Breadth in Musical Art Work

From an interview with the world famous virtuoso composer

IGNACE JAN PADEREWSKI

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—A biography of the distinguished pianist is presented in the "Master Study" pages of this issue. THE ETUDE feels especially honored by having Mr. Paderewski represented in our Polish number through the following interview. In the biography given we have endeavored to draw the attention of our readers to this master's work as a composer. We are confident that he has already given to posterity works which can not fail to rank with the very great permanent masterpieces of all time. His wide fame as a pianist has, in a way, drawn public attention from his genius in composition. His own intellectual breadth must lend even greater interest to his observations.]

"THE call for breadth in musical art has been insistent since the earliest days of its history. Yet one can not help being conscious of the fact that the public in general is inclined to look upon all art workers as idealists confined to a narrow road very much apart from the broad pathway of life itself. As a matter of fact, the art-worker never approaches the great until he has placed himself in communication with life in all its wonderful manifestations. Take, for instance, the case of the remarkable Florentine painter Leonardo da Vinci. The average reader would probably remember him as the creator of the much discussed Mona Lisa, but he was far more than a painter. He was an architect, an engineer, a sculptor, a scientist, a mechanician, and he even made excursions into the art of music, to say nothing of that of aerial navigation. Da Vinci lived over four centuries ago, and yet even in our own time, one now and then finds well meaning individuals who fail to realize that unless the artist has the element of breadth in all his work, his productions must be, to say the least, transient in value.

"Again, we encounter the case of another great Italian artist. Michelangelo, painter, sculptor, architect and poet. Could the creator of so many amazingly beautiful art works have been as great had he not possessed the universal quality of mind which must have compelled him to develop the technic of expression in many different forms of his art. This can not be attributed so much to a kind of natural versatility as to his great breadth of vision, his communion with life in many different forms. The case of Richard Wagner is likewise one in which our attention is drawn to a remarkable exhibition of breadth. In his earliest works Wagner followed the traditions of the Italian and French opera composers. *Rienzi* is quite as spectacular in its *mise en scéne* as anything that Meyerbeer ever wrote, but Wagner's broad outlook upon life soon led him to reach out for larger works. While it is frequently averred by man-critics that Wagner's music is greatly superior to his verse, we must nevertheless remember that the music of one of his earlier operas was rejected at the Paris opera and the libretto accepted for the use of another composer. In Wagner one finds not only the composer, but the poet and the creator of immortal stage pictures.

"Many of the great composers of the past have been men of such pronounced musical breadth that they could not have confined themselves to the creative branches of their work. Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Mendelssohn, Brahms and others took great pride in their public performances. Indeed, in the early days of musical art, when the literature of the piano, for instance, was insignificant in comparison with its great present wealth, the interpreter was in many cases identical with composer. Interest centered in him because of the fact that he was gifted with the creative faculty. Bach, indeed, was not only a masterly organist but could play the violin and the clavichord in a manner which attracted wide attention. Since the time of Bach, however, the score of music has increased so enormously that if one masters the literature of one instrument he will have accomplished a great task. But he should not, however, permit this accomplishment to obliterate everything else in his life, as so many apparently think he must do. If he possesses the mind of a creator he owes it to himself and to society to develop that as well. He must keep in touch with the great movements of his time and of the past in art, science, history and philosophy. The student who sacrifices these things can never hope to climb to fame on a ladder of technic.

SERIOUS INTEREST IN STUDY.

"The need for technic must, nevertheless, not be underrated. Technic demands patient, painstaking, persistent study. Art without technic is invertebrate, shapeless, characterless. You ask me whether the Poles, for instance, are a musical people. I can only say that one constantly meets in Poland young men and women with the most exceptional musical talent—but what is talent without serious, earnest study leading to artistic and technical perfection?

PADEREWSKI AT THE KEYBOARD.

"For more than one hundred years Poland has been woefully restricted in its development. Without national resources and with limited school facilities little progress of a broad character has been possible. In the conservatory at Warsaw, for instance, we meet at once a decided difference between that institution and the great music schools at Moscow and St. Petersburg. In the Russian conservatories general educational work goes hand in hand with music, and the result is that the students receive a comprehensive course leading to high culture. If the same studies were introduced in the Warsaw schools, instruction would have to be in the Russian language and the Polish opposition to this is so great that such a plan could only meet with failure. One can but take pride in a nation that has been divided for a century, yet still maintains the integrity of its mother tongue.

"As a consequence of the educational conditions in Poland there has been in the past what might be described as a lack of ambition to develop serious works of art. The people strive to be light-hearted and much of the music one hears in the home takes its complexion from this spirit. However, there has developed in Poland during the last twenty or twenty-five years what many now regard as the new Polish school of music. Much of this is due to the efforts of that remarkable man Sigismund Noszkowski.

"Noszkowski was born in 1848. He was early fired with an intense zeal to develop the melodic resources of his native land. For a time he studied under Kiel and Raif at Berlin, but in the late eighties he became a professor at the Warsaw Conservatory. His noble attitude toward his art may be estimated from the fact that his efforts for a time were confined to the invention of a system of musical notation for the blind. His example soon inspired many younger men to work at musical creation and as a result we can point at the present moment to distinguished younger composers with really remarkable accomplishments as musicians. Among the best known I may quote such names as Szymanowski, Rozycki, Melcer. The composer Fitelberg, is frequently classed among the members of the new Polish school, despite the fact that he is properly of Russian Jewish origin.

"By the use of themes suggesting those of the folk music of Poland, these younger men, all finely equipped for their careers through exhaustive technical training, have produced new musical works which must contribute much to the fame of Poland and to the pride of the Poles. This has been accomplished, it should be remembered, despite the political and educational restrictions and notwithstanding the fact that the scarcity of means for promoting musical culture in Poland is almost ludicrous. The conservatory, for instance, has a subvention of only about four thousand dollars a year.

BREADTH THROUGH PRACTICE.

"While there are many extremely gifted musicians in Poland, the young people, like the young people of many lands, are far too inclined to look upon music as a pastime rather than as a serious study. This does not mean that the student should eliminate the joy or the pleasure from his work at the keyboard, but he should rather find his true happiness in labor of a more serious kind. In Poland the general state of the musical development is not very great, but this is not due to lack of talent. In fact the quantity of talent is in some cases surprisingly high. This is particularly the case among executive artists. They have rich imaginations and great temporary zeal but lack the inclination or ability to regard music as a serious art worthy of a great life struggle.

"Students spend too much time in playing and too little in work. It seems beyond the comprehension of many that hour after hour may be thrown away at the keyboard and little or nothing accomplished. The very essence of success is, of course, practice. But students who are gifted are very likely to be so enchanted with a composition that they dream away the priceless practice minutes without any more definite purpose than that of amusing themselves. It is human to crave pleasure and the more musical the student the more that student is inclined to revel in the musical beauties of a new work rather than to devote the practice

time to the more laborious but vastly more productive process of real hard study.

MUSIC STUDY IS WORK.

"This is often especially true of exercises, scales, arpeggios, etc. Students with monstrous technical shortcomings neglect all exercises with the sublime conceit that they are different from other mortals and can afford to do without them. They are quite willing to attempt the most difficult things in the piano repertoire. The highest peaks are nothing to them. They will essay anything before they are able to climb and the result is almost invariably disastrous. Music study is work. Those who work are the only ones in any art who ever win the greatest rewards. What could be more obvious? Still it is one of the greatest truths in all music study. It is very delightful to sit at the keyboard and revel in some great masterpiece, but when it comes to the systematic study of some exacting detail of fingering, pedaling, phrasing, touch, dynamics: that is work, and nothing but work. One can not be too emphatic on this point.

PRACTICE THAT LEADS TO BREADTH.

"One is often importuned for suggestions to help aspiring pianists in their practice. While one may welcome an opportunity to help others in this particular, there is very little that can be said. System is perhaps the most essential thing in practice. I do not mean a system that is so inelastic that it can not be instantly adapted to changing needs, but I do refer to the fact that the student who wishes to progress regularly must have some system in his daily work. He must have some design, some chart, some plan for his development. A bad plan is better than no plan. In his daily practice, however, he should see to it that he does not narrow himself. His plan should be a comprehensive one and should embrace as many things as he can possibly do superlatively well, and no more.

MUSICAL CULTURE IN THE HOME.

"Music in itself is one of the greatest forces for developing breadth in the home. Far too many students study music with the view to becoming great virtuosi. Music should be studied for itself without any great aim in view except in the cases of marvelously talented children. Again, many children might be developed into teachers or composers who would never make virtuosos. This should be very carefully considered. Most of the students assume that the career of the virtuoso is easier, more illustrious, and last but not least, more lucrative than that of the composer. But is it not better to start out to be a great composer or a great teacher and become one, rather than to strive to be a virtuoso and prove a fiasco?

"The intellectual drill which the study of music gives the child is of great educational value. There is nothing which will take its place and it is for this reason that many of the greatest educators have advocated it so highly. In addition to this the actual study of music results in almost limitless gratification in later life in the understanding of great musical masterpieces.

"I am very much impressed with the educational value of the mechanical means for representing music, such as the best piano players with the best rol's and the sound-reproducing machines with the best records. I know of one instance of a man who possessed a high class player-piano. At first he refused to have anything to do with music except that of the most popular description, such as popular songs and light operas. Gradually his taste was revolutionized and now he will not permit any trashy music in his home. This was accomplished in such a short time that I was astonished. Naturally such a man would want his children, or anyone in whom he was interested, to attend the best concerts, the best operas and secure instruction in the art of music. In other words, a person addicted to very trivial music was won over to music of the best description. His whole outlook upon the art was changed and he was made a broader man in this sense.

"I can not but feel that these mechanical means of reproducing music, in addition to carrying masterpieces, to thousands who might not otherwise be able to become acquainted with them, will at the same time develop a more widespread demand for musical instruction, for the mysteries of the most beautiful of arts will always have their fascination as well as their educational benefits."

WHO IS MUSICAL?

BY DR. EDGAR ISTEL.

[This very suggestive article appeared in a recent issue of the Leipsic *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* and is expressly translated for THE ETUDE by Mrs. Aubertine Woodward Moore.]

PRINCE VON BULOW, Chancellor of the German Empire from 1900 to 1909, in an address to a Vocal Teachers' Association once declared that he did not know much about music, but that, nevertheless, the singing of the society had deeply moved him. This all too modest avowal from the lips of one widely known as an appreciative patron of art no doubt meant simply that the prince was not a skilled practitioner in any special branch of music.

"I AM NOT MUSICAL."

"I am not musical" is a phrase often heard in society when an opinion is sought in regard to some prominent concert or opera performance. It is apt merely to signify: "I do not play the piano or violin, I do not torment my fellow creatures with vocal exercises," or perhaps "I have no knowledge of the laws of harmony or counterpoint." For reasons of this kind, thousands of people consider themselves forever excluded from the Temple of Art, who yet have a far greater right to enter its Holy of Holies than the vast majorities who because of their superficial culture and their empty piano-playing or singing, fondly believe they possess authority to pass judgment on any work of art whatsoever, "who is musical?" To this question the celebrated surgeon, Theodore Billroth, was the first to offer a serious answer, which may be found in a posthumous collection of noteworthy essays, edited by the late musical writer and critic, Dr. Edouard Hanslick. Dr. Billroth maintains that the fundamental physiological requirements for what we now call being musical are an innate sense of rhythm and a capacity to recognize various degrees of pitch, volume and quality of tone, with the ability to recognize these properties in rapid alternation and in different combinations. Should it be asked if every individual having these qualifications should be pronounced musical the answer would have to be decidedly in the negative.

Does not every person not born deaf actually possess these attributes? This question cannot be answered unconditionally in the affirmative. There are people who are utterly incapable of marching or dancing in time, or who at best can only do so with the utmost difficulty. A remarkable instance of the kind may be found in the case of Beethoven, who although one of the most distinguished pianists of his day, as well as a great composer, is said to have been unable to keep step in dancing. It is also told of the famous prima donna, Malibran, who was passionately fond of dancing, that she could never succeed in falling into the right step. In neither case could the trouble have been in faulty sense of rhythm; it proceeded rather from a species of diffidence, or from physical awkwardness or inflexibility.

THE PEOPLE WHO CAN NOT KEEP ON THE PITCH

More frequently we encounter people who find it impossible to sing correctly a given tone that has been sung for them, and who insist that they cannot detect false notes even when heard in combinations. An incorrect reproduction of a tone, especially in the case of beginners in vocal art, is not always a proof of being unmusical; it is more apt to result from inattention, or from lack of skill in controlling the vocal apparatus. When musically trained vocalists sing false it is usually due to physical causes, such as stage fright, or undue strain. Most people can tell whether a tone be strong or weak, or whether it proceeds from an oboe, violin or some human voice, and yet I recall with considerable amusement, having a noted musical critic speak to me of a beautiful clarinet solo, in a certain Beethoven symphony, when it was, in reality, an oboe solo to which he desired to call my attention. Even a musical critic, it would seem, is not immune from certain unmusical traits.

Still worse is the condition of individuals who have no conception of the larger tone intervals, or of high and low ranges, who fancy they are reproducing a song when they accurately preserve its rhythm, while merely making a stab at its notes, or singing unconcernedly in monotone. Such people are totally lost to all possibilities of musical culture, even though they may have a strong predilection for music, a sort of childish delight in rhythmic motion and musical sound for themselves alone.

So then the question "who is musical?" should really be formulated thus: "How can we tell whether a person is musically gifted, or musically trained." A broad field is covered by the conception of music, starting with rhythmic monotone and leading to the symphony. Sense of rhythm and instinctive perception of pitch, volume and tone-coloring can scarcely afford a right to be called musical, for these attributes are found not alone in most human beings, but also in many of the lower animals.

EARLY INDICATIONS.

The earliest indication of musical talent, as Billroth justly remarks, may be detected chiefly in spontaneous ability to grasp and retain a melody. In this we have no longer a mere sensual perception, but the actual production of a small art work, not only rhythmically formed but fashioned of symmetrical parts. A knowledge of the manner in which a musical composition, large or small is constructed, is an essential element in what is properly called musical understanding. Many people are able to make their own a melody characterized by marked rhythmic movement and clearly defined structure, to recognize it whenever it is heard, even to hum or whistle it correctly from memory. This constitutes the first stage of musical understanding. Whoever fails to attain it is unmusical. It is, of course, far easier to have and to hold melodies with words than those of absolute music, especially when the words are adapted to popular comprehension.

Gradually to develop this primitive musical understanding to larger proportions is no easy task, and can only be accomplished by listening to artistic compositions carefully, attentively and very frequently. No art demands so much repetition as music. Unquestionably one of the principal reasons for the popularity of Richard Wagner is the fact that in his great music dramas extraordinarily plastic melodies are repeated over and over again in a way to stamp them indelibly upon the memory.

THOSE WHO ENJOY MUSIC.

Any one can enjoy music who will take the pains to listen many times to each fine composition he may have the opportunity to hear. To understand a musical work, in the highest sense of the word, is only possible for those who have gained a thorough knowledge of its construction. There is scarcely an art, unless it may be architecture, that is so entirely dependent upon formal laws as the seemingly unfettered art of music that appears to flow smoothly onward like a shoreless sea, without destination or boundary lines. To pass from mere sentimental enjoyment to thorough understanding of music should be considered a noble goal, well worth striving for, by every individual aspiring to true culture.

MAINTAINING A HIGH STANDARD OF EFFICIENCY.

BY A TEACHER.

TEACHING is a business to be carried on by the same general rules that apply to other businesses. Punctuality, making each minute show results for the time spent, aiming for the main point without waste of words or time, a clear head to grasp and solve the difficulties of each individual case—all of these things are as essential for the music teacher as they are for the banker.

A teacher who has been without sleep the night before, or whose mind is occupied with social pleasures, is in no fit condition to begin a day of instruction that will show up on the credit side of the ledger. Begin each day with abundant confidence and enthusiasm.

If a student makes unsatisfactory progress, and you are convinced that he is lacking in the necessary talent, send him home with a kind but frank explanation of your action. It is no disgrace for him that he lacks in music what he may make up for in other ways. It is a kind of graft for a teacher to keep a pupil and receive the remuneration when she knows she cannot give value in return.

On days when all goes wrong, follow the example of Mary, who, when her companion suggested that they should stop and pray that they might not be late for school, replied, "You can stop, but I'm going to keep on hikin' and pray while I hike."