



Violin

Summer Study ... the Crucial “Leg Up”

by Sally O'Reilly

Summer is over and most of us have returned to our classrooms, studios, orchestras and private students. The condition in which we find our students will depend on the way in which they spent June, July and August. Our reactions may range from pleasure to total horror as the result of their summer musical activities.

When I was young, my mother had me continue my violin lessons for the first six weeks of the summer. In mid-July, my teacher left for Chautauqua and we had vacation time. By junior high school, I had begun to have a few lessons in those last six weeks of the summer with the assistant concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony. At age 16, I spent nine weeks in Aspen, practicing, beefing up my orchestral skills, and playing chamber music.

This pattern of summer study began early because my mother recognized its value during academic “down time.” I had nothing else to distract me and could easily double my practice hours with plenty of time left over

for blistering my bare feet on Dallas' hot sidewalks and getting my quota of freckles in the swimming pool.

My friends who took the entire summer off tended to regress. Many complained of sore fingers in September. A few would quit because of the loss of continuity. Taking the challenge back seemed too daunting after a three month hiatus.

Our students are fortunate to have many different summer study options. There are Suzuki workshops, chamber music workshops, intensive programs like Bravo! and Encore for more advanced students, Aspen and Tanglewood for the orchestral emphasis. But students needn't be in special programs to benefit from lessons during the summer. My mother's deal with her students was, “When I'm in town I teach, and when you're in town you study.” It worked well. If a teacher needs to take a full three months off, a substitute teacher should be found and students should be encouraged to have lessons. I use some of my doctoral students.

They are happy to gain both experience and income, and I have peace of mind knowing that my students will 1) remember my name, 2) still know up-bow from down-bow, and 3) may have learned new repertoire.

This is the time of year for us to suggest study plans for next summer so that parents can make vacation arrangements that coincide with our recommendations. You might want to point out that losing 25% of the year on an instrument is the equivalent of taking three steps forward and one step back. The student who utilizes those extra months may move twice as fast as one who doesn't.

Plant the seeds for summer study early so you can look forward to September 2001.

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