

A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF BENJAMIN LAMBORD

By CESAR SAERCHINGER

THE news of the death of Benjamin Lambord, announced in *MUSICAL AMERICA*'s issue of last week, no doubt came as a great shock not only to a wide circle of friends, but to the musical world in general. As one of Mr. Lambord's closest friends, I cannot refrain from supplementing the brief review with a few facts that are perhaps not so well known as they might have been, had the deceased been of a less retiring nature. His was a nature that shrank instinctively from the cheap glare of publicity and the bustle of business life. "Business," indeed, as applied to art, did not exist for him.

Benjamin Lambord, composer, conductor of the Modern Music Society of New York, pianist and organist, was born June 10, 1879, in Portland, Maine. He died suddenly at Lake Hopatcong, N. J., where he was visiting friends, on June 7 last. The immediate cause of death was pneumonia, but to all who have known Mr. Lambord it has been apparent for some time that his health was poor. Overwork, insufficient rest, a too prodigal expenditure of nervous force in the pursuance of frequently irksome duties were the real cause.

By all those intimately acquainted with his work, Lambord's career has been considered as one of the most promising in the contemporary musical life of New York at least. Considering all handicaps, his activities, cut short at the shockingly early age of thirty-six, have been productive of some genuine results. His compositions, though, as published, they do not go beyond Opus 11, have in them not only solid worth, but a quality of sensuous beauty that is as yet rarely found in American compositions. There are, briefly, several groups of songs (some twenty titles in all) of which the settings of Christina Rossetti's "Remember or Forget" (Opus 1, No. 1), of Heine's "Lehn deine Wang" and Chénier's "Clytie" are probably the best; some choral works, of which the highly atmospheric "Verses from Omar" (with orchestra) is the most recent; several piano pieces, children's part-songs and two acts of an opera, "Woodstock." The last work shows Lambord's genius in a lighter vein, and while the work, as a whole, was probably abandoned by the composer, at least two numbers, the spirited song, "A Health to King Charles" and the madrigal "Hey-ho-Robin" are almost bound to become popular. They have all the charm and solidity, the springlike freshness and hale good spirits which we are wont to associate with the England of a more chivalrous age. Conceived in a similar spirit are the songs "Under the Greenwood Tree" and "The Daffodil's Secret."

Wagner and Strauss His Idols

But if Lambord's inspiration took any national turn at all, it was German. Wagner and Strauss were his idols and a more intimate knowledge of the works of those two composers was probably never held by any man. It may be remembered in this connection that, as conductor of the Modern Music Society, Lambord organized the only American Wagner centenary held in New York on the birthday of the composer in 1913; also that some ten years ago, when Strauss was still caviare to the general, he gave a series

of six concerts at which nearly all the non-orchestral works of that composer were performed.

The indomitable enthusiasm which prompted these activities, Lambord carried into everything he did. His dislike of organ work, as well as of teaching, was notorious. Yet there never was a more competent organist or a more conscientious teacher. St. Luke's Cathedral in Portland, Fordham Reformed Church, Christ Presbyterian Church and the West End Presbyterian Church in New York are among those that have had the benefit of his work. Especially at the Rye (N. Y.) Presbyterian Church, where he was active during the past year, will his idealism and extraordinary ability be remembered, for the "special services" which he gave there every month were models of fine taste. Over a hundred pupils, in piano or composition, have at one time or another profited from his knowledge and self-sacrificing energy. A teacher who never watches the time is a rare occurrence in these commercial days!

A Pupil of MacDowell

The orchestra was the thing which exercised a veritable fascination over Lambord. As a pupil of Edward MacDowell at Columbia University, he was noted for his harmonic facility and his grasp of counterpoint (among his manuscripts are fugues that would cause the envy of many a successful composer). But after he finished his course, his masterful orchestration of some of his own songs prompted MacDowell to give him the Mosenthal fellowship. With the income of this he went to Europe and studied with Vidal in Paris. Since then all his work has been "thought" orchestrally; and among his sketches are embryonic symphonic poems that should have seen the light of day.

Arthur Farwell, in a recent criticism written for *The Art of Music*, gives this estimate of Lambord's creative work:

"Benjamin Lambord is a composer whose work reflects in a striking manner the evolutionary upheaval which, in the present generation, has carried the nation from the end of the old epoch to the beginning of the new. There could not well be a closer fidelity to the old German musical spirit and style, especially as pertains to the *Lied*, than in Lambord's early songs."

Little need be said of Lambord's personality and the charm that his intellect and sparkling wit exercised over all that knew him. It is no idle phrase to say that all who met him—and his friends were a host—became his debtors. His generosity and good nature were of the kind that invited exploitation. Only one thing nature seemed to have omitted in his make-up—a sufficient will for self-preservation. Of sordid selfishness he had not a touch.

Letters from musicians have begun to pour in to the writer, all of which contain expressions of the high regard in which Lambord was held by his colleagues. Thus Henry F. Gilbert says:

"Lambord was one of those charming, witty, and delightful persons whose removal makes one feel the world to be a definitely poorer place to be in. In him I not only perceived a most disinterested devotion to the spirit of beauty, coupled with an unselfish and tolerant spirit toward others, but I also felt a pure and spiritual rectitude as a fundamental trait of his nature."

Edward Burlingame Hill of Harvard writes:

"Mr. Lambord had a rare nature, and extremely winning personal traits, which united to his sincere artistic nature will make his passing a genuine loss to musical affairs in New York."

Prof. Daniel Gregory Mason writes as follows:

"He will be a real loss to those who knew and liked him. He had a consciousness of the best things and a desire to work for them which are rare. Without having known him at all intimately, I got the impression that the rareness of such an attitude, the cheapness and second-rateness of most musical undertakings, depressed and discouraged him, and that he was often unhappy."

At the time of his death, Mr. Lambord was engaged upon the completion of a volume of critical analysis, "The Orchestra and Orchestral Music," to be published in "The Art of Music" series. He leaves a widow and a young daughter. His funeral services were held on Thursday last in St. Luke's Church. The music used was almost all Lambord's own. Several musicians of note were observed among those paying their last respects.

SAINT-SAENS TALKS OF MUSIC HISTORY

Witty and Erudite Lecture Delivered by the Composer in
San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO, June 10.—Camille Saint-Saëns, close upon eighty years of age, is an active and enthusiastic visitor at the Exposition almost every day. He has declined many public offerings of homage, but occasionally accepts dinner invitations and has publicly lectured in the French colony. Three programs of his works have been arranged, the dates being June 19, 24 and 27. In these concerts he is to direct the Exposition Orchestra. Sousa's Band will assist, and the soloists will be Katherine Ruth Heyman, pianist; Ada Sassoli, harpist; Horace Britt, cellist, and Wallace A. Sabbin, organist.

The Saint-Saëns lecture was given in the French Pavilion on Tuesday. Redfern Mason in his *Examiner* account of it says the venerable composer "talked, played the piano and sang recitative as it should be sung, and as it should not."

Mr. Mason continues: "Saint-Saëns talked about music with that erudition, urbanity and sly malice that characterize the man in his published works."

"He began by talking about the neumes and diaphony, remarking with a touch of irony that, before the thirteenth century, music was a 'grimoire,' which, if my memory serves me right, is a 'devil's grammar,' a volume beloved of astrologers and witches. He glanced at the superstition, based on the undecipherableness of manuscripts, that all the songs of the *trouvères* were in triple time. He also touched on the Oriental origin of many of the melodies of the ecclesiastical plain-chant and compared them with the improvisational outpourings of the muezzins of Islam."

"A Cappella" Music

"Coming down to Palestrina, he was on firmer ground. But, while paying

tribute to the genius of the great Roman, he reminded us that Pierluigi did not hesitate to make music on tunes of a startlingly secular description. To make good his point, Mr. Saint-Saëns played 'J'ai du bon tabac' à la Palestrina, with solemn contrapuntal weavings. He also touched humorously on the different ways in which a *cappella* music is sung. In Paris he heard it sung *pianissimo* with incredible slowness, so that the 'longs' were too much for the longest-winded singer, and had to be completed by a second voice. In the Sistine Chapel he heard the opposite vice of misrepresentation; for there the vocalists sang at breakneck speed.

"The influence of instruments on the development of music formed a delightful part of Mr. Saint-Saëns's discourse. He told of the treasure of dance music written for lute and theorbo by writers contemporary with Palestrina, music full of the true spirit of the world of living men. Incidentally, he emphasized the fact that the association of the minor mode with grief and the major with optimism is a comparatively modern innovation. A Tambourin by Rameau and a love song from the 'Acis and Galatea' of Handel were cited as illustrations of the joyousness of the minor mode. When the Saxon composer pictures Acis in tears, he turns to the major. Even the Dead March in 'Saul' is major in mode."

"Another important point had reference to the changes that have taken place in the construction of instruments. Mr. Saint-Saëns played the great opening strain of the Bach 'Chaconne' as it must have sounded when the bow was literally arched, and not straight in form as it is to-day. Curved, the bow could grip the quadruple harmonies as a unit; to-day they must be read in arpeggio. The clavicin he prefers to the modern piano in many compositions. Nay, he calls the modern grand an 'instrument of war,' and laughs at the idea of the art of 'touching' the piano."

Reverence for Originals

"Against editors in general Mr. Saint-Saëns poured out the vials of his scorn. Kalkbrenner he metaphorically flayed, and he scoffed at the meticulous excesses of Reinecke and Riemann. His doctrine is to go back to the original document; but this, he regrets, is seldom done."

"How the ornaments of old-time music should be played was dwelt upon in the same devout spirit of reverence for the intention of the composer. Recitative, he held, should be practiced from the viewpoint of declamation. In this domain he held Mme. Viardot as the last great representative of the good tradition."

"Playing the Chopin 'Berceuse,' Mr. Saint-Saëns shows the harmonic iniquities that are practiced by our modern virtuosi, with their excessive use of the pedal. The right use of *rubato* also claimed his attention; he inveighed against too great use of the *vibrato*. 'Music is expressive of calm, as well as of passion,' he said, and played a contemplative movement from a violin concerto, first as it should be played, then with the perverse emotionalism which is sometimes put into such works." T. N.

Exponents of Miller Vocal Art Science in Briarcliff Recital

The regular Sunday evening concert at Briarcliff Lodge, N. Y., on June 12, took the form of a recital by the artist students of Miller vocal art science under the direction of Adelaide Gescheidt. The program included an address describing the purposes of the system by the founder, Dr. Frank E. Miller. Then followed several arias and songs by five artists of the school and a song cycle by Ethel Watson Usher and Dr. Miller, sung by a double quartet.

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