

## ALBERT SPALDING'S "SUITE IN C" TAKES ITS RHYTHM FROM THE FOX TROT

"Interpretation" is a word that has been altogether too much emphasized in musical talk and writing, in the opinion of Albert Spalding, as expressed in a recent interview with a Tribune reporter. Brilliance of performance is dilated on in conversation and in articles by reviewers, according to him, far more than it deserves to be, with the result that appreciation of the music presented is lost. People, he finds, have got in the habit of listening to the player rather than to what he plays. They think of how he does it and forget about the piece itself.

"The interpreter's ideas," he declared, "must always be subordinate to the composer's. His highest function is to reproduce what the composer says. Take, for example, a performance of the Bach Chaconne or of any of the great violin concertos. The important consideration is not what this or that artist does with the work; it is how this or that phase of the writer's thought is realized."

"What of violin technique?" was asked. "Is it developing at all in our times? Is it changing under the influence of the modern composer?"

"Technique?" he queried in return. "Why, my candid opinion about that is that it is just the same to-day as it was 200 years ago. I can hardly see where essential innovation has come

into violin playing since the six sonatas of Bach were written. Whoever can play those works is fully



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equipped to undertake any modern piece. I can think of only one man who has added anything to the scope

of violin execution in the last 100 years, and that is Paganini."

In explanation, Mr. Spalding referred to Paganini's achievements in developing the higher positions for the left hand. "But the fact remains," he commented, "that a player, in order to perform the music of Bach with correct intonation, must have a technique that will take him over the whole finger-board. To illustrate my point from an example of modern violin writing, take the unaccompanied sonata in A minor of Reger. This is composed in a freer style than anything of Bach's, and yet it is not more difficult than a piece of Bach music to play."

The violinist admitted, however, that Reger, if not harder to play than Bach, is vastly harder to memorize. "For Reger," he explained, "writes an inordinate number of notes. Once somebody asked me if I had another long Reger piece in my repertory besides this one. I replied that I had not, and that I could not imagine a player who would undergo the labor of committing two long Reger works to memory. I regard modern music," he added, "as going in the wrong direction when it runs to complicated passage-work and elaborate development of themes. The beauty of tone of the violin rests on the quality of sound caused by its overtones. As soon as you go into complexities you lose this essential beauty. Bach always has a fresh sound because he never multiplies his notes to excess and consequently never destroys his tone."

"A characteristic of a Bach melody is that it gives the impression of its own harmonic support when heard. It is self-sustaining. It is musically sufficient without accompanying parts.

Bach's melodies are like the outlines of Da Vinci and Botticelli drawings. They contain the idea and structures of the whole work. Botticelli's sketches for one of his Medici portraits makes you feel the presence of the subject."

At the request of the interviewer Mr. Spalding discussed one of his own compositions for violin, the suite in C, and in particular the third movement, the Vivace. "This movement," he said, "is the rhythm of the fox trot dance, which, though very elusive, is clear. My idea of applying the fox trot to serious composition is new, but it is the kind of thing composers have always done. Some of the syncopated rhythms of our modern American dances are complex and fascinating, though they are treated in an unimaginative and inartistic way in the music of dance halls and restaurants. They are a great source for a writer of concert music to draw from. They represent a tremendous popular interest in new rhythmic forms. Rhythm in serious music has progressed but slightly in recent times. The great names in composition of late have been associated with progress in harmony. The rhythms of Haydn, Mozart and Schubert are more complicated than those of Wagner, Strauss and Debussy. The re-entrancy of rhythm as a factor in chamber music and symphonic music will be important especially, I believe, in the work of American composers. The fox-trot rhythm is purely an American invention. It is of the soil, just as the tunes of Foster were. Its intermittent syncopation lends itself to humorous treatment, and I have written the third movement of my suite as a scherzo. The rhythm of the fox trot has the breath of America in it."

## ARE THERE SHORT CUTS TO ACQUIRING VIOLIN TECHNIQUE?

By VICTOR KUZDO.

First Authorized Exponent in America of the System of Leopold Auer.

For the solution of life's tasks and problems we constantly seek short cuts. It seems to be an affliction, bordering on mania, to try to find the quickest possible way of accomplishing things. This is essentially true of the people of the United States. Life is too short, they argue, to waste time in detailed and prolonged efforts. Why not try to find a short cut?

There are many pursuits in life in which short cuts may be used to advantage. Let us now see if any such "royal road" exists for the violin student; and, if so, is it best to follow it.

The technic of violin playing is founded exclusively on finger (also hand and arm) gymnastics. It is all a question of muscular development, therefore we have to go through a course of manual training, with violin and bow in hand, just as the physical culture student goes through his course with dumbbells or Indian clubs. In all muscular drill the regularity of daily exercise is of the utmost importance. It is not so much the question of how much time you give to it, but

how regular you are and where your mind is during the work. You must act attentively and intelligently. If the violin teacher understands his business, his first effort will be directed toward giving strength and endurance to the fingers.

It is impossible to gain velocity with weak fingers. Faithfully and patiently you must carry out the instructions of your master. Don't be anxious to advance by leaps at the expense of thoroughness. You cannot gain and hold your ground by the "hurry up" system. Take a lesson from the fabled tortoise and be satisfied with the sure and steady progress that will be your reward. Spasmic work (too much one day and too little or none at all another day) spells disaster to the violin student. Care must be taken not to tire the fingers to such an extent that they

feel numb and refuse to act. There have been instances where students, through disregard of nature's warning, have suffered temporary—even permanent—paralysis of the finger and wrist muscles. It is therefore advisable to do your finger exercises at the end of your practice. Under these conditions you will never strain your muscles, because you will not be tempted to use your fatigued fingers when time is up. It is also a good idea to do some of your finger exercises upon your violin without the bow (for which your neighbors will be grateful) and two or three times a day, between your practice hours, just for a few minutes, of course. All great masters of the violin were hand workers; and none of them advocated "short cuts" in developing technic, their own experience having taught them the folly of it.

When deciding to study this instrument don't be deluded into the belief that wonders can be accomplished in a very short time. Regardless of your gifts, it is only by patient and persist-



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ent effort that you reach the goal. Buffon said: "Genius is patience."

If you are not prepared for the "long route" in your study leave the violin alone. Work can be condensed, thereby conserving your energy; but if you wish to achieve distinction in the violin world the months and years of patient labor cannot be shortened.

## The Secret of Leopold Auer's Success.

By ALEXANDER BLOCH.

When Mischa Elman made his sensational debut some years ago attention was at once directed to his teacher, and soon the name of Leopold Auer became famous throughout the world. Before that, though prominent in Europe, and particularly in Russia, Professor Auer was little known in America. Later, when other great artists appeared, pupils of the same master, it became evident that a man who could attain such results must be a great teacher, and the pilgrimage of violin students to Petrograd began.

There have been various theories to account for the success of Leopold Auer. Many concluded there must be some new method—a short cut to technique—that was the open sesame to fame. But this is not true. Professor Auer has written no method whatever; in fact, he is inclined to regard all methods as pretty much alike, and often allows his pupils to choose their own technical studies. Thus the material he uses is at the disposal of every teacher. Naturally he insists on certain technical principles (the development of strong fingers, absolute intonation, relaxation of bow arm, etc.). These principles, however, though of the utmost importance and requisite to good violin playing, are no secret, but are also taught by others. Therefore, it is to none of these things that Professor Auer owes his success as a teacher, but to a much deeper and subtler cause. The real source of his greatness is his personality.

When I studied with him in Petrograd I had the privilege of attending his classes at the Imperial Conservatory, and each lesson was a fresh revelation of the force of this personality. It awakened the aesthetic sensibilities and the faculty of self-criticism.

This was the whole trend and purpose of his teaching. In a hundred and one ways he made his ideas graphic, sometimes by an amusing anecdote, which was often so apropos that it became class tradition; again by caricature, exaggerating or ridiculing a fault. This process, though not as pleasant for the pupil as for the audience, was always effective. More often, by sheer force of temperament, he would arouse the pupil's emotions to unknown heights. Each composition was made to live, every mood was vitalized, the languor and coquetry of a Spanish dance, the daintiness of a minuet, the dramatic moment of a climax, the mystery of a pianissimo. At such times both pupil and audience

would catch something of the artist's spirit and feel capable of big things.

It must not be supposed for a moment that in striving for this idealism Professor Auer overlooks technical shortcomings. On the contrary, he demands greater perfection than those who make technique their sole object, and he diagnoses a technical trouble with uncanny sureness. Technique, however, is studied not for its own sake, but rather in relation to expression. He impresses his pupils with the idea that in playing all material things should be eliminated. There should be no effort apparent; no evidence of violin-mechanism; no sounds of bow strings, rosin or fingers—just pure tone—music. Needless to say, such an ideal can only be approached by a finished artist, but in striving to express himself with this sense of perfection in mind the pupil performs acquires technique.

In teaching Professor Auer always allows the greatest possible scope to individuality. He seldom marks or changes a fingering unless aesthetic reasons make it advisable. In questions of interpretations, too, he is most tolerant. The conception may be ever so different from his own, provided it is convincing and does not violate the principles of good taste.

Those of us who are privileged to know Professor Auer personally will never forget his kindness, his interest in his pupils aside from professional relations, his ungrudging praise where praise is merited. He is indeed a master, a great artist and, perhaps best of all, a sincere friend.



ALEXANDER BLOCH.

## OLD VIOLINS AS "ARTISTIC ANTIQUES."

By ERNEST N. DORING, JR., of John Friedrich & Bro.

The recent sale in this country of a collection of rare old violins brought over by a well known European dealer, brings forcibly to mind the fact that since old violins of over one hundred years date have been allowed free entry through the Custom House as "artistic antiquities," business for American violin dealers has been waning.

It is true that the former 35 percent duty assessed on old violins was a hardship, but considering the fact that it practically eliminated foreign competition, it was preferable to opening our market to the incursion of European dealers.

A reasonable duty placed on old violins, which, being brought over only for purpose of sale, should hardly come under the head of "artistic antiquities," would soon damp the ardor of the foreign dealers.

## WHY NOT CHEAPER VIOLINS?

By FRANK M. ASHLEY.

Violins have not been materially changed in form or method of construction for 400 years. They sell when new from \$5 to \$500 each. They are made entirely of wood and weigh about one pound each. Why this great difference in cost? An old violin made by Stradivari or Guarnerius cost \$5,000 to \$15,000 or more. Why this great difference in price?

In making a violin a board three-quarters of an inch thick is cut to the outline form of a violin, then scooped or routed out to get the proper arching. Why all this routing to get the proper arching when the plate might be made one-eighth of an inch thick in the first place and bent or pressed to form the arched construction? Let the inventors of the country get busy on this acoustical proposition and give us violins for \$5 equal in tone to those now costing higher prices, and we will have more music in America.