

interview

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- an interview with Joseph Pach

Liz Smith

"A violin is a living thing. It is not a piece of furniture. It moves."

In this rather romantic assertion, Joseph Pach is referring to the vibration of the violin, in sympathy with the strings, as it is played. But the violin, seems almost alive in the reciprocal relationship it demands of its player. As the expertise of the violinist develops and he begins to control and understand the form of the violin, the violin begins to take a physical control, as well as the obvious mental grasp, of the violinist.

The violin is supported between the chin and the left shoulder, with no support from the arms. In fact Mr. Pach could walk around for hours with the violin balanced this way, without feeling any discomfort. The muscles of the left arm are strained and tense to allow the fine movement and pressure of the fingers on the strings. The right arm is loose, relaxed, for the gliding motion of the bow. As a consequence one half of the back becomes very muscular, while the other side is undeveloped. The spine curves, and many violinists get periostitis.

To counteract this, Mr. Pach plays golf which uses the opposite muscles.

"In my opinion the violin is the most physically uncomfortable instrument to play", says Mr. Pach. "That's why it's important to start young, so the muscles develop."

Joseph Pach was very young when he began to study the violin. At the age of four and a half a music teacher heard him playing on a toy piano and insisted on teaching him to play the violin.

"You know, I believe most young kids have this, but are not always awake to it. In my particular case, rather than playing with building blocks, I played with sound. Nothing genius about it."

Before he started school, Mr. Pach was on stage playing the classical violin at church concerts, conventions.

His music teacher also entered him into many music competitions. At the Canadian National Exhibition he won gold medals in the youth competitions at the age of nine and ten. At eleven he was entered in the adult competition at the CNE and won a gold medal plus a \$500 scholarship.

After thirteen years of studying with Daffey, he left to spend the next sixteen years studying with Kathleen Parlowe. He left Daffey because,

"After thirteen years I could anticipate his thoughts in lessons without him ever saying anything. So finally he decided that he was not able to do any more for me."

The first year the Royal Conservatory opened the Senior School of Music, which offered a two year course in performance, Joseph Pach won a scholarship and received his degree in two years.

Pach's debut performance after graduation was a solo part with the Toronto Symphony, playing a Tchaikovsky Concerto.

"The sad story then was I had to go out and make a living." The only work available in those years was commercial work - CBC, television, radio.

"Talented musicians usually left for Europe or the United States in those days. In Canada there was no opportunity to exploit young people's talent and ability."

He played for the CBC orchestra ten hours a day, seven days a week. He remembers, "The

fact that you had to put up with this nonsense sort of drained one's ambition. When I got home from work, the last thing I wanted to do was to take the violin out of the case. But I never refused a concert during this period. The ambition to be a soloist in classical music never left."

Today the Canada Council rescues a lot of musicians from this plight and supports them while they are developing musically.

In 1954 Joseph Pach married Arlene Nimmons.

The 1958-59 winter season on CBC was frantic. By the end of the season Mr. Pach felt drained of energy and was literally anemic. The Pach's took stock of their lives and decided that the material things - the broadloom rugs, the expensive furniture, just weren't worth giving one's physical being to the CBC, especially when the heart lay elsewhere.

The Pachs took a gamble that not many would risk. With their small daughter, they packed up and moved out of the commercial scene in Toronto, where the salaries were high, to go to Vancouver. Mr. Pach did the same kind of commercial work in Vancouver, but there wasn't as much of it, so he had more time to practice.

In Toronto, the CBC called in a musician for each individual show, and if he began refusing them occasionally, the CBC would quit calling altogether.

From Vancouver they left for six months of practising in Vienna. They returned to Canada and then shortly left again. This time for London.

"We were desperately running away, just to be left alone. To get away from the temptation of doing commercial work. When you don't have much money, it's sort of an instinct to accept a job."

In London they rented a piano for Mrs. Pach and spent five to eight hours a day practicing - learning a duo repertoire. They were also enjoying the music environment of London.

In 1964 the Pachs moved to Fredericton to become resident musicians at UNB. Fredericton is far removed from the music environment of London and Vienna, but Mr. Pach says,

"I love Fredericton. I like the pace. In a place this small one feels responsible for creating a musical environment. In large centres one has to join an organization. I am not a joiner."

At this point in the conversation Mr. Pach brought out his violin made in 1673 by a craftsman who worked with the great Stradivari. I was interested to know just what is so special about a Stradivari violin.

Stradivari and several other craftsmen worked in the house of Amati in Italy. A customer would enter the shop and ask for a particular craftsman to make a violin at a fixed price. The craftsman would then make a violin of the exact value the customer had asked for.

Simplified, this means that a violin Stradivari made for \$300 is worth \$75,000 today. The violin that cost \$75.00 would today sell for \$20,000 to \$140,000.

There are other craftsmen who made violins of the same quality as Stradivari, but they made fewer of them.

"A Stradivari violin is in proportion so perfect, that they can't be copied by machine," said Mr. Pach.

The scroll at the top is perfectly symmetrical. The two thin lines of ebony inlaid around the edge of the face of the violin are ven. The two F-wholes on either side of the strings are carved within one thirty-secondth of an inch the same.

The varnish used by these early Italian craftsmen cannot be duplicated today. Mr. Pach's three hundred year old violin still shines like glass.

"A violin is irreplaceable. Each one is unique in appearance, sound and condition. Each violin is recorded and sold with its papers," he explains.

The sound of a violin develops with age. The violins from the house of Amati have the richest, mellowest sound of all. But, surprisingly, there is no shortage of these violins. There are more Strads than there are top violinists.



"There is a misconception of modern sonatas by the general public that I would like to clear up. It has been the aim of our Friday concerts to educate the public that the sonata is a conversation between two instruments. The piano speaks for awhile, the violin speaks for awhile. It is not one following the other."

"Many people think the sonata is written for the violin with a piano accompaniment. But Mozart, for example, wrote for piano with the violin as an afterthought."

There is a great deal of difference between playing classical works, like Mozart, and the more modern composers such as Ravel.

As Mr. Pach explains, "The classical composers - Mozart, Hayden, Bach - subjects the musician to working within a framework of style. The freedom lies with the style, but you can't inflict your personality into it."

"The romantics, such as Ravel, Dvorak, Bloch, Debussy, the Russian composers, gives three times as much emotional scope. The performer gets much more out of the medium."

The Friday concerts are very important to both Joseph and Arlene Pach. They practice for many hours every day and their concerts give them an opportunity to express their love of music and love for their instruments, to the Fredericton community.

This is a tremendous opportunity for students to develop their appreciation of music in the classical realm. The Pachs hold concerts throughout Canada and make Canadian and American tours every year. UNB is very fortunate to have these concerts offered weekly, with no admission cost.

The Pachs play at Memorial Hall every Friday from 12:30 to 2:00 pm. You can slip in and out according to your schedule during this time, and can be your lunch if you want to.

