

## PLAYED THE BANJO FOR BRAHMS

Unforgettable Experience of an American Girl—Brahms's First Hearing of the Instrument—Intimate Glimpses of the Composer in His Lighter Moods at Dinner With Klengel and d'Albert in Leipsic

[Editor's Note: This illuminative account of how an American girl played the banjo for Johannes Brahms, and won his admiration, was written by a former music student in Leipsic, who prefers to remain unidentified in this connection.]

ON Wednesday morning, January 30, 1895, all the music students were wild with excitement because, at the Gewandhaus rehearsal in Leipsic, Brahms was to direct his two concertos for piano, which Eugen d'Albert was to perform. Every one of us knew that Brahms always refused to write his name in an autograph book, but this only made the autograph fiends even more excited than the rest of the students.

The rehearsal was such a splendid thing that any attempt I might make at a description would utterly fail to give any other than an imperfect idea. Any one who has ever attended a Gewandhaus rehearsal can imagine how we cheered at this one; cries of "hoch," "bravo," etc., came to every student's mouth until we were all hoarse from trying to make known to Brahms our great appreciation and gratitude.

After the *probe* I went to the Grassstrasse entrance of the Gewandhaus to ask Herr Klengel if I were to have a 'cello lesson that afternoon, but before I could find him Frau Klengel came to me in a great state of excitement, and said, "Marie, don't tell Herr Klengel I told you, but I think you will be invited to our house this evening to meet Brahms." Just as she finished saying this her husband arrived upon the scene and admonished me to "come to your lesson at five o'clock; Brahms is waiting for me, I must go."

As everybody said, it was a cold day when Brahms came to the Gewandhaus, because the snow was falling and the wind was blowing, but I really felt none of the cold in my great haste to get home and tell mamma and the "girls." I went to my lesson at five o'clock and, like all of my 'cello lessons, it was a great pleasure for me. After it was over Herr Klengel said he had something to ask me.

### A Quick Temper

"You know Brahms is our greatest living composer," he remarked, "but at the same time he has one of the quickest tempers and the most peculiar dispositions I ever knew. For example, last night a large number of musicians were with Brahms, but he was in such a terrible mood that we were all afraid to speak to him, and when Herr Kapellmeister Sitt asked him as a great favor to write his name in an autograph album he became exceedingly angry and paid no attention whatever to the request. He was, however, very pleased at the rehearsal this morning, and after it was over I asked him to honor me at a family supper. 'I am invited to a large dinner given in my honor to-night,' he answered, 'but as I do not feel like meeting so many people I will accept your invitation, on the one condition that you have no one there but your own family.' To which I naturally said 'yes,' but I want you, Marie, to come and bring your banjo, if you will, at eight o'clock."

After Herr Klengel and I had discussed some of Brahms's works, especially the two sonatas for the piano and clarinet, the piano part of which I had heard Brahms himself play a few evenings before, in the Kammermusik Saal of the Gewandhaus, I had only one hour in which to go home, dress and return to Kaiser Wilhelmstrasse.

It was just about eight o'clock when I arrived at Herr Klengel's house, and I found no one there but the family and Herr Geibel, a very dear friend of the Klengels. We were all waiting, and, at the same time, hoping that Brahms would be in a good humor, when the bell rang and the maid announced Herren Brahms and d'Albert. We, that is to say, Herr Klengel's sister, Herr Geibel and myself were introduced, and much to every one's delight Brahms was in the very best of spirits. He picked up a copy of the *Concertsaal*, and seeing d'Albert's photograph in it immediately started to tease d'Albert about it. On the next page he saw his own photograph and read with apparent pleasure the words of praise that were printed under it.

### A Sight to Remember

Herr Klengel then asked him if he would like to hear a little 'cello music, to which he replied affirmatively, and in a few minutes Herr Klengel was playing his own 'Cello Variations in his usual perfect manner, d'Albert accompanying him on the piano and Brahms was turning the pages for d'Albert. Who can imagine a more complete representation of the perfect in music than these three masters sitting together. Frau Klengel leaned over to me and said, "Marie, this is something you and I will perhaps never see again; is it not a magnificent sight?" I could not answer, so filled was I with admiration and joy.

After Herr Klengel had finished, Brahms turned around, looked at him for a moment in silence and then, patting him on the shoulder, said: "I have heard of your phenomenal technic, but I would not believe any one capable of such wonders on the 'cello.'" It was a great pleasure for me to hear Herr Klengel receive such praise from one he so very much admired. He then performed Paganini's "Perpetuo Mobile," which he had arranged for 'cello, at the end of which comes a very brilliant passage in chromatic octaves. During this piece d'Albert, who had been reading at sight, played a false note, and Brahms called out to him to be careful and tapped him on the hand. Brahms clapped this piece heartily and laughingly said to Herr Klengel, "I have played 'cello myself and was once able to play a Komberg concerto. I must say those octaves at the end are a complete swindle; it is really too mean to swindle an audience in that manner."

### Brahms Tells a Story

Then we went to supper, during which Brahms amused us with several anecdotes, one of which I remember very well. He saw a white dish on the buffet, shaped like a large egg, and he could not be convinced that it was a dish until d'Albert handed it to him. He laughed and told the following joke on himself: "One evening, after I had directed a large concert, I stood talking to some friends, and I saw, through the crowd, what I took to be a young girl's shoulder, and, although I am not a passionate lover of womankind (we all knew him to be a woman-hater) this shoulder had a great fascination for me and an intense longing to touch it came over me. Imagine my surprise, though, and, I must add, disappointment, when I came near enough to satisfy my desire by touching it as I passed, to find it the top of a man's head, which bore a great resemblance to Herr Klengel's head."

Brahms was extremely fond of d'Albert, but treated him like a child. Notwithstanding the fact that d'Albert preferred red wine Brahms made him drink white wine,

because he himself liked it best, and, therefore, thought it best for d'Albert. The word "wine" reminds me of a remark of Herr Klengel to the effect that the only one needed to make the party complete was Frau d'Albert, (Teresa Carreño), so we all drank to her health.

After supper Herr Klengel asked me to play on the banjo, and just as Herr Klengel had expected Brahms had never seen or heard a banjo before. After I had played a piece Brahms said he was astonished to find the instrument capable of so much. He examined it carefully and took one of the brackets as a remembrance of "die kleine Amerikanerin," as he called me. After I had played several pieces he told Herr Klengel he could now see where Anton Dvorak found his melodies for his American symphony. Brahms said he enjoyed hearing the banjo very much and that he would like to hear me play the 'cello.

### The Much Sought Autograph

We were all sitting around a small table after Herr Klengel and d'Albert had tried to play on the banjo together, when Frau Klengel put a tablet before Brahms and asked him to write his name on the paper, which he did for each one of us, much to our great surprise and delight. I told d'Albert I already had his autograph, but would be very pleased to have another, which he gave me. It was then nearly eleven o'clock and Brahms had ordered a carriage at that hour for d'Albert, because he said if d'Albert intended playing the next evening in the Gewandhaus he must go to bed early. Herr Klengel wanted a photograph of us all together, so, after a great deal of coaxing, Brahms joined the group, but like most amateur photographs it was a failure. The company wanted one of Brahms alone, but he said he would rather have one of "das kleine Tambourin Mädchen," which they must send him when finished.

d'Albert was very sorry to leave, but Brahms said he *must go*, and his word was law with the artists, who nearly all worshipped him. After he had gone Brahms told us what a great artist he considered d'Albert. He said that this morning, in one of the concertos, d'Albert played E flat, instead of E, in a long and difficult passage, but that, with this exception, both concertos were played *perfectly*. We all drank Bowle, while Brahms talked to us about many things. About half past two Brahms said it was time for all good people to be in bed, and as he wanted to count himself one of these he must say good night. I told Frau and Herr Klengel that it was impossible to express my appreciation of their kindness in inviting me, and they said that they themselves felt very highly honored in having so great a master as Brahms, who stayed as a rule about five minutes in each place, spend an *entire* evening with them.

"You may be proud to have been the first to play your American instrument for Brahms," said Herr Klengel, "although, I am sure, no one could have shown it off to better advantage."

Brahms and Herr Geibel accompanied me home, and Brahms said to me, on leaving: "If 'das kleine Tambourin Mädchen' ever comes to Vienna she must certainly play for me again." I am sure I did not sleep any that night, and "the girls" said I kept them awake talking. As I told Herr Klengel the next day in my lesson it was one of the happiest days of my life and one I could never forget.

### Music Restored to Public School Curriculum in Montgomery

MONTGOMERY, ALA., July 1.—After being absent for nearly two years sight-singing is to be restored to the daily curriculum of the public schools of this city. Music and free-hand drawing had been taken from the list of studies as unnecessary and no appropriation was made for teachers. The work now will be in the hands of Alice Sachs, who was for eight years supervisor of music in the public schools up to two years ago. J. P. M.