

The Minneapolis Journal
 April 12, 1895

Those Powell Criticisms

To the Editor of The Journal.

I note that your reporter has quite misapprehended a statement of mine, made at the meeting of the Ladies' Thursday Musicale yesterday morning, with reference to the criticisms in the daily papers on Miss Maud Powell. It was a just penalty, perhaps, for attempting to be sarcastic; but permit me, on behalf of others involved, to make a correction.

I did not say that the criticisms in question were "shameful if not criminal." In fact, I was careful not to directly characterize those criticisms at all. What I said was, as nearly as I can recall my impromptu remarks, "It is a shameful, if not criminal, thing to arouse great expectations only to demolish them. This ladies' club, by numerous advance notices in the papers of this city, was led to the expectation that in Miss Maud Powell the people of Minneapolis were to hear a great artist; but we discovered, from the criticism of her playing that appeared in the papers the next morning after her concert, that she was no artist at all." Then I said, more seriously: "Good, honest, intelligent criticism should be received with gratitude; but criticism that proceeds from abject ignorance, incompetence and prejudice deserves to be rebuked. It is not a seemly thing to say, 'You're another,' and I will not attempt to reply to these critics; but in view of the fact that one of the morning papers stated that it was very fortunate for Miss Powell that she played in Minneapolis before Ysaÿe, permit me to read the opinion of the musical critic of the *Post-Dispatch* of St. Louis, in which city Miss Powell recently played, following both Thomson and Ysaÿe." I then read the extract, which as your reporter states, was highly complimentary to Miss Powell in comparison with these great violinists.

But now having made this disclaimer, I am quite willing to accept *The Journal's* report and to maintain that the criticisms referred to were in fact "shameful, if not criminal," and that they did "proceed from abject ignorance and incompetence." Who wrote those criticisms? One of them was written by a [*Tribune*] reporter who, while a skilled writer in certain departments, has again and again acknowledged inability to properly handle musical matters. The criticism in another morning paper [*Times*] was written by one who himself confessed to a friend of mine that he "didn't know beans about music"—and his criticism of the Powell concert abundantly bears out his testimony. The criticism which appeared in an evening paper [*Journal*—by far the best of the three, as it happened—was written by one who told me himself that he was not at the concert at all!

Now, I submit that the epithet "shameful if not criminal" may be properly applied to this sort of thing. It is shameful, first, as regards the artist herself. Miss Powell has been before the public for some years, playing in all the principal cities of this country and of Europe, and has received the highest encomiums from musical critics everywhere. To be sure, her reputation does not hinge upon what the critics of Minneapolis may have to say about her playing, but it is

rank injustice to her to place in the hands of confessedly incompetent persons the duty of pronouncing judgment upon her playing.

It is a shameful thing, also, as concerns the ladies who gave the concert. Here is a ladies' musical club of 300 members, devoted to cultivating the best musical interests of Minneapolis, not seeking their personal advantage or any pecuniary gain, but giving their services freely to many worthy charitable institutions; this club, wishing to raise a fund for a musical library and other purposes, arranges at great trouble and expense a concert by a violinist of international reputation, and then they are practically told, the morning after the concert, that they have been guilty of imposing on the public in bringing to the city one who is not to be classed as an artist! What an encouragement this is to the ladies to repeat their efforts!

It is shameful, again, from the standpoint of the city itself. Minneapolis people, in visiting Eastern musical circles, have often been pained at the jests which they have heard about "Minneapolis as a musical center." We raise very good wheat, they say, but in music we care only for chaff. One reason for this unjust impression concerning Minneapolis is the fact that such wretchedly poor musical criticisms have appeared so frequently in our representative dailies. What will musical people in Chicago, Cincinnati, Boston, Philadelphia or New York, where Miss Powell is well known and her artistic standing eminently recognized, think of the condition of musical culture in Minneapolis, which can be represented by such lame parodies on musical criticism as appeared in Wednesday morning's papers concerning the Powell concert? What will be the judgment of Theodore Thomas, Anton Seidl, Frank Van der Stucken and other famous orchestral leaders, under whose baton Miss Powell has many times appeared as a soloist? It is "shameful if not criminal" to have Minneapolis so misrepresented.

And then, once more, it is shameful as regards the interest of the papers themselves. The press of Minneapolis has achieved a deservedly high place among the newspapers of the country for editorial ability and business enterprise. In many respects our dailies rank well with the more pretentious sheets of much larger cities. Political happenings, public events, social functions and criminal trials are handled in magnificent shape. But when it comes to the realm of music and art, Minneapolis is still a provincial town, to judge by the character of work ordinarily done by the daily press in these departments. I submit that such a course must inevitably react to the disadvantage of these papers, not only as concerns outside opinion, but among the immediate patrons of the papers themselves.

At a criminal trial in London the other day, the accused (whose name can no longer be mentioned except with loathing) was asked if certain passages in a magazine article were not immoral. He replied: "They are worse; they were poorly written." While abhorring the ethical standard of this man, it might not be out of place, if one were asked whether these criticisms of Maud Powell were not "shameful if not criminal," to reply: "They were worse; they were poorly written."

— H. W. Gleason

Leslie's Weekly
April 18, 1895

HOW I CAME TO KNOW MAUD POWELL.

By **Ida Jeanie Benson**

Twenty-five years ago a girl who played the violin was a curiosity and a wonder—she was probably laughed at a good deal, too. But now there are in this country very many earnest, ambitious students of the violin among the girls; and there are still other students who have realized at least a part of their ambition and have become excellent players—and there is one who has become *great*: whose name ranks with the names of the world's greatest artists—Maud Powell. Not one of all the women can approach her, for she plays with the breadth and vigor and fiery abandon usually ascribed to a man; her tone is powerful and very warm, and her technique ample to meet all demands made upon it. She has won for herself a most enviable reputation, not only in the New World, but in the Old as well.

Personally she is very lovely indeed, being dark and of medium stature. Let me tell a little story which shows very clearly what sort of a woman she is.

To begin with, I am a girl and a violin-student. Several years ago I was living in a town in the far South, spending all my days in “fiddling”—to tell the truth, I was music-mad. I determined to come to New York and study with the best teacher to be found. Then came the question, Who is the best teacher? It was certainly not to be answered in our town, so I took a leap in the dark. I sailed for New York, trusting to be guided by some good Samaritan of the North to the one musician of all others whom I sought. The day after I arrived there came to me an inspiration----I would call up all my courage and go to Maud Powell; *she* would know.... I asked for her address—found the house, rang the bell. The door was opened by a colored servant, the sight of a familiar-looking dusky visage comforting for the moment my homesick heart. He said that Miss Powell was at home, and took my card to her while I sat waiting in rather an excited state of mind. Would she see me, or would she say “Not at home”? Presently she came into the room, holding my card in one hand, and extending the other to me she said:

“Miss B----, I am glad to meet you; can I do anything for you?” Her pleasant words and beautiful manner put me at my ease, and I plunged at once into my tale of ambition and present woe. She listened most sympathetically, asked interested questions about my studies and myself, and gave me some excellent advice, both musical and otherwise. As for a teacher, she advised a person who has not only a great reputation as a musician, but a great heart as well. I am very proud of being his pupil.

Miss Powell kept me nearly an hour, I gazing at her the entire time with profoundest admiration.... I found myself thinking that the loveliest eyes in the world are dark and soft, with a look of thought in them, like hers; and that ears that stand out a little from the head and have that clear, healthy tinge of red (like fingers when closed together and held up against the light) are much to be desired.

At parting she shook hands very cordially with me and assured me twice that she thought me a “plucky girl”—which encouraging remark went far toward helping me to “Keep a stiff upper lip.”

Of course, being a hero-worshiper, I was desperately in love with her, and wished with all my heart to go to see her again; but I could not think of presuming on the kindness she had already shown me, so I kept away and adored her from afar.

But one night about six weeks later, after a concert at Chickering Hall, I was waiting with some girl friends just outside the door to let the crowd pass, when I heard some one in front of me say:

“Why, how are you? Where did you go?” and looking up, I saw my idol.

“Oh, Miss Powell!” I exclaimed. “I went to Mr.-----”

“All right; you must come and tell me all about it.” And I have been again and again, and think I may say, without undue conceit that we are friends.

America’s great violinist is indeed a splendid woman. Perhaps that is one reason why she is such a fine artist!

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education
Vol. I, 184-185

The Evening Scimitar

Memphis, TN

December 12, 1896

Excerpt . . .

**MISS MAUD POWELL.
America's Great Woman Violinist,
and Her Career.**

Miss Powell's career may be said to have begun in her eighth year, when she played small piano solos in public in her native town, Aurora, Ill. Her first appearance with the violin was quite impromptu on the occasion of a picnic. The occurrence serves to show the youthful fearlessness and the compelling power of her talent.

Approaching the violinist of the band engaged to furnish the music for the dancing, she suggested that he allow her to take the fiddle, which, of course, he refused to do. Insisting, she said, "I'll play something for you."

With some hesitancy, he gave her the instrument. She tuned it and played from start to finish a small air with variations, including pizzicato, staccato and harmonics, double-stopping, etc. The crowd gathered around the little platform on which she stood, listening breathlessly, and breaking into frantic applause when she finished. Her face broke into a childish grin.

Almost throwing the fiddle back to its owner, she dodged through the crowd and was gone. Later, she was found barefooted in a little stream trying her best to assist some small companions in building a dam. . . .

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education

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The Daily Sun
Nashville, TN
December 19, 1896
Excerpt . . .

Miss Maud Powell.

. . . A pretty story is told of how, yet a small girl, she went with her family to a country picnic. There was dancing. There was, of course, a rustic fiddler. Little Maud Powell stood and watched the happy scene and contemplated the industrious saw-mill that was furnishing the “break-down” music. When the quadrille was done the child approached the country violinist, and said:

“Lemme have your fiddle; I’ll play you a tune.”

The great musician of those bucolic parts looked down at the tiny girl and wearing the air of condescension and amusement, placed the instrument in the outstretched arms.

There was such music shortly as had never been heard in Southern Illinois [Aurora], and as the little arm moved in graceful curve backward and forward, the brown young face glanced with the self-stirred enthusiasm of genius. The child stopped, astounded at the yells and applause of her companions, and darted away, blushing deeply. An hour later she had forgotten the incident in the cool stream of water which flowed about her bare ankles as she promenaded in the bed of a clear brook. . . .

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education
Vol. I, 209

The Washington Star
December 1896

Miss Maud Powell and Her Remarkable Musical Album.

. . . Miss Powell is the possessor of an album which she prizes very highly, for in it are recorded the signatures of all the eminent musicians, as well as other people of note. Many of them have added some happy sentiment to their autographs.

Upon one occasion Miss Powell played the Tschaikowsky concerto with Seidl's orchestra. Upon a photograph of himself, which Mr. Seidl gave her at the time, he wrote, "In remembrance of the concerto." And apparently so pleased was he with her perfect rendition of this beautiful concerto that, when he came to write in her autograph book, he could think of nothing more appropriate than to copy a few bars of this music, with the very pleasing addendum underneath: "Beautiful as it is, you have made it even more so. Anton Seidl, April 7, 1888."

A half dozen or more bars of the Moonlight Sonata, "To Maud Powell, in remembrance of London," Felix Moscheles has added to his autograph; while his mother, a lady eighty years old and over, has written her name clearly and beautifully.

The great Joachim and little Josef Hofmann have left their names upon the pages of this book. In pencil sketch of one of Miss Powell's violins adorns one leaf, and underneath it the artist has written:

"Old fiddle!
Thy music hath charms to soothe the savage beast;
But the motive power that guides
 The bow is in the deft hand
 Of talent, which challenges
 The rest of mortals here below."

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education
Vol. I, 214

probably *The Washington Post*
December 1896

**MAUD POWELL and LOTTA MILLS
PUT OUT FIRE**

Miss Maud Powell, the violinist, and Miss Lotta Mills, the pianist, two young women in whom Washington people entertain a peculiar interest, had quite an adventure in New York about a week ago. They are great friends, and both live in New York city, except when they are filling concert engagements. Miss Powell was calling upon Miss Mills, and they were playing piano and violin duets in great shape, when the smell of smoke interrupted their work, and both ran to an adjoining room, occupied by a mutual friend, but who happened to be out at the time, and found that the drapery on the dressing table, the portieres and the carpet were in flames.

Both girls, instead of screaming, went to work in earnest, and Miss Powell, by her coolness and vigorous action, soon stopped the spread of the fire, and even before assistance reached them the two young women had put the fire out. When their danger was entirely over Miss Mills, with true feminine delicacy, fainted, but Miss Powell, being of more heroic mold, simply went to work putting things to rights in the room where the fire took place, just as if she had not been doing the part of a heroine. Miss Powell is now in this city, visiting her father, Superintendent W. B. Powell....

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education
Vol. I, 206

Musical Courier
1897

MAUD POWELL, VIOLIN ON ICE ANECDOTE

MAUD POWELL, one of America's representative violinists, had a curious experience with Adams Express Company the other day, or rather the company had a curious experience with Miss Powell's fiddle, a valuable one, by the way.

The violinist had packed her instrument, with its case, in a pine box for shipment, and it was called for by the company. Then she went to the Twenty-third street office to have the box weighed and addressed, but it could not be found. After some talk and a complete description being given by the owner, a far away and sad expression came upon the clerk's face. He looked at Miss Powell, sighed and then smiled, and went away. In a moment he returned carrying the box coffinwise and said, his eyes beaming with satisfaction:

"We had it on the ice!"

The undertaking was a failure this time.

KAS Note: The violin (which turned out to be worthless) had been sent to her to examine by an over-eager fan who believed it was a "Strad." She never shipped her own instrument that way. For the complete story, See, MPA 0041 Maud Powell, "Two Laughable Episodes," The Etude, [October ?] 1912.

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education
Vol. II, 1

Vanity Fair
published by Blakely Hall
New York
December, 1897

MISS POWELL, THE FOREMOST WOMAN VIOLINIST OF AMERICA

Miss Maud Powell stands head and shoulders over her compeer violinists. Her position is unique. The question does not rise as to whether she be the foremost of women violinists. She is absolutely the leading violinist in America today. Marvelously gifted, she has disclosed the instincts of a born artist, allied to the keen, broad intelligence of a master mind.

It has been often said that Miss Powell plays like a man. It is true she has a masculine strength and power in her handling of the bow; nevertheless she possesses the tenderness and poetry of a thorough woman.

She has played in every important series of high class concerts given in this country, and when Mr. Van der Stucken made his arrangements for the trip of the Arions, in 1891, it was requested by the committee to look about for a representative American musician, who might be taken to Europe as an example of what America could produce in the way of a player. His choice fell upon Maud Powell. The reception in the musical centers of Germany fully justified the selection. She was declared to be not only a great artist, but one of the greatest of contemporary violinists.

The memorable closing words of Miss Powell's paper, read at the Musical Congress of the World's Fair, give the keynote of her success:

"Art is long, and time is fleeting, and to achieve something of the best, one must do three things – first, work; second, still work, and third, ever work."

Miss Powell's father, Prof. Powell, is an American born, and is today one of the foremost educators in Chicago, having been connected for years with the public school system. Her mother is of German by birth, and is a woman of highly artistic temperament, and vigorous mind. Miss Powell often speaks of her mother's marvelous powers of intuition, and she ascribes her musical temperament to the maternal side of the family.

"I owe all to my mother," declares Miss Powell. "It was her persistency, her faith, her courage that inspired me. Of myself, I might have failed."

Miss Powell was born in Aurora, Illinois. At eight years of age she was an excellent pianist, when much against her will, her mother decided to have her study the violin. It was a constant struggle for the sensitive child to carry her violin case through the streets of the little

town, until, upon a memorable day, she was taken to hear Camilla Urso. For the first time she realized the possibilities of the despised instrument. From that moment she worked with an understanding of the end to be attained. "One woman," she thought, "has mastered the violin, why should not another?"

Miss Powell was trained as a child to the habit of systematic study. There were four years of incessant drudgery under Prof. Lewis, of Chicago, the child traveling a distance of forty miles for each lesson. At the age of twelve, Prof. Lewis, foreseeing the brilliant future of his young pupil, advised her parents to send her to the Leipzig Conservatory. Not only was she admitted at once, but at the end of a few weeks she was invited to play at the conservatory concerts, and at the end of the first year she played a Gewandhaus public examination and was awarded the highest diploma offered for the contest.

From Leipzig, Miss Powell went to Paris and made an application to enter the class of Dancla, the famous violinist. There were eighty applications and only twelve vacancies, Miss Powell being unanimously awarded by the judges the first place on the list.

When the young girl had finished her studies she gave a series of concerts in London, and was about to return to America, when Joachim, the greatest living violinist, heard her play. "I expected to hear a prodigy," he said, "but I found an artist. She has a very great talent." He persuaded her mother to change their plans and place her daughter for a year of study under him in Berlin. Among Miss Powell's most valued possessions is the photograph of Joachim with the inscription, "To my talented, industrious, and dear pupil, Maud Powell, in remembrance of Joseph Joachim."

When she returned to New York she walked into one of the Thomas rehearsals and asked them to hear her play. Her playing so pleased Mr. Thomas that then and there he agreed to bring her out at the first concert of the Philharmonic Society. Thus she was launched upon her successful career.

Miss Powell's art grows and broadens from year to year. "I have just begun to know myself," she says. "My best work lies in the future."

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education

No source, 1897

Brooklyn Critic Out of Adjectives

Miss Powell must not play in Brooklyn so often if she wants me to retain any of my adjectives, for I do admire her virtuosity and her interpretations immensely. She is a great, scholarly violinist, with a magnificent tone and that which so few women violinists have—temperament and the virility to bring it out—which she did in the Grieg sonata. In this there were not two executants, but Mrs. Tomason and Miss Powell were the one expression of a great musical idea. How lucky the composers are that sometimes their works fall into such hands!

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education
Vol. II, 8

Minneapolis Journal
1897

A Second Maud Powell

When I'm grown up I wish to be a violinist. But if I cannot be a good one I am going to be a business woman—not one of your mannish women, however, who wear standup collars, white shirts and are always talking about dress reform and wishing that they might wear trousers and a coat and vest. I have read of some noted lady who has made a study of the costumes of women of all ages, and she has said that centuries ago women wore trousers and that the men, finding them the most comfortable kind of clothing, took them away from the women. The fact that the native women of the ancient countries, China and India, wear trousers to this day is a proof of it. Yet I think that a good musician who plays music which people enjoy and which affects their better natures is one of the greatest things that a person can be. I wish to do that when I'm grown up. If I am to be a business woman I intend to help to make other people happy even when I am very busy. My greatest ambition is to be a second Maud Powell. I don't suppose that I ever will be, but then it is well for people to have some high point toward which to aim because "not failure, but low aim, is crime."

— Miriam Knettle.

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From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education
Vol. II, 2