

# Book Reviews

## Practice

*250 step-by-step practice methods for the violin*

Simon Fischer

Peters, £29.95

Advanced student to teacher/performer

Simon Fischer studied with Yfrah Neaman and Dorothy DeLay and is widely known as a teacher and performer in the UK. As a writer he has international recognition through the *Strad* magazine. His latest book *Practice* deserves a prominent place on the shelves of every string teacher and performer. In it there is a wealth of marvellous advice which is both thorough and logical.

It is, however, a very long book and will undoubtedly, therefore, be used mainly for reference, or perhaps when inspiration is missing in the practice room! To read it from cover to cover would be an impossibility. There would be too much information to absorb and an overfull brain would be unhelpful to Fischer's very purpose which is 'to be able to make music without anything getting in the way'.

Practice is divided into eight parts: Fast Passages, Tone, Key strokes, Left Hand, Shifting, Intonation, Freedom and Ease, and Further Essentials. Fischer's analysis of good practice technique is well-written and unfussy in its detail. There is a comprehensive contents, an impressive general index and an index of over 750 musical examples from Corelli to Messiaen.

To begin with Fast Passages is an interesting idea. One might have expected perhaps 'Freedom and Ease' or 'Tone'. However, many violinists seem very scared about not being able to play fast enough. If this is a constant worry the sooner it is tackled the better. Fischer wisely starts with Galamian who, when asked what practice method he considered the very best, replied 'Playing through at half speed, because it gives you time to think.' Fischer's many tips include practising at performance tempo, speeding up with the metronome, controlling the speed of fast runs...loops...open strings...accents...the ideas flow fast from his pen!

One might even say too fast. In a book of this breadth focus can be a difficulty. Certainly a little tightening-up here and there would not come amiss. There is a tendency for instance to have too many musical examples. Do we really need all four musical examples in 'Fast runs: controlling the speed?' Surely the student can apply the principle to his own examples?

When issues overlap there is a lot of cross-

referencing in marginal notes, which occasionally distracts. This is a pity. The quotations of the masters could be emphasised more, indeed perhaps brought into the main text. On subdivision, for example (page 83) we find squashed in a corner this wonderful thought from Raphael Bronstein: 'In a sustained melody where a feeling of intensity and of moving forward is needed the mind supplies an upbeat before each note change and bow change. This gives a feeling of conducting your own performance.'

Some teachers may feel that a topic which is important to them is left out. My particular hobby-horse is awareness of the feet when aligning the body. However, no book on practice will be exhaustive. Criticisms aside (and what musician is not critical?) Fischer has provided us with a remarkable and inspirational tome. Before I put down my own pen and pick up my violin, I cannot resist passing on an aphorism of Fischer's: 'Do not try to break old habits just form new ones' and from Sándor Végh, a delightful heart-warming description: 'Two dear friends, who have not seen each other for years, meet by chance at a railway station. The feeling when they meet...that is vibrato!'

Rachel Greenwood

## The Great Violinists

### The Great Cellists

Margaret Campbell

Robson Books, £16.95 each (paperback) or £16 including p&p from the publisher (tel: 0870 787 1613, quoting ref: CH152)

Here are the long-awaited revised versions of the 1980 first editions of these invaluable books. The indefatigable author has continued her exhaustive research and interviews, and given the reader the benefit of her endless curiosity. Her family trees have been updated (although proof corrections she gave to the publisher were misinterpreted and to her great distress resulted in the juxtaposition of Galamian and Dorothy DeLay), unravelling the endlessly complicated branches from whom so many of the finest players today can trace their descent.

In a scampering through so many musicians there are bound to be a few who have been overlooked. I needed to look up information on Iona Brown and couldn't find her, nor is a player such as Levon Chilingirian given a mention, but the updates include the baroque movement and practitioners such as Andrew Manze, and players such as Maxim Vengerov who would have been barely born when the first edition was published. The books benefit from the experienced and meticulous editing of Julie-Anne Sadie and would make great Christmas presents. Buy!

Anne Inglis