

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

Two Great Sonatas

By the Music Editor

HOW many millions of people have exercised their imaginations over the two most popular sonatas in the world? Nobody knows. But everybody knows that the two sonatas that have interested most non-technical people are:

The "Moonlight Sonata" of Beethoven, and the B flat Minor of Chopin.

Both these sonatas were played recently by artists of widely differing character in the same week in Toronto. In his evening recital Mons. Francis de Bourguignon, Belgium, head of the piano department in the Canadian Academy of Music, played the popular favourite sonata in B flat minor. In his opening recital Mr. Austin Conradi, recently appointed head of the piano department in the Hambourg Conservatory, took for his biggest single number the so-called Moonlight Sonata of Beethoven. Each of these great sonatas has been played ad inf. by all kinds of performers. Each has been mooned over by sentimental admirers. No other two sonatas have been so seized upon by romantic imaginations bent upon making each of them tell a story. And the story in each case is a romance. The yarn about The Moonlight Sonata has been told over and over again, one of the variations being the lonely house, the dying girl and the moon.

The Chopin Sonata with the celebrated Funeral March has been interpreted from the audience just about as accurately. Thousands of people have heard the Funeral March when they never knew, even up to the hundredth time perhaps, that it was one of the movements in a Sonata. Most non-musical people have supposed that Chopin composed it to celebrate somebody's death—or his own. But somebody whispers over your shoulder at a performance that it was really the musical story of a student in Paris, all his chequered and romantic existence culminating in a still more romantic death.

And of course, so it may be. Chopin's stuff was much of it confessional and extremely subjective. On this head we have some very interesting testimony from George Sand as to how Chopin really composed his music. As quoted in the current issue of Musical Times he says:

His creation was spontaneous and miraculous. He found it without seeking it, without foreseeing it. It came on his pianoforte suddenly, complete, sublime, or it sang in his head during a walk, and he was impatient to play it to himself. But then began the most heartrending labour I ever saw. It was a series of efforts, of irresolutions, and of frettings to seize again certain details of the theme he had heard; what he had conceived as a whole he analyzed too much

when wishing to write it, and his regret at not finding it again, in his opinion, clearly defined, threw him into a kind of despair. He shut himself up in his room for whole days, weeping, walking, breaking his pens, repeating and altering a bar a hundred times, writing and effacing it as many times, and recommencing the next day with a minute and desperate perseverance. He spent six weeks over a single page, to write it at last as he had noted it down at the very first.

And of course Beethoven had habits even more eccentric. Yet there's a vast difference. Most of Chopin's genius seems to have been linked up with experiences. Much of his most poetic work is capable of being made into a story. Beethoven, less purely poetic, not so merely passionate, more imaginative, seldom wrote anything that could be twisted into a romance. It must be noted that Mons. Bourguignon did not attempt to tell any story in his playing of the B flat minor. He played it in a dry, somewhat passionless way, with meticulous regard for the rhythm and tonal balance. He seemed determined as far as possible to make absolute music out of what most people have preferred to regard as "programme." As a teacher he did wisely. Students should not be seduced into a merely sentimental interpretation. What Mons. Bourguignon restrained himself from doing in his Chopin he permitted himself to do in his Bach group in which he broke away from the merely traditional style. Does he, also, think that Bach is one of the moderns?

His shorter pieces of Tchaikowsky were quite colourful; the Humoresque delightfully so—but when shall we hear the last of that dismal Chanson Triste? The Rubenstein Etude (Storm) proved that "Ruby" knew infinitely better how to compose for the piano than for strings. In two French bits, the Allegro Appassionato of Saint Saens and the Berceuse Heroique—odd conjunction of ideas!—he showed up the French temperament in contrast. The Debussy soapbubble almost blew to bits before he had finished it; which of course was what the composer intended. And the player suddenly let himself into a much different atmosphere when he wound up with the hackneyed, but in this case delightfully fresh and crisp Moto Perpetuo of Weber.

Bourguignon's recital was almost a prolonged Etude, characterized by scholarly finish and epigrammatic quality, devoid of humour, shy of sentiment and not overly solicitous as to the poetic value of a pure and perfect legato.

CONRADI is of another type. He opened with the "Moonlight" Sonata which he rendered with due regard for its varying moods. The illuminated sadness of the andante became a caressing tenderness to his touch. He was conscious of his audience, who were critical of him. There was no end of beauty in his doing of the Sonata, which having been written as absolute music, he gave a tilt towards the "programme" variety. He kept the "moonlight" off the programme sheet; he put it into the playing. He tried to make it say something—verging on speech. Yet he kept it beautiful in tone, delicately sensuous in outline and free from over-sentimentality. The andante contained no sobs. If it was written just to record transitory moods, it was

surely very picturesque, sometimes abruptly so. And Conradi kept the interest unabated till the last.

A long intermission came next. The musicians in the audience thought it was intended to give them a chance to compare notes. Not so. The stage carpenters were busy. His next group was

24 CHOPIN PRELUDES.

Anybody who understands the fabrication of these intensely interesting works knows how necessary it is to get away from the Beethoven stage set to put them over.

But why—24?

Because one less would have been 23. Average time for each about two minutes. 45 minutes of Preludes. An unusual task. Nobody asked for the lot. They were given gratis. Somebody might have doubted whether any Canadian pianist could remember them all in their proper order. A foolish fear. Mr. Conradi had these Preludes on a musical film. Seriously so. Chopin's Preludes, even more than any other of his famous groups—nocturnes, waltzes, etudes and mazurkas—are studies in soul-photography. They are kaleidoscopic variations of Chopin; not so ravishingly tender and sobbingly sad as his nocturnes, less astoundingly clever than his etudes; a sort of compromise between the two with no end of characteristic colour, no particular order of intensity, but just the sort of stuff of which the man Chopin was made. Conradi undertook to prove that he could do the lot without a yawn from the audience. He did it. After he got past the middle, the Chopin mercury went down and the Conradi went up. The player actually could do it and not weary anybody—even himself. He finished—fresh.

And then—the stage carpenters again. The next group was a Conradi pair, which really should have been run on—delicately woven as they were—between the Beethoven and the Chopin. That would have given the audience the extra 15 minutes to go home on while the player recuperated after 24 Preludes.

The rest of the programme was quite superfluous, no matter how good it was. Even the Schumann Toccata was an extra dessert after a very full meal. And Mr. Conradi has good cause to congratulate himself that his first public recital contained so high a percentage of the really beautiful.

The Story of a Wound

(Concluded from page 5.)

He lived in the dark until his trained eyes could see the moving of a grass blade, and he is paying the penalty now in defective vision. By day he lay up, after making his report; often sleeping in the colonel's own dug-out until it was time to take his life in his hands again, and crawl out into No Man's Land, in search of knowledge.

I wish I could tell his whole story, the most romantic in the entire wonderful record of the C.E.F., and what led to his being "asked for" by a most famous general to be a member of his staff. Perhaps I may, some time, if he does not tell the tale himself.

We regret that by oversight the story "The Redskin," in last week's issue was not credited to the author, Carlton McNaught.



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