

BOOKS ON MUSIC HELP TO TRAIN LISTENERS

If the Plain Man Can't Understand Music, Abolish—His Ignorance

THE BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS: A Course in Appreciation for Young Readers.

Both books by Percy A. Scholes. Oxford University Press.

Music is the most direct of the arts. No symbol is interposed between the impulse from the singer or player and the receptive nerves of the hearer. The nature of a symphony cannot be realized by looking at an orchestra conductor, no matter how gracefully or dynamically he moves his baton. The spirit of a song cannot be conveyed through print or any other medium. In short, the only way to know music is to hear music.

Nevertheless, books may do much to increase the number of intelligent concert goers and to stimulate the exercise of this joyous gift in home and social life. No country in the world has made more rapid progress in musical appreciation than America. And there is a public eager to learn and to grow. It is only necessary to encourage and to suggest ways and means.

England is not preeminent for composition, but there has been for centuries an intelligent audience, a welcome for musicians, in the British Isles. The books from that source are well adapted for general reading. Mr. Scholes puts the plea for intelligence very effectively in his reference to Tolstoy. However great the Russian was, he erred in relation to music.

"A simple folk song," writes Mr. Scholes, "Tolstoy could understand; a sonata or symphony was beyond him. Tolstoy would abolish all complex music because the plain man cannot grasp it at a sitting. The assumption of the present book is that it is better to abolish the plain man—as a plain man. There is a world of beauty lying just beyond that plain man's reach; it is worth a little striving on his part to find the way to that world and enter in. The symphony is but the folk song developed."

The author explains the nature of sonata, symphony, oratorio and opera, discussing also the nature of the orchestra and of individual orchestral instruments. The book contains a concert goer's glossary of musical terms.

In the "Book of Great Musicians" a disproportionate attention is paid to those who were born in or who visited England. But used with other more comprehensive works this may be a valuable supplement. The style is well adapted to children. Here is the passage on the most famous living English composer. He had seen for the first time a copy of Beethoven's "First Symphony."

"And as Elgar looked at the first page of this scherzo he suddenly felt as if he were in a room with a fire with excitement. He had never seen such a piece before, and rushed off with the book under his arm to study it in quietness. With six children about it a house is rather noisy, as some of you may have experienced, but Elgar found a quiet place outside, and there he stayed reading this marvellous music through, over and over again, and taking in its harmonies and modulations."

"If you look carefully at the page of music given you will find it begins in key C, but 'modulates' by the time it gets to the double bar into key G. Then comes a modulation into E flat, followed by one into C minor. A flat follows, and before long it is in D flat. As those of you who know something of the theory of music will agree, it has now travelled a very long way in a very short time. These modulations are very 'romantic.' When the piece is well played you will feel quite excited. You will see that Beethoven inspired Elgar, and perhaps in future times it will be recorded that Elgar inspired you or some other boy or girl. For music is like measles in one way—it is 'catching.'"

"Now that Elgar had become really 'taken' about music he began to teach himself to play all the instruments on which he could lay hands. He became a pianist, and in later years had a reputation about Worcester as an accompanist. He played the organ too, and was able to take his father's place at the church when necessary. The violin and the double bass he also played pretty well, and when the orchestral society gave a symphony by Mozart or Haydn he would play one of these instruments."

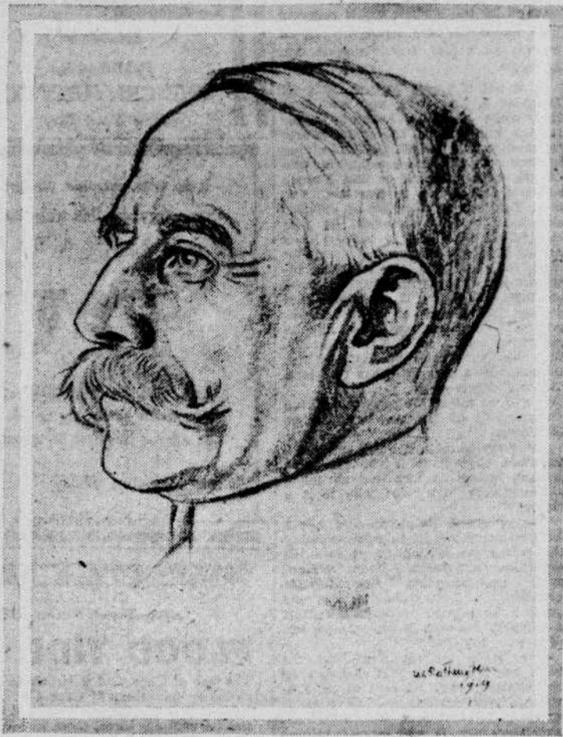
"Then, too, Elgar learned to play the bassoon, and with four friends made up a quintet."

"But Elgar's chief instrument was the violin. He worked hard at this and became a very good player. And for years to come he was known not as a composer but as a violinist."

"One of the finest works Elgar has ever written is a violin concerto. If ever you have a chance be sure to hear this. When you do so you will realize that it is a work that could never have been written by any composer who had not been a violinist. All the powers of the violin are used in it, and it is perhaps the most difficult violin piece ever written. "Besides studying these various instruments Elgar worked at the theory of music. You must remember that his success is not due merely to his being born with musical 'genius' and brought up in a musical 'atmosphere'

but also to his having lots of perseverance. He really tried.

"He was talking to the present writer about his early studies that had just been found at Worcester and sent to him. There was sheet after sheet of music paper, with the exercises he had worked and the attempts at composition he had made. You see a great composer had to work, just



Sir Edward Elgar.

Prima Donna Publicity in 1664

THE EARLY HISTORY OF SINGING. By W. J. Henderson. Longmans, Green & Co.

Reviewed by MARIAN HAVILAND. To people interested in singing, teachers, students and music lovers in general, Mr. Henderson's book must appeal like the thought of a holiday or adventure. Just at this season to turn one's thoughts a moment from the crowded lobbies of our modern concert halls or the flower laden platforms and the ways and voices of our singers and read about the very beginning of it all has a particular significance.

Although much of the book is a serious study of the various stages which have led up, or down, to our present-day conception of vocal art, there are delightful bits of picturesque detail which lend great charm to it all. It is interesting, for instance, to read about a certain Pope Sylvester who had a singing school in the fourth century. At his school the study of the chants led the instructors directly to the consideration of the management of the breath, which continues to be one of the singer's hardest tasks, and to the rudiments of style and uniform phrasing.

To be reminded that Charlemagne was in Rome for the Easter festival of the year 787, listening to the Roman chanters, sets one musing. Tales of the Troubadours, lords, ladies and pontiffs who had to do with the cultivation of the art of song all through the ages enliven the book, though, of course, making up only the illustration of the strictly musical theme.

A glance at the chapter headings gives one the best idea of the contents of the book. Here are some of them: Vocal Technique of the Early Chanters; The Troubadours' Descant; Birth of Dramatic Recitative; The 17th Century Italian Opera; Early Ideas of Singing.

The general reader will be interested to note that the prima donna, produced very much the same effect upon susceptible human beings in 1644 as she achieves to-day. In the year mentioned Cardinal Mazarin sent an order to the French Ambassador at Rome to secure the Italian singer, Leonora Baroni, for Paris. The Cardinal had heard her sing during his residence in Italy, where she was considered one of the world's wonders. Mr. Henderson goes on with the story thus:

"Forty Italian poets made a book of verses in her honor: Applausi Poetici alle Glorie della Signora Baroni. But this was not all. John Milton attended an operatic performance at the Barberini palace in 1639 and straightway indited a Latin sonnet, 'Ad Leonoram Romae Canentem.'"

Will Wagner Be Restored?

THE PERTINENT WAGNERITE. By B. M. Steigman. Thomas Steigman.

Reviewed by LOUISE REICK. "A brilliant appeal for the complete restoration of Wagner with a masterful analysis of the Wagnerian music drama." This we are told before reading the book and we are prepared to read, admire and agree. The several articles that comprise this volume are a plea for German opera as it was before the war.

There have been many discussions during the war and since as to whether art is international and remains a link between all countries—at war or at peace. It would seem that it should be so, because art expresses ideals of truth and beauty, no matter how warped or how embittered our political views may have become.

The music dramas of Richard Wagner are among the greatest of human creations. He is one of the first musical figures of all time and there are few that stand beside him. The author of this book has tried to make us feel that Wagner was a prophet, which he was not, and that the "Ring" is a prediction of the late war. The fallacy of this idea is easily seen. Wagner may or may not have had any political ideas in his head when he composed the Nibelung Trilogy, but certainly if he had we can interpret them only by the politics of his day. It has been proved that he was against the Government of Germany and was for his time a radical. We are more inclined to believe that in his various characters he expressed general ideals of human or godlike qualities.

We are told by Mr. Steigman in his analysis of the "Ring" that the third act of "Rheingold" takes place in a Krupp factory and that the last scene is a rather turbulent wrangle over peace terms. Perhaps the most far-fetched point of all is the comparison of Siegfried to the beloved American national leader who died three years ago. The allusion is obvious, as is the absurdity of the statement.

There is a great deal in this book that is good, but the chapter on the "Ring" cannot be taken seriously. The next two articles, "Traduttore, Traditore" and "Nicht Mehr Tristan," are appeals for the restoration of the German text. The author asserts with some plausibility that Wagner can never be a success in any other language than German.

The chapter on "Parsifolle" might well be left out. No matter how unpopular "Parsifal" may be with sections of the public, it is conceded to be a great work and great it will remain.

The book is cleverly written and the author is without a doubt informed on his theme. He writes with conviction, as in such a typical sentence as this from the preface addressed to Mr. Otto Kahn: "Surely there is nothing really extenuating in our patriotic protestations that it was not that we loved Wagner less but that we loved America more. The inevitable conclusion must then be that our love blinded us to the beauty of one and the ideals of the other."

Later on, perhaps, Mary Roberts Rinehart will be writing books for girls, considering that she is national chairman of the membership appeal committee of the Girl Scouts of America.

The Piccolo Has a Personality

THE ORCHESTRA AND HOW TO LISTEN TO IT. By M. Montague-Nathan. E. P. Dutton & Co.

A HANDBOOK OF ORCHESTRATION. By Florence G. Fidler. E. P. Dutton & Co.

"To know whether you are enjoying a piece of music or not you must see whether you find yourself looking at the advertisement of soap at the end of the programme."

Mr. Montague-Nathan thinks this recommendation of Samuel Butler, the younger, ought not to satisfy any one, especially if he or she discovers that the soap referred to has proved more absorbing than the unmentioned symphony.

The truth is, Mr. Montague-Nathan tells us, there is no great difference between the mental effort required for an understanding of what is meant by a "home run," or other sporting term, and that which can secure an acquaintance with the tone color of a French horn or grasp the significance of a "suspension."

How to enable "the listener who has hitherto been the serf of his ears (as regards the orchestra) to increase his enjoyment, a hundredfold? A few hours' attention, a few minutes' thought"—and may we add the perusal of this delightful little book?—and the trick is done.

This is the gist of the preamble contained in the opening chapter of this slim green and gold volume. Other chapters unfold in logical sequence and take up the study of: The orchestral group, considering its system and giving a simple chart showing the conventional groups of strings, wind and percussion; the principles of sound production; instruments and their sounds.

This chapter is particularly fascinating. Without undue technicalities the various instruments of the orchestra are discussed as regards shape, proportion and sound producing capacity and tone quality. The account of the evolution of some instruments to their present state of perfection reads like a story.

The chapter following deals with the collective orchestra, or with what the system of orchestration consists of, what the composer has to consider and how he proceeds in relation to the

Teachers Should Be Humanists As Well as Trainers of the Voice

WHAT MUSIC CAN DO FOR YOU. By Harriet Seymour. Harper Bros.

Reviewed by SUSAN STEELL. That teachers of music should teach much more than music is a dictum arrived at by the painful road of failure. Many pupils who have learned by rote how to play and sing might have been made happier provided their teachers had been humanists as well as piano players or voice culturists. In the much needed class of teachers who teach more than music must be placed the author of this book. She feels the art which she has learned and besides being able to write of music—intelligibly and helpfully also, she can make her pupils feel it too.

The simplicity of Miss Seymour's method of bringing music to her pupils and making them teach themselves almost merits to be called a miracle. Indeed, the effects of what she teaches cannot fail to affect the young as a lovely religion—one fashioned on love and not creeds—might very well do. Nothing that she says of the art that fills her life is faddish; her methods are the natural ones and her advice is always rational. Moreover, what she says has been practically demonstrated by years of teaching. "Melody," "technique" and "philosophy," three of her chapter headings, are the same topics that have been written about for so many years. Written about but that is all. What Miss Seymour does is to tell her readers how they may "know" music and get its delights; she smooths the way to this admirable result and is not content to repeat all the baffling things that have been said about music and musical methods and kept it away from people for so long.

"Symbolically music stands for the harmonizing principle in life and practically it so works out if we are willing to be very simple about it." And again, "Listening has been known down the ages as a means of spiritual development, learning really to listen is what brings us in touch with ourselves and through this inner contact we get the answers to our problems." Also, "If we are really musically conscious music brings us to a feeling of harmony within and without which at once becomes religious."

Miss Seymour's method of teaching or bringing these admirable truths to life in the breasts of her pupils is lucid and natural, but up to the present time it seems to have been ignored. She has the child find out for himself how music is composed by training him to recognize three elemental chords on which all composition is built, then to build simple harmonies himself upon what he has trained his ear to hear. Rhythm is first awakened in him and on that he can build tunes for himself or hear the "under tone" in tunes built by other persons. Up the hill he goes, but it is a pleasant ascent and far from rough or stony to his unaccustomed feet and ere long he will be found to be playing the piano naturally and able to "re-image" upon it the musical pictures that have formed in his brain. Such a "self-taught" child can go to a concert and benefit from it infinitely more than the person standardly taught to play pieces by notes set in front of him. He will hear the "under tone" and see the line of rhythm taken by the music he hears. This line even a neophyte will be capable of drawing on his programme to help him re-live the music.

So simple and clear is Miss Seymour's way of putting down her in-

contestable knowledge that the veriest layman is able to follow her. He will wish to be able to enjoy the gift which she says is the birthright of all of us, that is, the power to "hear under." This means to be able to tell the root of a chord when it is struck. That root always vibrates with the chord and to know this brings to the listener a sense of security, which, in turn, develops faith, a faith in the existence of that inner kingdom which, as one of our seers has put it, "makes every man his own best companion."

Much good—widespread good—should be carried by this little book, not only to the uninitiated for whom it was written but to those who have by the ordinary methods been led up to the gates of music only to find them apparently closed by all sorts of technicalities. Miss Seymour shows that these are not obstacles if only the first steps were rightly taken. Learn to hear and get out of yourself your own rhythm. Everybody has it. "Music is harmony," says Miss Seymour, "harmony is love and love is God." If the syllogism is right, and it surely is, then music is truly the birthright of each one of us. Only you don't pour it in, you bring it out.

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