no reason why they should not make the grandest interpreters on this instrument. It requires a soul that is capable of the deepest and broadest sympathy, with the finest and purest instincts. Women have not as a rule the power of application and the patience which is required to gain a mastery of the violin. The study must begin in childhood, hours must be devoted to its practice when the child would prefer playing out of doors with its comrades. It demands a constant sacrifice of self."

"I do not approve of public life for women. I have my mother with me, but my home life is broken up. My father is sacrificing much for my art in giving my mother up to me, and yet, torn apart as we all are, I feel I must go on. I have a mission to the people through my talent."

Miss Powell makes New York her headquarters and fills engagements from that center. Her father is superintendent of the public schools of Washington. She will speak this summer in Chicago, before the congress of representative women, on "Women as Violinists." Miss Powell

is regarded by many musical critics as surpassing the great Camilla Urso in her genius with the bow. She is younger and has had less experience, but her instructors have been the finest in the world, and her fire and sympathy, linked with a broad musical culture, offers an almost limitless field of opportunity.

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

*The Evening News*  
 Washington, D.C.  
 Saturday, July 8, 1893

## MISTRESS OF MUSIC

### Melody Was the Monarch of Maud Powell's Aspirations And Ambition

#### SUCCESS CROWNED HER STRUGGLES

#### Remarkable Career of the Young And Gifted Violinist of Whom Washington Is Proud

Although Aurora, Illinois, saw the dawn of Miss Maud Powell's life and the first suggestion of her genius, Washington may be said to be her home, if, in a life of incessant travel, she can be considered to have a home at all. Miss Powell might say with John Quincy Adams, "All that I am my mother made me," for it was her mother who put a violin into her hands before she had shown any musical talent, and by the sheer force of her will developed the latent artistic power which otherwise would have been lost to the world.

In those days, Camilla Urso was in the flush of her professional career, and Miss Powell, after hearing her play, thought, "one woman has mastered the violin, why should not another?" This thought speedily became a determination, and at the tender age of nine, Maud Powell was given a "fiddle," as she still calls it, and informed that she must learn to play it.

In the study of rhetoric one of the rules most frequently quoted is that the word "hate" should not be used in connection with inanimate objects, but just as our forefathers threw off the rule of the English king, so this feminine young American threw over an established rule of the king's English and simply hated that fiddle. She hated it for two reasons: first, because its possession drew down on her the undisguised scorn of her schoolmates and a storm of protest from conservative relatives who considered the family disgraced by such an unheard-of proceeding, and secondly, because of the amount of practice it required. She much preferred a romp with her little friends, for in those days she was a sad hoyden.

#### Camilla Urso Inspired Her

This rebellious state of mind continued until Mme. Urso came again to Aurora and she was taken to hear her play. It was a revelation, and for the first time she realized the possibilities of her despised instrument. After that she never had to be urged to her practice, for now she worked with an understanding of the end to be attained. Twice a week, when not yet in her teens, she went alone the forty miles to Chicago to take her lessons, and at 13 had made such progress that her parents decided to send her abroad for a year of study. Again family opposition came in and again the mother's determination overrode it, sanctioned as the step was by the father and son, who were most directly concerned.

When she appeared for examination before the staid old professors in the Conservatory at Leipsic her talent was so pronounced that all took an unwanted interest in her and opened every avenue at their command by which to foster and develop her great gifts and also to display them to others.

When the year was up, Miss Powell herself was impressed with the progress made and decided to go to Paris for one year more of study. At the Conservatory there, the tuition is free and consequently the examination is made extremely severe for all foreign applicants. At this time there were 87 applicants and but thirteen vacancies, and probably the most anxious hours of Miss Powell's life were the twenty-four preceding her examination. Before the official notice of her success came, she received a letter from her future professor, Dancla, informing her of the fact and congratulating himself that she had been assigned to his classes. This professor, whose name is familiar to every violinist, took infinite pains with her instruction and undisguised pride in her brilliant work, never missing an opportunity to display it.

### **Furore Created in London**

When this second year was almost at an end, she thought of something more that she needed, and that was the experience that comes from concert work. She went to Léonard, played for him and asked his advice. He counseled an immediate trip to London, and gave her letters of introduction to a number of the leading musical people there. She made her debut as a youthful prodigy, and at once became the rage. Among the noted houses at which she appeared was that of the Princess Louise, and upon a request for a second performance, she gave her the regulation American snub, preferring to keep to an engagement, which was not only previously made, but paid her more in dollars and cents. After a London season she made a tour of the provinces, repeating everywhere her metropolitan successes.

She was almost ready to return home, in fact their passage had been engaged, and Prof. Powell advised to their return on a certain steamer, when through the kindness of friends, she met the great Joachim, and at his request played for him. He made no comments beyond the most conventional expressions of approval, but sought out the mother for a confidential talk, in which he freely expressed his pleasure in Miss Powell's work because it was entirely free from the amateurishness of a so-called "prodigy," and also because it showed the nature of a true artiste. He strongly urged a year of study with him in Berlin, as he said it would round out her musical education and put her upon her feet professionally.

### **Her Triumph Is Continued**

That was enough for the mother, who at once cabled her husband of the change of plan, and instead of starting for the United States, they set off at right angles for Berlin. It is a requirement of the Berlin conservatory that all prospective pupils must register their names six months in advance, but Joachim brought about the suspension of the rule in her favor, and furthermore on examination day, when she entered the anteroom, she was taken at once to the committee instead of being obliged to wait her turn. This year of study was but a repetition of the three previous years, and at its end, she would probably have found some other cause for

remaining abroad had not the cholera broken out in Germany and brought from Prof. Powell a peremptory order for their immediate departure.

When she returned to New York she one day walked into one of the Thomas rehearsals and asked him to hear her play. He called one of his musicians to the piano, and, handicapped by a strange accompanist, she yet so pleased Mr. Thomas that he said then and there that he would bring her out in the fall at the first concert of the Philharmonic Society.

Common as is stage fright to every person who comes before the public, it may seem strange that for some time Miss Powell did not know what it was. By that I mean the name of the attack of wobbles, which a prospective entertainer always feels at the thought of his audience. Her mother's first query on her return from the concert was as to how she fared, and often her reply would be:

"I do not think I played quite as well as I might, but I felt so funny about the knees."

### **Mrs. Powell's Wise Discretion**

Instead of enlightening her as to the real reason, the wise mother said:

"Well that was only because your number came so late on the programme that you were tired from waiting."

"Oh, no; that could not have been it, for I was second."

The response came just as readily and unconcernedly:

"Then it was because you were excited by the drive there, and had not had time to get quieted down."

It was not until the child had come into the dignity of womanhood that she knew the meaning of that "funny feeling in her knees" when she faced an audience. When one sees Miss Powell play, when from her violin she brings tones of masculine virility, to which are added the delicacy of touch and sentiment peculiar to a woman, she seems to do it all so simply and spontaneously that the years of drudgery and the incessant practice still exacted are lost sight of in the [words missing] ...ment.

This achievement [words missing] from four to eight [words missing] which are a double strain, in that there is the purely physical fatigue of standing with the arms, hands and head in the necessary position, and the intellectual and emotional exhaustion inseparably connected with the study of any composition.

### **Steady Work Necessary to Achievement**

Perhaps Miss Powell's love and reverence for her art can be best realized by an extract from the paper which she read last Monday week at the musical congress of the World's Fair:

“The road leading to the Parnassus of art is steep and rugged. Moreover, there is no hand to assist and guide after the first few steps have been taken, so the ambitious climber must early learn to seek strength, courage and judgment within himself... While the violin is the most difficult of all instruments to master, the musical compensation is quite commensurate with the necessary expenditure of time and pains in conquering its difficulties. That expenditure, however, is so vast and so incessant that only those who have learned to play can have any conception of its magnitude.... To those who intend to devote their lives to drawing sounds from that wonderful little product of primeval forest, mountain chamois and human ingenuity, I can only say, ‘Art is long and time is fleeting,’ and to achieve something of the best, one must do three things: first, work; second, still work, and third, ever work.”

After reading that, one who would begin the study of the violin with professional aspirations must needs have consciousness of the genius of a Paganini or a Sarasate, and the courage of a Lief Ericson or a Christopher Columbus.

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

*The Washington Post*  
 Sunday, September 17, 1893

## MUSIC AT THE EXPOSITION

**Miss Powell Tells Why the Thomas  
 Concerts Were Failures.**

## PRICES WERE FAR TOO HIGH

**Sightseers Didn't Want to Be Instructed in Classical Music at \$1 a Head--Preferred  
 Popular Airs at a Nominal Cost--The Directors Saw Their Mistake Too Late.**

After an extended visit to the World's Fair, Miss Maud Powell, the distinguished violin virtuoso, has returned to her home, No. 1702 F street northwest.

Miss Powell is a daughter of Supt. Powell, of the public schools. She is almost universally regarded as the first woman violinist of this country, and only recently was accorded the greatest honor ever conferred upon any one—the privilege of playing as a soloist of the World's Fair orchestra. No other female violinist has been heard in the great music hall of Chicago, and none will be.

Miss Powell assumes her laurels with the becoming modesty which has been one of the most conspicuous characteristics of her career.

"I, of course, fully appreciate," said Miss Powell, in an interview with a *Post* reporter last evening, "the honor bestowed upon me by Mr. Thomas and the directors, and like most Americans, I greatly regret the outcome of musical matters at the Fair."

"What was the trouble, in your opinion, Miss Powell?"

"Nothing in the world but the admission prices. Mr. Thomas, I think, was perfectly right in every thing he did. When the directors first began to consider the subject of music for the Fair it was agreed by them to make the programmes such that they would be handed down to posterity as examples of classical and really great music. Mr. Thomas succeeded in doing this, which few artists in this or other countries could have done. The programmes, as representations of the music of the day, were marvels in their way, but the people that visited the Fair declined to pay the exorbitant price of admission.

"You see it costs 50 cents to get in the grounds and then another dollar to hear the music. This the people would not stand. There were too many other attractions to draw them away. It is a great pity, however, for the concerts were really wonderful in their way, everything from the acoustic properties of the hall down to the smallest detail being well nigh perfect. When it was

too late the directors saw their mistake, and after Mr. Thomas had resigned, they were anxious to get him back. It was natural that he should refuse to return to the directorship after what had happened.”

“Wasn’t the music a bit too heavy for the masses, though?”

“Not near as heavy as the prices of admission, yet I do think that Mr. Thomas’ last plan, that of giving concerts at a nominal price of admission, was the best one. His idea was to charge a small fee, say 50 cents, and have the concerts on the Wooded island.

“It is a beautiful spot for such an object, and the plan, I think, would almost certainly have been successful. When one has traveled around those grounds for any length of time they do not care to be educated in a musical or any other way, and Mr. Thomas’ idea was to soothe and refresh his audiences with the lighter and more popular music.”

Miss Powell will play in nearly all the large cities of the country during the coming season. She will practice here for several weeks before her return to New York.

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

*Toledo Daily Blade*  
November 23, 1893

## WITH MAUD POWELL

### **Her Individuality as Rare as Her Art An American Young Woman Who Ran Up the Ladder of Fame--She Works Honestly**

After the rabble of noisy professional people anxious to lay bare their achievements, Maud Powell comes as a balm. Her personality is a dangerous rival of her art. There are few American girls who could pass through the successes her violin has brought and retain all her simple directness of nature. Maud Powell has been called cold and unapproachable by men, but her womanly reserve is so impregnated with frankness, earnestness and sunniness that none but the vain and shallow could call her cold. Robbed of her violin, the woman satisfies; but with it, personality and art become one.

One fears, in writing of Maud Powell that his pen will overflow and unwillingly hurt her sensitive nature, for she is true enough to herself to spurn all but just praise.

### **European Adulation**

"I have worked hard," she says, "and I have worked seriously. When I see anything like this in a paper: 'Maud Powell looked as sweet as a peach and played the violin,' it nauseates me. In Vienna the people used to touch my arm or my dress with their lips, or the silk handkerchief that held my violin in place. One night I hurried away as soon as the concert was over to avoid them, so that I might not have it out on my pillow afterward."

Her ready flow of language impels one to ask if she writes. The qualifications are there. Her mother will tell you that Maud can write nicely, but that she has no time.

"I read a paper at the World's Fair," Miss Powell explains. "And there were those unkind enough to doubt that I composed it. I have had them inquire if it were true. They seem to think because I play the violin I cannot know anything else."

### **Her Mother's Request**

After you have heard Maud Powell's violin, you find yourself interested in heredity. Back in a little Western town some twenty-six years ago, Mrs. Powell left a goodly musical inheritance to her first-born. From the time of early girlhood she lost her musical identity in her daughter and is satisfied to behold the embodiment.

“She is the true artist mother,” says Maud Powell, “and I the selfish artist daughter. I have broken up a home. My father lives alone in Washington, and he loves domestic surroundings. My brother was deprived of home influence and the help of a mother and older sister, while we two roamed over the world together.”

### **Career in Schools**

When she was eight years old, the violinist that Toledo heard last night was given piano instruction. At thirteen she was sent abroad to study, and carried off honors usually bestowed on the children of France in the Paris conservatory. At fifteen she appeared in London and played for royalty. She had made a salaried engagement when summoned to tune her fiddle strings for the Prince of Wales. But Maud Powell is an American and consequently a business young woman, and preferred the salaried engagement to the Queen’s encomiums or bit of bestowed jewelry. Joachim, the great Berlin violinist, interfered, however, and carried her off for a year’s study after hearing her performance in London.

When she was seventeen years old she made her debut in New York with the Philharmonic society, under Theodore Thomas. Since then she has studied and played with a variety of leading choral clubs and orchestras, interpreting as nearly as she could the thoughts of great composers. She has aspired to nothing less than first woman violinist in the world, and is not far from the coveted place. Camilla Urso has given her second place, and her day is nearing an end. Maud Powell works rather than claims.

### **Violin in America**

“Violin playing in America,” she says, “is rapidly gaining a foothold. When I entered the profession, it was impossible to give a recital. People did not care for one kind of music through an entire programme; now there are at least forty places where recitals may be given.”

Last summer Miss Powell, as the representative of American violinists, toured Europe with the Arions, and became a true Bohemian. It may be her tendency to this sort of life and hatred of conventionalities that helped to make her recent interpretation of Dvořák’s violin concerto in A minor, such a brilliant success. In this difficult composition Dvořák indulges to the full his penchant for the rhythms of his native Bohemia.

Womanly as she is, Maud Powell dislikes to be called a “woman” violinist, for art recognizes no sex.

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

by Sibyl Wilbur  
*The Minneapolis Times*  
 April 10, 1895

## HOW MUSICIANS LISTEN

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### MAUD POWELL TALKS INTERESTINGLY OF THE EXPERT EAR.

#### **It Analyzes Music More Minutely Than Does That of the Lay Brother**

In the large and fashionable audience gathered last evening to listen to the marvelous singing of a mellow Amati in the hands of Maud Powell, few who listened with the sense of the soul and rejoiced with the exquisite gladness of artistic sympathy were aware that they were permitted the delight only through the impulse of the mother of Miss Powell, an impulse which shaped this artist's career. While the violinist was still a small child her mother went to hear the great Camilla Urso, and while under the spell of the music she determined to put a violin in her daughter's hands and urge her in every manner to a noble approach to perfection in its use. The child was not even fond of music. She loved to draw, however, and filled up her idle moments making sketches. Like Marie Bashkertseff she sketched the familiar faces around her on every waste scrap of paper. Today she makes a more creditable drawing of anything that interests her than many who have struggled with technique of the crayon for years.

Yesterday afternoon in a quiet corner of the West parlors I chatted with the artist and her mother. The latter I asked if she thought she had done well to alter the course of her daughter's genius.

"She might have been a greater artist with the brush than with the bow, yet who can tell. I held her to one form of art until she mastered the technique, her artist soul was awakened and she has done the rest. Still it might have been wiser to have aroused it on the other line."

"And you, Miss Powell, do you think that you could have loved music if you had pursued painting?"

"Loved it, yes! But I could not have created without these years of devotion to its study. And without having created music one cannot feel all it has to give, cannot understand its finest message. You know music has a message—musicians speak to one another by this language. I cannot say the language is translatable into words, but it thrills, it draws one up, it makes the soul strain at the bonds which hold it in its shell."

Miss Powell had just come in from a long afternoon's rehearsal. She had thrown herself into a big Turkish chair in an attitude of weary abandon, but as she spoke of the power of music she lifted herself in her chair, threw out her hand to her auditor in an explanatory gesture and

lifted her fine head as though listening to some esoteric music which thrilled for a second on the surrounding ether. There is nothing dramatic in her attitudes or manner, but an exceeding naturalness which makes the realm of art seem easy and familiar until one withdraws from her society.

“Do you think, Miss Powell,” I asked, “that by cultivating one line of art, until one succeeds greatly, that other forms of perfection or arts are opened and made possible to him?”

“Well, indeed, I can’t answer that. If there is only one life, it would seem as though they must be. How could any one do more than master one thing, and life is too short to do even that, as the masters will tell one. Yet, even if one could appreciate other arts than his own, one could scarcely execute in that line.”

“And do you think music is the highest form of art?”

“Music is the least understood. What does it mean to us? It moves us so many ways. It tears us to pieces, it exalts us and some times it undoes us. If you measure its greatness by its effect, I think it is the greatest.”

“How do musical people listen to music?”

“Oh, variously. They listen intellectually, that is they wait for the form which they know it will take. If it is built on the sonata form, for instance, they know it will shape itself. Then they enjoy the daring strokes of the composer, his departures from the beaten track, his unique manner of following a method. They also listen earnestly to the phrasing, waiting for the performer’s personal equation. This is the emotional listening. But the two blend together. I enjoy tone colors, the new combinations of instruments; sometimes, when I am longing for harmonies, my violin will not give me what I want.”

“Which requires the greater genius, harmony or melody?”

“Oh, I believe it requires the greatest genius to create simple and stirring melody which is inspirational. Moderns love harmony more than melody; however, in the old days, when the world was swept with Italian opera, which was mostly made up of melody, they would have thought our music of today chaotic with its richness of color and harmonic effects, whereas we revel in it. So great is the tendency to harmony that there is a danger of abolishing melody, but the greatest composers see the necessity of marrying the two. Wagner, in his great harmonies, still has a continuous succession of harmony [melody].

“And what do you think of Wagnerian music?”

“Well, great as it is, I am wondering if it is indeed the decadence school. You know they say we have entered that period of musical composition. Now, if it is the decadence, it is still a certain development. It seems to me like this.

“Recently when in New York, I went to hear Ysaÿe play. He did many things well, and I listened critically, approving intellectually, you understand. At last he played the Beethoven violin concerto. This ceased to be excellent, it became perfect, it was pure religion. I could not criticize; I wept. Musicians around me wept, and old orchestra players, worn out with musical routine, worn out emotionally, I mean, wept as well. I could have done nothing that was not good after listening to that. Later I went to hear Wagner’s ‘Tristram and Isolde.’ It was marvelously great, it was rich, it was original. Yet where I had wept before, listening to Beethoven, I now found myself panting. The effect was sensual instead of spiritual. It was entirely on the physical plane.”

“And what is to be the result, if music is set in that direction?”

“Ah! what is to be the result in literature, in painting; isn’t all art tending that way? We can do no better than to cling to the masters. There are none greater than Beethoven in music. And musicians will gradually settle back from the Wagner craze to a true sense of their proportional genius.”

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

*The Times-Democrat*  
New Orleans  
December 27, 1896

### IT WAS MY PLEASURE. . .

It was my pleasure during the past week to converse with America's great woman-violinist, Miss Maud Powell, who had filled an evening's engagement at the new and beautiful Atheneum. There is always a good deal of a temptation to force one's self upon visiting notables, and especially those whose art has strongly appealed to one's kindred sensitiveness. I had sat under the peculiar spell of Miss Powell's interpretations and aspired to meeting her, which was accomplished through a common friend to my entire satisfaction.

A true artist, as she undoubtedly is, would endeavor to escape all platitudes written or said about her appearance; but there is so much of soul in the limpid depths of Miss Powell's brown eyes, so much of sensitiveness in her curved lips—a strange mouth, which might fitly be described as indicative of dogged impulse—that there would appear to be a distinct relation between her artistic endeavors and the result obtained. A calm bearing, a superb poise do not deceive; there is the underlying passion of great thought, the scintillation, inconstant and strange genius and still the invariable purpose to attain to the ideal which dances beyond, no matter how far her progress obtains.

"I began hard work when I was eight years old," said Miss Powell, in answer to an expressed interest, "and then probably dreamed of arriving at the present period of development. With scarcely an intermission I have labored, aiming just beyond, and still further beyond, gaining ground but never quite touching the goal. Never, did I say? Well, there are moments of inspiration, you might term them, when to my consciousness there is nothing left to ask for; the instrument responds to the strings just as the heart will to a sentiment. These moments are sudden, unexpected, impossible to depend upon; a quick star in the night is as easy to realize before it is gone. One is repaid for years of practice in one of those radiant spells, however brief it may be; it is encouragement to go on and assure the perfection promised by them."

It is a well-known fact that a new violin has not the value in any sense acknowledged as the worth of the older instrument. Never having heard this point fully explained, I asked Miss Powell about the matter.

"An instrument may be of the most perfect model and finish and still prove harsh to the trained ear. Playing upon it—not scraping or idling without melody over the strings—will benefit it gradually; but there is not the same attraction to the violinist in giving tone to his new pet that a smoker finds in the coloring of his meerschaum, although both know that their work is as an investment for values. Wood, you know, is a living thing; it warps, swells, cracks, shrinks and changes temperature. Judicious care must always be expended upon this delicate instrument; it seems to feel slights or poor treatment. Playing upon it seasons it with sound, as it were; it

mellows in tone, sweetens, responds with facility, becomes more and more a companion and a human voice. It is strange how my Amati responds to me; when first I pick it up the wood is cold, the strings hard, the general tone ordinary. Slowly the warmth spreads, the cords vibrate, the bow pulsates, the sound softens, grows richer and more lucent. What gratitude this response brings to the player! It is a reciprocity than which nothing is more precious. But the trial comes when a violin which has been seasoned by a great master, played upon with all one's nature for enraptured ears, grows old. Truly, a violin grows old; not cracked or broken, but seasoned above the receptiveness of wood. The richness of the tone lessens, the grand power fails, the thrill dies out. There is such an instance as a Stradivarius or an Amati outlasting their usefulness, strange as it may seem; but usually the instruments of a celebrated manufacturer bring a fictitious value in a sale, being purchased eagerly by people who may or may not know that some of them have lost that for which the musician cherishes a violin. A dead Stradivarius is simply a petrified corpse; the spirit has evaporated. Is it not poetical and strange and immeasurably sad that such should be so?"

Miss Powell looked all of her expressed pathos as she spoke. She herself has the spirit of an old violin in her face.

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

*Vanity Fair*  
published by Blakely Hall  
New York, December, 1897

### MISS POWELL, THE FOREMOST WOMAN VIOLINIST OF AMERICA

Miss Maud Powell stands head and shoulders over her compeer violinists. Her position is unique. The question does not rise as to whether she be the foremost of women violinists. She is absolutely the leading violinist in America today. Marvelously gifted, she has disclosed the instincts of a born artist, allied to the keen, broad intelligence of a master mind.

It has been often said that Miss Powell plays like a man. It is true she has a masculine strength and power in her handling of the bow; nevertheless she possesses the tenderness and poetry of a thorough woman.

She has played in every important series of high class concerts given in this country, and when Mr. Van der Stüchen made his arrangements for the trip of the Arions, in 1891, it was requested by the committee to look about for a representative American musician, who might be taken to Europe as an example of what America could produce in the way of a player. His choice fell upon Maud Powell. The reception in the musical centers of Germany fully justified the selection. She was declared to be not only a great artist, but one of the greatest of contemporary violinists.

The memorable closing words of Miss Powell's paper, read at the Musical Congress of the World's Fair, give the keynote of her success:

"Art is long, and time is fleeting, and to achieve something of the best, one must do three things — first, work; second, still work, and third, ever work."

Miss Powell's father, Prof. Powell, is an American born, and is today one of the foremost educators in Chicago, having been connected for years with the public school system. Her mother is of German by birth, and is a woman of highly artistic temperament, and vigorous mind. Miss Powell often speaks of her mother's marvelous powers of intuition, and she ascribes her musical temperament to the maternal side of the family.

"I owe all to my mother," declares Miss Powell. "It was her persistency, her faith, her courage that inspired me. Of myself, I might have failed."

Miss Powell was born in Aurora, Illinois. At eight years of age she was an excellent pianist, when much against her will, her mother decided to have her study the violin. It was a constant struggle for the sensitive child to carry her violin case through the streets of the little town, until, upon a memorable day, she was taken to hear Camilla Urso. For the first time she realized the possibilities of the despised instrument. From that moment she worked with an

understanding of the end to be attained. “One woman,” she thought, “has mastered the violin, why should not another?”

Miss Powell was trained as a child to the habit of systematic study. There were four years of incessant drudgery under Prof. Lewis, of Chicago, the child traveling a distance of forty miles for each lesson. At the age of twelve, Prof. Lewis, foreseeing the brilliant future of his young pupil, advised her parents to send her to the Leipzig Conservatory. Not only was she admitted at once, but at the end of a few weeks she was invited to play at the conservatory concerts, and at the end of the first year she played a Gewandhaus public examination and was awarded the highest diploma offered for the contest.

From Leipzig, Miss Powell went to Paris and made an application to enter the class of Dancla, the famous violinist. There were eighty applications and only twelve vacancies, Miss Powell being unanimously awarded by the judges the first place on the list.

When the young girl had finished her studies she gave a series of concerts in London, and was about to return to America, when Joachim, the greatest living violinist, heard her play. “I expected to hear a prodigy,” he said, “but I found an artist. She has a very great talent.” He persuaded her mother to change their plans and place her daughter for a year of study under him in Berlin. Among Miss Powell’s most valued possessions is the photograph of Joachim with the inscription, “To my talented, industrious, and dear pupil, Maud Powell, in remembrance of Joseph Joachim.”

When she returned to New York she walked into one of the Thomas rehearsals and asked them to hear her play. Her playing so pleased Mr. Thomas that then and there he agreed to bring her out at the first concert of the Philharmonic Society. Thus she was launched upon her successful career.

Miss Powell’s art grows and broadens from year to year. “I have just begun to know myself,” she says. “My best work lies in the future.”

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