

## Parents Presentation by Alicia Foley

### INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon to you all, thank you for coming. Maria has asked me to give a short presentation on my experience with the YES School of music, which I have been attending these last sixteen years. By talking about my relationship with the violin over the years, the successes and the struggles; I hope to give you an idea of what is to come in the future, regarding your child's development both musically and psychologically, the sacrifices a family may have to make for the violin and, most importantly, the worthwhile benefits after years of hard work, what we all wait for and strive towards.

### PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

I began with the violin when I was three years old. My mother first heard about YES when we were living in Wexford in 1993. Maria was giving an interview on the radio, and my mother happened to be ironing in the kitchen when she heard it. Maria was speaking of the eastern European approach to music, and how she wanted to bring more classical music culture to Ireland. During the interview, Maria stressed the point that music was for everyone. This struck a chord with my mother as it echoed her philosophy on music perfectly.

She had always believed that music was indeed for all to enjoy in whatever way possible. She always felt that no-one owns music, and that is the beautiful thing about it – whether you are a musician by trade, play as a hobby or simply enjoy attending concerts. So my mother drove me to Dublin with my newborn brother, and that is where my lessons with Maria began.

I did not take to the violin at the beginning, and hated the amount of patience it required. But neither my parents nor Maria gave up on me, something that frustrated me then, but which I appreciate immensely today. After some time I began to appreciate the music, and even later, I actually began to enjoy myself. For every child it is different, some adore it right from the beginning, and already have the fortitude to practice over and over, others have to learn it. I had never planned on becoming a professional violinist, but the violin has taught me so many things I never thought I was capable of. The patience that you learn from practising passages over and over, or the calming effect playing a beautiful piece has on your nerves, or the amazing ability to express yourself through music - its very empowering knowing that after all the struggles over the years, you have done it.

### PRIORITISATION

However, there are sacrifices involved.

What many parents fail to realise is that, once your child begins playing the violin, the whole family may have to adapt to a different lifestyle. If you want your child to succeed in the violin, practicing is absolutely and utterly necessary, every day,

whether it's twenty minutes with a toddler, or two hours with a ten year old. It can be very trying, for both the parents and the child, to prioritise the violin over any other hobby. I always kept up other hobbies whilst in school, but it was very difficult to balance my time between violin and ballet, drama, debating and singing etc. The reality is that nothing else requires the same amount of dedication, every day, as the violin.

## **SACRIFICES**

So I think it is important to note that the violin does require some sacrifices from the whole family. Parental interest is absolutely necessary if you want your child to succeed. For the first couple of years, a child cannot practice on his or her own, they need help and supervision. My own mother dedicated so much of her time to helping my brother and me practice, and learnt all about music herself through our repertoires. Mr Masin will tell you that all of his most successful students were supported wholeheartedly by their parents, it is simply not possible to do it without you. I know that may sound daunting, however learning the violin is no piece of cake and your child will need all the help they can get if they are really going to enjoy it.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The violin has proved invaluable for my personal development. Learning how to play the violin teaches you how to be incredibly patient, something I would never have acquired but for practising repetitively. Being impatient or allowing yourself to get frustrated with the violin is of no help whatsoever, and once you learn how to practice patiently everything falls into place.

The violin also teaches you great self control – pacing yourself and controlling your body is a fantastic exercise for your mind. Your co-ordination and your awareness improve immensely. The calming effect of the violin is not always evident in the early years, but again is invaluable as you become older and really learn how to play the music, not just the notes. Many violinists find that practising is the best way to relax, let off steam, come to terms with things that are bothering you, and learning how to express your emotions.

Mr Masin regularly says to me that when I play, he can read me like a book and can tell instantly if something is troubling me. You cannot hide your emotions when playing the violin. It's too transparent. The shift from merely seeing the violin as a chore to something enjoyable is a huge step in your child's life. For some it comes very early on, for others, it takes a while for them to emerge from their shell.

It has a lot to do with self confidence and belief in oneself. I think it is very important not to underestimate the psychological effect the violin has on the player - it exposes your character completely. Another significant factor in your relationship with the violin is the pleasure that you give to other people when you play. Whether you are performing in a concert or more intimate settings like family

gatherings, christenings, funerals – knowing that people appreciate and enjoy listening to your interpretation of the music is a great feeling.

Playing at my uncle's funeral ceremony was another way in which I found I could express my sadness in losing him. Having that is very powerful. As well as the personal gratification one gets from the violin, teaching the violin is one of the most enjoyable things I do. Some parents in the YES approached me asking me to tutor their children, and I find it very invigorating to pass on the knowledge that I have acquired over the years onto younger children, and the impression I get is that they find it enjoyable too.

I hope it is reciprocal anyway, but I also help my younger brother and he shows me no gratitude and argues with me constantly...I guess familiarity breeds contempt! Getting the music scholarship into UCD was fantastic, and playing with the college symphony orchestra and being involved with the music department in college provides a truly enjoyable diversion from my law course. We are giving our next concert on the 31st of March in the National Concert Hall - playing in such a large orchestra producing such a huge and complex sound is truly exhilarating - a huge digression from the YES Chamber Orchestra.

## **CONCLUSION**

What I wanted to illustrate to you is how immensely gratifying it is to reach the point where you can say that you play the violin – having finished all the grades, participated in the competitions, and played in many orchestras and ensembles. It is even more gratifying when one has actually had to work at it, like the majority of violin students do. Once you reach the point where you can play music really well, and you are doing third level studies and playing some of the most famous works worldwide, when you have made it there, it makes all the struggles worthwhile. Bearing that in mind, I would like to wish you all luck with your children's studies, and however they develop in the years to come, it is important to keep the faith. Never forget that music is for everyone, and open for enjoyment by all.