



VIOLIN

After the Contest is Over ... What Now?

by Sally O'Reilly

In the recent past, I have written about preparing students for performance, audition, and competition. All three have the potential for fallout, but competitions are the most likely to necessitate follow-up from the teacher.

When our state competition was held in early November, the number of entrants was impressive. Minnesota is truly a "string state" and the level of string pedagogy equals and often surpasses that of other states in the country. Because of this, competitors play on a national level and winning any string competition in Minnesota really means something. The performance quality of our competitors at all age levels is exceptional.

Winners are understandably happy with their prizes and recognition. They deserve to be proud of their achievements. As teachers, we want to celebrate their successes with them, but we must always be vigilant so that we prevent one win from going to the student's head. It is our responsibility to maintain a sense of proportion for our students so that they don't rest on their laurels and bore us to death with subsequent unprepared lessons.

I have found that it is a psychological plus to lay out a post-competition plan for

every entrant before the contest takes place. This always includes new repertoire which I have them order ahead of time so that a fresh challenge is awaiting them in the first lesson following the contest.

Competitions like MNSOTA's are valuable for every entrant because each pupil receives written comments. It is important to go over these comments with the student so that positive observations from the judges can be emphasized. It isn't necessary to beat a student up with "I told you so" when a criticism reiterates something you've corrected a thousand times, but it *is* helpful to have support in dealing with a problem that must be fixed.

So, what do we do for the students who are not prize winners? Initially, we hope we haven't raised unrealistic expectations for them. I am always careful to say to younger, less developed students that they will have the opportunity to play for good judges and receive valuable comments. We use a contest as a goal, which requires the polishing of a solo piece. I never express doubts about the possibility of winning — you never know who may shine forth in the heat of the moment — but I keep the emphasis on the chance to be heard playing well.

Occasionally contests can precipitate jealousy of the winner. If the students are young, it's usually a parent who gets his nose out of joint. These are situations in which it is best to revisit the importance of the amount of practice time invested and the quality of the preparation. Most winners are not flukes and it is essential to impress this on students and parents alike.

It doesn't happen often, but sometimes a parent will report that a student is abnormally disappointed by a contest loss. I am always quick to say, "Then she mustn't participate in contests. We'll find other performance outlets for her." Then, if the student *is* hypersensitive, this provides a necessary 'out.' But if it is only parental hyperbole, a crucial point has been made and you probably won't ever hear that line again!

One final reminder: Let's never fail to impress on our students that it is the practice they do for competitions that makes them *all* winners.

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