

REVIEW in THE STRAD
about the
MINI VIOLIN METHOD of
Lenneke Willems

This is the second volume in Dutch teacher Lenneke Willems's Mini Violin series – a violin method aimed at group lessons for children aged five and six. The children's book and informative teachers' guide contain detailed plans for 33 lessons, taking children through many topics including double-stops and harmonics; practising using the first three fingers on all strings; introducing the fourth finger and the low second finger; and the low first finger B flat on the A string.

Willems's approach is designed to be creative and engaging for young children, including lots of clapping, singing and plucking as well as bowing, and encouraging children to learn songs by heart. In the first part she advocated sitting on the floor in a semicircle to help children stay focused; in Part Two she advises switching between standing and sitting depending on whether you're plucking or bowing. In the pupils' book there are lively illustrations and pictures to colour in, and the stave size is appealingly large. Children will enjoy learning the songs (with titles such as 'Boo, said Missy Moo' and 'Ice Cream Man'). Each double-page spread represents a lesson, with the music on the right and the homework plan on the left.

As in the first part, the teacher's notes for each lesson are incredibly detailed, even running to what might be called 'stage directions' – great for teachers who feel they need extra support, and others might like to cherry-pick bits and pieces of each lesson plan. In lesson 51, for

example, Willems instructs: 'We put away our violin and bow and sit down on the floor with our book. We look at the song "The Hen House". Ask what they see in this piece', and so on.

The method clearly demands parental involvement, and although Willems doesn't encourage parents to sit in on lessons, their role in practice time is crucial. The homework plan for each lesson sets out detailed instructions on perhaps five or six different things to practise, which will certainly need a parent to decode and explain what should be tackled.

Mark Boon's translation is nicely handled and definitely more idiomatic than that of the first part. The only thing that grates for me (and which is true of the series as a whole) is the 'kitchen-table' production quality – the page of photos of Willems and her class at the front of the book looks like a photocopy, for example, and the positioning of page numbers varies through the book. Apart from these gripes, though, this is a method that's sure to engage very young children and make learning varied and fun.

Catherine Nelson