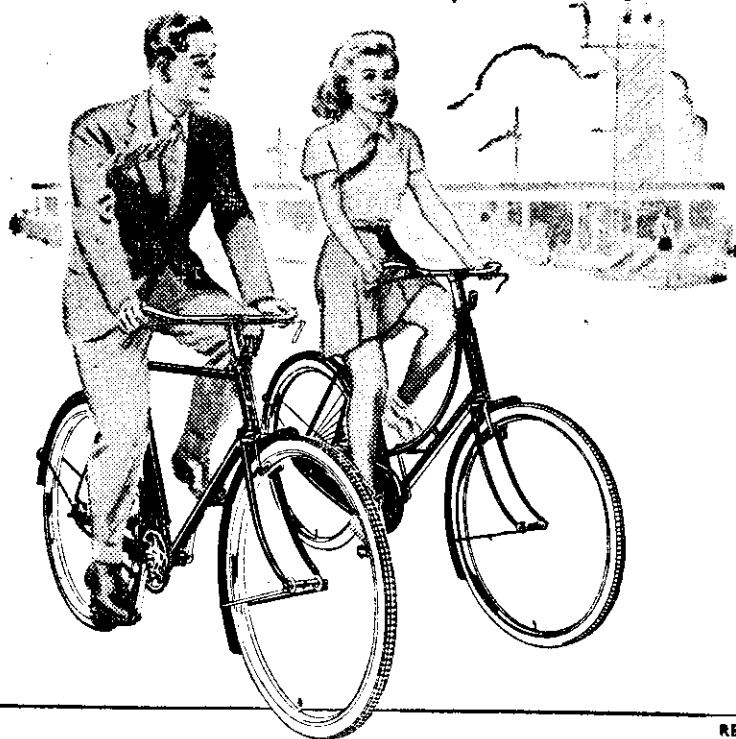


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FOR YOUNG MUSICIANS GOING OVERSEAS

Recollections of a Scholarship Winner

(Written for "The Listener" by ZILLAH CASTLE)

AS many musical students are waiting and hoping for permits and suitable opportunity to proceed overseas to take up scholarships in London, I find myself thinking back to the time when I was doing likewise, and maybe they, and possibly others, will find these recollections of some interest, and I hope, assistance.

On arriving at the Royal College of Music I had quite made up my mind that a certain professor whose name was frequently seen on gramophone records, would be the one for me. However, I had reckoned without the red tape of all worthy institutions, and I found myself playing at an "entrance examination" to two professors of the violin—well known in England but not in New Zealand. When I found later that I was allocated to one of these for my violin lessons, my disappointment was great and I determined to change over to my first choice. Fortunately, however, some of my fellow-students of some years' standing advised me against this, and I decided that before my lessons actually began I would observe the students and the methods of other professors.

The doors of the Royal College of Music studios are half-paned with glass so that it is possible to see what is going on within, although, of course, one must do so surreptitiously. In this way I was able to observe the manner of approach of the professor to the pupils, and vice versa, and at the same time to observe the methods of bowing, vibrato and so on. The professor to whom I had been allocated, taught along lines similar to those on which I had been taught, with naturally some modifications, but the main essentials of bow-arm, tone-production and method of vibrato were of the same school. On the other hand, the professor whose name was so well known to me had different ideas and many of the students under him had painful and heart-breaking months changing over their bow-hold, arm-action, vibrato, etc. Although many roads lead to Rome, and the ultimate result may be justified, I have grave doubts about it, and have seen many a good student take years to get as far as others of lesser talents did in half the time.

Too Many Teachers

It does not follow, of course, that one is better than another, but the point is they are different, and it has been my experience that better and quicker results are achieved by not radically changing one's style, unless, of course, you feel that yours is not right and natural.

Another pitfall common among students is the tendency to have too many teachers. Some of my fellow students, in vacation time, would take the opportunity of slipping across to the Continent and on the quiet take lessons from another master—sometimes just to get the hall-mark of an illustrious name. This I seldom saw bear good fruit—

they would have been better advised to take private lessons from the same professor they were with at the College. To my way of thinking it is much better (if there is a good understanding between professor and pupil) to stay with him and develop your own personality than to change methods of approach and style and "acclimatise" yourself to different personalities. I was interested to see a cable message the other evening about the Duke of Windsor and his golf. The writer said: "He used to be a very fair player, though he never achieved his ambition of getting his handicap low enough to entitle him to enter for the amateur championship. His trouble was that he had too many teachers."

Some great artists are self-taught—Albert Sammons and the late Eda Kersey are two English violinists whose names come to mind—and although I do not advise young students to take up the violin without a master, much can be achieved by an intelligent mind left to roam free, especially when there is opportunity to observe other players of your instrument—even if it is only to learn how not to play!

"Glamour Men"

Many reasons have been given for the fade-out of young prodigies on reaching adult age, and I think one of the chief reasons is over-teaching. I saw a young girl violinist ruined at the College through this. When I first arrived she was 14 or 15 and had already, for years, played concertos with orchestras in her own city in America. I heard her give a beautiful performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto with the College orchestra—it was talked of for weeks by all the musical world and she was regarded as a genius. When I left the College several years later, she was not so very much above the average, and since then, I believe, has given up violin playing altogether as she is considered a failure. She was taught too intensively—daily lessons were quite frequent from a professor of the dictator type. This is a type to beware of—the "glamour men" of the profession. They frequently have foreign names and set up a romantic atmosphere around themselves, surrounded by their satellites and pupils, who in gaping awe absorb all that they propound. These teachers do untold harm, as their approach to music is false and insincere; the music exists only for them, and their pupils become, if they have any talents, mere exhibitionists or mere parrots. Fortunately the type is rare in the English colleges—the authorities recognise it for what it is. This type is to be particularly avoided in the future in New Zealand with so many emigrants from the Continent arriving here. Do not be "taken in" by glamour and the "big noise" effects.

My advice to students is to stay with a teacher if you are happy and until you feel you can use your own wings (and a good teacher is one who can teach a pupil to work alone), and then fly, to the stars if possible—but use your