

# Background For Success

## ● TEACHING ●

by CHARLES MAGNANTE

**L**AST month, in considering a musical career from the viewpoint of the student, one point discussed was finding the right teacher. Now suppose we look at the goal of success from the instructor's angle.

Perhaps I should admit right here that I have not done any teaching for a good ten years. However, my first professional work was teaching, and before giving it up to devote my time to radio work, composing, arranging, etc., I had acquired a very large group of students. While a number of developments have come about in these past years, such as in ensemble playing and school concerts, there are certain fundamental points in teaching that will always hold true — and so I still feel qualified to give some advice on the subject.

### Starting Right

The personal — or perhaps I should say personality — element in teaching is something that should not be overlooked. When a contact is made with someone who is planning to study with you, it is a good idea to have the prospective pupil come for an interview before the first formal lesson. Talk things over. Find out what his, or her, ambitions are; whether his aim is a professional career, or whether music is merely a hobby. A friendly contact of this kind not only gives you some idea of the nature of the person you are to instruct, but puts the student at ease.

Sometimes a teacher, perhaps quite unknowingly, will make his pupils so nervous, that lessons become an ordeal instead of a pleasure. I never shall forget my unhappy experience, as a boy, in trying to become a trumpet player. An elderly gentleman had been recommended to my father as a fine musician and teacher, and it was arranged that I should study with him. He may have been a fine musician, but he certainly was not a fine teacher. His manner was so disagreeable that I dreaded every lesson. Even when I knew my work perfectly, he made me so nervous that I must have acted as though I had never looked at it. Before long, the

trumpet was given up as hopeless, and, with relief, I devoted all my attention to the accordion. Who knows but that, had my instructor been a different type of person, I might today be a trumpeter as well as an accordionist!

### A Happy Medium

This, of course, is an extreme case. Then there is the opposite extreme — that of becoming too friendly with your students. If they come to look upon you more as a friend than as a teacher, your instructions, admonitions, and advice are not likely to be as impressive as they should be. In short, relations between student and teacher should be cordial but business-like.

I do not feel that anyone is qualified to give accordion instruction (except in extremely rare cases) until he has studied for about five years. Then it is possible to handle beginners with efficiency — that is pupils who have not studied longer than two years.

A teacher just starting out, should not expect to receive large fees. The important thing is to become known. When you have turned out a few fine players, whose playing is testimonial to your teaching ability, you can ask really good money.

Many people start their business in their home — as I did. But this is no reason why a thoroughly musical atmosphere cannot prevail. Photographs or statues of famous musicians are inspiring to have about. In my first home-studio, I had a bust of Beethoven, and today I recall this more vividly than anything else about the room. Of course when you become established and can count on a steady following, it is worth while to open a real studio; or perhaps making connections with an established accordion school would work out more profitably for you.

The environment of the pupil from the earliest stage is important. One duty of a teacher is to see that his pupils hear as much fine music as possible; encourage them to go to piano or violin recitals, or to orchestral concerts as well as to accordion concerts. Acquaint your students with phonograph records and

suggest radio programs which should be of particular interest to them. Encourage them to associate with other musicians or people with musical interests.

There are some teachers who feel it worth while to give group instruction, that is, to give lessons to several pupils at a time. I do not agree. Their progress is bound to be slow, and, in the long run, the remuneration for group teaching does not make up for what the teacher loses in prestige. Private teaching of an instrument is always the best. I want to make clear that by group instruction I do not mean ensemble playing, which is excellent from the standpoint of study, and is recreational as well.

As soon as a student can play pretty well, it is a good idea for the teacher occasionally to play an accompaniment for him. This variety in the lesson is invariably helpful and inspiring. It is also worth while for the instructor to play a number to show what *can* be done with it — but not too often. As soon as you have several students in the same grade, give them individual parts to study of a three or four part arrangement of some number. Then plan for their lessons to come on one day, and after individual work with each one, bring them together for ensemble playing. This is excellent to develop coordination.

### It Pays To Advertise

Advertising is something no teacher should overlook, though the very best advertisement one can have is the "boosting" of appreciative pupils. However, to supplement this, ads inserted in magazines or local newspapers help to make your name known. Radio is also a most effective medium — and sometimes arrangements can be made with local studios to furnish accordion programs in exchange for a "plug" for your studio.

During the past few years, I have watched with great interest the growing popularity of accordion concerts which are staged by nearly every school of any considerable size. Nothing a teacher could do is finer than this — furnishing pupils with an incentive to work hard, and giving them an opportunity to play before an audience — a real challenge to any student to do his best.