

A D A G I O S in R A G T I M E

CATEGORICALLY speaking—America is the only great nation that has not produced a national music. The old nations have used up all their raw material of folk songs, etc., in making the works known as Symphony, Sonata & Co.. America has a folk-song motif in the shape of ragtime rhythm never yet exploited by serious musicians. Therefore Ragtime must be the Music of the Future But how will ragtime act when it comes to the sad element? Are we to have ragtime adagios and syn-copated andantes? Oh heavens!

S O S A Y S T H E M U S I C E D I T O R

MR. ORNSTEIN will please take notice; likewise Mr. Schoenberg, Mr. Strauss, Mr. Debussy, Mr. Montezzi, Mr. Gretchaminoff, Mr. Elgar, and Mr. Canadian Composer—hereafter none of them will be looked to for the music of the future: at least not in America. No, says Mr. Hiram Moderwell and Carl Van Vechten, as quoted in the November issue of Current Opinion, the great American composer will follow the prophets, he will follow the trail blazed by Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern and Lou Hirsch; he will learn his musical languages not in Paris or Berlin, but on Broadway; he will get his inspiration not in the Metropolitan Opera House, but in vaudeville shows and cabarets.

These writers assert that our "serious-minded" composers, writing in essentially the same style evolved by the composers of France, Germany, or Italy, using the forms perfected by the masters of those countries, and adding nothing essentially new or distinctive beyond their own limited individuality, are not creating, but merely rearranging the thoughts of others. They are therefore not building an American art, but weakly imitating a foreign one. The writers' contention is, in substance, that "imitative art can never be great art," that in all nations those composers who have achieved greatness have drawn their inspiration from the soil or from the hearts of the people, and have thus reflected in art as in everything else racial qualities which lend their work distinction. Even our imitative musicians admit that the one distinctive element which America has contributed to music is the so-called "ragtime." Ragtime, therefore, should be the basis, or at least one of the chief ingredients, of our national music. Indeed, ragtime, its champions say, reflects the soul of the American people. The "soil" of America is the pavement of its bustling cities; its "folk" is not the sluggish peasant but the nervous "hustler" of New York, Chicago or San Francisco.

It will be objected by musicians that ragtime is only a rhythm—not music, but only one element of music. Technically it is known as "syncopation." You cannot found a school of music on syncopation.

The matter is not so easily dismissed. Mr. Van Vechten points out that Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is largely based on a syncopated rhythm, and Schumann wrote hardly a piece without syncopation. He might have added that syncopation is the most distinctive factor in Scotch folk-music, one of the oldest musical traditions in the world. But ragtime is a different syncopation. It is not easily explained. Louis Hirsch tried to describe its peculiarity by saying that its "melody and harmony are syncopated differently."

The fact is that ragtime is more than a mere rhythm. The rhythm is the creation of the American negro, who brought it with him from Africa; but the "ragtime" of to-day is of recent growth and it is not peculiar to the blacks. This "apotheosis of syncopation," as Mr. Van Vechten calls it, is only the crude basis of the thing. The spirit of it, the exuberance, the nervousness, the irresist-

ible urge, are the reflection of a national character. It is irresistible because it is genuine.

Mr. Moderwell, in an article entitled "A Modest Proposal," published in The Seven Arts, describes his reaction to it as follows:

To me ragtime brings a type of musical experience which I can find in no other music. I find something Nietzschean in its implicit philosophy that all the world's a dance. I love the delicacy of its inner rhythms and the largeness of its rhythmic sweeps. I like to think that it is the perfect expression of the American city, with its restless bustle and motion, its multitude of unrelated details, and its underlying rhythmic progress toward a vague somewhere. Its technical resourcefulness continually surprises me, and its melodies, at their best, delight me. The whole emotion is one of keen and care-free enjoyment of the present. In ragtime's own language, I find ragtime "simply grand."

This view is substantially supported by Mr. Van Vechten, in his latest book of essays, entitled "Interpreters and Interpretations." Speaking of Irving Berlin, Louis Hirsch, Lewis F. Muir and others of their kind, he says:

The complicated vigor of American life has expressed itself through the trenchant pens of these new musicians. It is the only music produced in America to-day which is worth the paper it is written on. It is the only American music which is enjoyed by the nation (lovers of Mozart and Debussy prefer ragtime to the inert and saponaceous classicism of our more serious-minded composers); it is the only American music which is heard abroad (and it is heard everywhere, in the trenches by way of the victrola, in the Cafe de Paris at Monte Carlo, in Cairo, in India, and in Australia), and it is the only music on which the musicians of our land can build for the future.

Mr. Moderwell's "modest proposal," indeed, is nothing less than a suggestion that the concert singers who are in the habit of dispensing the classics—Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, etc.—in their song recitals, add ragtime to their repertory, to edify their "highbrow" audiences with such delectable fancies as "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee," "Everybody's Doing It," and "The Memphis Blues," which last he characterizes as "nothing short of a masterpiece." "In sheer melodic beauty, in the vividness of its characterization, in the deftness of its polyphony and structure," this enthusiast assures us, "this song deserves to rank among the best of our time."

But what of the public? Mr. Moderwell is convinced that a European audience would welcome such a programme with enthusiasm. Americans, he admits, might not take to it kindly. That they are "incurable nouveaux" and "ashamed to recognize their humble beginnings" may be as true a remark as it is tactless. Mr. Van Vechten's explanation of our reluctance to take our own popular music seriously is more flattering. He says:

Americans are inclined to look everywhere but under their noses for art. It never occurs to them that any object which has any relation to their every-day life has anything to do with beauty. Probably the Athenians were much the same.

∴ C H E S S ∴

(Concluded from page 25.)

- (d) If now 7. KtxKt, then 7... QxKtP 8. B-B4 (if 8. R-Bsq, Black mates in two), QxRch; 9. B-Bsq, QxKPch; 10. B-K2, Kt-B6ch; 11. K-Bsq, KtXRpch; 12. K-Ktsq! Q-Kt3ch, with a winning attack.
- (e) Again prettily played. 7... Kt-B3; 8. KtxKt, QxKtP; 9. R-Bsq instead, leaves White with approximately an even game.
- (f) 9. B-B4 would have saved a move later on.
- (g) 11. P-KB4 would not save the exchange, Black replying 11... Kt-K6.
- (h) This is perhaps rather bold. Certainly P-Q3 was preferable, the King's Bishop having no development on the Queen's wing, to preserve.
- (i) If 13. PxP, Black recovers by 13... KtxR and 14... QxQP.
- (j) Pxp first would have been an improvement.
- (k) Otherwise White gets a dangerous passed Pawn.

- (l) White gets some counter-attack as a result of Black's transposition, but it amounts to little in the long run.
- (m) 17... K-Ksq; 18. QxKtP would be altogether too risky.
- (n) If 21. KtxP, then 21... K-Bsq.
- (o) QxKP, permitting an exchange of Queens would be playing Black's game.
- (p) This is a mistake. K-Ktsq should have been played.
- (q) This and White's next move lose quickly. The correct play was 36. Q-QR4. Black would win eventually with the aid of his King's Rook Pawn. An interesting game in the early stages.

END-GAME NO. 30.

By W. and M. Platoff.

White: K at KKt2; Bs at Qe7 and KRsq; P at K3. Black: K at KR3; B at QR8; Ps at QKt6 and Q4. White to play and draw.

Solution.

- 1. B-B4ch, K-Kt3 (a); 2. B-K5, BxB; 3. K-R3, P-Kt7; 4. BxP, P-Kt8 (Q); 5. B-K4ch, QxB stalemate.
- (a) If 1... K-R4, then 2. K-R3, P-Kt7; 3. BxP, P-Kt8 (Q); 4. B-B7ch.

Welsman Studio Club

THE Welsman Studio Club, of Toronto, met for the first time this season recently, when an excellent programme was given by the Misses Alice Wark, Lily Timmins, Edith Buckley, and Messrs. Simeon Joyce and Bert Proctor, pupils of Mr. F. S. Welsman. Miss Marion Lawrason added greatly to the success of the programme by her artistic singing.

Miss Muriel Robertson was elected President of the Club, with Miss Constance Martin as vice-president, Miss Lillian Wilkes, secretary-treasurer; and Miss Anne Bellamy and Mrs. J. M. Livingston as conveners of the programme and refreshment committees.

In addition to a number of special programmes, to be given during the season, the members are planning an entertainment the proceeds from which are to aid in patriotic work. The Club has a large membership and the present season, entered upon with enthusiasm, promises to be a most successful one.

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