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Illustrated Interviews.

IX.—MR. ALFRED WOOD.

Two days it took me to track this gentleman down and run him to earth in Mr. Dallas's Studio at 419, Strand, and even then the limited time he had at his disposal prevented me from enjoying his company for any length of time. What with rehearsals, performances and minor duties connected with his profession I wonder he looks as young as he does, and I'll leave the reader for the present to guess his age from the accompanying illustration, and undertake to stake my professional reputation as reviewer in ordinary to *The 'Jo* that no one comes within measurable distance of it.

Well, as I before remarked I succeeded in following up his trail until he was brought to bay, and then it took all my diplomatic resources combined with the fatherly persuasion of Mr. Dallas himself to "draw him out" at all, so decidedly modest and retiring in his disposition. It was Mr. Dallas who started the ball by telling Mr. Wood that he had already spoken to me about his latest success and had promised me that I should hear it from the composer himself.

After a little persuasion Mr. Wood complied with our dual request, and tuning up a zither banjo which he took from the wall he sang to his own accompaniment a pretty little lullaby which, for simplicity, combined with its peculiar charm and its bright, catchy movement, it would be hard to beat. "Teaching Baby to Sing" is the title, and banjoists, guitarists and mandolinists (for it is arranged with accompaniments for either), may take my advice and buy a copy. The song was originally composed as a guitar song (for Mr. Wood is also a clever guitarist in addition to his many other qualifications), and banjoists have to thank Mr. Dallas, I believe, for its additional embellishments.

"But come," said Mr. Wood, as he rose to replace the banjo, "I have to be at St. James' Hall in half-an-hour from now, so I am afraid I must soon be moving."

Alarmed at the prospect of my prey escaping me, I hastily suggested the object of my visit.

"Well, since there appears no help for it," he replied, "suppose we talk as we go along, that is if you care to accompany me."

This was more to my liking than another adjournment, so bidding Mr. Dallas good day we stepped into the strand and sauntered westward.

"How long have you been in the profession Mr. Wood?" I asked.

"If you mean how long ago it is since I appeared on the stage, I made my first appearance at three years of age at the Salmon Concert Hall in the Boro' in conjunction with my father and brother, then known as Alf. Wood & Sons' Negro Minstrels, but I cannot remember when I first took to the banjo, but as a child I could "vamp" fairly on the old seven-stringed "tub." My brother was an experienced banjoist years before me and was considered grand at accompaniments, and in those days the common chords in the keys of G, C, D, and F, were the only ones in vogue with perhaps the A minor indiscriminately run in."

"Then you have been literally brought up in an atmo-

sphere of banjo playing."

"Yes, my earliest impressions are connected with it. I'll never forget the first impression the American Silver Banjo made on me. It was a 'Stewart' brought from America by the late Will Vane, who had returned from an American tour with Sam Hague's Minstrels (and I'll say here that I consider Vane was the finest jig and reel player that ever lived, and I have heard a few). Well, I went home and dreamed of Vane's new banjo and determined to possess one like it and learn the new style of playing. This, of course, came very rapidly to me, having thumped at the old seven-stringed tub for so long."

"Then you learned without a teacher."

"Yes! What little I have acquired has been the result of my own tuition, but in 1884 I first visited America and made it my business to hear all the best players of that country, thereby gaining some valuable experience during my two years stay there."

"As you have heard for yourself, as you say, the finest American players on American banjos what is your opinion of the English zither banjo, in comparison?" I remarked.

"Well," he replied, "since you ask me I must say that I think the zither banjo is a grand improvement for classic pieces, some of which could not possibly be played *in tune* on the ordinary, but on the other hand, for the real American banjo music, such as those unique minor jigs and quaint reels so characteristic of the negro race, give me the ordinary banjo. It is for this reason that I always use the two in my business, and I may add that both are from the manufactory of Mr. J. E. Dallas."

"Of course you have performed before a number of celebrities?" I queried.

"Yes," he replied, "including H.R.H. the Princess Louise and suite, and also in my relations with the Moore & Burgess Minstrel Co., whom I joined at the latter part of '94, before H.R.H. the Prince of Wales."

"Have your travels been varied beyond your tour in America?"

"Oh yes, after my return from America I went out to the Cape and boomed the banjo interest there. I went from Cape Town to Kimberley, and whilst at the

diamond fields there I made the acquaintance of Mr. Louis L. Playford, who is an excellent banjoist and at present his services are in great demand in Johannesburg musical circles."

By now, we found ourselves very close to Piccadilly, and the time becoming inconveniently short I was compelled to let Mr. Wood go, but I obtained from him before parting what he assured me was the opinion of himself and all the rest of his professional companions at the St. James' Hall, viz., that *The 'Jo* was a boon to all interested in the banjo, mandoline or guitar.

"I am not surprised," he added, "at its wonderful growth in circulation, and personally I am delighted with it."

And so bidding him farewell at the corner of Regent St. I pursued my way westward in search of new worlds to conquer, finding myself regretting, even on so short an acquaintance, having to part from so thorough a gentleman in every respect as those who know him personally will corroborate me in saying is the correct description of Mr. Alfred Wood, banjoist and comedian.



MR. ALFRED WOOD.

I had nearly forgotten to set right the inquisitive section of the readers of *The 'Jo* with regard to Mr. Wood's age, when my mind was suddenly beset with pictures of innumerable homes made desolate by the omission of something, which omission was causing many to become prematurely grey from the result of a prolonged guessing competition. Well, since you have all paid your entrance fee by purchasing this number, here is the answer: (the prize, I know, will not be won by any of you). Mr. Wood was born in the year 1863, consequently he is now in his thirty-second year.

JO. VELLUM.

How to Play the Guitar.

Reprinted by Special Permission from the MAGAZINE OF MUSIC.

Considering the undoubted beauty of the guitar as a musical instrument, and the variety of effects to be produced upon it, it is not surprising that, like other instruments of the same family, it is gaining popularity among those possessed of a musical and poetical taste.

Although an instrument of considerable antiquity, the guitar, as we have it now, was unknown in this country until the earlier part of the present century, when, after the Peninsular War, a Spaniard, Ferdinand Sor, introduced it to an English audience at one of the concerts of the Philharmonic Society, held at the Argyll Rooms, Regent Street.

Among other great players of the period may be mentioned Hector Berlioz and that marvellous and eccentric genius, Nicolo Paganini. The latter, when a very young man, devoted much attention to the study of the guitar, and composed several works of importance for it. His love for it, although, of course, not so overwhelming as his passion for the violin, never failed; and during his last illness he divided his attention between the two instruments, which, at his bidding, gave forth tones of deep and mysterious beauty.

In more recent years the guitar fell almost entirely into the hands of the fair sex, and was looked upon as an indispensable article in the equipment of a lady's drawing-room, where a violin or violoncello would not have been tolerated.

I well remember, when a boy, sitting next to an old lady, a friend of my mother's, at a concert at which Madame Norman Néruda (now Lady Hallé) was the bright particular star. Every one round me seemed carried away by the exquisite playing and the perfect grace of the fair violinist; and the room rang with loud and continued cheers as the last notes of a concerto of De Beriot's pealed forth from the magic strings. When the applause had subsided, my elderly neighbour turned to my mother, and, with an expression of mingled regret and scorn, said "What a pity Néruda is a woman! I cannot understand one of our sex playing the fiddle." Yet this very old lady was an enthusiastic guitarist!

That the guitar should be considered a ladylike instrument is not to be wondered at, its subdued, sympathetic tone being naturally in accordance with feminine tastes. It lacks the loudness—the harshness, I may say—of its strident relative, the banjo! and, unlike the mandoline, it is especially adapted for accompaniments.

The latter characteristic is, I think for some reasons, an unfortunate one, since the fingering out of a very few ordinary chords is the limit to which many amateur guitarists consider it necessary, or even possible to go. If they could be made to understand the actual capabilities of the instrument, and hear the lovely works of Giuliani, Leonard Schulz, and Regondi, which have been written for it, they would at

least realize that guitar music and guitar playing are very different from what they, and many beside them, have hitherto imagined them to be.

"Will you give me some finishing lessons?" said a lady to me the other day. "You see, I have never had any instruction, and there are one or two things which puzzle me and which I shall be glad to have explained." I expressed my readiness to help her, and asked what progress she had already made with the instrument.

"Of course you practise scales?" I said interrogatively. "Scales!" exclaimed my would-be pupil, jumping up from her chair in evident indignation. "No, no. I gave up the piano because I hated scales, and I certainly am not likely to play the horrid things on my dear, delightful guitar." Then she went on a little more coolly, "I can play the major chords perfectly. What I want you to show me is how to find the minor."

The popular notion that the guitar is excessively easy to learn is a mistaken one. No musical instrument with which I am acquainted can be mastered without patience and perseverance, not to mention a certain degree of talent; and no one should attempt to learn the guitar who is not prepared to devote considerable time and pains to it. The beginning is easy enough, and the pupil is surprised at the readiness with which the rudiments of the instrument are understood. But as time goes on, and the difficulties of *positions, harmonics, and vibrato* appear, it becomes evident that there is work to be done and thought to be exercised even in the study of the guitar.

I have no story to tell of "How I learnt the Guitar." It was a gradual process—one which began years ago, and is not yet finished. But to those who are anxious to take up this elegant and charming instrument I would venture to give a few practical hints which I have, on my part, gathered from some of the best authorities and most competent teachers.

The modern guitar has six strings—three of gut and three of silk covered with silver wire—which are tuned thus:—

First (Gut)	E
Second (ditto)	B
Third (ditto)	G
Fourth (Silver)	D
Fifth (ditto)	A
Sixth (ditto)	E

The compass of the instrument is three octaves and three notes, *frets* being placed upon the finger-board to indicate where the strings should be stopped. The value of a few lessons, at least from a really good teacher at the outset will be inestimable to the learner, as by commencing alone many bad habits are likely to be engendered, which afterwards will be found hard to overcome. Later on such assistance will be less necessary.

One of the most essential points to be observed in playing the guitar is a proper position of the instrument. The player should sit on a rather low chair and hold the guitar so that both hands can be freely moved without disturbing it. Let the right hand fall easily on the body of the instrument, the little finger resting on the sound-board. Strike the deepest three strings with the thumb, and the others with the first, second, and third fingers, raising the wrist high enough to allow the three fingers to strike the strings under the thumb. In playing a chord, the thumb should meet the finger between the upper joints, the knuckles being slightly raised. Great care should be taken to avoid *lifting the strings*, as by so doing they are made to rattle upon the frets with very unpleasant results.

The neck of the guitar should rest between the thumb and first finger of the left hand, the arm being kept slightly away