

GINGOLD, VIRTUOSO TEACHER

by Mary Budd Horozaniecki

Josef Gingold was a remarkable man. I knew him from my early training at the Meadowmount School of Music in the 1960s to his death in 1995. I had weekly lessons with him at Indiana University from 1970 to 1973, and continued study with him at the Blossom Festival School. After graduation I continued our professional relationship through correspondence, and returned visits for lessons whenever possible. The last time I saw him was in late December 1994, right before his death. I am honored to share my experiences with the Master for the next generation of string teachers so that they may also benefit from his life and work.

Mr. Gingold was a virtuoso. For him it was a frame of mind. It was his reality. He believed in what he called at one of my lessons “the eleventh commandment,” which was “know thy fingerboard.” He would start every day with his “Promenade of the Fingerboard,” scales and warm ups. At one of my first lessons he gave me a copy of *Scales in Two Octaves* by Leonard, a warm up I play every day. He would practice scales slow and fast. He enjoyed mixed fingerings, and making up challenges. For example, he would play an A major scale in two octaves: sul G: 12, 12; sul D: 12, 12; sul A: 12, 12; sul E: 12, 3, 21; sul A: 21, 21; sul D: 21, 21; sul G: 21, 21.



And the same is true for all different kinds of scales. Build your own! Mr. Gingold taught a loose left hand. “Make your fingers go on a diet,” he would say to me. He also warmed up by shifting octaves on the same string, using different fingers, and with lots and lots of double stops. The *Sevcik Op. 1 Book 4* was one of the staples of my technical diet.

Etudes were carefully taught in the studio, but were not assigned in order like at the Meadowmount School. Mr. Gingold had his own variants for each etude, which because they are not in print I have affectionately named the “Pepsi Challenges.” With him I studied his variants for Kreutzer 1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11 and “Big” Dont (Op. 35) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9. I explain these in detail when I give master classes and pedagogy workshops. The message is not only

to follow orders, but to be creative. “Mary, you must change the dutiful to the beautiful,” he would tell me. We also worked on etudes found in the *Ecole Moderne* by

“Mary, you studied with etude with me. I remember! You don’t need the music! I’ll help you.” he exclaimed and started playing the etude. (Mr. Gingold rarely used a score.)

Slowly I joined in. Then I realized he had stopped playing. I continued. I play the whole etude! It was like an out of body experience. It was amazing.

When I came to study with Mr. Gingold I was playing the *Suite in A Major* by Sinding. I had been at the Meadowmount School, where I had spent considerable time on technique, and had just started learning the major concerti. The first piece of repertoire

assigned by Mr. Gingold was the *Devil’s Trill Sonata* by Tartini. When I got this assignment I remember being quite surprised at the request. This would indeed be a big challenge for me! Such a difficult piece! He meticulously marked my music. When we got to the G octaves in the last cadenza he started to laugh saying, “We’ll have to invent some new dance steps for your small hand.” We worked measure by measure. I learned the piece “By heart,” but never played it in public. The next repertoire I was assigned was the *Sonatina in a minor* by Schubert. A real contrast, and repertoire that I perform a lot today. Then I was assigned the *Symphonie Espagnole* by Lalo, a performance piece. When I look back at these assignments, I see the genius in these assignments — the Tartini for technical strength and virtuosity, the Schubert for artistry, and the Lalo for performance repertoire. The technique needed

Wieniawski, but learned them as concert pieces. Mr. Gingold was always very clear as to what type of practice he wanted me to do. He loved slow motion practice, for perfect intonation and bow control. One of his favorite demonstrations in master class was his three-minute down-bow. It was incredible! My practice and lesson journal is filled with specific directions. “Without purpose to practice, there is no progress,” is one of the quotes I have recorded. When it came time to prepare something for performance he would say, “Know it by heart.” I remember one time in particular when I traveled to Bloomington for a lesson after a long break. I had prepared the *Poeme* by Chausson. Mr. Gingold instead wanted to start with the Dont Op. 35. “Let’s play number two,” he said, with that “let’s have some fun” expression on his face. I hadn’t played that etude in years. “But I don’t even have my music!” I replied.

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to perform the Lalo became manageable after mastering the gymnastics involved in the Tartini.

Our next project was the repertoire for my junior recital. He lifted the *Ciaccona* by Vitali from high school days (Charleir edition), but added his markings. Then I studied the *Concerto in e minor* by Conus, a Meadowmount piece. To complete the program I was assigned the *Sonata No. 5 in F Major* Op. 24 by Beethoven. Serious business. Mr. Gingold carefully instructed me to “play what is written.” “Nobody is smarter than Beethoven,” he said. He carefully marked bowings and fingerings for the first three movements, as he had for all of my repertoire, being careful not to stray from the urtext. When I came for my lesson, I had carefully prepared the three movements he had marked. When I finished the Scherzo there was an awkward silence in the room. “Go on,” I heard him say. “It’s not marked,” I replied in a worried tone. “Be your own teacher,” he replied, smiling. I spent the next week struggling to mark the movement. At the next lesson he contested every marking. I immediately responded by agreeing with him, and started to change my markings. This did not please him. “You don’t have to come to terms with me Mary, you have to come to terms with Beethoven!” “Believe in yourself; play what is in your heart — that is what you take out on the stage.” To this day, the last movement of Op. 24 is void of any of his markings.

One of my most memorable experiences with Mr. Gingold was the lesson I had after Spring Break the first year I

worked with him. My lesson was Tuesday at 1:30 P.M. Mr. Gingold had assigned a “small vacation piece,” the *Polonaise in D Major* by Wieniawski. I purchased the music and went home for the break. Like most naïve students, I never looked at the music, or took the violin out of the case, but I had a wonderful vacation. I returned to Bloomington Sunday night and went straight to the music building to prepare for the lesson Tuesday. In looking at the music, I realized that despite the fact that the piece was short, it was extremely difficult. On the last page there were thirds, in staccato, a feat that would take quite a bit of time to develop. I knew it would be something he was looking for, and I hoped that we wouldn’t get that far into the piece at my lesson. After practicing Sunday and Monday, I went to my lesson. There to my surprise was a pianist, sitting at the piano! Mr. Gingold made formal introductions, gave a tempo and away we went. Needless to say, because I had not even prepared the “dutiful” there could be no “beautiful!” “The pianist is excused,” he said, “Thank you so much for coming in today; please give my best regards to your teacher.” After the pianist left, I remember thinking, “Here it comes! Lord let it be fast and quick!” “Not bad sight-reading Mary,” Mr. Gingold laughed. “Do you have anything else for me to listen to today?” From then on I practiced five hours a day.

Mr. Gingold was a man who always made you aware of a higher calling. For ten summers I had the honor of being

invited to participate in Mr. Pressler’s class entitled *Chamber Music with Piano*, which was a special session seminar held every July. During one of these conferences I was preparing to perform movements from the Op. 8 *Trio* of Brahms, the Op. 24 *Spring Sonata* of Beethoven, and the *Trio* in B \flat of Mozart. During my stay I also had several lessons with Mr. Gingold. On my way to the performance I saw Mr. Gingold leaving his office. He was dressed immaculately in a powder blue suit and his derby hat. “I hope to honor you by playing well tonight,” I said to him. Mr. Gingold looked almost confused by this statement. “Mary, your honor comes from who you are, not how you play the violin,” he replied. Another time I was preparing an audition. “Is there anything special I need to know?” I asked him. “Be yourself,” he replied. “If it turns out that you don’t get the job, then it wasn’t meant for you. The people that know you will want you, and everyone will be happy.”

Mary Budd Horozaniecki receives national acclaim as a performing artist and pedagogue. She tours internationally as a soloist, chamber musician, and giving master classes. She has presented at three national ASTA conferences where her team research on violin duos was written in Strings magazine in an article entitled Vertical Climb. She was awarded the Master Teacher Award by MNSOTA in 1993. Presently, she is teaching at Augsburg, Macalester, and Carleton Colleges, and at the Upper Midwest String and Chamber Music Conference. †