

①  
another  
parent

copy on one  
side

check this  
it seems good

FOR PARENTS

By Harold Bradley

If you are a parent contemplating music lessons for your child think very, very, carefully before you invest; you may be spending money to do more harm to your pride and joy than you can realize until it is too late. Music lessons have no pure food and drug act requiring the label 'poison' to be displayed prominently on those products warranting this warning.

Why this alarming statement about an art that can only be looked upon as good, one that so many of us love enough to devote our whole lives to it?

Not everyone has had the experience of being a musician and then being made to look at music through the un-sentimental microscopes of science, medicine, psychology, psychiatry, education, and other fine arts. To see music in this perspective and as a part of the larger picture of life as a whole, puts it a pole away from the experience most students have in music lessons.

Most parents, we have learned, do not want their children to become musicians when they send them for music lessons. Most have a very vague idea that in some mysterious way it will do something for the child. Interviewing hundreds of parents over many years has revealed to us only a very few who have any definite idea of what they want for their child from music lessons. Some want the child to have lessons because they themselves had had lessons, others think it would be nice if the child could play some instrument. Only a few just wanted their child to have an appreciation of music. We have had a few who definitely wanted the child to become a professional musician.

These are all worthy motives on the part of parents ready to spend considerable sums - which in many cases means an equally considerable sacrifice which they can ill afford - on something that in the majority of cases will turn out to be a total loss, and in too many instances leave the victim scarred for life.

If you have any idea of investing in music lessons for your child take a look at what you could or could not get for your dollar.

In the first place it is you who makes the decision so whatever happens in the future your child can in no way be held responsible, the onus is entirely on you.

Let us deal with the motives in order. You do not want your child to be a musician. This is something over which you will have little control. Fundamentally, all children love music and love to perform. If you are an exceptional parent you may be able to withstand the blandishments of the teacher who tells you how talented your child is. But what about the child? How long do you think it takes before he is convinced? Not very long. Everything is in the music teacher's favor. If you are a sensible parent you are not going to convince your child at home that she is a genius, neither will the child learn this at school from her teachers there. To the child it is only the music teacher who is able to recognize her talent. What else should that child be but a musician, the one area she has been convinced is her metier?

Music is one of Man's greatest achievements. It is a great art but unfortunately there is much justification in the statement that music is an art practised mainly by non-artists. It has also been said that if music teachers were required to be able to play the pieces they teach, there would not be enough to go round. If it is music appreciation you want for your child then you must select that teacher who can produce the kind of music you want that child to appreciate. If you want your child to appreciate classical music he must be placed with a teacher who is able both to teach the classics and play the music she teaches. Regardless of yourself and your best of motives, your child will faithfully adopt the tastes and standards of the teacher you place him with. Moreover, if you want complete and utter frustration, saturate your child in the finest music at home with your

stereo system, develop his taste for good music, then place him with a teacher who is incapable of developing the equipment indispensable to the performing of the kind of music for which you have given him the taste.

If you have any idea whatsoever of having your child become a musician by trade, you must recognize clearly that there is no similarity between the training of a professional and the amateur's approach. This point should need no elaboration but in case you need explanation, in the trade itself only those capable of earning their living by playing an instrument are considered professionals. This in no way casts aspersions at the non-professionals, it is simply two entirely different spheres of activity. Ask any professional athlete. However there is one vital point that must be considered in music. The decision as to whether the boy is professional material in sports must wait until he is in his late teens or early twenties. Whether a boy or girl has the ability to be a professional musician will have been determined years before this age.

Music is fundamentally a masculine art - vide both the great composers and the great performers. It requires in its highest sense enormous vitality and the stamina of the male athlete. There is no trace of effeminacy among the great performers. In my own experience I have never known a great artist in music who looked like a great artist. There is no women's division as in many sports and a woman must compete on the same terms as the men. All the more credit to those exceptional women who have succeeded in music and they are the first to resent the miasma of effeminacy which has so unmanned this great art in America - a Samson be-decked in the raiment of little Lord Fauntleroy.

Let us examine the reasons for this. First, music education has become the women's department in America. It is invariably the mother who does the arranging of music lessons and chooses the teacher. A conservative estimate is that well over ninety per cent of the private music teachers in Canada and the United States are women, and as most mothers tend toward a woman teacher for a young child, the chances of Johnny getting the initial impression of music being a masculine activity are practically nil.

Add to this the factor that except in rare instances in larger cities most music teaching is done in the teacher's home, where the student goes by himself for individual lessons. Thus the music lesson takes on the aura of an intimate and pleasant homey type of affair in direct contrast with the child being one of many in the more business-like atmosphere of the school-room where he has spent the rest of the day.

The school has, of necessity, to have rules and regulations subjecting the child to disciplines which all must obey. All this disappears when the child goes for his music lesson. Classical music requires the ultimate in self-discipline. Even to perform the simplest piece well demands complete control of mind, body, and emotions.

It has long been recognized that the playing of the major instruments of music demands the highest standard of self-discipline of which the human being is capable. This is the greatest justification for studying music as an art. The ability to play an instrument is merely the product of the quality of self-discipline that has been built within.

As music education consultants, in the course of a year we interview many young people and their parents seeking advice as to which music school or college they should enroll in. These young people have all been convinced by their teachers - who else? - that they are talented. The majority haven't a hope of ever becoming a successful professional yet they will spend four years of college and thousands of dollars to find out there is no place for them in professional music.

We have followed the case histories of these and many others about whom we have obtained information. Most of them - the men, particularly - are earning their living in some area other than music, at jobs requiring no specialized

skills. The girls got married. The ones who had to turn to teaching because they could not make the grade as professionals, are not dedicated teachers and are doing something which was not their choice.

Very few study music with the sole purpose of becoming a private music teacher and the vicious circle goes round and round. The few who make the grade as professionals have little time or inclination to teach. This is one of the great tragedies of music; those who possess the skills and knowledge it takes to be a successful professional are unavailable to the average music student.

Can you imagine a high-school coach advising Johnny - who has reached his full height at five-foot-seven - to give up every other career to be a professional basket-ball player? Or advising Willie at one hundred and thirty-one pounds to go for professional football?