





To my talented pupil  
Jack Tracht  
in remembrance

Prof. G. Levich  
9.4.26.

# The Violinist's Handbook

*Scientific Gymnastics  
for the Violinist*

by

J. ALBERT FRACHT

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## WHAT THE CRITICS SAY . . .

“Albert Fracht made his New York debut last night at the Lewisohn Stadium, where 5,500 persons listened to music by Serge Rachmaninoff. Mr. Fracht, who has been directing the Charleston (S.C.) Symphony Orchestra for the last thirteen years, also conducted the Vocalise and the Second Symphony in E Minor. He gave an impression of ability and experience, and also of a devotion to Rachmaninoff’s music . . . its singing, richly melodic climaxes were voiced with their full inherent eloquence; various other episodes were convincingly proclaimed; the playing was well unified and the tempi duly flexible.”

—*Francis D. Perkins*—New York Herald Tribune

“He is a man of enormous vitality and humble faith, of contagious enthusiasm and great curiosity about persons and things he encounters in the course of his diverse activities.”

—*Gateway*

“Conductor Albert Fracht, regularly musical director of the Charleston (S.C.) Symphony Orchestra, was making his debut conducting the Stadium Symphony, and he gave the patrons plenty for their money . . . Fracht is obviously a maestro of experience who knows his way with a baton. A sensible man on the podium, he conducts without making undue fuss and achieves creditable results . . . the Symphony was notable for its broad singing line and romantic expressiveness.”

—*Harriett Johnson*—New York Post

“The outstanding musical events of December were the two concerts of the Charleston Symphony Orchestra under the meticulous direction of J. Albert Fracht, with Dorothy Warenskjold, soprano, as soloist.”

—*Musical Courier*

“Mr. Fracht did a thoroughly competent job with all the music on the program. What he does, he does with taste. Neither mannered nor inhibited, Mr. Fracht presents readings that never misrepresent the idea of the composers.”

—*H. C. S.*, New York Times

“Mr. Fracht is sensitive to human values, as he is sensitive to music. His lectures, even his conversations with friends, make music seem a very intimate, a very living thing.”  
—*International Musician*

“For his third and last program of the season yesterday evening at the Lewisohn Stadium, Albert Fracht conducted the works of Johannes Brahms for an audience of 5,000. The ‘Academic Festival’ Overture and the First Symphony which opened and closed the concert have often been heard in this series, but the Rhapsody for Alto Solo, Male Chorus and Orchestra, Op. 53, may have been a Stadium novelty, although it was not announced. Martha Lipton, of the Metropolitan Opera, was the soloist with twenty men from Margaret Hillis’ American Concert Choir . . . In the program as a whole Mr. Fracht provided the most convincing interpretation. The Overture had a spirited close. There was considerable sensitiveness in the orchestra’s playing of the Rhapsody, and the C-Minor Symphony revealed the conductor’s objective devotion to the music along with his knowledge of the score.” —*Francis D. Perkins*—New York Herald Tribune

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. Albert Fracht began studying the violin at the age of four and made his public debut when he was seven. He began his long teaching career at thirteen, interested even then in the possibility of developing sounder more scientific methods of playing than those currently in use.

In his search for perfection, Fracht studied with Franz Kneisel in New York, Alexander Fiedeman and Willy Hess in Berlin, Germany, and with Ottakar Sevcik in Czechoslovakia. It was Sevcik who convinced Fracht that he had a "gift" and advised him to put it in print.

In the years that followed celebrated violinists came to Fracht from all over the world for instruction and advice including former concertmasters of the Metropolitan Opera, Israel Gralnick and Naumburg prize winner Frederick Buldrini. Also members of the New York Philharmonic, The NBC Symphony, The Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Dallas Symphony, The Detroit Symphony, etc. His method attracted concert violinists Elliot Magaziner, Emmanuel Compinsky, Elias Breeskin, David Sackson and Yehudi Menuhin.

Years of devoted attention to violinistic problems, their causes and "break-down-clarifications," have been a continuing source of inner satisfaction and joy to Fracht. At long last, Sevcik's advice to "put it in writing" has born fruition.

J. Albert Fracht conducted the Charleston (S.C.) Symphony Orchestra for 18 years and organized and conducted the South Carolina Philharmonic as well. During this time he was head of the music department of the College of Charleston, Head of the music department of Ashley Hall, lecturer at the Citadel, music editor of the *Charleston News & Courier*. In recent years he organized and conducted the Long Island Festival Ensemble. He has also been guest conductor of the Charlotte Symphony, The Westminster Choir, The New York Concert Choir and the New York Philharmonic.

Presently residing in Great Neck, N.Y., Mr. Fracht continues to teach, is music editor of the *Great Neck News*, and is preparing more books for publication.

## FOREWORD

To play the violin on a high level of art demands skill and a deep understanding of the body itself as an instrument. These basics dominated by calm self-control should obviate physical and mental problems that have destroyed the careers of many highly gifted men and women. "Know how" and its application are the bone and muscle of this book.

## INTRODUCTION

Despite the many books that have been published about violin techniques, there is a need for a book which gives specific mechanical instruction in how to avoid the many physical ills which heretofore have been considered occupational hazards of violinists. The purpose of this book is to present daily routines to the teacher, student, and accomplished artist, to follow as a way of life, no less important than the study of music and interpretation for the purpose of a superb performance. My thesis is that the artist may realize his potentialities with security, only as long as he can prevent such conditions as undue tensions, frustrations, headaches, cramped muscles, neck boils, swollen fingers, stiffened joints, and resulting neuroses.



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# MASSAGE

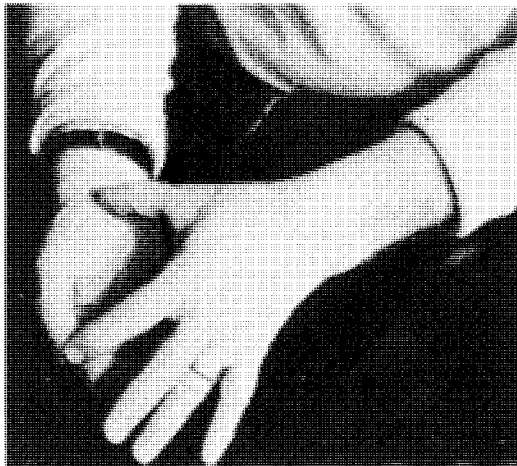
Every athlete knows the values of the massage. The violinist no less an athlete will be wise to make use of the massage technique.

## When to Massage

Massage before and after each playing period. This will help prevent muscle fatigue.

## Start the Day's Work With A Massage

The following massage should be adhered to before breakfast. Be

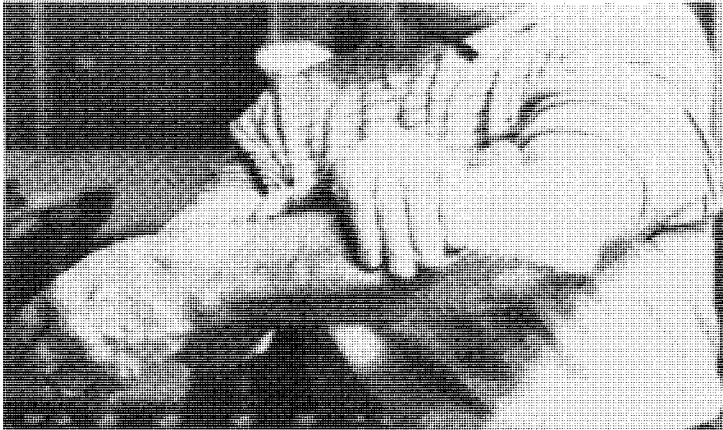


sure that any part of the body being massaged is in a thoroughly relaxed condition. The actual massage treatment is affected by a squeeze-release or a kneading movement of the massaging hand. For working purposes we will call the thumb reaching as far back as the wrist, the "heel" of the hand.

### **Massaging Neck and Shoulders**

Because of the natural "unnatural" position necessary in playing the violin, the neck and shoulder muscles continue to stiffen after a day's work is done.

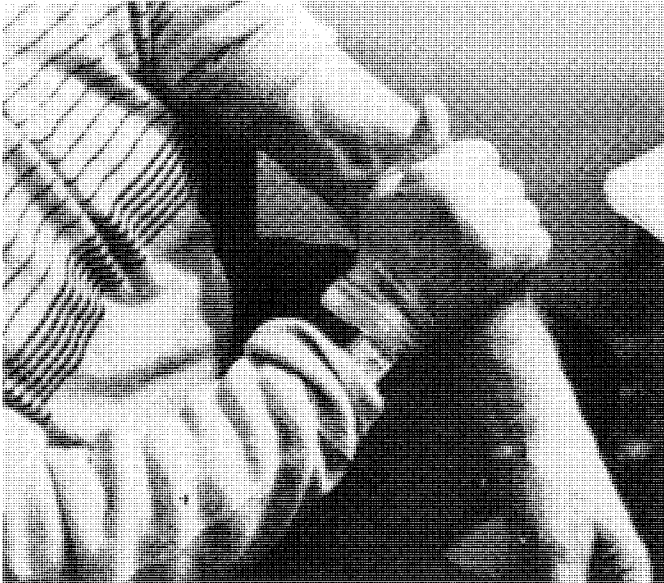
Using the right hand, start the kneading movement on the back of the neck pressuring the neck between the heel and fingers of the hand. Reach around the ears as well. Dig deeply into the shoulder and back muscles. Repeat the same technique with the left hand. Now tense the muscles of the neck for a moment and let go. Do the same with the shoulder muscles.



### **Massaging Arms**

The right hand kneads into the upper left arm working its way from that position down to the wrist. Pay special attention to the hollows in

and around the elbow. Repeat the treatment with the left arm massaging the right.



### Massaging Wrists

Place thumb of the right hand firmly on the front (palm side) of the left hand wrist with the right hand fingers on the back of the left hand wrist. Begin with a gentle kneading movement increasing pressure as you continue. Added pressure of the right hand effects an involuntary response-movement (back and forth) of the left hand. This is a desired movement and benefits the left hand fingers as well as the wrist. Now turn the left hand around (fingers of the left hand will now face the floor instead of the ceiling) and continue the same treatment. Change hands and massage the left hand keeping in mind that the massaged hand must be completely relaxed.

### Massaging Palms

Continue the kneading movement digging deeply into the palms with the massaged hand free to respond to the massaging movement.



### Massaging Fingers

Use the kneading movement. Place the right hand thumb on the small knuckle of the left hand with the other fingers of the right hand on the palm side of the left hand and resting directly on the small knuckle as well. Making sure that the left hand is completely relaxed, knead deeply into the knuckle and the space between the fingers as well. Do the same with each finger of the left hand. It might help to relax the left hand in this treatment by leaning the left hand lightly against the body. All the muscles and joints of the left hand fingers should get this treatment. It saves hours of practice.

### Massage and Finger-Stretching Treatment

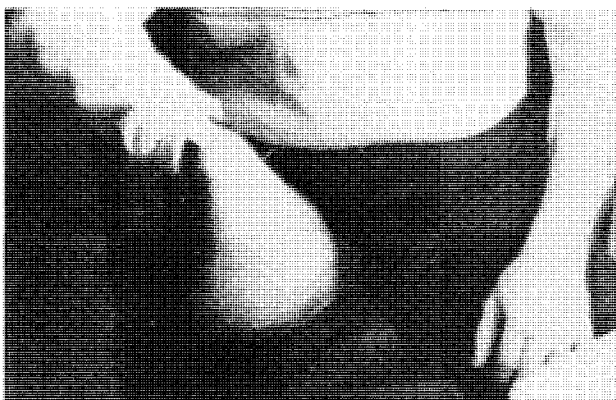
No good dancer would begin dancing without first exercising, stretching, and massaging his leg muscles. This rule fits the violinist's fingers as well.



Spread the left hand fingers as far apart as possible. Keep them stretched and in this position. Place the index and third fingers (held together) of the right hand in the grooves of the left hand. Rub the right hand fingers in a forward-backward as well as a rounded movement deeply in each finger groove. This treatment may be painful but the benefits are worth a little pain.

### **Relax Fingers, Wrists and Arms of Both Hands**

Clasp hands with fingers interlocked. In this position begin a round of up-down and circular movements that creates a corresponding series of wrist-action responses. Follow this treatment with alternating finger pressures against each other while keeping them interlocked. This includes alternating finger pressures against each of the knuckles. Now dangle each arm loosely at the sides of the body and in that stance shake them from side to side in a semicircular movement permitting them to respond as they will. Enjoy this treatment for as long as you wish. Now tighten the whole body for a moment and then let go suddenly. Finish with a healthy rigorous drying period.



### **Two Extra Minutes for General Well-Being**

Stretch towel as far apart as possible in both hands. Raise the arms in a stretched position straight up and in this pulling position, pull the

arms to the right side while at the same time resist the pull with the left arm. Now switch to a left arm pull with arms behind the head. Use the same pull.

Now with arms in front of the chest, use the same pull-and-resist movement. Bend the torso as far forward as possible and use the same pull-and-resist movement. Bend torso as far back from the waist as possible and continue with the same pull-and-resist movement. Raise the arms above the head and bend the knees, putting the body into a sitting position—with arms extended swing the body gently for a few up-and-down movements. Stand upright and indulge in a last stretch movement bringing the whole body into a delicious, tight feel—let go suddenly and enjoy your breakfast.

## RELAXING GYMNASTICS FOR REST PERIODS

### *Comment*

Practice long enough to feel the need for a rest period making certain that the need is conditioned by fatigue and not by laziness.

Lie down quietly for a few moments, then mentally, begin to tell yourself using the word "relax" that your feet are relaxing, that your ankles are relaxing, then the calves, the knees, the hips, the stomach, the chest, the back, the shoulders, the neck and any other part of the body in which you have felt any pressure. This is a kind of self-hypnosis but after several attempts it really works and in a matter of minutes, the body should react with a long quiet sigh and you will be at rest. You may even fall asleep for a short period. With calmness in charge, begin a series of relaxed stretches in the lying down position. Start with the toes, and then a few stretching gyrations of the ankles, and so on, through the entire body. Take a few deep breaths holding them for long pauses before exhaling. All of these movements must be done in an easy, relaxed manner to get the best results. When your energies begin to come back, get up on your feet and do some body bends and a few lazy arm swings. If there is time, take a short walk at a good pace, taking an occasional deep breath, then come back to work with renewed energies.

## **SOME FACTS ABOUT THE VIOLIN**

### **Two Extreme Models**

Every violin has its own peculiar traits. We will analyze a few of them. First consider two extreme models; the flat-bellied model (Stradivarius) and the high-bellied (Stainer) model. The flat-bellied violin sounds softer under the ear but projects a tone much better, particularly in a large concert hall; the high-bellied violin sounds bigger under the ear (than the flat-bellied violin) but does not project as well. Hence, the deep-bellied violin, if one must use one, is well suited to a small concert hall while the flat-bellied violin is essential for a large concert hall, or for that matter, any type of concert hall. The Stradivarius type of violin will take more punishment from the elements as well as abuse from a performer; one may "dig" into it with greater abandon, and it is a better balanced instrument, generally speaking, from top to bottom. It is true that some high model violins like the Amati possess a beautiful tone and are perfect for chamber music; but for all practical purposes we recommend the flat-bellied violin.

### **Bridge Problems**

Finding a violin maker who knows how to fit a bridge is a problem. He must be able to judge the best sounding wood, know the exact thickness needed for a particular instrument, know the exact height, to allow breathing ease for the various hot and cold seasons, know the exact spot for the legs and, also, the correct thickness of the legs. A properly fitted bridge is a heaven-sent gift. A good violin maker is of invaluable assistance in choosing the proper strings for the individual violin. Always get the very best strings, and with these you must be sure to get the correct weight

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