

THE TALKING BOWS

By

Felix Mayerhofer

“You played that very well,” Madam Olga told Gina, her violin student, “but let’s play the duet one more time. There’s an old saying that ‘practice makes perfect.’” Raising their violins and bows into position, the sounds of two beautiful stringed instruments filled the room.

“Very good,” said Madam Olga, as Gina placed her violin and bow into the case. “I want you to continue practicing every day.”

Madam Olga was the proud owner of MADAM OLGA’S STRING EMPORIUM. She had bought the music shop after moving to the United States from Russia.

“I heard a country fiddler play on TV,” said Gina, “and I liked it. Can I learn to play that kind of music?”

“Oh, no, no, no!” exclaimed Madam Olga. “I don’t want to ever hear you play that crazy country or jazz music. Stringed instruments and classical music were made for each other and nothing else!”

After Gina left, Madam Olga lovingly dusted all the violins, violas, cellos, and basses before closing for the day. She spoke to them as if they were her children. “My beautiful stringed instruments shall only

play the music of Mozart, Beethoven, and other great composers,” she said.

Giving the cello a final swipe of her cloth, Madam Olga slowly trudged up the steps to her small living quarters above the store.

An eerie silence fell over every corner of the store as dusk turned to darkness. The grandfather clock chimed 12 at the stroke of midnight.

As the store slept, a sudden movement on the piano top broke the stillness of the night.

“Do you think Madam Olga is asleep?” whispered Chris, the violin bow.

“Yes I do,” answered Yoko, the cello bow.

“Let’s wake up the violins, viola and cello, and play a string quartet,” said Chris Bow. Sweeping his bow across the strings so they could tune-up, the instruments awakened with a start.

“Why did you wake us up?” snapped the violin.

“Because our backs hurt from being in one position all day,” answered Chris Bow, “and we want to play.”

“Madam Olga will be furious when she sees how you’ve messed up our strings with that sticky resin you use on your bow,” said the violin. “She’ll rub us harder than ever with that nasty dusting cloth. You know how she loves us, and when she sees what you’ve done, you bows will be in big trouble.”

“You strings think you’re so terrific,” said Yoko Bow. “How good would you sound without the bows? We do all the work and you get all the credit.”

“Let’s quit squabbling and play,” said Vickie, the viola bow.

Before the words were hardly out of her mouth, the small quartet burst into marvelous and delightful sounds.

“We want to go back to sleep,” whined the cello as they finished playing.

“Stop complaining!” said Bubba, the bass bow. “You play and take naps all day. I don’t even get a chance to play with the string quartet. To keep myself busy, I compose my own songs. Listen to what I can do.” Sad but beautiful notes leaped from the bass, both in pizzicato and with the bow, giving off a slow but pulsating jazz beat.

“What’s that you’re playing?” asked a curious Chris Bow.

“It’s the blues,” answered Bubba Bow. “I always get that mellow feeling when I play the blues.”

“Can we play, too?” interjected Vickie Bow.

“Sure, if you don’t mind feeling happy and sad at the same time,” said Bubba Bow. “That’s what the blues can do to you.”

When the full orchestra finished playing, a sniveling Yoko Bow said, “That was so beautiful I could just cry, and the bass solo was lovely.”

Vickie Bow piped up and grumbled, “You’d love us too if you heard our viola section.”

“Let them hear us! Let them hear us!” exclaimed the excited viola section in one voice.

“Okay!” said Vickie, raising her bow. “Let’s play!”

Without waiting for a response from the other strings, the viola bows swept across the strings with musical magic.

Before the viola bows had barely finished, the envious violin bows waiting for their chance, furiously answered back with sparkling and fiery passages.

“Whew!” exclaimed Yoko Bow. “That was exciting. What we need now is soothing music to calm our nerves, and that’s exactly what the cello bows do best.”

Raising her bow and conducting with great dignity, the other cello bows respectfully followed her direction.

When the melodious music came to an end, there was a PLUCK, PLUCK, PLUCK of a different string sound from another section of the room.

“What is that terrible racket?” asked Vickie Bow.

“It’s me!” answered a banjo in a gravel-like voice...

There in a dusty corner was a banjo, guitar, and drum set left behind by the previous storeowner.

The haughty strings knew they were there, but had completely ignored them.

The banjo asked, “Is there anyone here that can play country?”

“Who in the string section would even associate with a banjo,” answered an indignant violin. “We would never allow you to be a member of our family!”

Shyly raising his bow above the other bows, Chris Bow confessed, “I do! I can’t help myself. The instant they start playing their country music, the horse hairs in my bow start swaying and tapping to the rhythm.”

“Well! Let’s do it!” said the banjo. Before Chris Bow could answer, he was swept into the excitement of lively music, forgetting the warning Madam Olga had given them. This was the happiest music he had ever played.

In the middle of the song, Vickie Bow asked, “Can we join in, too? It sounds like fun!”

Without missing a beat, the friendly banjo answered, “Sure you can!” as the orchestra joyously began playing country music.

“Shh!” said Yoko Bow. “I think I hear Madam Olga.” All the strings hurriedly returned to their regular places.

Whispering, Bubba Bow said, “It sure has been a fun night.”

“Quiet!” Yoko Bow answered softly, “Madam Olga will hear you.”

Walking down the steps, Madam Olga was humming the very country music she hated. Suddenly! She stopped dead in her tracks. “Oh my!” she exclaimed. “Where did that come from? Now I remember,” she said, talking to the strings. “I had this terrible nightmare. I dreamt you were playing the music I absolutely forbid you to play. This is unbelievable! I can’t get it out of my head! I’ve got to do something about this right now!”

Sitting down, she closed her eyes and began imagining her beloved stringed instruments playing a beautiful classical piece with full orchestra. As the music came to an end, she sighed, opened her eyes and said, “Ah, that’s more like it, I feel so much better.”

Picking up Chris Bow, she flexed and carefully held him in her hand. “This bow has the most wonderful feel and it’s so well-balanced,” she said.

Chris Bow smiled. She had never said anything nice about him before.

Putting Chris down and picking up her cloth, Madam Olga began dusting Chris’s violin.

“Ouch!” yelped the sensitive violin.

As Madam Olga lurched back in surprise, she sputtered, “That nightmare is not only causing me to have hallucinations, but I’m hearing things, too. I could swear I just heard a screech come from the violin.”

All the bows laughed and smiled to themselves and thought-- Madam Olga would never know how right she was.