

SAINT-SAËNS LECTURES ON "THE EXECUTION OF MUSIC"

Famous Composer Speaks at Salon de la Pensée Française in San Francisco—Modern Errors in the Performance of Ancient Compositions

Bureau of Musical America,
No. 1101 Pine Street,
San Francisco, June 23, 1915.

A LECTURE delivered by Camille Saint-Saëns at the Salon de la Pensée Française on "The Execution of Music, and Principally of Ancient Music" has been authoritatively translated into English by Henry P. Bowie and is published in pamphlet form.

Speaking of modern errors in the performance of compositions from the olden-time writers, and particularly mentioning Bach, Handel, Haydn and Beethoven, Saint-Saëns, finds the evolution of the musical instruments partly to blame.

"In the time of Bach and Handel," he says, "the bow truly merited its Italian name of 'arco.' It was curved like an arc—the hairs of the bow constituted the chord of the arc, a very great flexibility resulting which allowed the strings of the instrument to be enveloped and to be played simultaneously. The bow seldom quitted the strings, doing so only in rare cases and when especially indicated. On this account it happens that the indication of *legato* is very rare. Even though there was a separate stroke of the bow for each note, the notes were not separated one from the other. Nowadays the form of the bow is completely changed. The execution of the music is based upon the detached bow, and although it is easy to keep the bow upon the strings just as they did at the commencement of the nineteenth century, performers have lost the habit of it. The result is that they give to ancient music a character of perpetually jumping, which completely destroys its nature.

"The very opposite movement has been produced in instruments of the key or piano type. The precise indications of Mozart show that non-*legato*, which doesn't mean at all *staccato*, was the ordinary way of playing the instrument, and that the veritable *legato* was played only where the author specially indicated it. The clavecin or harpsichord, which preceded the piano, when complete with two banks of keys, many registers giving the octaves and different tone qualities, oftentimes like the organ with a key for pedals, offered resources which the piano does not possess. A Polish lady, Mme. Landowska, has studied thoroughly these resources, and has shown us how pieces written for this instrument thus disclosed elements of variety which are totally missing when the same are played upon the piano; but the clavecin tone lacked fulness, and shadings or nuances were out of the question."

"Perpetual Legato"

The composer comes to a conclusion that the indication *non-legato* degenerated into meaning *staccato*, and he discussed "the tyrannical reign of the perpetual *legato*," a tyranny still continuing. Notwithstanding the example of Liszt, whom Saint-Saëns calls "the greatest pianist of the nineteenth century," the "fatal school of *legato* has prevailed—not that it is unfortunate in itself, but because it has perverted the intentions of musical authors." In this connection Kalkbrenner is criticized for his arrangements of the Beethoven symphonies, and the French professors are criticized for following Kalkbrenner's example. Saint-Saëns continues:

"The house of Breitkopf, which until lately had the best editions of the German classics, has substituted in their places new editions where professors have eagerly striven to perfect in their own manner the music of the masters. When this great house wished to make a complete edition of the works of Mozart, which are prodigiously numerous, it appealed to all who possessed manuscripts of Mozart, and then having gathered these most precious documents, instead of reproducing them faithfully, that house believed it was doing well to leave to the professors full liberty of treatment and change. Thus that admirable series of concertos for piano has been ornamented by Karl Reinecke with a series of joined notes, tied notes, *legato*,

molto legato, and *sempre legato* which are the very opposite of what the composer intended."

Abuse of the Pedal

Abuse of the pedal is mentioned as "one other plague in modern editions." Mozart never indicated the pedal and presumably made no abuse of it. Beethoven indicated it "in a complicated and cumbersome manner." A convenient indication is "ped," but Saint-Saëns finds this convenience no excuse for "inflicting it upon the author where his writing indicates the contrary." Words employed to indicate movements of compositions have changed in meaning. Formerly the *largo* was only an *adagio*; the old-time *presto* would scarcely be an *allegro* now. "The *andante*," says the composer, "which now indicates a slow movement, had at that time its original signification, meaning 'going.' It was an *allegro moderato*. Handel often wrote *andante allegro*. Through ignorance of the fact the beautiful air of Gluck, 'Divinities of the Styx,' is sung too slowly, and the air of *Thoas* in the 'Iphigenia in Tauris' equally so. Berlioz recollected having heard at the opera in his youth a much more animated execution of these works."

In olden times the notes were not defined as at present, and their value was merely approximate. Rameau's works are cited in example. "To conform to his intentions in the vocal part such music must not be interpreted literally. One must be governed by the declamation, and not by the written note indicating a long or short duration. The proof of this is to be seen when the violins and the voice are in unison—the way of writing them is different."

Stress is placed upon the importance of properly understanding the embellishment marks in the old writings. Individual taste may guide, but cannot always suffice.

"I will cite in connection with the subject of the *appoggiatura* the beautiful duo with chorus of the 'Passion According to St. Matthew,' and at the same time, I would point out the error committed in making of this passion a most grandiose performance with grand choral and instrumental masses," says Saint-Saëns. "One is deceived by its noble character, by its two choruses, by its two orchestras, and one forgets that it was destined for the little Church of St. Thomas in Leipsic, where Sebastian Bach was organist. While in certain cantatas that composer employed horns, trumpets, trombones and cymbals, for the 'Passion According to St. Matthew' he only used in each of the orchestras two flutes, two hautbois, changing from the ordinary hautbois to the hautbois d'amour and the hautbois of the chase—now the English horn; that is to say, hautbois pitched a third and a fifth lower. These two orchestras and these two choruses then certainly were reduced to a very small number of performers."

"In all very ancient music, from the time of Lully, one finds constantly a little cross marked over the notes. Often this certainly indicates a trill, but it seems difficult to take it always to mean such. However, perhaps fashion desired that trills should thus be made out of place. I have never been able to find an explanation of this sign, not even in the musical dictionary of J. J. Rousseau."

Some of Rameau's signs are unintelligible. With clavecinists the multiplicity of grace notes is extreme. Saint-Saëns finds "a curious sign which indicates that the right hand should arrive upon the keys a little after the left," and he comments that this shows "there was not then that frightful habit of playing one hand after the other as is often done nowadays."

Chopin's Directions

Coming to the modern epoch, due honor is to be given to Liszt for his improvements in the methods of music-writing. Then Chopin is taken up in an attack on "recent editions" which are "commencing to falsify" his works. Here are some of the remarks:

"Chopin detested the abuse of the pedal. He could not bear that through an ignorant employment of the pedal two different chords should be mixed in

tone together. Therefore, he has given indications with the greatest pains. Employing it where he has not indicated it must be avoided. But great skill is necessary thus to do without the pedal.

"In the new editions of the author no account of the author's indications whatever is observed. Thus in the 'Cradle Song,' where the author has indicated that the pedal be put on each measure and taken off in the middle of it, modern editions preserve the pedal throughout the entire measure, thus mixing up hopelessly the tonic with the dominant, which the composer was so careful to avoid.

"A question of the greatest importance in playing the music of Chopin is that of *tempo rubato*. That does not mean, as many think, that the time is to be dislocated. It means permitting great liberty to the singing part or melody of the composition, while the accompaniment keeps rigorous time. Mozart played in this way and he speaks of it in one of his letters and he describes it marvelously, only the term *tempo rubato* had not at that time been invented. This kind of playing, demanding complete independence of the two hands, is not within the ability of everybody. Therefore, to give the illusion of such effect, players dislocate the bass and destroy the rhythm of the bar. When to this disorder is joined the abuse of the pedal, there results that vicious execution which, passing muster, is generally accepted in the salons and often elsewhere."

The Tremolo

The abuse of the *tremolo* is discussed as still another "plague." A tired voice may be sometimes an excuse, but there is no excuse for the violinists and cellists. And then: "When one is strongly moved the voice is altered, and in moving situations the singer should make his voice vibrate. Formerly the German female singers sang with all their voice, without any vibration in the sound and without any reference to the situation; one would say they were clarinets. Now, one must vibrate all the time. I heard the 'Meistersingers' Quintet sung in Paris. It was dreadful and the composition incomprehensible. Not all singers, fortunately, have this defect, but it has taken possession of violinists and cello players. That was not the way Franck, the cello player and collaborator of Chopin, played, nor was it the way Sarasate, Sivori or Joachim played."

"I have written a concerto," adds Saint-Saëns, "the first and last movements of which are very passionate. They are separated by a movement of the greatest calm—a lake between two mountains. Those great violin players who do me the honor to play this piece do not understand the contrast and they vibrate on the lake just as they do on the mountains. Sarasate, for whom this concerto was written, was as calm on the lake as he was agitated on the mountains; nor did he fail on this account to produce always a great effect."

THOMAS NUNAN.

Musical Program at Re-dedication of Scranton Church

SCRANTON, PA., July 3.—In connection with the rededication of the newly constructed Washburn Street Presbyterian Church a special feature was the music program, given by the Crusaders' Singing Society, and directed by Edward Parry, a rising young teacher, who is building up a splendid reputation in local music circles.

A "Musical Night" was recently enjoyed by several hundred persons at the Bethania Welsh C. M. Church in this city, at which solos were given by Mrs. Henry Schoen, John Griffiths, Jay Highfield, Elsie Williams and Mr. A. Williams, and an address on sacred music was given by Rev. D. Wynne Reese.

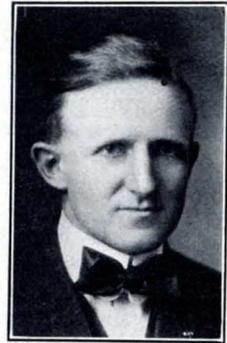
W. R. H.

Zandonai's "Francesca da Rimini" has now scored a success in Rome.

EVOLVES NEW ARM TECHNIQUE

Fingers and Wrists "Dummies" in Piano Scheme of Otto L. Fischer

One hot July day in the year 1900 a young American boy was anxiously pacing the gravel paths surrounding the Herrenhaus in the Grand Ducal Park in Weimar, Germany. From within the building, which consisted of but one huge room without windows, but entirely of glass on the side facing a garden, came strains of Chopin and Liszt. The young man was not interested in the music but rather in the moment when it should cease. At this moment he would advance boldly, knock and then—the noted



Otto L. Fischer

pianist, Ferruccio Busoni, would appear and the intruder would introduce himself. Anxious parents were waiting in a hotel in the city to hear the result.

It was favorable. The boy, Otto L. Fischer, was received into the flock of students of which Busoni was the shepherd, just as our MacDowell, fifteen years before had been received, not more than two blocks distant, by Liszt.

In the fifteen years which have elapsed the yearning for complete self-expression goaded Fischer on to ceaseless activity in mastering the essentials of technique and expression. He changed the entire system of his technique, casting aside all active finger and wrist action and made the arm the source of all energy with fingers and wrist in complete relaxation. Mr. Fischer has just written a new school of arm technique, a work consisting of exercises and a detailed description of the manner of their execution, according to the principle of relaxed weights viewed by one to whom fingers and wrists are mere "dummies," the arms pulling the strings. This has received much favorable comment.

Large Enrollment for Peabody Conservatory Summer Courses

BALTIMORE, July 1.—Frederick R. Huber, director of the Peabody Conservatory Summer School, announces a very large enrollment of pupils for the various courses. Students from many States have availed themselves of the opportunity of studying in the different branches or being coached in special work under the eminent instructors. Horatio Connell, the American baritone, who is the newcomer on the teaching staff, has had a large number of pupils assigned him. He will give the opening recital of the course of public recitals and lectures which are to take place weekly, beginning July 9. A course which seems to have been accepted with interest by many is that of Interpretation of Gregorian Chant, conducted by the Rev. Father Leo Manzetti. The classes in rhythmic gymnastics, conducted by Minna D. Hill and Hattie Holthaus, show that America is taking considerable interest in the ideas advanced by Dalcroze, the famous Swiss teacher of dancing.

Concerts of Henry Parsons

Henry Parsons, tenor, who is under the direction of the Musicians' Concert Management, has already been booked for a number of important appearances for next season and has many engagements for the summer. In view of the fact that Mr. Parsons made his first American appearance only last autumn after several years of operatic work in Italy his success is the more to be noted.

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