

What Will Our Music Prophecy?

Canada's Answer Rests With Her Young Folks

Germany's Productions of the Past Thirty Years Betrayed Her "Kultur"

By KATHERINE HALE



F a country is made by thinking musically, it is sometimes saved by its power of listening musically. To-day, the sweetest music of life is stilled. The violins, the harps, the gentle spring-like pastoral flute, they have been hurled to earth under the call to arms of the fife, the drum, the trumpet, the instruments of wind and fury. The world is rocking and swaying in a great reverberating noise. And you may say that the country that began the noise was supposedly the most music-loving on the earth. Truly, one of Germany's finest mental exercises was the exact study of the science of music, and out of Bach and Handel and Mozart came the great Beethoven, who was indeed a god, for his work signified the triumph of spiritual power over physical limitation. And after Beethoven came Wagner, who expressed the pinnacle of German culture; music, drama, and poetry combined, all covering the starkness of brutal Sagas with the mantle of heroism.

But after Wagner, in the last thirty years, has come a great change. It was as though, after the Franco-Prussian War, the character of the two nations reversed, the Germans getting farther and farther away from any spiritual vision in their music, and the French, whose earlier composers were merely frivolous, learning through suffering the tremendous meaning of music. As long ago as 1905 the well known novelist, Romain Rolland, said "In the old tranquil spirit of Bach we get Christ's speech unadorned and in all its living force, but the Germans of to-day have little in common with the Germans of yesterday who loved pure musical thought. While they applaud Wagner and encore Brahms, they are, in their hearts, not only frivolous but sentimental and gross. The most striking thing about the public is their cult of power since Wagner's death. When listening to the end of the Meistersinger, I felt how the haughty music of the great march reflected the spirit of this military nation of shop-keepers, bursting with rude health and complacent pride."

Written nine years before the war, this is an amazing prophecy. It brings home to us with swift force the direct relationship of the dream in the heart and the word on the lips.

And now, of all times in the history of the world, we look to the future through the eyes of the children: the children who must grow up to make harmony again in this broken and discordant world.

IMAGINE a concert hall seating over three thousand people, with a great stage on which four hundred performers, chorus and orchestra are often placed. It is an early spring afternoon; daylight and artificial light mingle in an eerie way. Rimming the huge stage is a border of tiny palms and potted flowers, daffodils, tulips, narcissi—children of spring.

The great space is empty at four o'clock. Half an hour later it is entirely filled by an audience of children; boys and girls from five to fifteen years, gathered from the public schools to hear a violin recital given to them by the world-famous violinist, Isolde Menges.

The air is vibrant with an incessant and excited chatter; the children overflow the seats, a hundred or more are seated on the stage, a group of grown-ups enter a stage box, and then a young girl appears with a violin under her arm. In her short, dark velvet dress, with her hair boyishly bobbed, she too, looks like a child. The audience greets her with a roar of applause. She smiles and advances to the row of daffodils that separates her from her audience and tells the children how glad she is they could accept the invitation of the music club that brings her to the city, and her own invitation to come this afternoon.

"I am playing to children in great halls like this, and in smaller halls, all over Canada," she says, "and I love to do it because there are so many little things I want to say to you about music, especially about violin music, and questions I want to ask you. There may also be questions you want to ask me, but first of all let me play you something—it is a sonata by the great master, Haydn."

And then this boyish girl takes up her violin and sets it against her cheek and over the great palpitating sea of excited children float the quiet notes; the singing voice, the free spirit, the eternal joy, the expression of all youth speaking to them in their own language.

The effect was instantaneous. No child there had to be introduced to this beauty. It belonged to each one of them, and they appropriated it instantly, in silence while the music lasted, and then with such a storm of applause as must have carried a happy conviction to the artist.

Observe that before playing she did not preface or explain the sonata. She took everything for granted. She gave her childish audience a piece of perfect classicism first—the finished product of beauty for which there is never any explanation.

"NOW," she said, when the applause died down, "I'm awfully glad you liked that so much. I think it is beautiful too, but it is rather hard to play, though it sounds so easy. It becomes beautiful as you work at it. How many of you are studying music?"

Thousands of hands went up.

"How many are studying the piano?"

Fully a thousand hands.

"How many the violin?"

Hundreds of hands.

"Ah, that is good. Well, now, the thing is that you must make the violin a very beautiful voice. How many of you like to practise?"

A studious storm of hands

"WHEN listening to the end of the 'Meistersinger'" quotes the writer of this article, from Romain Rolland, the well-known novelist—"I felt how the haughty music of the great march reflected the spirit of this military nation of shop-keepers, bursting with rude health and complacent pride."

The application of this opinion alone would influence you to read this article. But Katherine Hale has gone farther, and puts the onus of Canada's musical future and the prophecy it may make, upon every parent, teacher, and upon individuals generally, who are or should be interested in the child's musical education—in short, upon YOU.

—THE EDITORS.



Isolde Menges—Violinist

"How many of you don't like to practise?"

A laughing ripple of hands.

"Well! I'm in the last class! I never have liked very much to practise. But I like very much to make the violin sing, and to do that I have to think about it, and to work. I thought about this violin voice when I was very little. Guess when I gave my first concert? How old do you think I was?"

The auditorium rang with "guesses."

Isolde Menges waited for the uproar to subside, and when it did not subside she waved her instrument and stamped her foot in a sort of elfin fury.

"Do not make such a wild noise!" she commanded. "Listen to me! I was only three when I played in my first concert on my tiny violin. I want Canadian children to learn to love their violins when they are very small, like that. You must ask your parents to let your little sisters and brothers have baby violins and if they do not keep such things here in the music shops you must ask them to send for them. It is never too young to begin to learn, and all learning should begin like play work. Then there are such lovely little pieces. Here is one by Schubert, 'The Moment Musicale.' Many of you have learned it upon the piano. I wonder what picture it makes for you? This is what I see as I play the little phrases, or sentences, of this piece. I see a dark wood and several little gnomes, you know, those fairy men with the peaked caps and merry wrinkled faces? Well, there they are, playing a little game in the woods. Listen and see if it comes to you like that!"

AGAIN she took up her instrument, and the children listened to her, fascinated by a fairy spell, and again they responded instantly as the tiny elfish picture floated over the great hall.

Play-time was illustrated in a joyous French dance, summer-time by Schubert's "Bee."

"Shut your eyes and be very quiet," commanded the artist before she played this, "for it isn't a very big bee, and you won't hear it hum unless you listen."

Sleepy time depicted in a little lullaby composed by the artist's own little twelve year old brother, brought the question "how many of you write compositions in music?"

A few shy hands went up.

"Why not begin to try to make tunes as you do little pictures and stories?" asked the girl with the boy's hair. She was quickly becoming a comrade that they knew very well.

During her last number, when a few of them became

restless and began to scramble for wraps and rubbers, she gave them a little lesson in politeness.

"If anyone leaves this hall while I am playing, I shall think they are very rude! And fancy any boy or girl not waiting to sing 'God Save the King'!"

Afterwards, Miss Menges told me that she was quite as much interested in this end of her art, the playing to children wherever and whenever she can, as in the carefully arranged programmes for mature audiences.

"In the first place," she says, "it is much easier, more inspiring, for an artist to play to children, for their minds are clearer, their spirits more receptive; they are not weighed down by a lot of unnecessary things—wondering thoughts about non-essentials, for instance—as older people are, and so the message of music goes straight home to them. And then I resent the idea that all the best concerts should be given to grown up people, from the point of view of the children's pleasure as well as their education. And so from one end of Canada to the other, I am trying to do my bit in this way. I have had, or will have, engagements in all the largest towns and cities from coast to coast, and everywhere I suggest to the committee who engage me, that I should like to give a free concert to the children of the town."

SURELY there is a hint here for many musicians!

Much might be done in an educative way along the same line by others who possess the seeing eye and the understanding heart as well as the gift for music. Music clubs could take up the question with much benefit to themselves and the children, and so could conservatories and colleges of music.

Another movement which is now on foot in several Canadian and American cities is that of Saturday morning talks to children about various phases of music. I have been to one or two "mornings" which were distinctly worth while.

An invitation is given through the press to all the children to come to the recital hall of some large music shop, a club room or elsewhere, and under the supervision of someone who has mapped out a plan of procedure the children are introduced to different phases of music.

At the first of these hours that I attended I found a slim young girl in charge, who evidently knew and loved children as well as she knew and loved music, for she seemed to be drawing out their own individuality as well as giving them something definite to study out for themselves during the week to come before the next "Hour."

It was a dance morning. There had been a little talk about dancing and how music and color may be turned into the movement and rhythm of the dance. Two little children, a boy and a girl, gave a dance that they had themselves "invented" the week before. It was an Oriental dance and they had costumed it and worked it out in a delightful fashion. The other children sat about the big room not as an "audience," but in groups, just as they liked, and they asked questions and made suggestions and were altogether free to express themselves on the subject of music and dancing.

"Last week it was Gramophone Day," said the—what shall I call her—Instructress? "We had a tremendous crowd of children, for, you see, there is a gramophone in nearly every home and the small people of to-day are beginning to know the world's artists so well through the records that names like Kreisler, Mischa Elman, Calve, Melba, and so on, are so familiar that they are naturally eager to hear anything I can tell them about these artists and the music that they sing and play. We have a graphophone expert here and he described to the children the process of making the records, and why it is that certain voices are so beautiful in the machine and why some voices are unpleasant."

One little boy of about seven said to his neighbor, "I do hope they won't put on the 'Humoresque.'" I get awfully tired of that tune. I like Fritz Kreisler's "Reverie" much better."

WHEN one realizes that there is nothing unusual in such a discriminating remark from a small boy whose home is in no way more musical than that of many others in this day of a thousand records, one can see that an awakening of musical consciousness is one of the signs of the times.

Perhaps, should one look far enough into it, a reason for the effort which is certainly being made throughout Canada for more music in the schools and a better conception of the meaning of music, lies in the fact that people everywhere are beginning to realize that the safety and sanity of a nation really lies in the dream at its heart which makes possible the word on its lips.

Dreams are the sub-conscious thoughts of men's minds working out on the astral plane, the plane of unconsciousness which we call sleep. When the dream is carried over into everyday life we call it imagination.

Now, children are the most imaginative folk in the whole world, and as they dream, while they are children, so they will "do" in later life. The German dream of all-power, a black dream, has overshadowed the whole world.

"What are children?" says Savigny, the French scientist, in a recent novel called "Promise." "Take away sentiment and poetry and they are in truth but unfinished facts. It is the fulfilled fact that I seek and must seek—the perfect man."

"Seek him!" replied Lemaure, the musician. "Leave us the children. What are they indeed? Possibilities, renewals, promises. And the only perfect thing in this imperfect world is promise."

And that is why I ask, and so many others all over the country are asking, that the meaning of music may be made clear to the heart of the promise of this country—its children.