



Violin

Developing a Passion for Performance with Thorough Preparation

by Sally O'Reilly

As the child of a professional musician, I grew up hearing many people tell of their failed attempts at instrumental study. Most of these tales of woe included some sort of trauma in performance. It is astonishing how many successful, well-adjusted adults still harbor feelings of humiliation and inadequacy as the result of memory slips, forgetting the piece altogether, or just disappointing parents with a less-than-stellar performance. The saddest thing about most of these stories is that they usually end with "so I quit studying."

We can all agree that the last thing this world needs is another professional musician, so perhaps we could view these nightmarish incidents cynically as a vital part of keeping the musical population down! Unfortunately, what we *do* need are supporters of music, and the best way to get them is to educate them by training them well. People who have experienced performance in a positive way at any level can appreciate the enormous effort that goes into building real artistry. These are the people we need at the head of symphony boards and advisory committees of schools of music.

So how do we create a performance situation that is foolproof? Let's examine study habits from the ground up. First, we have to be sure that the student's position is correct. Then, we

have to provide our students with the basic tools of total accuracy, both in intonation and rhythm. Each element should be isolated and strengthened during the early stages of study.

We memorize with three senses — aural, tactile, and visual. We must find ways to support each of these senses throughout the learning process. We have an equation in music: Repetition Equals Memorization. Repetition at different speeds hastens the process. Slow speeds keep the focus on each note and prevents finger memory. It also builds depth of tone. Medium speeds practiced with the music reinforces visual memory and keeps wrong notes and rhythms from creeping in. Attention can be given to bow apportionment and dynamics. Finally, a speed just below performance speed challenges control.

As teachers, our response to our students' performances has tremendous impact on the students' sense of self worth. If ever there was a moment when affirmation and acceptance were essentials to building a passion for performance, *this is it*. Leave your ego at home. Whether you know it or not, this is not about you. It is the student's moment *totally*. If you have criticisms you must save them. If you want to tear down the performer's ego, go ahead and vent your spleen and exonerate yourself if things didn't go exactly

the way you'd hoped. *But*, if you want to build the student, praise the good things and reassure him that the next time will be even better. Eat the "I-told-you-so's," and be sure that the student's parents do, too.

So let's assume you've managed to "stifle yourself" as Archie Bunker would say. When *do* you get to tell the student about the last performance's negatives? Well, if you want the most return for your effort, save it until you're preparing the student for the next performance. A reminder that a fast passage fell apart because of lack of slow practice will be much more powerful now because the student won't want to repeat past mistakes and will be receptive when you offer ways to avoid them.

Basically, we have a choice between negative, after-the-fact ammunition which destroys self-confidence and positive, before-the-fact ammunition which supports the student. It isn't easy to hold your fire until you see the whites of their eyes, but this aspect of teaching *is* war, and if you don't win the battle, the student loses.

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