

# INTERMISSIONS

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## FEATURED INTERVIEW: CYRUS FOROUGH

Professor of Violin at Carnegie-Mellon University and Roosevelt University

*Cyrus Forough is both professor of violin and chamber music at Carnegie-Mellon University and artist-teacher in violin at Roosevelt University, as well as a member of the faculty at the Music Institute of Chicago. During the summer months, he serves on the faculties of the Beverly Hills International Festival, Bowdoin International Festival, and the Pilsen International Academy in the Czech Republic. Of Persian ancestry, he came to the U.S. as a six-month old infant. He later graduated from the Brussels Royal Conservatory and Chapelle Musicale Reine Elisabeth in Brussels, as well as the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow, where he was a pupil of the Russian master, David Oistrakh. He completed his studies at Indiana University with Josef Gingold, also serving as Gingold's assistant. He has concertized extensively in the US, Europe, Asia, and in the Middle East, both as soloist with major orchestras and in recitals accompanied by his wife, pianist Carolyn McCracken. As Artistic Ambassadors of the United States, they toured extensively throughout the US, South America, and the Caribbean. Turning to teaching, his past posts have included appointments at Louisiana State University, Wisconsin Conservatory, and Sherwood Conservatory, as well as at Indiana University Summer String Academy and at the Meadowmount School of Music. His former students include prize-winners at both national and international competitions. Recently, he spoke with Intermissions.*

INTERMISSIONS: How did you begin to study the violin?

CYRUS FOROUGH: My mother was a talented violinist who had studied with Leopold Charlier and Andre Gertler in Brussels. She noticed that I had a good ear. I would accurately imitate sounds and pitches that I would hear. So she started me on violin when I was six. I was a natural as far as right-hand technique was concerned.

INTERMISSIONS: When did you first play in public?

CF: Within a year of my beginning my studies, I made my debut, and then I played on TV. I played the Vivaldi Concerto in A minor, Viotti Concerto No. 23, and the Rode Concerto No. 8.

Then my mother insisted we go to Europe to continue my study. In Europe, I played for Odnoposoff in Vienna and Bouillon in Paris. Next, I played for Andre Gertler in Salzburg. My parents were impressed enough with my progress to allow me to study violin at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire, where I was immediately accepted as a pupil of Arthur Grumiaux.

INTERMISSIONS: What was Grumiaux like as a teacher?

CF: Well, Grumiaux was quite good, but he was on tour a lot, so I had a lot of lessons with his assistant. His assistant taught quite the opposite of Grumiaux, and my



Photo courtesy of Cyrus Forough

STEVEN PALINCSAR HAS AN INCREDIBLY VAST AMOUNT OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT REPERTOIRE AND THE EVOLUTION OF VIOLIN TECHNIQUE.

- CYRUS FOROUGH

## FEATURED INTERVIEW: CYRUS FOROUGH *continued from page 1*

playing began to suffer. My mother got very upset and we eventually decided to change teachers, which was quite difficult in those days. So I became a pupil of Andre Gertler for the next twelve years. Gertler had been a pupil of Jenő Hubay in Budapest. Hubay had been a pupil of both Josef Joachim and Henri Vieuxtemps.

INTERMISSIONS: What were your lessons with Gertler like?

CF: Gertler was from the “old school,” and was very, very demanding. He would scream and yell. Nothing was ever good enough for him, but still I managed to graduate from the Brussels Conservatoire with first prize in violin, and earned a master’s degree from the Brussels Royal Chapelle, a special program for highly advanced students created by Belgium’s Queen Elisabeth.

INTERMISSIONS: Next you became a pupil of David Oistrakh at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow.

2 CF: Yes, you know the first day I met Oistrakh was on a Monday. I played for him, and he arranged the schedule right then. He asked me to play the Tchaikovsky Concerto at 6:00 p.m. that very Wednesday-only two days away. I had never before played the Tchaikovsky. I had to get a copy of it as quickly as I could. Then I had to practice all the rest of the day on Monday (about 14 hours), all day on Tuesday and Wednesday up until the master class. I played the first movement for him, without having had the benefit of rehearsal with the pianist. Oistrakh worked with me for about an hour and a half, and then he asked me to play the last two movements for the following week. So I had jumped in with both feet so to speak.

INTERMISSIONS: You had entered competitions by this time too hadn’t you?

CF: Yes, in fact, I was a laureate (finalist) at the Tchaikovsky International Violin Competition in Moscow in 1974. Later I won a prize to perform as soloist with the Milwaukee Symphony. I performed the Shostakovich First Concerto. Then my

wife and I won a competition to become Artistic Ambassadors of the U.S.

INTERMISSIONS: Then after Oistrakh’s death you came to the U.S. to attend Indiana University as a pupil of Josef Gingold. Can you describe your studies with him?

CF: I credit Mr. Gingold with turning my life around, and not just as a violinist. Yes, Gingold was a wonderful teacher, and had been a distinguished violinist as concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell. I not only studied with him, but served as his assistant as well. It was at Indiana University that I met my wife, Carolyn McCracken, who was a piano student of György Sebok there.

INTERMISSIONS: How did you become interested in teaching?

CF: I just naturally gravitated toward it, initially as a sideline to my performing career. I had been Mr. Gingold’s assistant at Indiana University, then I taught one summer at Louisiana State University, then joined the faculty of the Wisconsin Conservatory in Milwaukee. Then I came to Chicago, where I taught at the Sherwood Conservatory of Music. Later, after I established myself, I accepted an appointment at Roosevelt University. Now of course I teach one day at Roosevelt, and commute to Pittsburgh, where I am professor of violin at Carnegie-Mellon University. I also teach at the Music Institute of Chicago.

INTERMISSIONS: You taught at the Meadowmount School of Music for a number of summers.

CF: Yes, I did for four summers and enjoyed it very much. Now I teach in Pilsen in the Czech Republic, then last summer I also taught at Bowdoin International Festival in Maine. It was Joel Smirnoff of the Juilliard Quartet who recommended for me to go there. Also, I teach at the Beverly Hills Festival for two weeks in L.A.

INTERMISSIONS: Where are some of your former students today?

CF: Well, one of my students is one of only two Americans to be invited to participate in the upcoming Tchaikovsky International Competition. One had been a semifinalist at the Sibelius International Competition, and had won the Sibelius Family Prize. One of my students is now assistant concertmaster of the North Carolina Symphony, and another just joined the Indianapolis Symphony. Two of my students tied for first place in the Society of American Musicians contest. Another student was first place winner at the Lynn University Second Annual Violin Competition. Last year, two of my students were semifinalists at the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, where one also received the Paganini Caprice Prize.

INTERMISSIONS: Could you share any unusual stories about a few of your most memorable performances?

CF: I sure can. Once, we’ve had a flat tire on the way to the hall. Another time, my wife once took a pre-concert tumble down a long flight of stairs. Still another time, on a steeply sloped European opera stage she and her music slid toward the stage’s edge while I struggled against gravity pulling me forward toward it!

But perhaps our most memorable example of turning a bad situation into good comes from a concert where, shortly after it had commenced, the lights went out and engulfed both us and the audience in total darkness. I reassured them that each of us would continue to play solo pieces which we did, all the while battling against dizziness and loss of equilibrium in the sea of black nothingness. Finally someone brought a candle to the stage and our concert continued with hot wax dripping on the keys and my wife’s hands from the candle held by the page-turner! But the atmosphere was magical and the response from the audience was especially enthusiastic and wonderful. The newspaper the following day told of the standing ovation triumph by the magic of candlelight over hoodlums who had tried to sabotage the concert due to political prejudice.

The great Russian virtuoso David Oistrakh, who numbered Cyrus Forough among his students, praised his former pupil for his “elegant manner of performance.”



# ANTONIO VIVALDI

## *Four Seasons sonnets*

Baroque composer Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) composed his famous set of four violin concertos (part of a set of twelve concertos) known as the *Four Seasons* with an unusual twist. The manuscript contains a set of four sonnets. Each sonnet is descriptive of each of the seasons. The text for each of the sonnets appears below.

### SPRING

Joyful spring has arrived,  
The birds welcome it with their happy songs,  
And the brooks in the gentle breezes  
Flow with a sweet murmur.

The sky is covered with a black mantle,  
Thunder and lightning announce a storm.  
When they are silent, the birds  
Again take up their harmonious songs.

And in the flower-rich meadow,  
To the gentle murmur of the leaves and plants  
The goatherd sleeps, his faithful dog by his side.

To the merry sounds of a rustic bagpipe  
Nymphs and shepherds dance in their beloved spot  
When Spring appears in its brilliance.

### SUMMER

Under the merciless summer sun  
Languishes man and flock; the pine tree burns,  
The cuckoo begins to sing and at once  
Join in the turtledoves and the goldfinch.

A gentle breeze blows, but Boreas  
Joins battle suddenly with his neighbor,  
And the shepherd weeps because overhead  
Hangs the dreaded storm, and his destiny.

His tired limbs are robbed of their rest  
By his fear of the lightning and the heavy thunder  
And by the furious swarms of the flies and hornets.

Alas, his fears are well-founded:  
There is thunder and lightning in the sky and the hail  
Cuts down the lofty ears of corn.

### AUTUMN

The peasant celebrates with song and dance  
The pleasure of the rich harvest,  
And full of the liquor of Bacchus  
They finish their merrymaking with a sleep.

All are made to leave off singing and dancing  
By the air which now mild gives pleasure  
And by the season which invites many  
To enjoy a sweet sleep.

At dawn the hunters  
With horns and guns and dogs leave their homes:  
The beast flees; they follow its traces.

Already tired and terrified by the great noise  
Of the guns and the dogs, and wounded it tries  
Feebly to escape, but exhausted dies.

### WINTER

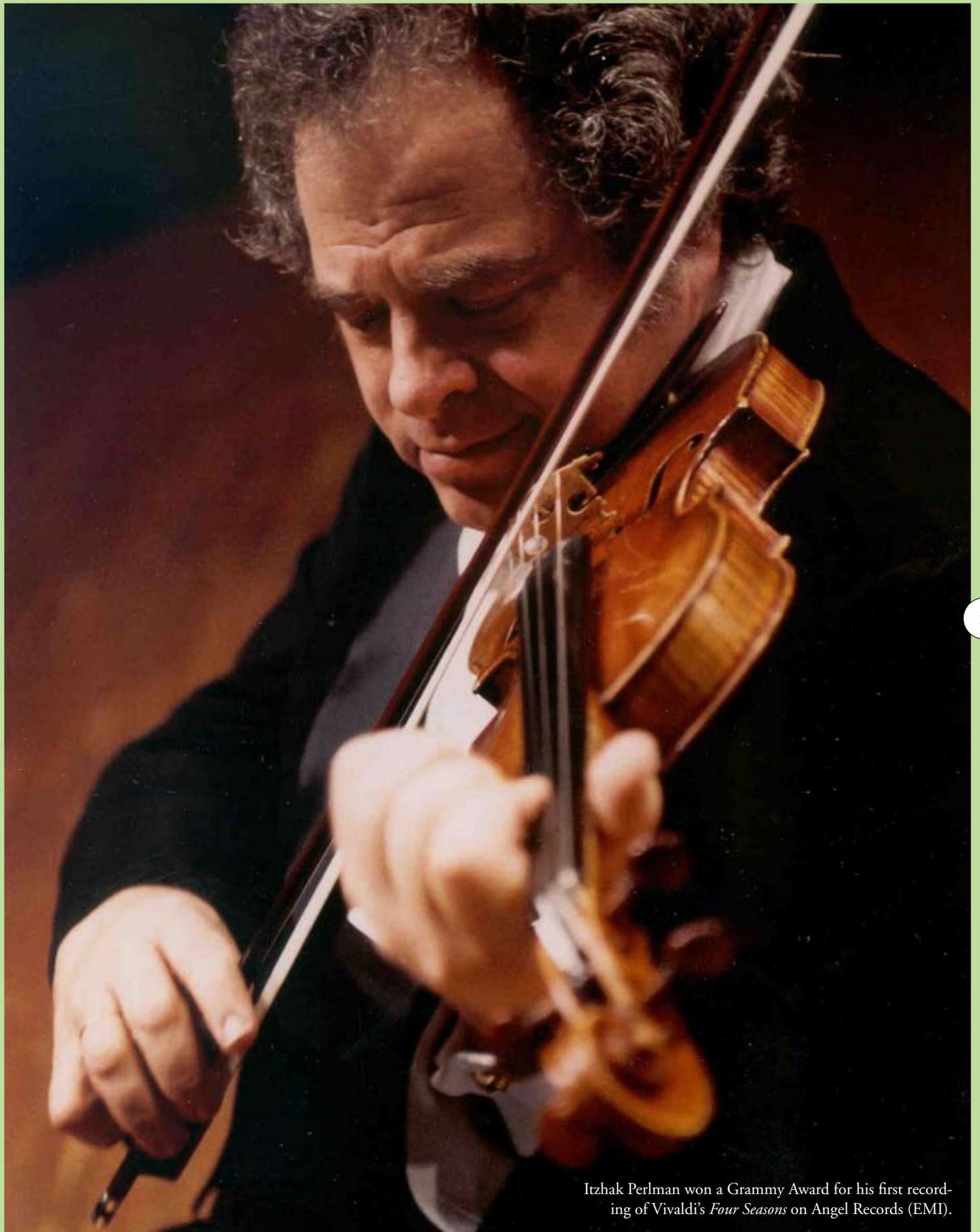
Frozen and shivering in the icy snow,  
In the strong blasts of a terrible wind  
To run stamping ones feet at every step  
With one's teeth chattering through the cold.

To spend the quiet and happy days by the fire  
While outside the rain soaks everyone.  
To walk on the ice with slow steps  
And go carefully for fear of falling.

To go in haste, slide and fall down:  
To go again on the ice and run,  
Until the ice cracks and opens.

To hear leaving their iron-gated house Sirocco,  
Boreas and all the winds in battle:  
This is winter, but it brings joy.

The many recordings of the *Four Seasons* now fall into two categories. First are those using regular instruments (Stradivaris and Guarneris) with regular bows. Second are those using period instruments and bows. Of either type, the best recording is by Isaac Stern as soloist and conductor of the Jerusalem Music Center Chamber Orchestra. Some experts have actually mistaken it for a period instrument performance. For the first category, there are excellent recordings by Salvatore Accardo, Arthur Grumiaux, Elmar Oliveira, Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman, and a number of performances by I Musici. In the period instrument category, the best recordings are by Fabio Biondi, Giuliano Carmignola, Alice Harnoncourt, Monica Huggett, Andrew Manze, Enrico Onofri, and Simon Standage. Of these, Harnoncourt with the Vienna Concentus Musicus conducted by her husband Nikolaus is the greatest. Listen especially to the barking dog in the slow movement of the *Spring* concerto, and to the opening of the *Winter* concerto. There is an excellent violin and keyboard edition of the *Four Seasons* edited by Christopher Hogwood and published by Baerenreiter. The full score is available from Dover Publications.



Itzhak Perlman won a Grammy Award for his first recording of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* on Angel Records (EMI).

# IN CONVERSATION STEVEN PALINCSAR ON VIOLIN TEACHING

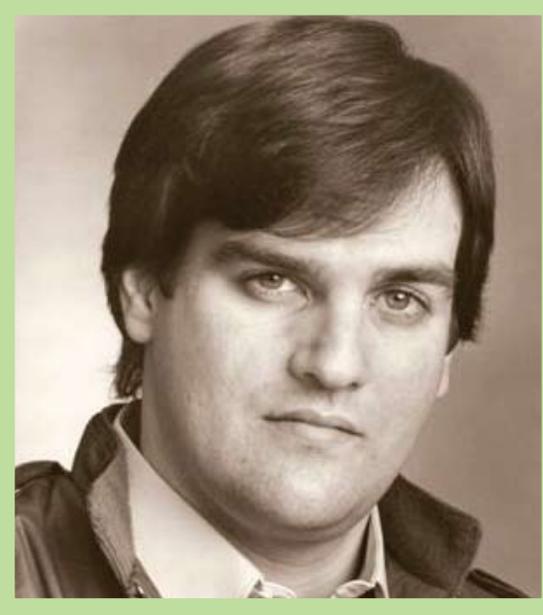


Photo courtesy of Tom Fezzey

QUESTION: In the November issue of *INTERMISSIONS*, it was announced that you and a colleague, Margaret Pressley from Seattle, have been invited to present a program on “College/University/Conservatory Audition Preparation” for the 2008 American String Teachers Association National Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Could you say a few words about auditions?

STEVEN PALINCSAR: I'd be glad to. Well, the first thing that might shock some students is that if they have waited until now to begin their preparation for this year's music school auditions, they have minimal chances for success. Audition Preparation is more of a science than an art. Students need to do everything they can to maximize their chances of acceptance, and beginning their preparation as early as possible is the best thing they can do.

QUESTION: When do you begin to prepare your students to audition for schools such as Juilliard, Curtis, Eastman, or Northwestern?

SP: From the very first lesson they have with me.

QUESTION: Are you serious?

SP: Absolutely. My job as a violin teacher is to bring my students to as near a professional level as possible by the time they walk into the audition, and to nurture and develop their love for music and the violin.

I begin by assessing their strengths and weaknesses, and work to nurture their strengths and to eliminate their weaknesses. In effect, I help them to convert their weaknesses into strengths. You know, in my opinion, there is no excuse for a student to play out of tune or out of rhythm at an audition. None. The tonal quality should be absolutely gorgeous, and the musicianship

impeccable.

Furthermore, the student should be completely comfortable at the audition. No matter what unexpected events may occur, they must perform at their absolute peak.

Over the years that a student studies with me, I keep an eye out for pieces that the student has mastered that may later be performed at an audition. So, assuming the student goes to high school for four years, we will already have the entire audition repertoire selected and mastered by the beginning of the junior year. Then we work for the next year and a half to perfect the performance, and to master audition technique.

You see, at the audition, the student has an incredibly short time to demonstrate that she/he has what it takes to succeed at a school like Juilliard. At most *thirty seconds*. *Probably nearer to five or ten seconds!* The decision has already been made in that first impression. The rest of the audition is merely a confirmation of the audition committee's first impression. So if a student needs a few minutes to get it together, they're out of luck. And that's that.

QUESTION: So you prepare all your students for a career in music?

SP: Well, no, not really. The impetus for a life in music must come from the student. If they choose to go to the University of Illinois as a pre-med, that's up to them, but they will have the necessary preparation if they want to put it to use.

QUESTION: What happens once a student decides they want to pursue a career in music?

SP: I sit down with the student and his/her parents, and we talk about what they will need to do.

QUESTION: Do you ever try to talk a student out of a career in music?

SP: Absolutely not. Not under any circumstances. Nor do I ever try to encourage a student to go into music as a profession. The decision must always be entirely theirs. Most students know pretty much by about middle school or early high school what they want to do.

QUESTION: What do you do next?

SP: I give the student a hand-out that I prepared on how to research potential schools, and a research form for them to fill out.

QUESTION: What does it contain?

SP: Questions on repertoire, faculty, facilities, living accommodations, contact information, tuition, scholarship procedures, etc., etc. The student must do the research for each school they're thinking about, and bring me a completed form with all the information as soon as possible. I need to know about any specific repertoire requirements for example.

QUESTION: Do you encourage your students to apply to specific schools?

SP: Never. I am not an admissions counselor. The student must choose what schools to apply to. Then I assist the student in planning and preparing for the audition.

QUESTION: What if you believe the student has no chance of getting accepted to the school of their choice?

SP: It's my job to make sure the student is as prepared as he or she can possibly be, and to provide the student with my absolute faith, commitment, and support.

I will say this, however. If a student is set on a specific teacher, and that teacher has faculty positions at more than one school, I might recommend applying to the other schools as well, but that's as far as I will go.

For example, Dorothy DeLay taught at Juilliard, but also taught at the University of Cincinnati, so many kids could go study with her there. Victor Danchenko teaches at Curtis, which is out of reach for most kids, but he also teaches at Peabody, which for my students is not a stretch at all.

I also try if possible to get a student to study in the summer with a teacher that they may like so that they can connect together. Sometimes, a kid comes back after summer studies and says she doesn't want to study with that teacher anymore. It's rare, but it happens.

QUESTION: Once the repertoire is prepared, do you begin work on the audition itself?

SP: No. You see, my students play in a weekly studio class in addition to their private lessons, and I use the class to prepare kids for auditions, competitions, solo and chamber recitals, and concerts with orchestra. So really my kids have already had a number of years working on the audition itself, and have developed contingency plans to deal with almost every possible problem.

QUESTION: Could you talk a little about your studio class as it relates to auditions?

SP: Absolutely. Well, the first thing I try to do is to create an environment where students can be comfortable enough to perform for each other. In the beginning I allow absolutely no criticism of a student's performance. Not by me, not by the kids, not by parents, not by guests, not by anyone. I insist that everyone applaud as

the student gets up to perform. Sit quietly while they play. Then applaud after each performance. Next, everyone in the room must pay the student a compliment. No criticism is permitted. No suggestions of something the student might work on. Just a compliment. One thing that they liked. I start each year this way, even if the kids all know each other and have studied this way a number of years.

We also work on how to accept a compliment even if completely undeserved in our opinion. Kids are taught to be gracious and polite, and to say something like "Thank you, I'm glad you enjoyed the performance."

When I judge that each student is ready for it, I ask for a couple of suggestions from the students for something that the performer might work to improve. I usually choose kids who are more advanced players to make the suggestions. Then we talk about these suggestions as a group to determine whether they are important or just interpretative. I never ask for more than three per class. At the private lesson, I can always add one more if needed.

If a student has a problem in the middle of the performance (for example a memory lapse), I work through it with them, and we develop a contingency plan. Something that the student can fall back on if someone drops a folding chair at the audition. We try to brainstorm everything that can possibly go wrong at the audition or performance. I teach the students never to stop the performance even if they are frustrated, angry, or about to cry. I tell them that it's quite likely at a performance only the performers know that anything was wrong. I remember that I had a friend who played what we both thought was a disastrous performance of a Mozart Concerto. Afterwards, members of the audience kept coming backstage to praise his playing over and over again. Even if the whole audience is full of musicians, we must never stop, and must never lose our cool.

During the year, we also talk about goal-setting, and how to break down a goal into bite-sized pieces. I normally do most of

this for the student, but one of my goals is to teach each student how to become completely independent of me, in effect to become their own teacher.

I frequently invite guests, prominent musicians, to whom I give evaluation forms similar to those used by audition committees. Guests turn the forms into me only, and do not share their comments with the student directly or the class. The comments are filtered through me, the teacher. You see, not every comment is helpful, and some are even destructive.

QUESTION: What happens once a student plays the audition?

SP: I insist that the student write a thank-you note to the jury, and then I help the student to move on to the next audition. If the student receives a rejection letter, I ask them to bring it to the lesson, and we talk about it together.

QUESTION: Do you ever try to contact the jury?

SP: Only if I am close friends with someone on the audition committee. Otherwise, never.

QUESTION: How many of your kids usually get accepted to Juilliard, Eastman, Indiana, or Curtis?

SP: It depends on so many factors. If Curtis for example only has room for two students, it's highly unlikely that a kid will get accepted there. Also, the character of an audition committee can (and does) change over time. I need to be up on what changes have occurred. Some schools no longer want to hear romantic concerti, but prefer only 20th century works (such as Bartok or Prokofiev). We need to network with faculty. We can't have an us vs. them attitude. As a violin teacher, I am providing a service not only to my students, but to the schools as well. So how many kids get accepted? They *all* do. In fact, every student I've ever prepared has gotten in at least somewhere. Cream always seems to rise to the top.



HENRYK SZERYNG, one of the greatest violinists of the 20th Century, signed this photo to Steven Palincsar.

Photo courtesy of Chicago Symphony Orchestra

## *more* SHEET MUSIC WEBSITES

BEETHOVEN HOUSE, now based in Massachusetts (and formerly in New York City) has a large selection of violin sheet music. However, many of the works listed on the website are no longer available. [www.beethovenhouse.com](http://www.beethovenhouse.com).

JOHNSON STRING INSTRUMENT, also based in Massachusetts, has a fairly good selection of violin music, as well as instruments, bows, strings, shoulder pads, chin rests, tuners, etc., etc. [www.johnsonstring.com](http://www.johnsonstring.com)

JUILLIARD SCHOOL BOOKSTORE is an excellent source for violin sheet music. [bookstore.juilliard.edu](http://bookstore.juilliard.edu)

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Another option is to download sheet music to a file which you save on your computer, and print out the music on your desktop printer. Usually there is a fee for this, but not always.

EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC'S Sibley Music Library has the largest private music library in the U.S. Several obscure pieces are available by such composers as

Ernst, Hubay, Lalo, Sauret, Vieuxtemps, and Ysaye, as well as Friedrich Herrmann's transcription of Mendelssohn's complete lieder for violin and piano. This is a free site, but downloading with a dial-up modem will take about a half-hour for some pieces. [urresearch.rochester.edu](http://urresearch.rochester.edu).

EVERYNOTE.COM is a website that has both readily available pieces as well as some more unusual works and transcriptions. The site is also quite reasonably priced. [www.everynote.com](http://www.everynote.com).

ELIBRON is a site which has many unusual pieces. However, the site is somewhat more expensive than Everynote.com. [www.elibron.com](http://www.elibron.com).

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