

BOOKS / REVIEWS

MICHAELA'S MUSIC HOUSE: THE MAGIC OF THE VIOLIN

Gwendolyn Masin

ISBN 9783905760047 MÜLLER & SCHADE €42

(WWW.MICHAELASMUSICHOUSE.COM)



Michaela's Music House is a beautiful-looking publication, full of colour, pictures, games, musical examples and photos of the young musicians who so clearly inspire its author.

This unusual book is cast as the diary of four-year-old Michaela as she takes her first steps as a violinist–musician, and it sets out to inspire young learners. It covers Michaela's first two years of lessons, culminating in the fictional character performing her first concertino movement in public. The stories are imaginative and full of magical ideas, and the descriptions of lessons are loving and child-centred.

Although the diary is ostensibly Michaela's, the authorial voice is actually that of the teacher. A marginal gloss provides clarification of some points – mainly for the non-specialist, or perhaps supportive parent – and there are also asides to fellow teachers. The supporting musical material suggested (only a minimal amount of repertoire is included in the book) includes Járdányi, Robert Pracht and old favourites Murray & Tate.

There are some definite peculiarities about the learning path Michaela follows. Lesson 1, of the 24 that represent an actual span of 240, is all exercises – no music at all. One of the first pieces is an accompaniment to 'Oh dear, what can the matter be?' in 2/4. Notation appears before a finger chart, theory precedes concrete musical experience, and vibrato comes in Lesson 22.

The book possesses a wonderful energy, allied to a certain naivety that hints at a world beyond run-of-the-mill experience, and definitely outside usual conventions. Writing on Michaela's growth of confidence in music is excellent, as is the idea of a public performance as just another game among many.

PHILIPPA BUNTING