



Strings Attached: One Tough Teacher and the Gift of Great Expectations

By Joanne Lipman and
Melanie Kupchynsky.

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A resonant tale of a devoted string teacher

I'd bet that most serious musicians have had a "Mr. K" type of teacher in their lives, one whose brutally honest, tough-love approach pushed them to become far better players than they themselves thought possible. No patsies to the concept of "student self-esteem," these Mr. K types were not afraid to challenge, cajole, and even insult students to work harder and triumph over adversity. How else could a string student like myself have survived adolescence when playing an instrument that was the opposite of "cool"? After all, this affinity for classical music often meant a lonely seat at the lunch table.

The Mr. K of this remarkable, engrossing memoir is Jerry Kupchynsky, a Ukrainian immigrant who spent his early years escaping the horrors of WWII, then reinvented himself at 19 in the United States, and inaugurated a public-school music program in New Jersey, where he trained generations of young musicians to play difficult orchestral repertoire while learning discipline and perseverance that they could apply to every aspect of life.

Engagingly written by two "products" of his intensive training—Joanne Lipman, journalist and former viola student, and his daughter Melanie Kupchynsky, a violinist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra—*Strings Attached* uses their personal stories of musical growth to chronicle Mr. K's four decades of devoted teaching, despite the tragedies of caring for his disabled wife and the heart-wrenching disappearance of his younger daughter. This mystery reinforces the central themes of family, community, and the healing power of music.

As a cellist who got my start in public-school music, attended Juilliard, and eventually won a position in the San Francisco Symphony, this artfully articulated, inspiring story resonated with the musician in me.

—Barbara Bogatin