

HAS AMERICA GROWN MUSICALLY? ASK THIBAUD

Appreciation Has Immeasurably Broadened and Deepened, in this Country, Declares French Violinist—Solidity of Musicianship Prized Where a Decade Ago It Was Little Valued

SERIOUSNESS is the dominant element of Jacques Thibaud's character—the seriousness of a man well along in life. Yet those who deem this quality specifically the attribute of one advanced in years are likely to experience a sense of incompatibility when confronted by the French violinist who has just returned to this country.

Thibaud is essentially young, youthful in figure and in face, almost boyish, as it were, in the enthusiasm with which he avows and expounds his artistic principles. He can be truly naïve at moments. None the less a strong spiritual maturity is felt to govern all that he says, does and purposes. Ideals so uncompromisingly lofty and so ineradicably ingrained would seem to demand embodiment in one considerably more aged.

Nor is the vanity of the conventional virtuoso Mr. Thibaud's. This fact could, if necessary, be demonstrated by his choice in the matter of programs. But it is even more eloquently disclosed in his expressed desire to end his days as member of a chamber music organization. Toward that goal he is working with ardor and the sooner the day arrives on which he can permanently devote his energies to chamber music without the hindering necessities of solo work the more pleased will he be. His life will then have rounded out a sort of violinistic trilogy—for he began as orchestral player before evolving into a full-fledged soloist of international repute.

Mr. Thibaud had not yet become acclimated to his new surroundings when a representative of MUSICAL AMERICA saw him a few days after his arrival. Promptly upon landing he was hurried off to Boston for his first recital and such rest and energy as an unusually peaceful December ocean trip had enabled him to store up were quickly dissipated. He felt weary and ill at ease at all times except when playing and had not yet recovered his physical equability when he returned to New York. Still he frankly professed a brighter outlook for his tour than had been the case on his previous visit.

"This time I have every inducement to optimism," he remarked, "in strong contradistinction to what I experienced ten years ago. At that time I never really succeeded in accustoming myself to America, to American tastes and American ways. I was always the stranger, and constantly ill at ease. Exigencies of popular taste forced me to play programs that were distasteful to me and musical culture was oftentimes of a very indifferent variety. To-day I can see at a glance how things have changed, how appreciation has immeasurably broadened and deepened, how seriousness of purpose and solidity of musicianship are prized where a decade since they were little valued. How judge of the changes? By the attitude of the public at the recital I have already given and by observing the programs offered in various localities by various artists of the highest standing."

Praise from Philip Hale

At his recent Boston appearance Mr. Thibaud played the "Chaconne" of Bach in a manner that evoked from Philip Hale the declaration that it had never been played to such superb account by any violinist living or dead whom he had heard in the whole course of his critical career. This same "Chaconne" Thibaud will play at his forthcoming recital in New York. Besides this he is to play among other things Lalo's "Spanish Symphony" and Saint-Saëns's "Havanaise." His outstanding desire is to offer works of pure worth and dignity.

"One of my most especial grievances on the occasion of my first American tour was the fact that I was compelled to play short light pieces. Only such were supposed to satisfy the popular musical sense. Now to me there is nothing more distasteful and artistically unprofitable than forcible constraint of this kind. To feel completely in my element I must devote myself to what is substantial, profound, musical. How futile is the incessant exploitation of brilliant virtuosity! In these days it defeats its own purposes, for everybody is a good technician and everybody who so chooses can amaze by sensational tricks. Such is no longer the privilege of the few. But performers of this type, however much they may startle and amaze the body of



Jacques Thibaud, the Famous French Violinist, Now Making His First Tour of the United States in Ten Years

the public, do not maintain their hold or impress themselves indelibly upon the minds and souls of their hearers. What artist conscious of his true mission would wish to play Paganini when he can play Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms, Franck?

"It is only such men of serious bent as Ysaye, as Kreisler, as Joachim, as Flesch and a few others of that stamp that count in the eventual course of things. They educate and elevate the public, thus performing the most vital function of the artist. It is such as they who stand sponsor for great works and who will support them in the face of public opposition. Both Ysaye and Joachim had to struggle against the deadly opposition of popular indifference and critical assaults when they brought forward what was new and great, though little understood. But they persisted and gradually the critics began to see the beauties of what had previously been impenetrable to them while the public, too, began to follow suit. How much more enviable is the distinction of having brought about such conditions than that of having won cheap plaudits with some brilliant superficiality!

I only regret that such a man as Ysaye does not write. He has an exceptional talent for composition and could enrich the literature of modern violin music to a wonderful extent. And there is Kreisler, gifted with an exceptional creative fancy! Would that he might see fit to turn his attention to the larger forms—what a rare suite for violin and orchestra he could produce!

But we are not destitute of good modern violin works. Think of the sonata of Fauré, of Chausson's wonderful "Poème," of the new concerto by the Flemish composer, de Jongen, to mention only three. Nor do I think that there is great validity in the complaint respecting the contemporary tendency to bring forward too much music that is unviolinistic. Those who make this contention forget that the technique of the instrument is advancing—whether they realize it or not. They formulated the same objections against the Brahms Concerto when it was first brought

out. To-day children play it. Paganini would have been more or less of an impossibility without the technical innovations which he introduced with his compositions. Technic, indeed, keeps pace with new methods of musical expression.

"The development of harmonic complexity such as distinguishes the music of to-day may to some degree discourage contemporary composers. A violin with its four strings allows no extensive latitude for striking elaborateness of harmony. And so if there be any falling off in productivity in the violinistic field at present that fact may be tendered as a very plausible explanation. Besides some of the much-exploited forms are becoming outworn—the concerto, for instance. The sonata for violin and piano remains a supremely aristocratic and noble one and there is much to be made of the suite, with orchestral accompaniment."

There exists in some quarters a very definite idea that violinists of the French school must appeal by virtue of their *finesse* only to the few. From this viewpoint Mr. Thibaud strongly dissents.

"The French school is, in reality, much broader than many persons realize. The majority of great modern violinists have studied in my country and have been proud to acknowledge the fact. Kreisler is one of these; Joachim was another. Indeed the latter openly professed his pleasure at being able to acknowledge the French instruction that he had received. Of course, great masters like Kreisler, Ysaye, Joachim are individualities, not distinctive products of one school or another. But they underwent French training at some time or other and absorbed all the characteristic qualities inherent in such training. A great personality, however, transcends 'schools' and it is by the greatness of the sum of art and personality that a player conquers—not because he has studied in this way or that.

"It is amazing to note how many splendidly gifted violinists there are in France to-day whose merits are undiscovered by music-lovers. The fault lies with the pecu-

liarily perverted trend of their ambitions. In Dieppe, at the Casino, I heard one of the orchestra violinists play the Lalo 'Spanish Symphony' in a manner that I seldom expect to hear surpassed. I spoke to him after the concert, asked him why he had not succeeded in making himself better known. He simply did not care to. He preferred playing in small orchestras and in cafés. The case is really pitiful and yet one encounters so many of the kind."

Possibly some may be inclined to wonder why Mr. Thibaud should elect to play the Saint-Saëns "Havanaise" at his first New York recital, in view of the frequency with which the piece is played. The reason is simple—the "Havanaise" is the young violinist's hallmark. It was he who, in theatrical terminology, "created" the work. For thirty-five years it lay neglected on the shelves of the Durand publishing house. It was brought to light picturesquely.

Propaganda for Saint-Saëns

"On one occasion, while I was one of the violinists in the Colonne Orchestra, I was also to appear as soloist at one of the Sunday concerts. Colonne requested me to play something new, yet a work which would not require too much time in performance. Yet he expressed a doubt as to whether such a composition were to be found. 'Yes,' I assured him, 'I have the very thing you want.' It was Saint-Saëns's neglected piece. To the amazement of all it took the audience by storm. Seven successive Sundays I was obliged to perform this work and then other violinists took it to their hearts. In consequence I received a charming letter from Saint-Saëns which I have cherished ever since, wherein he thanked me most effusively for what I had done in behalf of a composition that he loved so well but which had been allowed to lie so long in oblivion. My delight in this work has never abated. I am proud to have done for it what Ysaye did for César Franck's Sonata and Chausson's 'Poème' and what Joachim did for Brahms."

As already intimated Mr. Thibaud hopes eventually to devote his energies to chamber music altogether. Not all the glories that can accrue to the soloist equal in his estimation the artistic satisfaction to be derived from the participation in a trio or quartet. He has, of course, frequently indulged in such lofty pleasures and the trio, consisting of himself, Pablo Casals—of whose art he is a fanatic admirer—and Harold Bauer has won no end of fame in England and in France, where, on occasion, Mr. Bauer's place at the piano is taken by Mr. Cortot. The joint appearances of Mr. Bauer and Mr. Thibaud will be among the most fascinating artistic incidents in the present American tournées of each of these players.

H. F. P.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS FOR CINCINNATIANS

Special Musical Programs Arranged in Churches—Organist Guild Recitals

CINCINNATI, Dec. 27.—Musically speaking, Christmas week was a quiet one in Cincinnati. At the Conservatory the holiday season was ushered in by an afternoon of Christmas carols sung by the young choristers of the class of Harold Beckett Gibbs. Carols were also sung by various choirs of boys and girls throughout the city in connection with Christmas festivities arranged by the Woman's Club, which consisted of Christmas trees and programs of story telling and music at the Woman's Club, in the various libraries and public institutions of the city.

The majority of churches, as usual, arranged elaborate Christmas programs, one of which was unique, being held at midnight, that of the Church of the Epiphany, Walnut Hills. The service, which was arranged by Mrs. Lillian Tyler Plogstedt and under her direction, consisted of an arrangement of an old Breton carol, sung by the vested choir of sixteen female voices; the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei from the Caecilia Mass of Gounod, and a baritone solo, "Under the Silent Stars," of Whitney Coombs, sung by E. F. Weidinger. The latter was given with cello accompaniment by Max Froehlich, of the Symphony Orchestra.

The American Guild of Organists of the United States and Canada is giving half-hour recitals under the auspices of the Southern Ohio Chapter A. G. O. at Christ Church, the first of which was given Friday with the last to be given Wednesday, December 31. John Yoakley, organist of Christ Church, gave the program.

To-day Mrs. Lillian Tyler Plogstedt, organist of the Church of the Epiphany, presented the program. A. R. H.

Quintilia Bellavoce, who sings leading rôles in Italian opera on the Bowery, was stricken with appendicitis while leaving the theater on December 25 and was removed to a hospital in serious condition.