

The Value of the Gramophone

By Golan E. Hoole

ALMOST within the memory of men still living, the world has witnessed the application and development of new discoveries in science, and inventions in mechanics, that bid fair to revolutionize the life and customs of the rapidly awakening nations. Each discovery and invention in its turn has been hailed as a new wonder, and now appears the phonograph, or gramophone, by which are reproduced the tones and modulations of the voice or instrument, in speech, song and instrumental selections.

That a needle moving in a groove on a record should communicate such a variety of vibrations to a small drum or diaphragm, and should reproduce so faithfully every shade of tone quality and expression, is surely an object of wonder and delight.

Finding a Permanent Place

The first flush of surprise and delight is now wearing away, but the instrument is fast forming a place for itself in the lives of all peoples from the frozen arctic circles to the sultry luxurious tropics and is exercising an influence in the world that the inventor surely scarcely ever anticipated or dreamed of. More than any other invention, the advent of the gramophone has been, and will continue to be, a priceless boon to the cause and progress of music in the homes of the people, especially of those who, on account of distance from musical centres or from pecuniary circumstances, are not able, but on very rare occasions, to hear the outstanding performances of great artists, or even those of a good standard by lesser known performers.

A striking feature of the gramophone is the pleasure it can give—for we can put on the kind of record that pleases us most—and still another is the lessons we can learn from its use. Do we wish for light catchy music, or some rag-time melody with its peculiar rhythm and accent, a comic song, or even a dance? Or, do we, for the time-being, incline to music of a serious type—a pianoforte solo by Paderewski or Pachmann, or a violin excerpt by Elman, Kreisler or Heifitz? We can have our choice. A wide selection of records by world famous players and singers is available and suited to our various tastes.

The Principles Governing Music

"How can I learn to sing or play like that?" "What must I do to develop my own powers?" "What are the principles which govern the formation of beautiful music?" are the questions that must haunt the day-dreams of many a young, aspiring music lover. These are the searching questions which every music student must face in his longing for musical expression. If he is able to take lessons he follows the directions of his teacher; if not, he must glean a hint here and there, always asking questions from more advanced musicians and doing a power of thinking on his own account. We are not now speaking of the boy or girl who is sent to take lessons in music and who takes every opportunity of evading the daily necessary practice, but of one whose soul has felt the call of life's springtime and, like the birds, must needs express himself in music.

Musical sounds are entirely mechanical; therefore, they can be examined, understood and mastered. The spirit makes use of these sounds to express itself, but can only do so when the mechanical part of music is under command. If we wish to fly, we must first learn to control the mechanism of the flying machine. In like manner, we must know how to control the mechanics of sound. Let us, therefore, consider first the elements of song. Vocal sound is formed by pressing the air from the lungs through the vocal chords situated in the larynx, or "Adam's Apple," thus producing a series of vibrations which we use generally in the form of speech or song. If we can talk we have the basis of song. Song is merely a developing and lengthening out of the

sounds of speech, only that song is moulded into certain definite forms of melody, time and rhythm that all may recognize and repeat. Every song has a melody or tune; the notes are varied in length, some long, some short, and all follow each other in a rhythmic swing and at a pace accommodated to the meaning of the words and of which the composer generally gives an indication.

These three details: Time—or the length of various notes; tone—the rising and falling of the melody in the scale; and rhythm—the swing or accent of the musical phrase, form the first group of the elements of music; these can be learned from any music primer by anyone of ordinary intelligence.

Next in order come: Diction—or the distinct enunciation of words; nuance (light and shade)—or the gradual changing from soft to loud and vice versa; and tone-quality. Diction, nuance, and tone-quality are built upon the foundation of the first three elements. Without the first three, there could be no song, and without the second three the song would not be worth listening to. So far, all are mechanical and understandable. When we hear a song or a record, we can apply these principles as a standard of execution or criticism.

There is, however, still one more attribute of song, which is indefinable: it is of the spirit and defies dissection. It is expression. Expression is the conscious, or unconscious, play of the thoughts, feelings and emotions upon the mechanism of music or song, using this arrangement of sounds as a vehicle to transmit these feelings and emotions to another person or persons. For instance, we can say, "How do you do," scornfully, patronizingly, timidly, angrily, gently, sweetly, joyously, repellently, etc., or in a hundred different ways and mean a hundred different things; the words are merely a method of transference. So in song: the real singer uses the time, melody, rhythm, diction, nuance and beauty of tone to convey and intensify the meaning he wishes to express to his hearers. Now, let every would-be singer or player criticize any record by these seven tests, (if the record is an instrumental one, omit diction) and then apply the same tests to his own efforts; he will then soon find his own weak points, which he should lose no opportunity in striving to master. Much can be done by the student himself. He must have his own ideals and be prepared to tramp the road towards their attainment. The teacher may be consulted for directions as would a map or a fingerpost, but he can never carry the student on his back. Many students expect the teacher to do everything for them, but they never arrive anywhere. No! the road to high ideals he must tramp for himself, but he will always be in good company. On studying the seven principles of song, the student will find that, "beauty of tone," whether of voice or instrument, will be the one that will take the greatest amount of time and labor to master. This is where the advantage of good records by first-rate artists comes in: they make good models. A beautiful tone has two characteristics: clearness and richness. These are the qualities to be worked for and thoroughly blended. Some people imagine that the possession of a good voice is everything. It is certainly a great gift to have a good voice, but it is very much like having a section of good prairie land: it takes a lot of labor to break and cultivate it properly, and then only the best of seed used. A good voice needs lots of cultivation of the best kind and then the choicest of music to develop its usefulness; for it can easily be spoiled by injudicious training and made of no value whatever. If, however, we follow the promptings of nature, we shall not go very far wrong, because the voice soon cries out in reproach if we use it improperly.



Prof. Hoole

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IF I WAS A FARMER

If I was a farmer,
With fine horses and land,
I'd show the people around
Where a farmer should stand.

I'd plow up the ground
And work it down fine,
They hurry around to get
My grain sown in time.

If it's April the first,
We don't want to wait;

If we do old Jack Frost
Will take it for bait.

I'd raise lots of grain,
Cattle, horses and pigs,
For I tell you it all helps
To make the pocket-book big.

So to get big production
Stand close by our side
And lend us a hand
So we don't slip and slide.
—A FARMER'S WIFE.