

AMERICANS TOO EASILY TRICKED BY FOREIGN NAMES IN MUSIC

Lack of Confidence in Our Own Serious and Talented Musicians
Bitterly Arraigned by Mme. Zeisler—Ignorant of Our Own
Resources—Questions of Technic as Viewed by the Famous
Pianist—Advice to Beginners

By HARRIETTE BROWER.

FANNIE BLOOMFIELD ZEISLER is an eloquent pleader in the cause of musical progress in America.

"This country has made a marvelous advancement in the understanding and appreciation of music," she said the other day to the writer. "Even the critics, many of them, know a great deal about music. The audiences, even in small towns, are a pleasure and delight to play to. I am asked sometimes why I attempt the last sonata of Beethoven in a little town. But just such audiences listen to that work with rapt attention. How are they to learn what is best in music unless we are willing to give it to them?"

"The trouble with America is that it does not at all realize how much it knows, how much talent is here, what musical resources are here. We are so easily tricked with a foreign name and title. Our serious and talented musicians are constantly being pushed to the wall by some unknown with a name ending in 'ski'. These are the people who get American touring engagements (for one season at least) and the best places in our music schools and colleges, crowding out our native musicians. It makes me very bitter against this utterly mistaken and fallacious idea of ours.

"I have many talented students who come to me from all over the country. Some of them become most excellent concert artists. If I recommend them to managers or institutions, should not my word count for something? Ought I not to know what my students can do, and what is required of a concert artist? But instead of their securing an engagement the foreigner with the high-sounding name is the one invariably chosen. When I first started on my career I endeavored in every way to get a proper hearing in America. But not until I had made a name for myself in Europe was I recognized here. And I want to say that it was the founder of your great paper, Mr. John C. Freund, who extended to me, in those early days, every possible encouragement, and for that kindly interest I am most deeply grateful."

A Practical Musician

Each year, as Mme. Bloomfield Zeisler plays for us, we feel a deeper experience, a clearer insight into human nature, a broader outlook and grasp on art and life. The possessor of such a mentality, ever seeking for truth and the sincerest expression of it, must continually progress until—as now—the greatest heights are reached. Mme. Zeisler is no keyboard dreamer, no rhapsodist on Art. She is a thoroughly practical musician, able to explain as well as play. Out of the fullness of a rich experience and out of the deepest sincerity and conviction she speaks, as she plays, with authority and enthusiasm.

"The first thing to be done for a pupil is to see that the hand is in correct position. I explain that the wrist should be about on a level with the second joint of the middle finger, when the fingers are properly rounded. The knuckles will then be somewhat elevated; in fact they will naturally take care of themselves, other points of the hand being correct. Two things are of supreme importance—firm finger joints and loose wrist. These must be insisted upon from the very be-



Fannie Bloomfield Zeisler, America's Most Illustrious Woman Pianist

ginning. I sometimes use firm wrist in my own playing if I wish to make a certain effect; but I can safely affirm, I think, that no one has ever seen me play with weak, bending fingers.

"Piano technic includes so much! Everything goes into it—arithmetic, grammar, diction, language study, poetry, history, painting! In the first stages there are rules to be learned, just as in any other study. In school we had to learn the rules of grammar and mathematics. Just such rules are applicable to musical performance. I must know the rules of versification in order to scan poetic stanzas, so I must know the laws of rhythm and metre to be able to punctuate musical phrases and periods. Pupils who have long passed the stage of division and fractions do not seem to be able to determine the time-values of the various notes and groups of notes used in music. They do not know what must be done with triplets, dotted notes, and so on. Therefore it is plain, 'technic' includes a multitude of things.

Each Pupil a Different Problem

"Each pupil presents a different problem as to physical formation of hand and

body, intelligence and talent. Those who are the most talented do not always prove the most satisfactory students. They grasp the composer's ideas quickly enough, it is true, so that sometimes in a few days they can take up a difficult composition and dash it off with such showy effect as to blind the eyes of the superficial listener. But they are not willing to work out the fine points of the piece and polish it artistically. Neither are they willing to get right down to the bedrock of technic and work at that seriously and thoroughly. If this course is suggested they grow restive, think they are being held back, and sometimes prefer to study with a more superficial teacher. The consequence is they never really amount to anything, whereas if they possessed perseverance along with their talent they could become great artists. I would rather have an intelligent, earnest, serious pupil who is obedient and willing to work than a very gifted pupil. The two seldom go together. When you find both in one person a marvelous musician is the result, if afforded the right sort of training.

"One thing a teacher should insist upon is that the pupil study harmony. A practical, working knowledge of keys, chords and progressions is essential. There may be no need to study orchestration or composition, but the student must know the foundation and structure of the material of music. My pupil must be familiar with the various chords of the scale and know how to analyze them before I can make clear to him the rules of pedaling. Without this knowledge my words about the use of the pedals are so much Greek to him. He must go and learn this first before coming to me.

According to Rule

"Experience counts for much with the teacher, but much more with the pianist. The beginner must go according to rule until he has thoroughly mastered the rules. He must not think because he sees a great artist holding his hands in a certain way at times—turning under his unemployed fingers for octaves perhaps, or any other seeming eccentricity—that he himself is at liberty to do the same things. No, he must learn to play in a normal, safe and sane way before attempting any tricks. What may seem eccentric to the inexperienced student may be quite the legitimate means of producing a certain effect for the mature artist, who through wide experience and study knows just the effect he wants and the way to make it.

"For the artist does many things the pupil should not attempt. The artist knows the capabilities of his own hand; his technic is individual in a certain sense, and it should not be imitated by the learner of little or no experience. If I play a chord passage with high wrist, in order to bring out a certain effect or quality of tone at that point, the thoughtless student might be under the impression that a high wrist was habitual with me, which is not true. For this reason I do not give single lessons to any one, nor coach on single pieces. In the case of the interpretation of a piece a student can get the ideas of it from hearing it in recital, if he can grasp and assimilate them, which is not always the case.

Questions of Interpretation

"Interpretation! That is a wide subject. How can it be defined? I try to arouse the imagination of the student first of all. We speak of the character of the piece and try to arrive at some idea of its meaning. Is it a Largo, then it is serious and soulful; a Scherzo, then it should be blithe and gay. We must not depend on metronome marks for cor-

rect tempo, for they are not reliable. In Schumann they are generally all wrong. We try to feel the rhythm of the music, the swing of it, the spirit of it. In giving out the opening theme or subject I feel it should be made prominent, to arrest attention, to make it clear to the listener. When it appears at other times in the piece it can be softened or varied.

"Variety of effect we must have. If a passage is played with decreasing or increasing tone, whether this run is soft and the next loud, or *vice versa*, does not matter so much as the securing of variety and individuality. I may see it one way, another player may see it the opposite way. One should be broad-minded enough to see the beauty of each. I do not expect my pupils to copy me and do things just as I do them. I show them how I do it, then leave them to work it out as they see it.

"*Pianissimo* is one of the later things to teach. A beginner should not attempt it too soon, for then it will only result in flabbiness. A true *pianissimo* is the result of strength, not weakness."

London's Musical Policeman

LONDON, Dec. 26.—If a story that is going the rounds of the press may be relied upon London's representatives of law and order are adding musical qualifications to their bountiful supply of accomplishments. It appears that one of London's best known musicians and a certain young novelist were waiting for a taxicab a few nights ago and the novelist insisted upon whistling to his companion a melody which he had composed himself. "It seems all right," said the musician, "but let's try it on a policeman." A tall young constable listened gravely as the two whistled the new-born melody. Then he pronounced judgment.

"There is something to be said for the motif," he declared, "but the accidentals in the fifth bar are feeble and the modulation into the minor at the tenth bar must offend the ear of a well-trained musician." And humming a fragment of "Parsifal" the musical policeman went back to regulate the traffic at Piccadilly Circus. F. J. T.

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