

PEDAGOGY TALK SESSION

presented by Sally O'Reilly — reported by Elizabeth Ericksen

Sally O'Reilly's pedagogy talk on January 19 was a question and answer session. About 10 people attended the session, which was engaging, entertaining, and informative. The session covered a number of topics that were raised by the participants.

Mozart Concertos

Sally feels that Mozart concertos are often taught too early. Playing them well requires sophistication of bowing and left hand technique. She recommends that students study a Viotti Concerto #22 or #23, a de Beriot Concerto #7 or #9, and the Kabalevsky Concerto before taking on Mozart.

She stated that Mozart wrote vocally even for instruments and recommends that students listen to Mozart arias while studying the concertos. This can help them internalize breathing, which is especially important when playing the slow movements.

She recommends that students learn the Joachim cadenzas when studying the 4th and 5th Concertos because that will be expected for professional orchestra auditions.

When asked if there is an age when a student is too young to learn Mozart, she said not if they have the appropriate preparation. She joked that some will say you are too young and then after a while you are too old—so you're never the right age to learn Mozart.

Avoiding Injury

Sally said that it is very important to get students set up with the appropriate chin rest and shoulder pad. She feels that the instrument should be able to be held up without the use of the arm. She noted that Vronsky said that a teacher, when looking at a child, should ask himself, "Could this student play the Tchaikovsky Concerto looking like that?"

"Nag, nag, nag!" You have to keep making adjustments with students as they grow. Some tall students may need to change their position weekly. Tall students also may benefit from a raised chin rest and a Kun shoulder pad. She has seen pink foam-rubber make-up pads used to build up the chest area of the shoulder pad.

Size of Instrument

In addition to looking at arm length, Sally looks at the left shoulder. The instrument should not extend beyond the shoulder. It is beneficial to the student to stay on a smaller instrument longer until they grow into the next size.

In addition to size, it is important that

the "equipment" is in good working order. Fix the pegs, put tuners on all four strings, and ensure that double stops can be played in tune.

Remedial Work

Sally uses a two-speed tape recorder to point out intonation problems. If you play back a performance at half speed, you can hear every mistake and the teacher does not have to say much.

"Students hate to be stopped—so much so that they will even play it right."

"Once students have played correctly longer than they have played incorrectly, you can hear their confidence improve and they come into their own."

Technical Studies

Sally recommends using technical studies so that students are not learning technique in repertoire. If students are struggling with something, it is because they don't have all the information or technique they need to make it happen.

Sevcik, Op. 8 – Shifting: Students learn these studies at the speed $\text{♩}=50$. She rebows the studies so shifts are played during the slur not on the bow change. Sometimes she has them redo the studies at $\text{♩}=60$.

Sevcik, Op. 9 – Double Stops: She teaches this book in C Major only, playing very slowly. She will have students mark double stops Major or Minor.

Flesch Scale Studies – Double Stops: They learn these after finishing the *Sevcik Op. 9*. Sally teaches the 6^{ths} first, then the 3^{rds}. Octaves come after 3^{rds}. She suggests using arm weight to play octaves, releasing the arm weight during the shift. "Accuracy in shifts happens above the fingerboard." She recommends *slow* practice. If something is well set at a slow tempo, the faster speed comes quickly.

Schradieck – Finger Flexibility: Sally requires her students to play the first two pages, No. 1, 1-25 with repeats, $\text{♩}=120$, with

no mistakes. If there is a mistake, they bring it back the next week and the next and so on until perfect. This builds physical stamina and concentration. The rest of the book is also taught at that speed, but some of the primary keys (G and D Major) are played at $\text{♩}=160$.

Sevcik Op. 8 and *Schradieck* help students become familiar with the entire fingerboard. *Sevcik* works on shifting up on each string. *Schradieck* works across

the strings within a position. When getting ready to shift, ask three questions: Where am I? Where am I going? How do I get there?

Etude Books

Sally usually gives only book 1 of the Mazas etudes. If she feels the student needs more etudes before *Dont Op.*

37, she will assign Sitt etudes rather than Mazas book 2.

"Gavinies etudes were Joseph Gingold's favorite form of torture."

Sally has added de Beriot *Concert Etudes* just before Paganini *Etudes*.

Practicing

Early in your association with a student, bring up the amount of practice you expect. Be clear that it is the parent's job to make sure the child practices.

As I listened to Sally O'Reilly answer questions, I got the sense that there was a purpose for every book and technique that she taught. Each book covers a different aspect of technique, so that there are no holes. She approaches technical problems from a number of different angles. She has a comprehensive approach to violin teaching.

Sally O'Reilly is professor of violin at the University of Minnesota and a composer of technical studies for strings. Her teaching materials are published by Kjos. Elizabeth Ericksen teaches violin and viola at Carleton College and MacPhail Center for Music. †

