

Lessons Learned From The Great Masters

"We Are All Musicians When We Listen Well"
Says FRANCES C. HARRIS

MUSIC has been defined as the language of the emotions. If audiences wore their hearts upon their sleeves, it would be interesting to collect statistics recording the genuine feelings produced by concerts and all descriptions of musical performances. An amusing story is told of the experience a London orchestra had with the late Shah of Persia during that potentate's visit to the British capital. He attended a concert, and sat there apparently unmoved, signifying neither by facial expression nor gesture that the music made the slightest impression upon him. When it was all over, however, he remarked that he had enjoyed the first piece on the programme, and would like to hear it again. The orchestra promptly attacked it, but Mazaffar-ed-din angrily shook his head to indicate that it was not what he wanted, and so with several other numbers which the orchestra began to try over. It was only when it became necessary for the players to tune up again and the customary babel of sounds was let loose that a pleased expression overspread his august Majesty's countenance, and he despatched his Grand Vizier to pin upon the lapel of the conductor's coat the Order of the Victorian's Humming Bird, which leads one to believe that musical taste is all a matter of becoming accustomed to certain kinds of music.

After all, why should a man be musically ex-communicated because he cannot understand Strauss or Debussy. It is unfair to say of a reader that he is devoid of poetic feeling if, although he may delight in the easy meters and simple imagery of Longfellow, he finds Browning somewhat beyond his depth. The taste for classical music is an acquired one, and the absurdity comes in when highly-cultured modern musicians who have been gradually acclimatized to the rarefied atmosphere of Brahms and Tchaikovsky look down with scornful pity upon uncultured music-lovers who can only enjoy something that has "a step and a tune" in it.

Musical fashions cannot be determined by printer's ink. The public in the end will demand the kind of music it likes best, and not what critics and writers say ought to be most popular. It is related that when Verdi was putting the finishing touches to his "Il Trovatore" he was one day visited by a friend, an able and conscientious musical critic. Verdi played him several portions of the work, and asked him his opinion of them. First came the "Anvil Chorus."

"What do you think of that?" asked the composer.

"Trash!" laconically answered the critic.

Verdi chuckled to himself, and said: "Now, look at this, and this, and this," at the same time showing other numbers.

"Rubbish!" came the answer. Verdi showed his delight at these answers to such a degree that his friend demanded to know what he meant by such conduct. The master replied:

"My dear friend, I have been composing a popular opera. In it I resolved to please everybody, save the great critics and classicalists, like you. Had I pleased them I should have pleased no one else. What you say assures me of success. In three months 'Il Trovatore' will be sung and whistled and barrel-organed all over Italy,"—and such proved to be the case.

Sense of Rhythm First

THE first step toward musical appreciation appears to be the sense of rhythm. One ought to be rather lenient with the noisy man who at a concert keeps time with his feet to a popular tune. He shows that he has the first essentials of a musical ear, the sense of recurrent beats.

The American (and when I say American I mean the whole American continent) demand for music is the most cosmopolitan demand in the world. The American people must have all kinds of music, by all kinds of composers.

The people of this continent have not had the same musical opportunities as the European people. Surroundings have unquestionably much to do with the enjoyment of music. In Europe the principal sources of amusement are to be found in the gatherings at local opera houses and concert halls. Until recently music has only been part of a function for the American people. They were willing to accept it as one of the many events in a day's outing.

Public taste is unquestionably improving, but all changes of this kind must be gradual.

The advent of the gramophone is largely responsible for what might be termed a musical reformation. As is the case with every phase of every art, real appreciation can only spring from real comprehension. It is not easy to appreciate an opera at the first hearing. Often the musical sense is latent and does not begin to disclose itself until after a fairly long course of instruction. Now that it is possible in almost every home to enjoy selections from works of the great masters the demand for good music is steadily increasing. We are all musicians when we listen well.

Most people are obliged to engage teachers in the locality in which they themselves live. Great care should be taken in the choice of a teacher. Too often a teacher is chosen on the score of cheapness alone, and under the mistaken idea that "anyone is good enough to begin with," whereas if there is a time when a pupil needs to be taught more carefully than at any other, it is at the beginning.

In some places where it is impossible to engage teachers of any description the gramophone may prove a great help to the student of music. Much can be learned by suggestion. Nothing has a more refining influence on the home circle than good music.

The Artists' Views on Practising

PARENTS can be of the greatest assistance in the musical education carried on within the home. There should be discrimination between a child who shows promise of achieving celebrity in music, and is to be taught accordingly, and one with whom music is to be but an added accomplishment in the circle of home and friends. An abnormally gifted child is apt to practise too much, and should not be encouraged, as a promising career may be ruined by the strain. A famous teacher, who has brought forward many concert players, will not allow even his most advanced pupils to practise more than four hours a day. He says significantly that a pupil who will not become a virtuoso on four hours' daily practise will not become one on six or eight. It is true that Paderewski often practises eight hours a day, but he is an artist of many years' standing, and in spite of his slender and poetic appearance at the piano, a man of great muscular strength, developed largely through exercise.

On the other hand, there is no royal road to "pieces"—neither for the beginner nor for the accomplished musician. Instrumental music is a matter of head, heart and fingers, and the musician who neglects the daily exercises soon will fall off in technical facility. Above all things, parents, do not say to your child's music teacher, "Can't you give Mary some more pieces, instead of all those scales and finger exercises? We heard Florence, next door, play such a lot of pretty things the other day." Remember, you have not heard "Florence" play C twenty times with her thumb, D twenty times with her fore-finger, and so on up to G. But her parents have, and the chances are that one of them has said to the other, "Dear me, it is surprising how many pretty things Mary, next door, can play."

Von Bulow used to say that if he left off his exercises for a day, he noticed the effect on his playing; if he left them off for two days the public noticed it; and then he added, with characteristically cutting sarcasm, that if he left them off for three days the critics began to notice it.

Paderewski, the greatest living pianist, practises every day for an hour or longer. Sometimes he will play over a brief left-hand passage a hundred times or more before he is satisfied with it. Here is a genius who drudges, which may be one reason why no other pianist is able to rival him with the public.

Technique may be only a means to an end, but it is the only means to that end. With patience, even students of the most ordinary intelligence can reach the point when their performance will be a pleasure to the home circle. Parents, even if not musical, who have their children properly taught, can have but little idea at the outset of the paradise they are opening up, not only to the children, but to themselves as well.

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