

THE QUESTION OF PIANO TONE

Harold Bauer Maintains that It Depends Entirely Upon the Sequence of Played Notes—Putting Real Life into the Practice of Scales—A Chat in His Unique Paris Studio

By HARRIETTE BROWER

Paris, Aug. 1, 1913.

BURIED in the heart of old Paris, in one of the narrow, busy thoroughfares of the city, stands the ancient house in which the celebrated pianist, Harold Bauer, has made a home.

One who is unfamiliar with Paris would never imagine that behind rows of uninviting buildings lining the noisy, commercial street, there lived people of refined and artistic tastes. All the entrances to the buildings look very much alike—they seem to be mere slits in the walls. I stopped before one of the openings, entered and crossed a paved courtyard, climbed a winding stone stairway, rang at a plain wooden doorway, and was ushered into the artist's abode. Once within, I hardly dared to speak, lest what I saw might vanish away as with the wave of a fairy wand. Was I not a moment before down in that dusty, squalid street, and here I was in a beautiful room whose appointments are all of quiet elegance, costly but in exquisite taste, and where absolute peace and quiet reign. The wide windows open upon a lovely green garden, which adds the final touch of restful repose to the whole picture.

Mr. Bauer was giving a lesson in the salon beyond, from which issued echoes of well-beloved themes from a Chopin sonata. When the lesson was over he came out to me.

"Yes, this is one of the old houses, of the sort that are fast passing away in Paris," said he. "There are comparatively few of them left. This building is doubtless three hundred years old at least. In this quarter of the city—in the rue de Bac, for instance—you may find old, forbidding looking buildings, that within are magnificent; perfect palaces; at the back of them perhaps, will be a splendid garden, but the whole thing is so hidden away that the very existence of such grandeur and beauty would never be suspected from without." He then led the way to the music room, where we had an hour's talk.

"I was thinking, as I drove down here," I began, "what the trend of our talk might be; for you have already spoken on many subjects for publication. It occurred to me to ask how you yourself secure a beautiful tone on the piano and how you teach others to make it?"

Mr. Bauer thought an instant. "I am not sure that I do; in fact I do not believe in a single beautiful tone on the piano. Tone on the piano can only be beautiful in the right place—that is, in relation to other tones. You or I, or the man in the street, who knows nothing about

music, may each touch a piano key, and that key will sound the same, whoever moves it, from the nature of the instrument. A beautiful tone may ensue when two or more notes are played successively, through their difference of intensity, which gives variety. A straight, even tone is monotonous—a dead tone. Variety is life. We see this fact exemplified even in the speaking voice; if one speaks or reads in an even tone, with-



A Photographic Silhouette Study of Harold Bauer in His Paris Studio

out modulation, it is deadly monotonous. "Now the singer or violinist can make a single tone on their instrument, beautiful through variety; for it is impossible for them to make even one tone which does not have shades of variation in it, however slight they may be, which render it expressive. But you cannot do this on the piano; you cannot color a single tone, but you can a succession of tones, through their difference, through their relation to each other. On the other hand you may say any tone may be beautiful if in the right place, no matter how harsh it may be. The singer's voice may break from emotion, or simulated emotion, in an impassioned phrase. The exact note on which it breaks may not be a beautiful one, it may even be very discordant, but we do not think of that, for we are moved by the meaning back of the tones. So on the piano there may be one note on a phrase which, if heard alone, would sound harsh and unpleasant, but in relation to other notes it sounds beautiful, for it gives the right effect. Thus it is the relation of tones which results in 'a beautiful tone' on the piano.

"The frequent trouble is that piano teachers and players generally do not understand their instrument. A singer understands his, a violinist, flautist or drummer knows his, but not a pianist. As he only has keys to play and they are right there to his hand, he does not bother himself further. To obviate this difficulty with those who come to me, I have had this complete model of piano-key mechanism made. You see, I can touch the key in a variety of ways and the results will be

different each time. It is necessary for the pianist to look into his instrument, learn its construction and know what happens inside when he touches its keys.

"As you say, there are a great many methods of teaching the piano, but to my mind they are apt to be long, laborious, and do not reach the vital points. The pianist may arrive at these after long years of study and experimenting, but much of his time will be wasted in useless labor.

"In my own case, I was forced by necessity to make headway quickly. I came to Paris years ago as a violinist, but there seemed no opening for me then in that direction. There was opportunity, however, for ensemble work with a good violinist and 'cellist. So I set to work to acquire facility on the piano as quickly as possible. I consulted all the pianists I knew, and I knew a good number, as to what to do. They told me I must spend months on pure technic first, before I could hope to play

at all; but I told them I had no time for that. So I went to work to study the effects I needed. It didn't matter to me how my hand looked on the keyboard; whether my fingers were quite flat or whether they stood on end. I was soon able to get my effects and to convince others that they were the effects I wanted. Later on, when I had more leisure, I took more thought about the position of hand and fingers. But I am strongly convinced that much time is spent uselessly on externals, which do not reach the heart of the matter.

"For instance, players struggle for years to acquire a perfectly even scale. Now I don't believe in that at all. I don't believe a scale should be even, either in tone or rhythm. The beginner's untrained efforts at a scale sound like this"—the speaker illustrated at the piano a scale with tones all blurred and run into each other; then he continued—"After a year's so-called 'correct training,' his scale sounds like this"—again he illustrated, playing a succession of notes with one finger, each note standing out by itself. "To my thinking such teaching is not only erroneous, it is positively poisonous—yes, poisonous."

"Is it to be inferred that you do not advise the practice of scales?"

"Oh, I approve of scale playing surely, for facility in passing the thumb under and the hand over is very necessary. I do not, however, desire the even, monotonous scale, but one that is full of variety and life.

"In regard to interpretation, it must be full of tonal and rhythmic modifications. Briefly it may be said that expression may be exemplified in four ways: loud and soft, fast and slow. But within these what infinite shades may be made! Then the personal equation comes in also. Variety and differentiation are of supreme importance, for they are life.

"My American tour begins the latter part of October, by an appearance in New York, then I go West. After my season is finished in America, I shall go to Australia for a tour; this will keep me from Paris for a year. I should like to give you a picture to illustrate this little talk. Here is a new one which was taken right here in this room, as I sat at the piano with the strong sunlight pouring in at the big window at my left."

SLEZAK ALMOST DROWNED

Clings to Boat and Is Rescued, as His Companion, Sturmfels, Loses Life

TEGERNSEE, BAVARIA, Aug. 6.—The drowning of one operatic tenor and the narrow escape of another resulted from the overturning of a boat in which Leo Slezak and Fritz Sturmfels were sailing on the lake here to-day. Sturmfels was drowned, but Mr. Slezak clung to the boat and was rescued. Mr. Sturmfels was heard in America in the tenor rôle of "Baron Trenck," and he was widely known as a member of the Royal Opera at Leipzig.

American music lovers have a direct interest in Mr. Slezak's fortunate escape, as his death would have removed from this country's concert and operatic field one of the most popular visiting artists, since the Czech tenor is to be a feature of this year's concert season, besides appearing with the National Opera Company of Canada. With three leading orchestras Mr. Slezak will be soloist, appearing at Chicago with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in Cleveland with the New York Philharmonic, and in St. Paul with the St. Paul Symphony. At Utica he will be heard in the festival under the auspices of the B Sharp Club. At Des Moines the tenor will sing under the auspices of Drake University and another college engagement will be that of Chicago University. Milwaukee is one of the various cities which will hear Mr. Slezak in recital.

NEW ORLEANS TO HAVE OPERA

Werlein Gives \$45,000 Guarantee for Tenor-Impresario

NEW ORLEANS, Aug. 8.—With the signing of a \$45,000 guarantee by Philip Werlein a season of French opera is assured for New Orleans next season, with last year's tenor, Mr. A. Affre, as the impresario. Mr. Werlein assumed the obligation personally, trusting to be relieved by the subscribers later on. The lease of the Bourbon street house has in consequence been transferred to Mr. Affre.

In order to protect Mr. Werlein the Association of Commerce, which had opened a campaign for a more high-class opera season, has started a guarantee fund, to which Mayor Martin Behrman was the first subscriber. Other signers up to this time include W. R. Irby, Albert Breton, Theodore Grunewald, E. H. Farrar, General Arsène Perrilliat and L. P. E. Giffroy. A larger guarantee has been given M. Affre than was given the former impresario, the excess being no less than \$5,000.

Mayor Gaynor Liked the Ragtime

Ragtime found a supporter in Mayor Gaynor, who sat near the Subway Band at Battery Park, New York, on the evening of August 7. While many younger members of the big throng could scarcely refrain from one-stepping to the lively music, the Mayor laughed.

"Tip-top," he said. "It's the sort of music for the children, and for occasions like this. I don't know whether I even would like more serious tunes wedged in between."

"This band can play classic music just as well, but what's the use of dragging it in? There's no sense of their playing opera tunes when the crowd wants to hear ragtime, and I quite agree with it."

Ona B. Talbot Concerts Announced

INDIANAPOLIS, Aug. 11.—The Ona B. Talbot Concerts in the Shubert Murat Theater, this coming season are announced as follows: November 10, Russian Symphony Orchestra, Modest Altschuler conductor (soloist announced later) December 4, Russian Ballet and Symphony Orchestra, Theodore Stier conductor, assisted by M. Nivikoff and Anna Pavlova; January 12, New York Symphony Orchestra, Walter Damrosch conductor, soloist announced later; February 25, Ignace Jan Paderewski, and March 19, Mme. Ernestine Schumann-Heink and assisting artists.

Musical Setting for "Elektra" by William Furst

BERKELEY, CAL., Aug. 9.—William Furst has completed a musical setting for the "Elektra" of Sophocles, which will be presented on September 6 at the Greek Theater of the University of California by Margaret Anglin. It is the first attempt to write a score for this tragedy, and the preliminary hearings of Furst's music are said to be highly satisfactory. Miss Anglin used Mendelssohn's score for "Antigone," by Sophocles, but could find no music for "Elektra." She consulted Furst, who has been composing for this work for three months.

The recent Bach-Reger Festival at Heidelberg failed to attract as many visitors as the promoters had expected.

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