



VIOLIN

How to Interview Prospective Students (and Parents)

by Sally O'Reilly

As a new school year begins, most of us will be receiving phone calls from parents of prospective students who will ask about our programs. They will call with their prepared lists of questions. How long are the lessons? How much do they cost? What days do you teach? What times do you have available? The lists are varied and can go on and on.

We, as professionals, need to be prepared with our own lists, which include our individual studio policies as well as some direct inquiries about the student and the parent. Usually parents are referred to us by other students' parents or other teachers. Or they may be responding to an advertisement. It is not out of line to ask who or what occasioned the call, and it may give you information you can follow up on if you feel you need to know more about the student/parent before scheduling a personal interview.

It is important to be direct about your expectations very early in the process. Issues of tuition, a student's missed lessons (when do you make them up, if at all?), lessons you miss, practice expectations, attendance at group lessons, parent participation, and recitals should be discussed at the outset.

Meeting a student with the parent face to face is the second level of the interview process. Pay close attention to the inter-

action between parent and child. Is there tension between them? Is the child passive or reluctant? Is the parent pushy, supportive, or disinterested?

Talk with them about goals. State yours and ask the parent for his/ hers. If the child is old enough, try to ascertain his or her level of interest. If the student has already studied for any period of time, listen to some prepared material and evaluate previous progress as part of your decision to accept or reject the student.

If the child is a beginner, it is advisable to do a few simple tests of combined concentration and rhythmic aptitude. I will clap two $\frac{2}{4}$ measures: ♩|♩♩ ...and ask the child to clap them back. 50 to 60% will do it immediately and accurately. Another 40 or 50% will have a problem. Then, I clap it again and say, "Pie, yum, apple, pie." At least half of those who had difficulty with the more abstract clapping will succeed with word association. The remainder of children who still have difficulty probably have some marked rhythmic deficiency. This is inherent and cannot be remedied. If you need "bread and butter" students (and we *all* have at one time or another), you can accept an arhythmic pupil, but you both will probably end up being very frustrated rather quickly.

People in my generation sang a lot. We

sang in school and church. Families sang in the car. These days there are children who seldom sing. I point this out because testing a child to see if he can carry a tune may be misleading if he hasn't had the opportunity to develop some vocal ability. The ability to sing well is indicative of a good ear, but the inability to sing well isn't necessarily indicative of a bad ear.

With young students, parent support and participation is essential. If you suspect indifference on the part of a parent, you probably don't have much of a chance with the child. If one of the parents isn't involved enough to take notes in lessons and supervise practice, any child under the age of twelve will most likely founder (and drive you crazy in the process!) Parents should not be allowed to use us as high-priced babysitters!

The more information we can give about our requirements and the more knowledge we can gather about each parent/student constellation, the better we can populate our classes with the kind of students we want.

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