

Music Teacher magazine, August 1998

Review of Basics

Anyone fortunate enough to have been to a master class or to have had lessons from Simon Fischer - or those able to read his monthly contributions on 'Basics' in The Strad magazine, where he discusses a particular aspect of violin technique - will need no persuasion to buy this book. It is a violinists' bible containing '300 Exercises and Practice Routines' in which Fischer suggests ways to practise key passages in the violin repertoire. Strad readers may notice that although Fischer uses fewer musical examples to illustrate a point of technique here in 'Basics', there are many more exercises than in his articles in The Strad.

Basics is divided into seven sections (A-G) covering Right Arm and Hand, Tone Production, Key Strokes, Left Hand, Shifting, Intonation and Vibrato, prefaced by a detailed introduction and advice on how to use the book.

The surprising omissions are playing pizzicato (there is only one reference to it in relation to coordination, and harmonics (except as an aid to playing fast). This is interesting, as many beginner violin tutors introduce these techniques early on.

With well-illustrated, helpful photographs (showing, for example, the bow hold and the positioning of the left-hand fingers for vibrato), a clearly laid-out text, excellently printed music, and a fully cross-referenced index (though with a misprinted key - A minor, instead of E - for Elgar's Sonata), this is an essential book for all violinists. Compared with an hour's lesson, Basics is marvellous value.

The blurb on the back cover says it belongs on the music stand, not on the bookshelf, but weighing in at 850 grammes (230 pages) it needs something more robust than the usual metal stand to balance it on. However, it is Fischer's perceptive understanding of the fundamentals of violin technique exemplified in the exercises (and explained in succinct and readable English) which really make this book a must-buy.