



# Violin

## Choosing the Best Audition Repertoire

by Sally O'Reilly

Recently the importance of the right choice of repertoire for college auditions was brought home to me very forcefully by a young woman who had applied to graduate school to study with me. At her audition last winter, she played the Bach *E Major Preludio* and the Amy Beech *Sonata* (without piano). The choice of works was totally inadequate as a representation of her real violinistic ability, but our string faculty had no way of knowing this. The result was acceptance into the program, but denial of scholarship aid. She chose to come to school anyway. Imagine my shock when she walked into her first lesson this fall and played the third movement of the Tchaikovsky *Concerto* ... *really* played it!

I can only conclude that her former teacher failed to guide her with regard to the do's and don'ts of auditions. Her audition repertoire concealed her strengths including her well-developed technic.

When our students are preparing entrance auditions, we need to consider some basic requirements as we help them choose and prepare repertoire. We must ask: 1) What is the student's real violinistic level? and 2) What are the student's strengths and weaknesses?

After those two questions are answered honestly, we can proceed to an effective choice of works for the student. If for example, a student has a modest amount of practice time available (i.e. one to two hours on four to five days a week), lengthy works should be avoided because the time needed to practice them in depth simply doesn't exist.

Shorter concerto movements that shine a positive light on a talented high school student include the first movement of the Bruch *Concerto in g minor* and the outer movements of the Kabalevsky *Concerto*.

Concertos that work well for talented but less-developed violinists include the third movement of Viotti *No. 23* or the first movement of Viotti *No. 22*. Rather than struggling with unaccompanied Bach, the Telemann *Twelve Fantasias* offer many masterable movements. A beautifully polished Handel or Corelli sonata is always well-received. A student with a beautiful sound can show it off with Borowski's *Adoration. Meditation* from Massenet's *Thais* is technically more demanding and should be assigned with caution. If you have a student who has a flare for performance and a real grasp of style but who isn't advanced enough to tackle works by Wieniawski or Sarasate, the *Mazurka* by Mlynarski has charm and pizzazz.

The violinistically advanced student has broader choices. The first two movements of Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*, the third movement of Bruch, and the first movement of Barber are always attractive choices for auditions. With regard to unaccompanied Bach, I tend to avoid the *E Major Preludio* because the stress of an audition often interferes with the uninterrupted concentration necessary for a successful performance. The *Adagio* and *Presto* from *Sonata No. 1* and the *Allemande* and *Gigue* from *Partita No. 2* usually fare better than a fugue or the *Chaconne* under the pressure of

an audition. Those should be attempted only by students who have the talent and discipline to master them.

Sonatas, while they are essential for the student's musical development, should only be included if the pianist will be present. An unaccompanied Beethoven, Brahms or Franck sonata will make a tepid impression no matter how beautifully it may be played.

If you have an advanced pupil who has fast and accurate fingers, choose a piece that spotlights that ability. The Mozart *G Major Rondo*, the fifth movement of Lalo, and the third movement of the Barber *Concerto* are excellent examples from different periods.

Mozart and Mendelssohn concerti are splendid choices for the student with a pristine technic who gives great attention to detail and right arm precision. The "war horse" concerti — Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Dvorak and Sibelius — should be saved for top-flight talents who practice many hours every day.

We are fortunate in Minnesota to have many serious violin students who are willing to "pay the price" for the highest level of achievement. As their teachers, we only have to select repertoire wisely, teach it carefully, and rest assured that they will represent us, themselves and the composer well.

*Sally O'Reilly is professor of violin at the University of Minnesota and a composer of technical studies for strings. She is founder and director of Bravo! Summer String Institute. †*