

Young Violinists Tuning Up With TV

By ELEANOR BLAU

Straddling his chair in front of a television set, Robert Gellerman, age 11, watches critically as the close-up image of a hand—his own—approximates the art of violin vibrato.

The performance, recorded moments before on video tape, is marred by a basic error in technique. But Robert has not yet detected it. So his violin teacher, Burton Kaplan, replays the tape in slow motion.

The violin sound, pinched before, moans like a fog horn, to Robert's delight. "Wow, this is a riot," he remarks. But the diversion is only momentary. His concern now is with the sight, not the sound, and he quickly returns to his purpose—discovering for himself, with as little help as possible, what he is doing wrong and how he can correct it.

Such a task is central to Mr. Kaplan's unusual teaching approach, which includes the use of electronics to help performers virtually teach themselves. It will be used by six of his protégés this summer in an experimental session at the Third Street Music School Settlement, 55 East Third Street.

Thirty-six youngsters, most of them from underprivileged neighborhoods, will attend five half-hour sessions a week, from July 6 to Aug. 29.

Various other devices will be used during the summer program—a tachistoscope, which flashes images on a screen to speed sight reading; a "Dynalevel," which changes color to reflect changes in violin tone, and

gadgets invented by Mr. Kaplan.

But the devices, including the tape, will generally be used only during a small portion of each session.

Their chief function is to communicate with immediacy, Mr. Kaplan says. If a student—in any field—can perceive something directly, he says, instead of merely being told or shown by another person, there will be no credibility gap; comprehension will be more complete, and the learning process most efficient.

Students observing video replays often detect errors and correct them immediately, even when the flaws already have been pointed out by the teacher, to no avail.

Watching oneself on video tape is almost like watching someone else—and the initial experience is rarely unpleasant.

"It was better than I expected," is a typical student reaction. "Hey, that wasn't so bad."

In contrast, performers merely listening to themselves on audio tape for the first time generally are appalled.

Mr. Kaplan thinks that may be in part because recordings only reproduce a sound they do not tell (except subtly) how the sound was produced. But students watching themselves on a television monitor see how their body postures affect the sound, and they thus perceive errors or ugly tones as correctible.

A good video recorder with monitor and zoom lens costs about \$2,800; tape costs \$60 an hour, which is relatively

inexpensive, considering that it can be re-used up to 400 times.

Mr. Kaplan, who studied with Dorothy Delay and Ivan Galamian, performed with the Pittsburgh Symphony and Cleveland Orchestras and the Kaplan String Quartet before turning to teaching seven years ago. The 33-year-old violinist has not given up playing, but teaching has become his primary concern.

For weeks now, the string players who will teach at the Third Street School have been in training at Mr. Kaplan's home on West End Avenue, where he has three video recorders, two on a special research loan from the Ampex Corporation.

The teachers have been learning to operate the machines; they've been falling off the balance boards their young charges will learn to stand on occasionally while playing, and they have been taking turns playing the part of children who never saw a violin up close before.

"Now, step four," Russell, one of the instructors, tells his pseudo-pupil. "Did you ever hold a bow and arrow?" "No," replies Judith, cheerfully unhelpful.

Mr. Kaplan, transformed to a 7-year-old and enjoying the role, looks wide-eyed at Russell and, following his instructions literally, winds up holding the violin at a crazy angle, close to his ear.

"Have the children look, touch, move," he says, a teacher again. "Make them laugh. Also, play for them."

The violin is a "fantastic" instrument, he adds. "Show them what it can do."

