

INTERMISSIONS

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FEATURED INTERVIEW: JAMES KJELLAND

Associate Professor of Music Education at Northwestern University,
Co-Author of *Strictly Strings* Series, Author of *Orchestral Bowing: Style and Function*

James Kjelland, professor, conductor, editor, and author, is one of the best-known experts in string pedagogy today. Born in Monroe, Wisconsin, he moved to Brodhead, Wisconsin as a child beginning his music studies at age nine. He earned both his BME and MMus degrees from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and his PhD degree from the University of Texas at Austin. Originally a cornetist, he began cello study in his early 20's with Margaret Christy, Gabor Rejto, and Phyllis Young, as well as violin and viola with members of the Pro Arte Quartet. Formerly the Orchestra Music Editor at Highland/Etling (now a division of Alfred Publishing), Dr. Kjelland is co-author of the widely-used Strictly Strings Series and is author of Orchestral Bowing: Style and Function. His teaching positions have included posts at the University of Southern California, where he also conducted the USC Community Orchestra, and the University of North Texas. Currently, he is Associate Professor of Music Education at Northwestern University. He continues to travel throughout the US presenting workshops and appearing as guest conductor. Recently, he spoke with INTERMISSIONS.

INTERMISSIONS: Could you talk a bit about your family? Were they musical?

JAMES KJELLAND: My father loved music, but was not a musician. My mother played the piano and my grandmother was a good singer, although not classically trained. My maternal grandfather was a violinist in a sort of jazz band, playing fox trots and so forth. So I was really the only one in my family to pursue a career in music.

INTERMISSIONS: Could you talk about your earliest musical training?

JK: Piano was my first instrument. I was nine. I studied only two years initially, then had one more year as a senior in high school, but that was mainly to develop a better knowledge of music theory.

When I was eleven, I began cornet study in the school band program in a little town in southern Wisconsin named Brodhead. Most of my classmates had already had a year of band, and they talked me into joining. The cornet is a shorter stubbier cousin to the trumpet that produces a mellower sound



STEVEN PALINCSAR
HAS A COMPREHENSIVE
KNOWLEDGE OF VIOLIN
PEDAGOGY.

– JAMES KJELLAND

and is a bit easier to hold for kids. Then I "graduated" to the trumpet when I was in high school.

INTERMISSIONS: Who was your first cornet teacher?

JK: That would've been my band director, Ron Rockow. He introduced me to the cornet, and I took to it right away, and became quite proficient. He became a sort of surrogate father when my dad was quite ill. My dad ultimately died when I was thirteen. I subsequently studied with Cliff Keuler, who was a great motivator, and inspired me a lot. Both Cliff and Ron were very good teachers in their own way, so I was very lucky to have had their influence.

2 INTERMISSIONS: After high school you went to the University of Wisconsin?

JK: Yes, in Madison. I got my first two degrees there: Bachelor of Music Education and Master of Music in String Development.

INTERMISSIONS: Obviously, there was a huge shift from being a trumpet player to strings. What led you to study string instruments?

JK: During my whole undergraduate experience, I had no thoughts of being an orchestral director. I concentrated on trumpet, studying with Donald Whitaker, who was a Northwestern graduate, beginning as a senior in high school, and I also studied with Robert Holt. My biggest inspirations were my ensemble directors including H. Robert Reynolds, who later taught at the

University of Michigan. He was my role model as a conductor, and when I was a senior I got to conduct the University of Wisconsin Symphonic Band, and that was quite a thrill. Another key role model was the very well-known composer and arranger, James Christiansen, who later went on to a successful career at Disneyland and then Disney World.

So during this time from high school through college, I played string bass, as well as guitar, on the side. Mostly I was self-taught, but it was left-hand only. I never touched a bow until my first string techniques class with Richard Church and Marvin Rabin where I learned violin and bass. Later I discovered the cello after my undergraduate degree was completed.

Marvin Rabin came to Madison when I was a freshman at UW. When I got my bachelor's degree, I started working more directly with Marvin in his capacity as head of the National String Workshop, while I started my first job as band and orchestra director in Middleton, Wisconsin. I was co-director of the high school band, director of the high school orchestra, and also team taught the elementary and middle school string program. All during that time, I was discovering the cello while learning all the string instruments.

INTERMISSIONS: Who was your first cello teacher?

JK: "Statzie" Statz was my first teacher for about a year, and then I studied with Margaret Christy, who had just retired from

the University of Alabama. Margaret really took me down the path to correctly playing the cello. Next, in the master of music program, I studied with Lowell Creitz. I studied with him for the better part of three years. Then after earning my master's degree, I went out to Los Angeles to teach at the University of Southern California, where I studied with Gabor Rejto, a cellist on the faculty. After Rejto, I studied with Phyllis Young at the University of Texas.

INTERMISSIONS: What were they like as teachers?

JK: They were all influential. Statzie got me started well. When I went to Margaret, I didn't have to change much, I had a good setup. Margaret helped me with shifting and vibrato, and led me to a good sound. She had me do the Sevcik bowing variations that Silva had transcribed. She was very artistic with the bowing. Lowell Creitz had me analyze structurally and harmonically the pieces I was playing, and got me to think more like a composer. Rejto did the most changing of my technique in both hands than any of my previous teachers. He didn't change my bow hold that much, but he overhauled the left-hand. Phyllis Young really helped me to develop a bigger sound. She used props and analogies to communicate subtle concepts without words.

INTERMISSIONS: Could you talk a little about your Master of Music program?

JK: That was a unique degree, where I studied violin, viola, cello, and string bass. I also studied with George Bornoff and Marvin

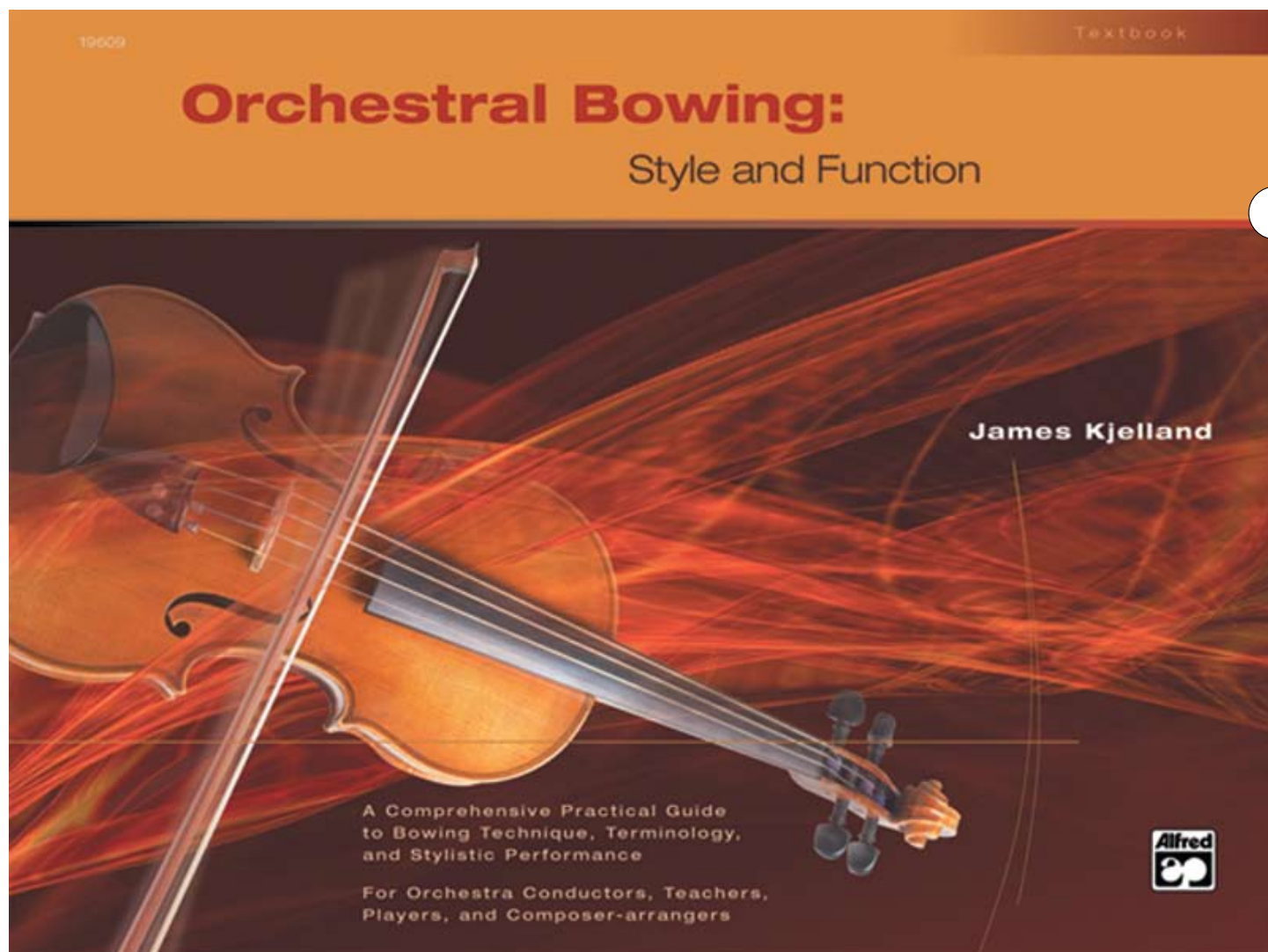
Rabin in the National String Workshop. I studied violin with Norman Paulu who was first violin of the Pro Arte Quartet, then also with second violinist Tom Moore, as well as viola with Richard Blum. Blum also coached the string quartet that I was in. Since we were all in the String Development master's program, we formed a quartet in which we switched instruments on each piece. I played second violin in Beethoven's Op. 18, No. 1 quartet and the Glazunov Novelettes, viola in Mozart's Horn Quintet, and cello in the Shostakovich Quartet, Op. 49. We called ourselves the Not-Quite Ready for

Prime Time Players. It was quite an event that had not been done before or since. I took a semester of double bass with Roger Ruggeri and Jim Klute, from the Minnesota Orchestra. I learned a lot of technique and pedagogy with Rosemary Poetzl, who still teaches in the Milwaukee area, and is really entertaining and absolutely first-rate.

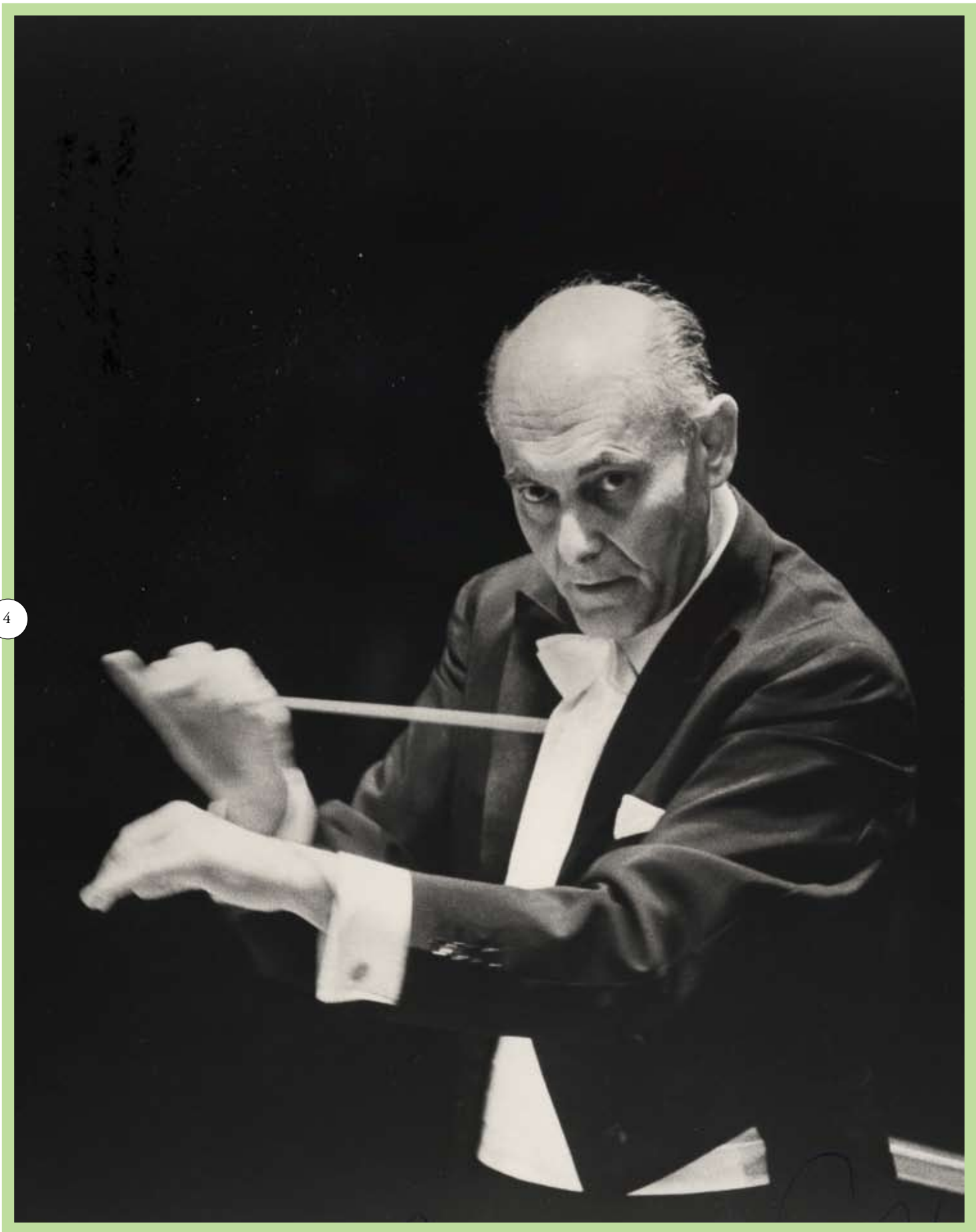
INTERMISSIONS: When did you start teaching college?

JK: In Los Angeles, I was a visiting lecturer at the University of Southern California's music education department. I was there

for three years in a row, and they had done a couple searches for a tenure track person and didn't find anybody that they liked, so they offered me the job with the understanding that I earn a doctorate in music education. I went to the University of Texas at Austin, completing the coursework in the summers, and then took a year off to do my residency (1982-83). At USC, I taught from 1977-1990, leaving as Associate Professor of Music Education. In addition, I also conducted the USC Community Orchestra, which consisted of non-music majors, faculty and staff, and people from the community at large. Then



James Kjelland's textbook, *Orchestral Bowing: Style and Function* (© 2003, Alfred Publishing Co.) with its accompanying workbook, is a wonderful and invaluable introduction to orchestral bow technique.



I went to the University of North Texas at Denton, where I taught music education and conducted the UNT Campus Orchestra. I was there for three years (1991-1994), and then came to Northwestern in the fall of 1994.

INTERMISSIONS: Could you talk about how *Strictly Strings* came about?

JK: In Fall 1989, I had just started a four-year stint as editor of string music at Highland/Etling (which had just become a division of Alfred). I knew John O'Reilly, who was vice president at Highland/Etling. It was John who invited me to become the string editor. The string editor solicits and evaluates manuscripts submitted for publication, corresponds with the authors, edits and proofs the music. Also, promoting the music, conducting it in reading sessions, and preparing the recordings used in marketing the music were part of the job.

JK: We started work on *Strictly Strings* in February 1990, with the first volume appearing in 1992. So John O'Reilly and Jacqueline Dillon joined me on the project. I had known Jacque from Madison, when she came to do a workshop using my orchestra students. We'd occasionally hook up together at workshops over the years, even co-teaching some sessions.

Jacque and I decided we wanted a method that put low strings on an equal footing with upper strings. We took a bottom-

up perspective, and made bass and cello into melody instruments. We emphasized orchestral music, doing ensemble music almost from day one. We also introduced things that were normally advanced technique into the first book. We introduced spiccato, staccato, and martelé in the first book. We also introduced the fourth finger for violin and viola much earlier, and shifting for cello and bass much earlier. In Book 2, we took everything we introduced in Book 1, and developed and refined it. Finally, in Book 3, we created a technique reference book, which we called *Orchestra Companion*. The series is still selling well, which is quite unusual—sixteen years after it was introduced.

INTERMISSIONS: Let's shift gears now and talk about your book—*Orchestral Bowing: Style and Function*.

JK: This book is all about everything I wish someone had told me when I first started conducting orchestra. It was inspired by my lack of knowledge when I first began working with strings. I designed it to be self-help for the non-string player to help him/her understand what's going on. It includes the nomenclature, the stylistic performance practice, breakdown of notation, where a certain type of bowstroke is typically applied. Everything that every conductor should know. It also includes a workbook where students can learn to decide which bowings they should use. There are three sections in the workbook. The first section is about sound production and bowing skills such as developing crescendos and decrescendos, tone and volume, or adjusting

bow placement from the bridge, adjusting between different strings—basically sound production exercises. The second section is bowing etudes: martelé, sautillé, staccato, spiccato. Those etudes are primarily from the orchestral literature arranged to be played by early high school orchestras. The third section is the real meat of the workbook, that is, orchestral excerpts from baroque to contemporary, where the student decides what bowstroke and/or which bow direction to use. They are about style, performance practice (Mozart vs. Vivaldi), phrasing and bow direction, and more advance techniques such as sul ponticello. Everything in the workbook is in Chapter 4 of the textbook with commentary and proposed answers for the third section of the workbook. The text is really a teacher's manual for the workbook.

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INTERMISSIONS: Where do you see your job as a music educator in terms of the composer, the theorist, and the performer and conductor?

JK: I think music teaching in general is a calling. It's something you have in your blood. For some of us, there's no choice. My philosophy is simply: "make it sound good." I love the process of helping someone to play better. I'm the bridge between the work of academic researchers and performers. And as a conductor, a bridge between the composer, the performers, and the listener. For me, that's a great place to be.

IN CONVERSATION

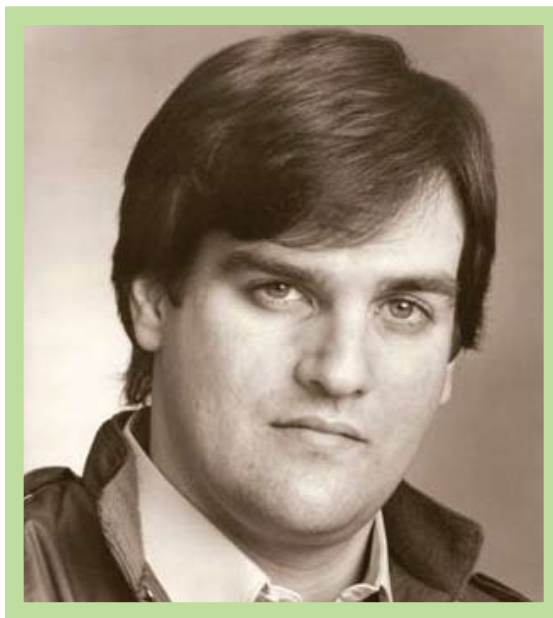
STEVEN PALINCSAR ON VIOLIN TEACHING

QUESTION: Since this issue of *INTERMISSIONS* is an all-orchestral issue, let's focus on what it takes to play in an orchestra.

STEVEN PALINCSAR: In general, we train young violinists for the all-but-elusive goal of becoming soloists. However, the chance of becoming the next Joshua Bell or Hilary Hahn is near impossible. Even in providing the best possible training, no teacher, even one who has successfully and continually trained students to pass the auditions to Juilliard or Curtis or to win the top prizes

6 at competitions, can guarantee that a student will have a solo career. There are, of course, violinists who are not famous but who play rings around Joshua Bell or Hilary Hahn, but who will never achieve worldwide fame for a variety of reasons, talent not being one. Most violinists earn their livings as orchestral musicians, chamber players, or as teachers. Why then do we still emphasize solo repertoire in private lessons? Why do schools that have never produced even one soloist continue to emphasize solo playing as preparation for a career in music?

I believe that we must emphasize orchestral playing, chamber playing, conducting, and composition in our younger players, and those that exhibit an interest in teaching should be



encouraged in this. There are great rewards in becoming a part of an ensemble—some more altruistic, some practical. Whereas there are very few soloists who can support themselves as soloists, orchestral musicians playing in even a regional orchestra can do quite well financially. In a major orchestra such as the Chicago or Dallas Symphony, a violinist will earn quite a nice salary, benefits including health insurance and pension, and will have the opportunity to earn their living doing what they love—playing the violin. There will be opportunities to perform chamber music, to teach, to conduct, and yes, even perform as soloist in recital or with orchestra.

QUESTION: Where does a young player begin?

SP: I believe that there is an important difference in the goals of solo vs. orchestral playing. A soloist's goal is to *stand out*, whereas an orchestral player's goal is to *fit in*. A soloist can be very successful when lacking even the basics of musicianship, but a top orchestral violinist must also be an outstanding musician. We must realize that no one is born with the skills and knowledge to

play in an orchestra. The best training for an orchestral musician is experience. We can play our violins at home and achieve an incredible mastery over them, but this does not mean that we will become even competent orchestral musicians. No, we must play in an orchestra. This is why all my students are required to play in at least one orchestra, whether that is a high school or middle school orchestra, the Chicago Youth Symphony, or one of the Midwest Young Artists orchestras.

QUESTION: How much technique do you need to play in an orchestra?

SP: Considerable, but not virtuosic. We need to be able to play all of the major and minor three-octave scales and arpeggios with different bowings, with bull's-eye intonation,

with differing rhythms, with an expressive and responsive vibrato, and with a beautiful tone, and to have completely mastered, and in my opinion, memorized, the Kreutzer Etudes. We must have at our complete disposal from memory (for the professional orchestral audition) either Mozart's Third, Fourth, or Fifth violin concerto with cadenzas, a concerto of the standard repertoire, also with cadenzas, such as the Mendelssohn E minor or Beethoven, and for the finals, one of the three Bach fugues from the Solo Sonatas. Even when not required, a student should have mastered the complete work.

QUESTION: Your students study orchestral excerpts with you don't they?

SP: Yes, but first we begin with James Kjelland's excellent workbook which accompanies his text, *Orchestral Bowing: Style and Function*. Of course, kids don't use the text (that's for the teacher), they just use the workbook. This work gives a wonderful introduction to orchestral bowing technique and to playing styles of different historical periods with practice in determining which bowing is best in each situation. The work is at the level of even the intermediate Suzuki violinist. Students develop bowing technique such as staccato, détaché, martelé, sautillé, spiccato, and tremolo, as well as hooked bowings. They learn about bow control as well—bow speed, volume control,

and string crossings. It's a wonderful and comprehensive introduction to orchestral bowing technique.

QUESTION: Then your students study excerpts?

Yes, then we turn to Josef Gingold's three volumes of orchestral excerpts, and later to the Prill excerpts from the works of Richard Strauss, and still later to the Kuenzel Wagner excerpts in two volumes. Each excerpt is studied with the same demands as a Paganini caprice: intonation, rhythm, clarity, brilliance, tonal quality, volume, and there is a further skill to develop—musicianship. With the release of *The Orchestra Musician's CD-ROM Library*, I have each student learn the entire first and second violin parts to the complete work as well.

QUESTION: Once the student has acquired the technique and knowledge from studying orchestral repertoire, they need to put it into practice don't they?

SP: Oh absolutely. Playing in any kind of ensemble is helpful. In playing in an ensemble, we learn to compromise, to cooperate, and especially to listen. I cannot over-emphasize developing the ability to listen. We must listen to ourselves—to our own playing for intonation, tone, articulation, vibrato, etc. etc. We must listen to our stand partners, to our section as a whole, to the other sections, and to the conductor, and I think, also to

the composer. Since our goal as orchestral musicians is to fit in, we must determine how we can fit in to the best advantage of the whole. Sometimes this requires that we give up a part of our personality to take on the personality of the ensemble.

QUESTION: Do ensembles have their own personalities?

SP: Definitely. Listen to string quartets for example. Compare the Emerson, Guarneri, Juilliard, and Vermeer quartets for instance. Each has its own distinctive sound. Listen to the Chicago Symphony under Solti, the Berlin Philharmonic under Von Karajan, the Cleveland Orchestra under Szell. In fact, listen to the Chicago Symphony under Reiner, then Solti, then under Boulez. It's basically the same orchestra, but the orchestra's personality does change over time and under each conductor.

You know when I listen to Joshua Bell or Hilary Hahn, their message is: "Listen to me! Aren't I wonderful? Aren't I great?" When I listen to the Chicago Symphony playing a Mahler symphony, the message is: "Listen to Mahler! Isn't Mahler wonderful? Isn't Mahler great?" It's quite a different message, don't you think?

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