



Producing Excellence: The Making of Virtuosos

Izabela Wagner

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Driven by a passion for music, for excellence, and for fame, violin soloists are immersed from early childhood in high-pressure competitions, regular public appearances, and arduous daily practice. An in-depth study of nearly one hundred such children, *Producing Excellence* illuminates the process these young violinists undergo to become elite international soloists.

A musician and a parent of a young violinist, sociologist Izabela Wagner offers an inside look at how her young subjects set out on the long road to becoming a soloist. The remarkable research she conducted—at rehearsals, lessons, and in other educational settings—enabled her to gain deep insight into what distinguishes these talented prodigies and their training. She notes, for instance, the importance of a family culture steeped in the values of the musical world. Indeed, more than half of these students come from a family of professional musicians and were raised in an atmosphere marked by the importance of instrumental practice, the vitality of music as a vocation, and especially the veneration of famous artists. Wagner also highlights the highly structured, rigorous training system of identifying, nurturing, and rewarding talent, even as she underscores the social, economic, and cultural factors that make success in this system possible.

Offering an intimate portrait of the students, their parents, and their instructors, *Producing Excellence* sheds new light on the development of exceptional musical talent, as well as draw much larger conclusions as to “producing prodigy” in other competition-prone areas, such as sports, sciences, the professions, and other arts. Wagner’s insights make this book valuable for academics interested in the study of occupations, and her clear, lively writing is perfect for general readers curious about the ins and outs of training to be a violin soloist.

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