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ESSENTIAL READING FOR THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

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## REVIEW: O'Connor Method gets thumbs up from the Press

By Philippa Bunting

This exciting new publication from violinist and composer Mark O'Connor marks out a distinct swathe of territory and proceeds to occupy it comprehensively.

Designed to establish and develop a 'new American Classical Music', the series – currently two books, but eventually projected as a ten-book series with piano accompaniment volumes and possibly viola and cello transliterations – initiates learners into not only the world of violin playing, but specifically American fiddle playing. Its author hopes it 'encourages a love of music-making in a slow, steady and natural way'.

The succession of melodies is attractive and carefully planned, though there is acknowledgement that you need to learn a few basics before embarking on the book, it is a particular feature of the whole series that more complex, aspirational pieces make their first appearance in simplified versions. On the accompanying CD, O'Connor's quality of tone provides inspiration for his students – and they certainly will feel that they are his students. Piano tracks are well arranged and supportive.

Working on the principle that 'beginner tunes can be great tunes', the method goes on to build a rich pyramid of learning, full of contextual information, theoretical and even biographical background – illustrated by charming pictures of a young O'Connor and others in various bucolic poses.

Players in the US can join what almost constitutes a movement to rival Suzuki, including a national registry of teachers and numerous teacher training events nationwide. 'We're at the tipping point!' enthuses one course participant. If O'Connor is the new Suzuki, then Boil 'em Cabbage Down is the new Twinkle Twinkle Little Star – a starting point for those embarking on their journey with the violin, and subject to a set of rhythmic variations throughout volume one, culminating in a double-stopped version.