

# INTERMISSIONS

MAY-JUNE

2009

## FEATURED INTERVIEW: STEPHEN SHIPPS

Professor of Violin at University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and Artistic Director of the International Music Academy - Pilsen in the Czech Republic.

*Stephen Shipps studied violin with Josef Gingold at Indiana University, from which he earned both the BMus and MMus degrees. He also studied violin with Ivan Galamian and Sally Thomas at the Meadowmount School of Music and with Franco Gulli, both at Indiana University and at the Academia Chigiana in Siena, Italy. A former member of the Meadowmount and Amadeus Trios, he is currently violinist of the Kapell Trio. The trio recently signed with Naxos to record the complete trios of Bohuslav Martinů—to be released in 2010. Stephen Shipps has also recorded for American Gramophone, Bay Cities, and Melodiyal/Russian Disc. As a soloist, he has appeared with the Ann Arbor, Dallas, Indianapolis, Omaha, and Seattle Symphony Orchestras, as well as the Piedmont Chamber Orchestra, and at the Madeira Bach Festival. He has been a member of the first violin section of the Cleveland Orchestra under Lorin Maazel, and has served as associate concertmaster of the Dallas Symphony, concertmaster of the Dallas Opera, and as both concertmaster and associate conductor of the Omaha Symphony and the Nebraska Sinfonia. In addition, he has served as guest concertmaster for the Seattle, Toledo, and Flint Symphony Orchestras. His many radio appearances have been heard over NPR, as well as Hessische Rundfunk of Frankfurt, RIAS Berlin, and Moscow Radio. His work on the Mannheim Steamroller Christmas Albums has yielded a dozen gold and two platinum records. Stephen Shipps has adjudicated major national and international competitions for three decades and serves on the International Advisory Panel for the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis and the Board of Directors of the Sphinx Competition. He is former director of the American String Teachers Association National Solo Competition. Prior to joining the University of Michigan faculty twenty-one years ago, where he is Professor of Violin, he served on the faculties of Indiana University, the North Carolina School of the Arts, and the Banff Centre in Canada, and has also taught at the Meadowmount School of Music. Stephen Shipps recently served as Visiting Professor of Violin at the Prague Academy of Music and teaches regularly at the Hochschule für Musik in Karlsruhe, Germany. He founded and directs the International Music Academy - Pilsen in the Czech Republic, now in its fifth year. Recently Stephen Shipps spoke with INTERMISSIONS.*



INTERMISSIONS: When did you begin studying the violin?

STEPHEN SHIPPS: I started violin at public school in Boulder, Colorado in fourth grade. I was eight.

INTERMISSIONS: How did you choose the violin?

SS: I read a mimeograph piece of paper that came home from the school, and said, "That sounds like fun." And they were going to give a free fiddle to lend. And that's how I started out. It was pure luck.

INTERMISSIONS: So you chose to play the violin yourself?

SS: Yes, I did.

INTERMISSIONS: Is your family musical?

SS: My mother plays the piano on an amateur basis and my father doesn't play any musical instrument at all.

2 INTERMISSIONS: Who was your first violin teacher?

SS: She was a lady named Charlotte Hilligoss, and she was the wife of the chairman of the String Department, Eugene Hilligoss, who was a cello teacher at the University of Colorado.

INTERMISSIONS: What was she like as a teacher? What did you learn from her?

SS: All the basics: how to hold the bow, how to hold the fiddle, how to practice, basic note-reading. She had a basic theory class every Saturday morning for all her students. So we had note-reading games.

INTERMISSIONS: How long did you study with her?

SS: Three years. Then I moved to a very fine violinist, who was a professor at the University, named Wilfrid Biel. He was a Galamian student, who had gone to school with Michael Rabin and that generation. He also earned the first doctorate from the University of Michigan while I was studying with him.

INTERMISSIONS: How different was he from your first teacher?

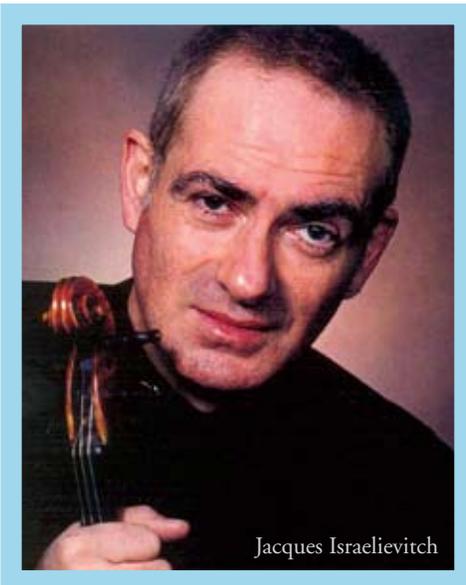
SS: Oh, he was very hard-nosed New York. Big-time. Carl Flesch scales. Kreutzer, Rode, and Dont etudes. Repertoire was the Mozart G Major Concerto, Bruch Concerto No. 1, Beethoven F Major Romance, Vivaldi-Respighi Sonata. Those kinds of pieces.

INTERMISSIONS: How long did you study with him?

SS: Three years.

INTERMISSIONS: Who was your next teacher?

SS: Well, my father got a new job at Indiana University in Bloomington, and



Jacques Israelievitch

Biel sent me to Josef Gingold, who he had known at Meadowmount, and I played for Gingold while I was in tenth grade. He did not accept me because I was not yet good enough, but he passed me on to his assistant, Jacques Israelievitch. Israelievitch just retired last year after twenty years as concertmaster of Toronto. He was also concertmaster in St. Louis, and was a wonderful violinist and a wonderful person—very inspiring. And he was really my inspiration to become a professional violinist.

INTERMISSIONS: How different was Israelievitch as a teacher from Biel?

SS: He wasn't much older than I was for

one thing, but he had already won a prize in the Paganini Competition when he was sixteen years old. And he was exotic—he was not American. He was a dashing young Frenchman and he played absolutely beautifully. So I did whatever he told me. He told me to practice five hours, so I practiced five hours. So every five weeks or so when I had enough music ready to take to Gingold, we would go to Gingold, and Israelievitch would get a lesson on how to teach, and I would get a violin lesson. So it went like that for a couple years until Gingold accepted me full-time as a freshman at Indiana University.

I also studied with Isaias Zerkowicz who took over as Gingold's assistant when Israelievitch had to spend time in France for army duty. Zerkowicz spent his career as associate principal viola in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. He was also a wonderful influence—teaching me lots of Schradieck studies, my first Bach Fugue (G minor), my first Beethoven Sonata (No. 1), Lalo Symphonie Espagnole and the Conus Concerto.

INTERMISSIONS: What did you learn from Gingold?

SS: He was the ultimate inspiration and was still in his prime as a player at that time. He played magnificently in every lesson, and we just all adored him. He knew everything—etudes, concerti, Bach—all from memory, and what a gentleman he was.

I was surrounded in that class by truly great players who were in the process of making solo careers. Miriam Fried, Eugene Fodor, Yuval Yaron—all people who were winning major international competitions. I was aware that I was not in the same league as those guys, so my interest was in playing trios and my interest was in playing orchestra.

For Gingold, of course, we worked on solo pieces, but also we worked on all the orchestral excerpts that I needed to play to get into a good orchestra. In addition at Meadowmount, I studied chamber music with Gingold for four years, and studied violin with Ivan Galamian and Sally Thomas.

INTERMISSIONS: What were they like as teachers?

SS: Galamian was very grandfatherly and was getting quite old. We were all scared to death of him, but because he was very close friends with Gingold, we thought there was a special place there at Meadowmount for Gingold's students. Sally Thomas was much tougher on me, but she was just great.

INTERMISSIONS: Who did you study chamber music with at Indiana?

SS: Janos Starker and William Primrose.

INTERMISSIONS: What were they like as teachers?

SS: With Primrose, we played chamber music actually with him. He taught us hands-on what to do. I had chamber music with both Starker and Menahem Pressler of the Beaux Arts Trio. They were the two people who most taught me how to play chamber music. They were both as different as possible from Gingold. They were tough teachers. You had to be outstandingly prepared for chamber music coaching or you would hear about it. Their toughness in addition to Gingold was

what turned me into a professional violinist eventually.

INTERMISSIONS: From Indiana University, you earned both bachelor and master of music degrees.

SS: Yes, but after earning my bachelor's degree, I was accepted into the first violin section of the Cleveland Orchestra under Lorin Maazel, who was music director at that time.

INTERMISSIONS: What kind of previous orchestral experience did you have?

SS: Almost none. I played in local orchestras such as the Evansville (Indiana) or in the Indianapolis Philharmonic or in Owensboro, Kentucky, and a few concerts with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic.

INTERMISSIONS: What was the Cleveland Orchestra audition like?

SS: In those days, there was no list of orchestral excerpts. You were auditioned on "the orchestral repertoire." It was a long audition—an hour and a half. So I played my concerto and my Bach, and then

I started in. Strauss *Heldenleben*, Brahms Second Symphony, Schoenberg Chamber Symphony, Bartók *Miraculous Mandarin*. I didn't know either the Schoenberg or Bartók. I just had to sight-read.

INTERMISSIONS: What was Maazel like to work with as a conductor?

SS: I thought he was absolutely phenomenal. Unfortunately, he didn't get along well with the orchestra because they were still reeling from the death of George Szell. But there were some really wonderful concerts in Cleveland, in Carnegie Hall, and all over the world on tour.

INTERMISSIONS: After three years in Cleveland, you left the orchestra. Where did you go?

SS: I got the associate concertmaster position in the Dallas Symphony under Louis Lane and was there just a couple years. I had gotten my dream but I realized it wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to play chamber music and I wanted to conduct, so I went back to Indiana.



INTERMISSIONS: For your master's degree. Who did you study with?

SS: I went back to Josef Gingold. I also at this point studied with Franco Gulli both at Indiana and in Siena, Italy. They both had great respect for each other. Gulli emphasized adherence to urtext and was a great violinist in those days.

INTERMISSIONS: After completing your master's degree, what did you do then?

SS: I had a chance to be a conductor, and I went to the Omaha Symphony under Thomas Briccetti as concertmaster and associate conductor. Briccetti had been a pupil of Samuel Barber and was an excellent, excellent musician. I learned a lot from him about conducting.

INTERMISSIONS: What kind of things did you learn as a conductor?

SS: Clarity of movement. Efficiency of movement. Small, small beats—that was all that was needed. Efficiency of gesture. If Briccetti could get a fortissimo sound with just his little finger, then he would do it.

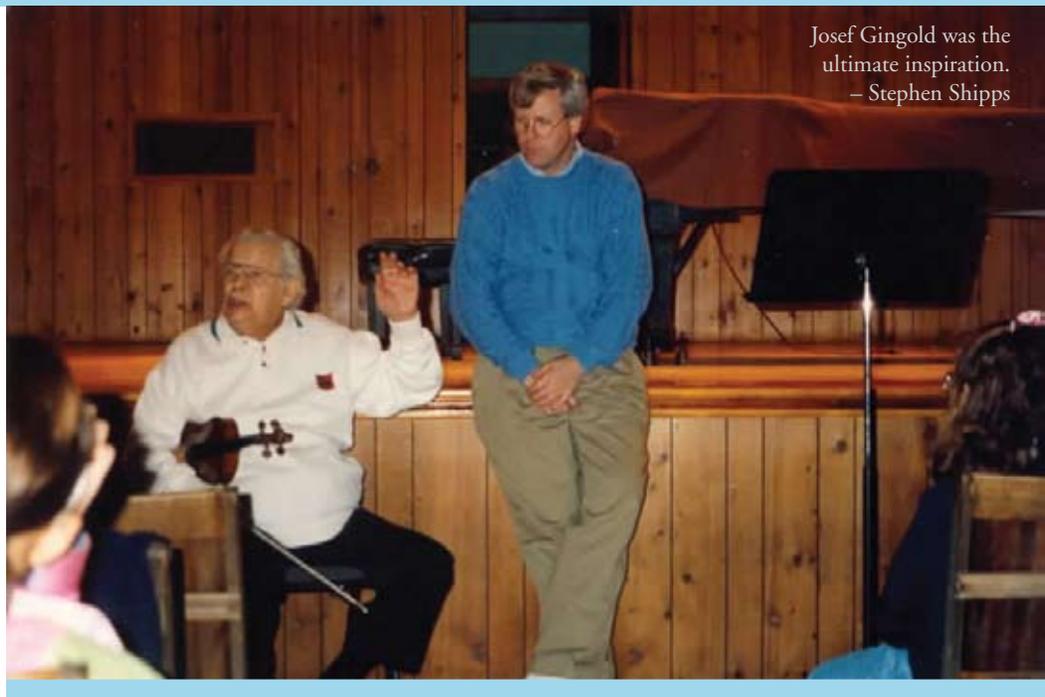
INTERMISSIONS: How long were you in Omaha?

SS: Three years. Then I left to go into teaching. I was offered a job teaching at the North Carolina School of the Arts, where I went and stayed there for nine years. Then I was offered the job at the University of Michigan, which I accepted, and that was twenty-one years ago.

INTERMISSIONS: You also taught briefly at Indiana.

SS: Yes, that was for Gulli's sabbatical. I did that twice and taught there for two years, and I taught at the String Academy in the summers there for four years. After that, I joined the faculty at Meadowmount. I had also been at Banff off and on for a few visits.

INTERMISSIONS: Can we talk about what you're like as a teacher?



Josef Gingold was the ultimate inspiration.  
— Stephen Shipps

SS: Well, hopefully I'm different for everyone. Everyone needs different things. If a student is going for an orchestral career, we try to work on excerpts. If a student is going for a solo career, which is few and far between, we go for international competitions. I've seen about half a dozen go that way in thirty years of teaching. Then there's everyone else, and that's thinking about what everyone needs.

I don't have a standard repertoire list. I build technique with Schradieck and Ševčík and all the standard etudes. I also use Ricci's *Left-Hand Violin Technique*. I use Ricci's new book, *Ricci on Glissando*, which comes with a DVD for bowing technique. It's got a quick cure for the shaking bow syndrome—right there in the book. Also, I'm old-fashioned, I don't like shoulder pads.

INTERMISSIONS: Let's talk about the audition process at the University of Michigan. What are you looking for?

SS: We're looking primarily looking for someone who can excel in the ensembles at the school because like most schools we're ensemble-driven. They should function very well in their string quartets and in the orchestras. For example, right now they're playing Mahler's Second Symphony. Last year, they played at Carnegie Hall in Mahler's Fifth Symphony. We're playing big repertoire, and a student must have the technique to keep up with that kind

of situation. So usually we can tell in ten seconds if someone is sensational. We can tell in ten seconds if someone will never cut it in those kinds of ensembles. We also have students who are somewhat in between. For those students, we discuss among the faculty what to do. If someone on the faculty hears something special and the other committee members don't, then we defer to that person if they want to teach the student for four years. I have been wrong in my judgment on occasion.

Specifically, we ask for a first movement of a standard concerto with cadenza (such as Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Sibelius, or Tchaikovsky), two contrasting movements of a Bach Sonata or Partita (although preferably not the G-minor Adagio or D-minor Allemande unless played really beautifully), and a Paganini caprice or a Wieniawski caprice. It's quite seldom that a student can get in with a Mozart concerto.

We're pretty stringent about our audition process so that once a student is in, then they are in the school usually until they graduate.

INTERMISSIONS: You like Ruggiero Ricci's books. What did you think about Ruggiero Ricci as a player?

SS: I think Ricci was both a great musician and a great violinist. His career was not as major as his artistry deserved in my opinion.

Josef Gingold shares a laugh with Stephen Shipps after dinner.



His recordings are some of those that I keep coming back to, and you can always tell it's him playing.

INTERMISSIONS: Who are some of your other favorite violinists?

SS: In high school, I always loved Szeryng. Szeryng was a magnificent player. I got to meet him because Israelievitch was a Szeryng student. Of all the great violinists, I got to hear Szeryng the most, but to me the two greatest violinists of the century were Milstein and Heifetz. I never got to hear Heifetz live, but I did have the great pleasure of hearing Milstein twice which was unforgettable. Of the living players (Ricci's still alive—he's ninety this year), Anne-Sophie Mutter touches my heart when she plays. She's a great violinist. Of the Americans, I love Joshua Bell's playing. Cho-Liang Lin, one of Dorothy DeLay's pupils is a great violinist, and the list goes on and on and on.

INTERMISSIONS: Let's talk a little about the Lucien Capet *La Technique Supérieure de l'Archet* translation project that you directed. How did you come across this book?

SS: Gingold was the one who told me about that book originally. He said it was just a crime that we don't have that book in English. When I came to Michigan, I had a doctoral student, Margaret Schmidt, who now teaches music education at Arizona

State. We did it together as a project and it took us twelve years. Gingold wrote the foreword to the book which unfortunately came out after he passed away. It was about the time that I came to Michigan that the copyright had run out, so we were free to reprint it.

Capet was always an interesting figure to me. Gingold had actually heard him play when he was studying with Ysaÿe. Capet was the teacher of Galamian. And for about five years, I owned his violin, his Montagnana, which I played on. I had a big interest in him and his quartet recordings.

INTERMISSIONS: Where can someone obtain that book, *Superior Bowing Technique*, today?

SS: At the moment, it's in the Shar catalogue or you can go to [encoremusic.com](http://encoremusic.com) or [capetmusic.com](http://capetmusic.com)

INTERMISSIONS: What kind of violin are you playing on now?

SS: It's by Premysil Spidlen from Prague. He's still alive. He's eighty-five, but not making fiddles anymore. At least from what I've seen, he's the greatest living maker. Many of the Czech players play on them. Josef Suk played on one for years. Shlomo Mintz still plays on one.

INTERMISSIONS: You played for a time

in the Meadowmount Trio and also in the Amadeus Trio.

SS: I played in the Meadowmount Trio for thirteen years. It was a very fruitful experience. We had some recordings which came out—Dvořák, Turina, Chausson. We were very happy with those. I left Meadowmount to start my own school and left the trio at that time.

I'm presently in the Kapell Trio. We're recording the complete Martinů Trios for Naxos. We're very excited about that project.

INTERMISSIONS: Could you talk about your summer school?

SS: Five years ago, I started the International Music Academy in Pilsen in the Czech Republic. It's a one-month program in July, but students can come for shorter periods. Age range is from eight to thirty-two. It's a very strong school, and there are a lot of international prizewinners that come from that school. We have all string quartet instruments and we have piano. We also have chamber music and improvisation available and encouraged for all students. In piano, we have the greatest Czech pianist, Ivan Moravec along with Arthur Greene from the University of Michigan, Stephen Swedish from the Kappell Trio, and Miroslav Brejcha of the Pilsen Conservatory. In violin, we have David Updegraff from the Cleveland Institute, Sylvie Gazeau from the Paris Conservatoire, Ivan Štraus from the Prague Academy, Marjorie Bagley from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Kirsten Yon of Texas Tech University, and quite a few other of the top Czech pedagogues. In cello, we have the great British cellist Raphael Wallfisch as well as Miroslav Petráš of the Czech Trio. We have individual rooms in a dormitory that we rent for the summer. I encourage prospective students to check out our website: [ima-pilsen.com](http://ima-pilsen.com). All the details are there in English and of course, also in Czech.

## IN CONVERSATION STEVEN PALINCSAR ON VIOLIN TEACHING

QUESTION: Could we talk about holding the bow?

STEVEN PALINCSAR: Certainly. Well, first of all, there are four basic bowholds.

QUESTION: Four? Not three?

SP: No. The three you're referring to are the so-called Franco-Belgian, the so-called German, and the so-called Russian. The fourth is the Galamian or Capet bowhold.

QUESTION: Why do you say "so-called?"

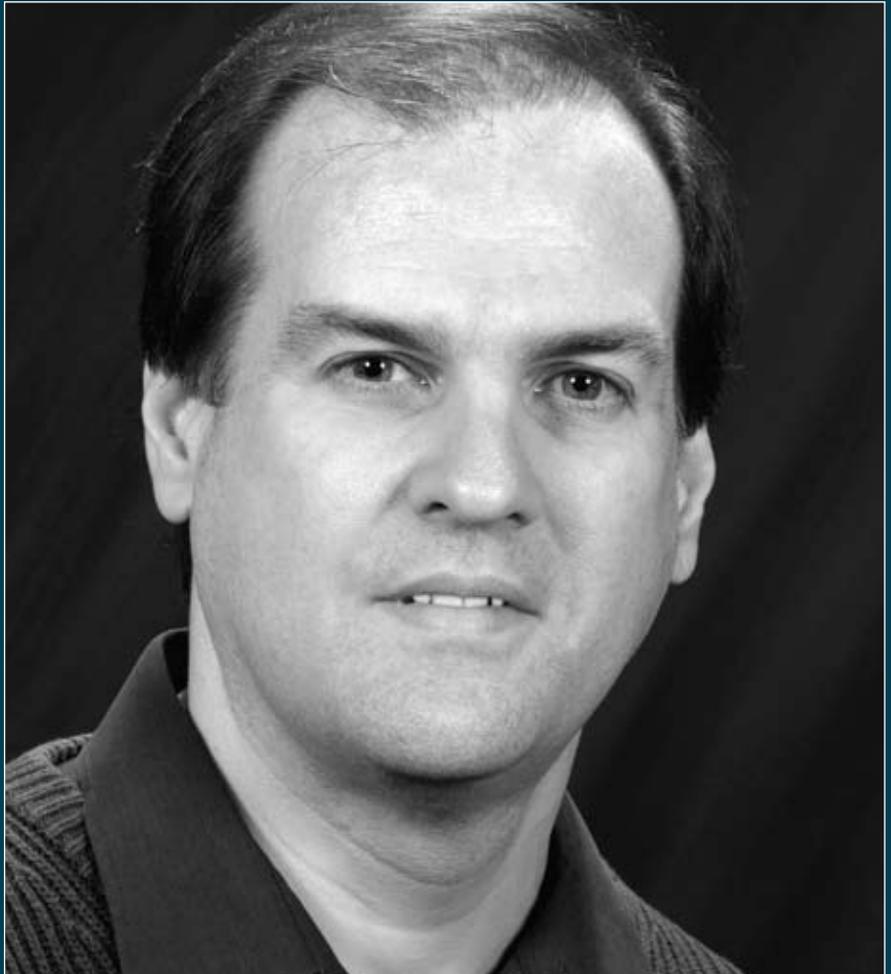
SP: Because these are terms created for discussion purposes. They don't represent actual schools. Think about it, French violin methods have historically revolved around the Paris Conservatoire. If you know anything about the French, you would

know that even in Paris, the Ecole

6 Normale de Musique and the Paris Conservatoire don't see eye to eye on anything. The Paris Conservatoire sees

itself as *the* French school of violin playing. Of course, historically, the French school of each era revolved around who exactly the Conservatoire's most prominent violin professor was. But my point is that the Conservatoire's violin faculty believes that *it*, and it alone, determines the French school. They don't accept input from even the Le Mans Conservatoire (which is actually in France), and would certainly never form any kind of cooperative school with the Belgians. So the notion of a Franco-Belgian school is fictitious.

The German school really was centered on how Joseph Joachim played, and he was Hungarian by birth and early training, and his later training was with the great Jewish violinist Ferdinand David, who was concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under Felix Mendelssohn-



One of America's premier violin teachers, Steven Palincsar was recently named as the first Haynes Family Distinguished Master-Teacher of Violin Studies. A Life Member of the Suzuki Association of the Americas, he is a Registered Suzuki Violin Teacher through Level 8. Since founding The Steven Palincsar Violin Studio, his students have twice been invited to perform at Carnegie Hall. Next fall, he will begin accepting private violin students through Midwest Young Artists. He can be contacted through his website: [www.palincsar.com](http://www.palincsar.com).

Bartholdy. Joachim held his bow with his fingertips, so he couldn't really get a very powerful sound.

The Russian school really was centered on how Mischa Elman held the bow, but he learned this from his uncle, who was a Klezmer violinist. The Russian bowhold is far superior from either the German or the true Franco-Belgian bowhold, because it affords its player a powerful sound—particularly in the upper half of the bow. The limitation is really at the frog because of the hand being so pronated. The Russian bowhold is the most natural bowhold. Compare it with other natural players such as Country or Appalachian or untrained Gypsy or Jazz fiddlers. It's virtually the same.

So, in any case, there really is no such thing as a Russian school at all, or a German school, or a Franco-Belgian school.

These “schools” were popularized by the Hungarian Carl Flesch, who wanted to discuss the various approaches to holding the bow for his then-forthcoming book, *The Art of Violin Playing* (which we now know as Volume 1). Flesch saw that Joachim's method was the center of the Berlin Hochschule and therefore the German violinists, so he identified it as the German School. He knew that he, who had been trained with Massart in Paris, played similarly to the Belgians César Thomson and Eugène Ysaÿe, so they must all be part of the Franco-Belgian school. Finally, he saw that Elman and Heifetz, who were trained in Russia, both used the same bowhold. So this must be the Russian School.

QUESTION: Isn't the Galamian bowhold really the so-called Franco-Belgian bowhold?

SP: No, it is far more superior. The true Franco-Belgian bowhold is a very weak bowhold that produces a sweet tone, but no power to speak of. The Galamian bowhold,

which he learned from his teacher Lucien Capet, affords the violinist the ability to be heard clearly in the largest of concert halls—those seating around 3,000 people.

In the Franco-Belgian bowhold, the little finger rests on the back of the stick, with the other three fingers holding the bow at the first joint with no pronation—but with virtually no space between the fingers. To really project, the Franco-Belgian player must push with the wrist as well as the arm—which leads to a really crunchy sound.

In the Galamian bowhold, since the index finger has much more space between it and the middle finger, and the little finger has much more space between it and the third finger, the wrist is not used. The power comes from the elbow, but the hand is mostly tension-free. We also find greater flexibility, clarity, and cleaner articulation in bow technique when using this bowhold. That's why I prefer to teach the Galamian bowhold and identify it as completely separate from the Franco-Belgian.

QUESTION: How do you develop bow technique in your students?

SP: There are a number of ways. In the beginning in Suzuki programs, we use the martelé as the basic stroke and this is taught first—rather than the legato stroke, which takes much more time to develop.

I prefer to use Ševčík's *School of Bowing* with beginners to develop their knowledge of bow technique and also use Jim Kjelland's workbook to accompany his college text, *Orchestral Bowing: Style and Function*. I prefer to isolate each different bowstroke and work on each individually—one at a time with the student mastering each, no matter how long it takes, before moving on to the next stroke. Of course, I will already have worked to develop a student's intonation and rhythm first. There are a number of

effective practice methods that I use which are described in detail in both of Simon Fischer's books: *Basics* and *Practice*. There is also much wisdom as well as numerous practical exercises in Lucien Capet's *Superior Bowing Technique*, which thanks to Steve Shipp's, is now available to us in English. I prefer to have a student well-prepared in bow technique before encountering each bowstroke in an etude, a piece, a concerto, a sonata, or a duet.

One other important aspect of bow technique that I should mention is the bow itself.

QUESTION: The bow?

SP: Yes, it is vital that the student use a bow that can both draw the sound out of the violin and can support the student in his/her development of bow technique. I remember in my own case that I could never do ricochet bowing when I was younger until one day my teacher let me use her bow. I discovered to my amazement that I could do ricochet with the best of 'em. So the bow is a vital part of the bow technique equation.

In fact, I recommend to students (and parents) that they should spend more on getting a good bow than on getting a good violin. A good violin can always be borrowed for an important concert, so it's not absolutely necessary that one has a violin that can really project. A student can develop their technique quite well with even a cheap violin, but the bow is another thing altogether. A bow need not cost thousands upon thousands of dollars, but the search must be made until the student finds a bow that will serve them in developing their technique and in drawing a sound from their violin.

# YEHUDI MENUHIN

## THE GREAT EMI RECORDINGS REISSUED

This latest collection of 50 CDs from the great American-born English violinist, violist, conductor, chamber musician, teacher, and author Sir Yehudi Menuhin, whose exciting awe-inspiring performances, earned him a place as one of the most admired musicians of the 20th Century, has just been released on the EMI label.

Born in New York on April 16th, 1916, Yehudi Menuhin was taken to San Francisco, California as a child. It was there that he began violin studies at a very early age, becoming a pupil of Louis Persinger at age six, and making his debut the next year playing Charles de Beriot's *Scène de Ballet* with his teacher at the piano. He made his New York debut at the age of nine, and the following year, he made his European debut in Paris with Paul Paray conducting the Lamoureux Orchestra.

In Paris, he began studying violin with Georges Enescu, and later had additional lessons with Adolf Busch. He returned to the US for an appearance playing the Beethoven Concerto in New York under the baton of conductor Fritz Busch winning unanimous critical acclaim. He made his London debut two years later and began touring extensively throughout the US and Europe. At the age of twelve, he appeared as soloist with the Berlin Philharmonic under Bruno Walter in a program consisting of violin concerti



of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. He then toured throughout the world, including concerts in Australia, Japan, and Russia.

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