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VIOLIN WHICH SINGS OF BRUCH IS HER “FIDDLE”

Maud Powell an American Woman First—The Artist Afterward

By G. H. L.

And the violin—the most wonderful violin, which speaks the message of Tschaikowsky and Bruch—that violin she calls her “fiddle.”

Maud Powell, American, birthplace Peru, Ill., the most famous woman violinist in the world—and she says “fiddle!”

Perhaps the frankness, the affectionate tone of that single word express best her true womanliness. “After my concerts women have told me that they were glad that I was one of them. That is one of the dearest tributes I have ever had.” So said Miss Powell last evening.

The talk turned more particularly to the artistic supremacy of a sex. “There are few women that equal the greatest men in the field of art,” she continued. “Women have a genius for mothering. But they seldom carry over the greatness of their motherhood into the field of art. They have not been interested—have not thrown their whole natures into artistic forms of expression. There is something of the man, too, in the greatest woman, as there is of the woman in the greatest man. You feel that in the tenderness that is in Ysaÿe’s playing at times.” Withal, we wondered at the greatness of the woman’s artistry as she spoke, for here was what the world has called a true artist—and a true woman. The light of the woman was in Miss Powell’s eyes now.

“I would not be understood as saying that I am opposed to woman suffrage,” she went on, “for even though I don’t have any particular desire for the vote, the withholding of it seems unfair. It is true that a great many women are not yet ready for it, but then many men are quite unfit.

“You ask me what I think of the future of true music in America. That is far from being a difficult question, for I say—and truly believe—that a longing for music is in every American heart. We hear a great deal of talk in this generation about the supremacy of what you call the ragtime and the abhorrence of the classical. But only in a measure is this true. Why are people so frightfully afraid of that innocent, little word ‘classic?’ Does it not stand for all that has survived the test of time in art? Does it not mean the worthiest and the best? Before audiences in western cities I have played an old familiar Scotch melody and then swept into the best of

Arensky. And the latter has always been appreciated. It is only that little word ‘classical’ that the people fear—it is the bugaboo of a word, not the music itself. In the last five years violin audiences the world over have more than doubled.

“I have heard it said that musicians fear the so-called provincial atmosphere of the smaller cities, but it is not so. No city is more provincial than New York. A month ago we were in a little town in Iowa—and it was one of the most wonderful audiences before whom I have ever played. The love of music, it is everywhere—everywhere that you find the American people.”

“My particular style? I hope I have none, for I wish to be not a technician, but a musician. I wish only to run the gamut of my fiddle—that is all.”

And we wondered, not at fame of Maud Powell, but rather in the sweet simplicity of the woman—the woman and her—“fiddle.”

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

The Musical Observer
New York, August 1913

MAUD POWELL
An Appreciation
By Gustav Saenger

Has no superior among living violinists. — Henry T. Finck

Although Mr. Finck's opinion, as quoted above is not of very recent date, it still holds good. Maud Powell, to-day, stands at the very top of her profession, worthy to be ranked as the equal of the greatest living violin soloists.

In speaking of her many remarkable gifts she is frequently alluded to by writers as being the best among women violinists. To the writer this seems an entirely wrong estimate. The greatest violin players from the times of Tartini, have always been men. To fulfill the requirements of what is understood as *a really great* player always demands certain qualifications, which, as a rule, are not characteristic of the female player. Although designated as the "Queen of the Instruments," the violin by no means shows off to best advantage played in anything like an effeminate manner. To the contrary, its greatest powers are developed and brought to light by players of individual force, domineering individuality, strength of bowing and the so-called *big* tone. The great violin player invariably carries with himself an air of authority and mastery. When he faces his audience his violin is transformed into a sound producer of supernatural powers, his bow a sceptre with which he sways his listeners at will, and whatever he plays comes as the inspired message of a seer.

No violinist has ever achieved fame or greatness unless he has possessed a very considerable amount of *personality, individuality* and *magnetic force* in addition to all other technical or special abilities. All the great classic players must of been gifted in this way and all our great modern players have these gifts. However, there is this to mention. All the classic players won fame by playing their own compositions almost to the exclusion of all others; even Paganini was never known to have played any compositions in public but his own. However with the advent of Wieniawski, a change occurred. He proved himself a master of all styles and played the classic repertoire as perfectly as he did the romantic or his own.

Since then, the revolution in musical style with its astonishing effects upon violin solo music has worked a wondrous change, and to-day Wieniawski is succeeded by *the modern virtuoso* who in one recital program covers the entire history of violin music from Tartini to Brahms and Tschaikowsky, and who, let it be understood, plays each work with distinctness, character and proper artistic interpretation. The list of modern players who can be placed in this class is not very large one.

Such names as Kreisler, Elman, Zimbalist, Ysaye, Thomson and Flesch are uppermost in our minds when we try to mention the biggest, and it is just here that we are enabled to place Maud

Powell, just where she belongs – *right at the top-notch of the representative list of masculine players and equal to any of them in the artistic rendition of every important classic or modern work of which the literature of the violin may boast.*

One of the greatest compliments ever paid her was when W. J. Henderson in one of his critical notices about her playing said that she was *a blood descendent of Spohr*. She certainly plays with all the purity and immaculate tone production for which the great German was famous, her bowing is as decisive, as energetic and as firm as any great player's has ever been and her interpretation of whatever she plays is the very essence of artistic culture and refinement. This is where her femininity stands her in good stead. Some of our most prominent players may be able to force their instruments a little more than she does and this is no drawback to her either. In all the years I have heard her play, I have never heard her rasp, nor force her violin more than was absolutely necessary. She never forgets that it is a violin she is playing, and no matter how delicate, how passionate or how strong her tone may be, it always is a beautiful, sympathetic luscious *violin tone*. And this is certainly more than some of our famous men players can boast of all the time.

* * *

Mme. Powell has been a tireless worker and the splendid results she has achieved are the fruits of years of incessant exertion to reach a foremost position among representative players. She has played in the largest and smallest cities throughout the United States and it is a pleasure to state that her European reputation is equally as great as her American. She commands an enormous repertoire and one of her most delightful traits is her willingness to assist rising composers and the practical assistance she gives wherever possible.

In a recent conversation with her manager, Mr. H. Godfrey Turner, the writer was tempted to ask how it was possible that Maud Powell included so many small towns in her tours, and how these could possibly afford to pay her price. In answer Mr. Turner stated that irrespective of the fact that these small towns were enabled to pay her price, she took greater delight in playing in small towns, feeling that she had a mission to fulfill, one of which could not be fulfilled by playing in large cities only. This is still another proof of this admirable artist's sincerity and musical enthusiasm.

In the course of our conversation, Mr. Turner mentioned many interesting events in Maud Powell's various tours, and one little reminiscence is worth while retelling, showing, as it does, what even our greatest artists must endure in touring the smaller American cities

The place in question was the "Opera House" in a small Iowa town. It was a small, corrugated iron shed, lighted by oil and, as Mr. Turner remarked, it was his first and only experience with a "tank."

"When we arrived," said Mr. Turner, "the manager of the opera house, who was managing the concert, met us in his automobile. He had a wonderful manner and we were friends at once. There was not enough room in the car, so he sat on my lap and gave directions to the chauffeur to stop at the 'Waldorf Astoria.'

"We carry a full size Steinway concert piano and as this particular engagement was one of the last of the season we had it boxed. When it was taken to the opera house a crowd watched and followed the wagon. The express men and carpenter were wonderful. They said 'there wasn't goin' to be no bills' – they considered it an honor for the lady to come into the town and play."

Not long ago this same manager wrote a letter to a New York trade paper, advising managers if they want a good "attraction," to engage Maud Powell, if only for the pleasure of meeting her magnificent husband!

In speaking of Mme. Powell's appearances on the Pacific Coast, Mr. Turner remarked that eight years ago, when he was in San Francisco (Mme. Powell had never played there before), the local manager said to him, "if you say this woman is so good, why do you play all those dinky little towns?" "My answer was 'to make money to play in the big ones.'" Mr. Turner argues that it is a mistake to allow violinists to play in halls which are too large. As an exception, he mentions the Cleveland Hippodrome and says that when Mme. Powell played there it was as though she were in her own room, as there were 4,500 people there who sat breathless. Acoustically it is said to be the most astonishing place in the world.

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Violin players and lovers of old instruments will be pleased to learn a few particulars about the violin this artist uses. It is a genuine Johannes Baptiste Guadagnini and in her opinion is *the* fiddle for this country and *the* fiddle for her work. It is in perfect preservation and the atmosphere of neither steam-heated trains nor zero weather seems to affect it. Mme. Powell has owned and used it almost constantly since 1908 and proclaims it a most admirable concert instrument. When she got it, it had been in California in a trunk for over seventy years. It has a remarkably strong tone, capable of every possible degree of shading and its responsive qualities are absolutely perfect throughout its every string, position and register.

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During the coming season Mme. Powell will not go to the far West. Drawing a straight line from Minneapolis, Minn., to San Antonio, Texas, and taking all the states east of that line, she will be heard in the principal cities of each.

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

The New York Evening Sun

21 October 1913

MAUD POWELL AT HOME
Interview by R. J. Cole

In the world's orchestra Maud Powell is one of the first violins simply because she is so much more than a violinist. When a famous European musician cried out in amazement, "You play like a man!" he missed the fact that in her womanhood was the source, not the limitation of her art.

She came in out of the rain, on an autumn day recently, laid off her wraps, and talked to the wood fire. She talked of militancy in politics and peace in art, of American music and of greatness in women.

"Militancy? I loathe it. But the women in England live in a pitiful isolation. The men have little to do with them in any way that will help the sexes to understand each other. A few clever hostesses attract swarms of men. At the other extreme the athletic young girls with their flat heels have a certain rough-and-tumble outdoor relation with men. But as for the genuine friendship, real comradeship exchange of ideas and points of view, common enough here, you will find little of it in England. The result is bad."

"You are not opposed to woman suffrage?"

"Certainly not. I don't have any particular desire for the vote, but the withholding of it seems unfair. It is true that a good many women are not ready for it. But many men are quite as unfit."

"Do you think the women who have won artistic distinction have helped to encourage the others in their progress toward greater freedom?"

"It may be so. After my concerts women have told me they were glad I was one of them."

But Mme. Powell hastened to disclaim artistic supremacy for her sex.

"There are few women that equal the greatest men in the field of art. Women have a genius for mothering. But they seldom carry over the greatness of their motherhood into the field of art. They have not been interested --- have not thrown their whole natures into artistic forms of expression. There is something of the man, too, in the greatest woman, as there is of the woman in the greatest man. You find that in the tenderness that is in Ysaye's playing at times."

This reference was characteristic. There is no jealousy in Mme. Powell's heart. She loves the praise of excellence as much as she hates the flattery of pretentious mediocrity. She recalled with reverently grateful memory the playing of Camilla Urso.

"She first showed me what it was I wanted to do – what all my crude scrapings might become."

She spoke of the pleasure the recorded playing of her fellow artists gave her – Kreisler's, for example. She greatly admires his art, though she does not accept his view of woman suffrage.

"Our artists in various fields are clever, sprightly, full of technique. Some of them are trying to do the real thing, and I feel like taking an axe to get it out of them! There is more of liveliness and high spirits than of spirituality. We don't live deeply enough. We depend too much on the big outer stimulus – like a baseball game – to rouse us."

The fire on the hearth had by this time somehow got into Mme. Powell's eyes.

"I sometimes think America needs a stroke that will humble her pride–bitter hardship like national defeat or the burden of heavy debt. We must be turned away from these things that we possess to a deeper inner life.

"The Civil War and the long strain of the years that led to the break produced the New England poetry and the melodies of Stephen Foster. I do not mean that the artist himself must go out and fight. But he expresses his generation. And this generation has not suffered."

It was not far to a questioning of the very nature of music. Is it a rhythmical imitation of the sounds of the outer world or something less obvious? Mme. Powell replied that she did not find anything new or significant in such attempts as the Strauss Domestic Symphony – a kind of moving picture in tone.

"Of course you can find the same thing in the older music. There is the cuckoo's note in the Pastoral Symphony. But I find the Fifth far greater. People tell me that my playing sounds like the rustling of leaves or the sound of water. That may be well enough for the listener. But the greater work of the composer is to express universal moods of joy or sadness. Music is not fitted to reproduce the details of life. It is a kind of special language that speaks out of the soul."

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

Minneapolis Tribune
21 December 1913

CADENZAS
by Caryl B. Storrs

Maud Powell Recital at the First Baptist church last Monday evening – December 15, 1913

.... At the close of the program I went back to her dressing room to thank her for the pleasure she had given us, and to bid her good-bye. I found her, her husband and her accompanist rushing madly to gather up their belongings in order to make a 10:40 train, for Chicago. "I haven't a minute to visit," she said, "but come along to the station with us." So I got into the waiting taxicab with her and Francis Moore, leaving her husband to ride outside with the driver. On our way down Nicolls (?) Avenue I asked: "Why are you hurrying so to get away from Minneapolis?" "I have to hurry," she replied, "as I must be in Binghamton, New York in time to give a recital." "Don't you believe a word she says," interposed Mr. Moore; "she has plenty of time to get to Binghamton and she is hurrying only that she may reach there in time to rehearse her program with a strange accompanist. And she is taking all this trouble in order that I may be able to spend Christmas with my wife and baby in El Paso, Texas."

Few artists, I believe, of Maud Powell's calibre, would be willing to put themselves out to such an extent in order to allow their accompanists to spend Christmas at home. Most of them would say: "You have been hired to accompany me, and I expect you to do so all during the season. If you desire to hold your job, you must allow your wife and baby to spend Christmas alone." Again, during her busy two days in Minneapolis, Maud Powell found time to hear Ilse Niemack, the 10-year-old violinist, play, and to write of her work as follows: "The child played for me this morning and surprised me. She played the Mendelssohn Concerto extraordinarily well for a mere youngster. She not only has undoubted talent, but is well trained. If she keeps on at this pace, she will have a future."

Another refreshingly human incident of the Powell recital was the admission, free of charge, by Albert K. Cox, manager of the Y.M.C.A. orchestra whose members occupied the choir loft. And Ruth Anderson, the conductor of the orchestra, not being informed until Monday noon of the privilege granted her organization, devoted all the afternoon to sending word to the individuals who make up its personnel....

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

Oregon Daily Journal

Portland, Oregon

15 January 1913

**AMERICANS LACK THE EMOTIONAL ABANDON
THAT MAKES RAG-TIME MUSIC SUCCESSFUL**

Maud Powell Declares Puritan Spirit Handicap Insofar as It Robs One of Spontaneity

By V.W.

Maud Powell, violinist of the most superb skill, with her insured fingers and her assured standing in the artistic world, is still a woman so broadly cultured, so keenly observing and so philanthropically thoughtful that it is a delight to converse with her.

Madam Powell travels round and round the world, exhaling music and inhaling wisdom which she also disseminates to the favored few who really know her.

I was led to Mme. Powell's apartments by the magic tones of her violin and for a moment I listened through the open transom to the wonder interpretation of some colossal composition. "Won't you tell me what you were playing?" I asked her after the greetings had been exchanged.

"Did you like it? It is one of the things I love most to do, Tschaikovsky's Concerto. I introduced it into this country in 1888, playing it in New York. The public scarcely accepted it at first, but now it is in every violinist's repertoire. Sibelius' Concerto, another composition which I introduced two years ago in New York, isn't yet accepted by as many people as I have fingers," and she indicated by spreading each of her hands, each finger of which is valued at \$10,000. "It is a gigantic, rugged thing, an epic really, and I worked on it eight months before I felt that I could give it to the public. It is on new lines and has a new technique. O, it is wonderful."

And her face lighted up as only the face of an artist can when discussing the thing most loved.

"Is it true that each of your recitals is an 'event' with you as it is with the musical public?" I asked.

"Most emphatically it is. I always try to put myself in the place of the audience. They have been thinking and planning for my appearance for weeks, sometimes for months. Should I not in turn, give them the very best I have? I always do and they invariably repay me with appreciation both personal and general."

"What think you of the American's taste for music—for ragtime?"

"An American trying to play or sing ragtime is insufferably vulgar. I do not mean that ragtime is vulgar, I mean it is vulgar when we try to play it. Under a white hand ragtime degenerates into a poor imitation of sounds that are wonderful when made by a primitive race.

Influence of Puritan Spirit

"We white of North America are touched heavily with the Puritan spirit, we cannot be spontaneous, we lack the emotional abandon that comes so easily to natural, primitive people. I have suffered from it myself. Until I went to South Africa, I never fully understood what a handicap this was, and is, to all Americans with Puritan ancestry.

"South Africa, like many other countries, excludes the aborigines from theatres and concert halls, so my knowledge of them was gained elsewhere than in my audiences. Can you imagine any ignorant man here in this city standing for hours under a hotel window to hear me play? Yet that happened in Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and every other African city that I visited. I noticed it first in Johannesburg one morning while I was practicing. Glancing out the window I spied a Kaffir in wide-mouthed, wide-eyed bronze nudity listening.

"I was careful not to let him see me and watched to see how long he would listen. He stood there immovable two hours or more, absolutely enraptured, yet he lived in a kraal and was elaborately costumed when he had on a few strings of beads. Again, just outside Pietermaritzburg we passed a Kaffir boy playing most wonderfully on a mouth organ. He did not stop as we approached, but turned softly aside to let the 'white gods' pass. I have seldom....

[The remainder of the article is missing].

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

Musical America

29 March 1913

**"GO WEST, YOUNG MUSICIAN!" MAUD POWELL ADVISES
That Is the Place, Says Violinist, to Look for the Great American Composers and Works of
the Future—Bellingham's Symphony Orchestra an Example of Western Progressiveness
— Musical Appreciation in Hawaii**

by Herbert F. Peyster

Musical conditions in the West have been discussed so frequently and so extensively by all those musicians of significance or insignificance, that there seems about as little left to say on the subject as about opera in English. Sometimes the theories and deductions of this artist or of that are of weight and importance and sometimes they are not. But there is one, at all events, whose views and impressions are always worth recording. Maud Powell is a keen observer of the artistic evolution of those sections of the country which are decried by the uninitiated as musically unlettered. And as the great American violinist revisits these localities annually she knows well whereof she speaks. Miss Powell has been in more than one sense a path-breaker, a pioneer. She it was who gave the initial impetus to more than one community whose people had previously walked in musical darkness. She has had the privilege of starting them, as it were, upon artistic careers that have yearly grown greater in promise and she has witnessed the achievement of almost incredible results.

It is but a few weeks since Miss Powell returned from another of these expeditions. Indeed, during the past Winter she has been even farther West than the Far West. Christmas time found her not at her New York fireside and in the vicinity of snow and Christmas trees, but on the beach at Honolulu, clad in a bathing suit and ready for a canoeing party – in short, disporting herself as though the calendar had turned topsy-turvy and December had suddenly transformed itself into July. However, the Hawaiian journey was not really business, Miss Powell explained a few days ago to a representative of MUSICAL AMERICA, but only a sort of pleasure trip, a mid-season vacation, so to speak. She did play two or three concerts while she was there by way of pleasant diversion. But if she had been there on serious business she might have given thirty or more without contriving to satisfy the insatiable musical appetite which a taste of her art had engendered among the natives.

But business before pleasure and the American West before Hawaii! In a sense her travels through the Western States may have been a pleasure trip but they involved some arduous labor. No one is more popular with Western audiences than Miss Powell, and according to one Western manager, only two other persons can vie with her in the esteem of audiences – Lillian Russell and David Warfield. Which is equivalent to saying that of all visiting musicians her popularity is the greatest.

"Those who sit calmly in so artistically cosmopolitan a center as New York are scarcely qualified to form ideas concerning Western conditions," Miss Powell observed. "There is an atmosphere of smugness here-abouts that prevents one from acquiring the proper conception of the way things progress out there. Hearing as much music as we hear in New York and hearing it under the conditions we do makes it all but impossible for one who has not seen things on the spot to understand just how matters are developing.

Their Own Standards

"The fact is they have their own standards, their own very particular ideals in the West and they do not necessarily coincide with those that prevail here. I feel convinced that the proper place to look for the great American composers and works of the future will be the West. It may seem curious to those who imagine that artistic appreciation and culture are confined to the East to learn that the Eastern opinion of an artist counts for very little in the estimation of those who patronize musical functions in the West. They accept or reject the artist according to their ideas of him. The newcomer must make his own way, must definitely prove his capabilities before he can hope for anything resembling a following.

"In San Francisco, for example, it is necessary for the newly arrived artist to give two or three concerts if he hopes to profit financially. Comparatively few will attend the first, irrespective of what his success in other quarters may have been. If he pleases at this first appearance a very much larger gathering will be at his subsequent ones. But unless the musician who has not yet proved his case has made arrangements for more than one hearing his efforts are scarcely likely to be particularly remunerative. On the other hand, there are many local artists in those parts who are looked upon with the highest favor and of whom Easterners have heard nothing.

"Musical progressiveness is not equally distributed. I find many of the newer Western communities more prone to advance than some of those in the Middle West such as Kansas and Iowa, which are inclined to be a little sluggish. And the motive force for such advancement lies largely, as has been so often pointed out, in the activity of the women's clubs. They are indefatigable in their energy. The men are still somewhat slow. And it is characteristic of existing conditions that one should sometimes hear the surprised exclamation, "Oh! look at the men," when some of them are seen at a concert. That is one of the peculiar, one of the amazing problems of our national life, the solution of which we have not yet found! Why should it be that so many persons cannot bring themselves to look upon a taste for music as something compatible with distinctly masculine likings?

"In many places they make it their business to "study up" my recitals beforehand. They have their Victor machines, they provide themselves with records of the various numbers on the program, and they post themselves on the lives of the composers and the characteristics of the compositions. They study these matters diligently before the concert takes place, and their talking machines afford them private rehearsals, one might say, so that the enjoyment derived from the actual concert is two-fold.

Bellingham and Its Orchestra

"I played this year with the Bellingham (Wash.) orchestra. Fancy a place so remote having an orchestra! Well, it is due entirely to the efforts of Mrs. Davenport-Engberg and it has been in existence more than a year. When Mrs. Engberg understood I was to play there last year she set about establishing an orchestra, her own violin pupils forming a nucleus. She had no easy task before her. At that time not a soul in Bellingham had any idea of what a viola was. Mrs. Engberg industriously set about teaching some of her pupils the viola. Gradually other instrumentalists were secured. A flutist was found and in order that his sojourn in Bellingham would be assured the resourceful organizer of the orchestra procured him eleven pupils. Picture to yourself a town of that rank with eleven people busily learning to play the flute!"

"Well, they rehearsed ceaselessly. As the time drew near they practised the piece I was going to play with them [Wieniawski's "Souvenir de Moscow"]. Their concertmaster played the solo part. Nervousness was naturally aroused to a high pitch when I appeared to rehearse with them. "Now if you make a single mistake at the performance," Mrs. Engberg flatly told her players, "I solemnly vow to run right out through the door at the back of the platform." "Very well," answered a voice in the orchestra, "but you won't be able to get through for the crowd!" But the concert went off most creditably. This year the orchestra had improved wonderfully. They asked me I I were pleased. 'Pleased,' I answered, 'why I am thoroughly amazed!' So I was. But my saying so delighted them beyond all words. And now, through the work and devotion of one woman that town has an orchestra on which it may pride itself."

When Miss Powell is anxious for a few weeks of relaxation hereafter it is not at all unlikely that she will first look for it in Hawaii.

Hawaii's Lazy Charm

"If you are ever looking for an ideal place in which to be lazy I can recommend that one above all others," she declares. "In the first place it has a climate which does not vary more than ten degrees throughout the entire year. And the people have such a delightful way of accomplishing things and yet of not living constantly under a nervous tension in order to do so. The manner in which they treated us was charming beyond description. No sooner did we land than they had thrown huge garlands about our necks and we were obliged to pass through the streets with them on. And there were feasts and banquets without number. At some of these we ate native food in native fashion seated at the table wearing long flower garlands and eating without knives or forks.

"At the few concerts which I gave the hall was entirely filled. But many more wanted to hear the music than could be accommodated. As a result the windows were left open, and those who could not get in sat outside in the carriages and made the most of what they could hear in that manner.

“The music of the natives must be heard performed by them to be appreciated. Its main charm lies in its rendering. On paper it is unimpressive and of little value. But in playing it the Hawaiian musician, like the Hungarian gypsy introduces effects that are not to be reproduced on paper. They have a curious way of varying the rhythmic plan of a piece by improvising a bar here and another there when one least expects it. Moreover, there are other decorative features that defy reproduction in black and white. There is a lovely lazy charm to Hawaiian rhythms. But all of this music would quite lose its point if played by any but native artists and on anything but their own instruments.”

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

Musical Courier
16 September 1914

MAUD POWELL INTERVIEWED.

The Violinist Gives to Musical Courier Representative Interesting Views on Audiences and What They Like Best -- Also Discusses New Music Faults-- Admired Sibelius

Maud Powell possesses that prime indication of true greatness: absolute modesty and a dislike for talking about herself. She was seen recently by a representative of the MUSICAL COURIER in her beautiful studio in the art centre of New York which clusters about Gramercy Park, and she talked of music, of art, of architecture, entertainingly, instructively, brilliantly, showing not only the thoroughness of her knowledge of, but the depth of her insight into, music and all of its allied arts. But herself she passed over with a word.

Her tour? Certainly, it was to begin early – October 12 – as it always does, and continue, as usual, far into the late spring. It would take her from coast to coast, from North to South. Her bookings were made long ago and complete early enough to admit of herself and husband, who is also her manager, taking a long rest in their favorite playground, the White Mountains.

“Yes,” said Mme. Powell, “I play everywhere, from the largest cities in the smallest towns. My programs? No, I never suit them to any particular audience. I never ‘play down to the public taste.’ The American public is the most discriminating and the most grateful that it is possible to imagine. I have noticed, however, that American audiences do not care for long introspective things. Some sort of poetic or dramatic point is necessary--the music must paint a picture.

“And then, I think the matter of a form that is easily felt is of great importance. These long-winded things that wander on and on and never seem to get anywhere are dreadful! I feel that way about them myself and the average American audience certainly feels the same.

“That is one of the troubles with much of the new music that is sent me to try--either that, or a forced attempt at lightness and popularity which ends in triviality. Sometimes these things sound nice when you first hear them, but their charm soon wears off. It is so terribly difficult to write anything that is pleasing and yet has the true classic ring; and it is no less difficult to write things possessing true depth and are not merely gloomy, sombre and tiresome.

“No, in America one need never ‘play down to any audience,’ not even in the far outlying regions of the West. I play Bach violin and piano sonatas for mixed audiences out in those regions, and I can tell from the attitude of attention that such works as these are thoroughly appreciated.

“What people demand is form, rhythm, melodic line. They do not like popular things and anyone who attempts to play such things will fail.

“You think it strange that anyone in these modern days should speak in favor of form? Well, but even the moderns, the best of them, possess that instinct of perfect balance which is the true foundation of form. Those who profess to have a contempt for it are generally merely ignorant. They are lacking in that feeling for architectural outline which comes with perfect knowledge and they excuse themselves by a pretended contempt for it.

“It is this that I like so much in Sibelius. With all his rugged strength and independence he always possesses that complete balance, that perfect architectural outline, which renders his music so lucid. I love his concerto; its strong, rugged themes, its wonderfully direct appeal, its modernism and yet withal its complete simplicity of thought and structure. It was a joy to me to introduce this concerto in America and I play it every year with unflagging interest. It grows on one.

“I had a delightful meeting with Sibelius at the Norfolk Festival, where some of his new compositions were played. I am planning to play some new works by him this season, partly arranged by myself.

“I have just come down from the White Mountains, Whitefield, and am glad to get to work again, although I had a delightful time there planning our new home there. Oh! Yes, we planned it ourselves and the builders are at work on it now. It is up on the hillside--not right on top of the hill for I like to leave some impression to be gained by going beyond the confines of the home grounds. To live constantly with the best view only destroys its greatest value – its power to surprise.

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

Musical America
16 October 1915

USING PROGRAM NOTES FOR VIOLIN RECITALS

Powell Adopts This Method of Satisfying Audiences That Seek Information about the Compositions She Plays— Better, She Declares, than the Mood-Dispelling Expedient of Talking from the Stage— A Valuable Means to Heightening the Interest of Concert-Goers in the Smaller Cities— Constant Tax Placed upon the Emotions in Recital-Giving— Mme. Powell to Take Another Coast-to-Coast Tour with an Interlude in Hawaii

by Herbert F. Peyster

Everybody knows Maud Powell's famous silhouette and nobody who ever beheld the violinist in the flesh would dream of denying the perfection of the resemblance. The thing is redolent of individuality. Never did a photographic cross-section, *sans* eyes and ears, so happily identify its subject. But today – well, there's the rub! Maud Powell is just beginning seriously to debate the wisdom of posing for a new silhouette of ampler outlines.

The older likeness is just a trifle less faithful than it has been hitherto, for a summer of open air activities has had the effect of increasing the artist's weight. Now to take on weight gracefully and to pulchritudinous advantage is a virtue unusual enough in persons habitually lithe. Miss Powell possesses it consummately. Fuller in face and more vigorous in general appearance than the lissome black portraiture suggests, one would still balk at applying to her the gross and dreaded adjective "fat," with its intimations of indolence. Rather does she symbolize the freshly garnered vigor and accumulated physical and magnetic force that the annual vacation confers upon the artist confronting a season of ruthless labors and momentous responsibilities.

For such a season Mme. Powell has been storing up energy in New Hampshire, whence she returned but recently. A year ago she designed the sort of bungalow she wanted, and even before spring was far advanced the domicile waited only for someone to live in it. It was a place of varied and picturesque interior fascinations; and once installed in it the artist established a flower garden wherein she and her husband, H. Godfrey Turner, labored assiduously at planting and transplanting. They transferred the site of certain trees (which appear to have withstood Mr. Turner's ministrations singularly well) and Mme. Powell worked sedulously to bring flowers of sundry kinds into being – worked with her hands, in fact, somewhat more than prudence warranted. The floral obligato of bugs and creeping things observed the bounds of decorum. The cult of vegetables was neglected. In spite of horticultural exploits and photography (the violinist took pictures of every corner of her house, inside and outside), she plied her music diligently – to what effect her approaching concerts will tell.

Pianistic Skill

Those who have known Maud Powell only under the formal circumstances of the concert hall are probably unaware of her skill as a pianist. If they could drop in upon her at her home unawares, they would experience a shock of pleasant amazement. The present writer, though already acquainted with her pianistic abilities, could not, as he stood outside the door of her Gramercy Park apartment, resist the impression that it was a pianist of pre-eminent abilities who played with such inspiring energy and breadth the exacting piano part of the D'Indy Violin Sonata. To hear her dissect and analyze such a work, playing a phrase here and a page there, is to obtain a glimpse of an extraordinary musical spirit served by a powerful and luminous intelligence.

This D'Indy work will figure in her forthcoming New York recital. But even more interest is likely to pervade violin circles over the fact that the program will be inaugurated with the Seventh Concerto of De Bériot, which has come to be looked upon as the exclusive property of conservatory students even as has long been the fate of Mendelssohn's G Minor Concerto among piano compositions cursed with excessive classroom handling.

"And yet it is a work of solid and substantial musical qualities," says Mme. Powell. "In practicing it, I have been repeatedly moved to exclamations of delight. After all, where are we to find good new concertos today? Consider, for one thing, how superior in musical substance is the De Bériot by comparison with Paganini. I played Paganini last year because several musicians asked me to do so in order to show that I could cope with it. Yet my heart was not in it. It afforded me no musical satisfaction. Whenever I picture Paganini to myself, it is with a thought of his charlatanism. Now the De Bériot work may be hackneyed, but a good deal that is generally overlooked becomes apparent when it is properly played; that is to say, with the proper understanding of its style and interpretative traditions. As much is true of the Mendelssohn. I flatter myself on having the authoritative idea in both cases. A passage near the opening of the last movement, for instance, I play in a way not practiced by the majority of artists. Yet I received the idea from Joachim who in turn had it from David; and in the case of the De Bériot I obtained essential suggestions from Dancla."

"Among the new works which I obtained this summer is a violin arrangement of 'Molly on the Shore,' which Percy Grainger made for me. Edwin Grasse, on his part, supplied me with cadenzas for the Mozart Concerto which appear to me in their way as perfect as Kreisler's for the Beethoven. In spirit and character, they are ideally adapted to Mozart and, as in all of Mr. Grasse's compositions, the excellence of the writing from the standpoint of violinistic idiom could not be surpassed."

Her travels will once more take Mme. Powell to the Pacific Coast. Her Christmas vacation (she grants herself a few days' rest during the holidays) carries her beyond, even to Hawaii, where, as readers of this journal have more than once been apprised, she has visited before. She became from the first enamored of the calming *dolce far niente* atmosphere of the

place, of its people and customs. Nothing about it is conducive to work, everything to the restoration of the vitality which an artist such as Mme. Powell expends on the occasion of every successive concert.

"I shall go sea-bathing on Christmas Day," she announces in an ecstasy of joyous anticipation, "and revel in the sunshine and the rain of the place. One takes both with the best grace in the world. Everything in Hawaii has the gentleness of a caress – the waves of the ocean, the sun, the rain. Nobody could ever think of raising an umbrella if, when riding out, he were caught in a shower; nor should I bother to shut my window as I should here if a little rain were to wet me. Even the waves of the ocean have a tenderness about them. And to hear the natives sing and play their music, especially by moonlight, is an experience not easily to be forgotten. The music itself is apt to be sentimental and the words often vulgar. To appreciate it you must hear it under the proper circumstances. Its fascinations from the musician's point of view lie mainly in the elaborateness of its rhythmic effects.

"The Hawaiians are instinctive musicians. I remember having once heard a band of players perform a piece which their conductor had written only that afternoon. They were given only the melody and obliged to improvise their own accompaniments. One of them, I remember, played a dominant chord where a tonic should have been. I shall never forget the angry glances this drew from the others – glances which expressed the sentiments 'You fool!' more emphatically than ever could have words."

At the risk of being stigmatized as unsociable, Mme. Powell has long since abjured functions prior to concerts at which a large portion of the community bestows upon the artist effusive evidence of its good will and exacts everything from handshakes to professional advice in return. "I wait for that until after the recital," she says. "Then I am pleased to see people. In fact I need to; it affords a sort of outlet to the extra supply of magnetism and vitality left over from the recital proper.

"I have often been urged and sometimes on my own part half resolved not to put forth in a certain recital the full emotional and psychic force which I am capable of giving out. But once on the stage and launched upon the music I have to perform, I realized that I must throw myself into the necessary spirit whatever labor it entails and give my best. The strain, to be sure, may be terrific, but if I don't go through it I am not doing what my audience has the right to expect.

Explaining the Program

"I have found that in some of the smaller towns and in places where the percentage of cultivated musicians in the audience is apt to be small, they want me to talk from the stage about the compositions I am to play. In many cases this sugar-coats the pill for them. The old belief that classical music is a fundamentally dull thing out of which one can get no pleasure is still broadly prevalent. However, it is remarkable how a little information about the works to be played – just enough to help them form mental pictures – will improve the attitude of the hearers and gain their sympathy.

“Yet I entertain an abiding dislike for the spoken word in a musical performance of any kind – it disrupts the existing mood and makes it vastly difficult to re-establish it – and so I have adopted the expedient of employing program notes. These are of the utmost usefulness, I find. I recall the difficulty I had not long ago to win the consent of certain persons in charge of a concert of mine to the inclusion of a Bach piece in my program. Bach, they argued, must necessarily be beyond the grasp of my hearers. And yet when their programs had given them a certain amount of information about the composition, they received it with every sign of pleasure. The preparation of these program notes has been another of my duties during the summer.

“All told, however, the quality of music one can offer the small and remote communities today is immeasurably above what it used to be. Only now and then do I encounter such strange notions of what constitutes a good violin playing as the one I met with a year or so ago, when a man once asked me why I put off my real violin playing till the end of the recital – that is, when I played a brilliant technical showpiece. He freely admitted that he had never known one who did anything but tricks of that sort on the violin.”

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

The Music Lover

August 1915

Vol. I, No. 4

**An Original Interview with
MAUD POWELL
by Ernest John, Editor and Publisher**

Editor's introduction:

*"A CHAT with Mme. Powell has made the word 'sincerity' more meaningful," said a Western newspaperman, and we believe our readers will gain much the same impression from the interview which Mme. Powell gave to *The Music Lover* and which is published for the first time, in this issue. No great artist in the world to-day is capable of appealing more strongly to American audiences, for she herself is an American, but with Europe's thousand years of tradition in her veins. Biographical data is unimportant in the face of an exquisite art, but there are those who may better understand the breadth, the subtlety and fire in her playing when they know that the famous artist is the daughter of a Hungarian mother, herself a skillful amateur composer, and a literary father of English-Welsh descent.*

In the quarter of New York that is richest in tradition there is a house which is a "home" to Maud Powell --- at least for a few weeks in the year. To meet and talk to this famous woman is a thing of joy, for she greets her guests with the charming simplicity of the really great. Because her records may be heard where she herself can never go, the interview dealt for the most part with them, and they will have an added interest for music-lovers everywhere because of what their maker has had to say concerning them.

"You, no doubt, have some personal favorites among your Victor records. Which are they?" was the first question.

"I like --- *Deep River*," said Mme. Powell, in the tone which indicates mental stock-taking.

"*Deep River?* Why?"

"I like it musically. I like it as a tune; it is well harmonized and I consider it one of my best records from the point of view of recording. The phrasing is good, and I feel that I was at my best in it. Then, too, it's a real American tune. A man I met in Texas, who had lived in New Orleans in the 70's, told me that he had heard it sung, with a slight variation of rhythm, by the darkies who loaded the cotton schooners."

"Then, I like the Tenaglia *Aria*, too. Let me see --- oh, yes --- that's listed as *Have Pity Sweet Eyes*. You see, to speak of the Tenaglia *Aria* doesn't convey much and people like some sort of suggestion from the title."

"Do you feel that this aria is a 'find'? That is, is it something like --- oh, say the Raff Cavatina? Something that everybody can and will enjoy?"

“Oh, no,” said Mme. Powell. “It isn’t superficial enough for that!” and she laughed with the glee of a wood elf. “Oh, no --- but it takes the listener into a few moments of serious enjoyment through its simplicity and nobility --- like a perfect Greek statue or a lovely bit of architecture.

“Oh, the old writers wrote marvelous things, didn’t they? Things that last to this day and --- like the old painters --- it seems to me that they must have worked with a touch of religious ardor. I don’t believe, for instance, that those wonderful cathedrals could have been built in a day like this, do you? Why, we have no reverence for *anything*!

“That reminds me. A woman friend of mine says she ‘hates’ the violin. What she means is that she is afraid of it emotionally. Isn’t that rather typically American?”

Mme. Powell got up and for a moment or two was very evidently looking for something, then she said:

“I wanted to show you a book of wild flowers --- painted for me. These little things! The beauty of them is enough to make one weep or sing --- but --- people don’t see them. We are too busy playing the game of life to really *live*, and for us pleasure is a synonym for excitement. Our music is *ragtime*, which sometimes tickles the rhythmic sense, but more often merely assaults the ears, and vulgar songs of the day, with their unspeakable words! People don’t seem to realize that there is much more beauty in quiet music and in classical music if they’ll only get familiar with it. That it’s more beautiful and --- lasts longer.”

“Lacking the inspiration of an audience, how can you manage to put so much emotional force into a record like --- well, say the Sibelius *Valse Triste*? ”

Mme. Powell laughed, and then she said: “Just nervousness! Making a record is the most nervous work I’ve ever done in my life! I’m as limp as a rag when it’s over.”

“Just nervousness?”

“Yes, I think so. But of course, being an artist means that your nervousness goes into the right channels and accomplishes the thing you want to do. There’s a ghastly feeling that you’re playing for all the world and an awful sense that what is done *is* done.”

“You watch that awful face at the window, waiting for the raising of the eyebrows which tells you to begin, and then (laughing heartily), for the life of you, you don’t know whether you can put your finger on the right note or not! I assure you there is no chance of being bored!”

“Violin records seem wonderfully satisfying. Why should they be?”

“I do think that the violin or the string quartette too, perhaps, does more to cultivate taste. It’s freer from the ‘feet of clay.’ You are not required to listen to words or speculate on accompanying dramatic action and all that. The music is more impersonal than when you listen to a voice. It makes its own appeal and there are not extraneous distractions. A song from opera is less complete in form because it is related to the context, both of music and action, but with us --- the things that we play must be complete in themselves.”

“Will you tell me another record that you personally like?”

“As a crisp and scintillating piece of violin work I like Hubay’s *Hejre Kati*, and I think it’s a wonderful achievement in recording.”

“How much of the original brilliance is lost in the Victrola reproduction?”

“Practically none; there may be a little less of --- well --- shall we say string elasticity? That seems to express what I mean. I’ve heard people say that the Victrola doesn’t sound like the violin, but d’you know, to me it sounds *exactly* like the violin. I think perhaps people have to learn how to listen. You can get behind all the mechanical part and listen subjectively.”

“Is there another record?”

“Yes, the Bach *Bourrée*. I like it for its rhythm. One man, by the way, who doesn’t know anything about classical music, says it’s my best record --- Bach, if you please! Then, too, there’s a lovely aesthetic effect in going from the B minor of the *Bourrée* into the F major *Menuett* of Gluck. The first C in the menuett gives me untold satisfaction. It’s wonderful, and the transition is *so* simple. It occurs, of course, in the interval between the end of the *bourrée* and the beginning of the menuett.”

“By the way, I wish people wouldn’t play my record of the Mendelssohn Concerto so fast. It loses all the nuances, all the rhythmic charm, and sounds --- stupid.

“Once, when I was on a concert tour, I went into a store where they happened to be playing it. I was rather ‘on edge’ with the strain of concert work, so I went to the young man at the Victrola and said, ‘Won’t you please play that a little slower?’ He told me the Victrola was playing at the right speed, but I said, ‘Well, but you’re playing that in G, and it’s written and played in E.’ Then Mr. Turner came up and said, ‘Since this is the lady who made the record she *may* be right, you know’; then, of course, the poor boy wilted --- but it does spoil the record to play it so fast.”

“Mme. Powell, how far do you think an artist may go in the matter of personal interpretation?”

“Only so far as to make every little point tell; interpretation should never be a cloak for personal display.”

“Do violinists ever feel that they cannot interpret the work of some certain composer?”

“Not unless they are afflicted with spiritual laziness. Of course, there are always some composers whose work seems to lie more particularly within one’s own taste and capabilities. Musicians ought to be able—as an actor is—to associate themselves with the spirit of a composition. Many a time I’ve given a composition the benefit of the doubt and delved into it till I found the hidden treasure.”

“How do you think the technique of the modern violinist probably compares with that of Paganini?”

“We have to express more. In fact, I think too much is asked of the violinist—it would almost seem as though the orchestra is the solo instrument of the day; the violin is a singing instrument, and it *has* its limitations you know!”

“And now, do you find that public taste has improved in recent years so far as violin music is concerned?”

“Amazingly.”

“Along what line is it developing?”

“Oh—I think the public still rather likes to be dazzled; but it seems to differ somewhat in different communities. Some like the brilliant things, some the emotional, and some the spirituelle—dainty. It’s largely a question of putting them in the right mood. A great deal depends on the art of compiling programs—I mean that things must be led up to properly; creating the proper contrasts and so on. The American public doesn’t like long, meandering introspective things, but they like things with a definite idea; things that are short and can be grasped in their entirety. They think rather too much about just going from one bar to another and enjoying it as they go along, instead of thinking of a composition as a whole.”

“How much of the musical development is due to the Victrola?”

“Ah! It’s hard to say too much about the influence of the Victrola --- it is a real, a vital and indeed a national influence. Why, do you know, out in Montana I saw a man get off the train who looked like a tramp. He had a big sack over his shoulder containing records which we ourselves had seen him select in a Victrola shop. He must have had a hundred dollars’ worth --- and he was going to carry them ten miles!”

A famous critic has said concerning Maud Powell: “There is at least one woman that can fiddle with the best of the men and at the same time express herself clearly and forcibly in writing.” He meant in talking, too.

I had had a delightful morning and was by no means ready to leave, but Mme. Powell had been practising when I called, and even an interviewer must be reasonable; but --- there was no difficulty in remembering what she had said, even in the roar of the city streets.

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

Star-Telegram
Fort Worth, Texas
February 12, 1915

VIOLINIST'S HUBBY LOSES CLOTHES; EATS IN OVERCOAT
Maud Powell's Trunks Left Behind at Belton in Rush to Catch Train –
Age of Lady No Subject for Conversation
by W. G. Byrne

Mr. and Mrs. Maud Powell arrived in Fort Worth Friday morning from Belton, Texas, where Mrs. Maud fiddled Thursday night. Mr. Powell ate breakfast under trying conditions Friday, being enveloped in an overcoat which interfered with the manipulation of his knife and fork in the Westbrook hotel breakfast room. The reason of the "make up" was that Mr. Powell, who in private life is H. Godfrey Turner, had hurried to the train in his dress suit after assisting Mrs. Maud at the Belton concert. The Powell-Turner trunks were delayed and the husband was forced to wear a frilled shirt, dress suit and patent leather shoes when he ate his "ham and –."

"He's more fun than you can imagine," confided Mrs. Maud. She watched her husband frisk about the room in his "June bug" coat, sans collar and necktie, but still wearing his eye glass and she relaxed from the tedious grind of being an artist.

Disappoint Anxious Mothers

She simply gloated in the activities of Powell, who busied himself removing ever so often a tweed hat from the telephone receiver in order that he might tell some fond parent Mrs. Maud didn't have time to listen to all of the violin prodigies in the world.

"He's awfully human even if he is English," declared Mrs. Maud.

"I was simply a normal player when a child," said Mrs. Powell-Turner. "No one made much ado about me. I worked at my art until I got to the position that I coveted. In fact I was so busy that I not only forgot the silver anniversary of my introduction to the public, but have been overlooking it for about five years since. I was sixteen when my first public concert was given, so if you are spiteful enough, figure out my age for yourself."

Summing it up hurriedly, Mrs. Powell-Turner is crowding the half-century mark with five years' leeway.

"People don't get their poise until they are past forty," she said. "There is so much in sight at twenty or even thirty that one is not sure of one's self. But when the forty mark is reached, the richness and ripeness of life is developed and one begins to make definite plans. For myself, I believe I play better now than I did ten years ago and I believe that I will play even better when I've passed the fifty-year mark."

"It's awfully bad form to talk of age. It really doesn't belong in polite conversation," said hubby. "Take my case for instance. I'm getting close to the fifty-five mark and Mrs. Powell-Turner is a grandmother by proxy. But we don't care for age. It's all part of the game, this beastly affair of living. I don't intend to get old until I die. Then, by Jove, I won't even admit that I'm dead."

Original Sunny Jim

"He's the original Sunny Jim," said Mrs. Maud enthusiastically. "I decided that ten years ago when he was managing my tours. I had to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner with him on the continent and I made up my mind that a man who could be as pleasant at breakfast as Godfrey is would be alright as a husband. So I married him. And I haven't regretted it, have I, Sunny Jim?"

"Righto old girl," said the dress suited man.

And him talking to one of the best violinists in the world!

Mme. Powell is accompanied in her concerts by Frances Moore, an El Paso boy whom she "discovered" one day while walking through the music stores – both of them – at El Paso.

Mme. Powell's concert tonight will be under auspices of Our Lady of Victory Academy.

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