

## A NEW NOTE IN OUR PIANO MUSIC

Charles T. Griffes a Composer of Individuality Whose Writings Are Strong, Vital and Modern—A Discussion of His "Three Tone-Pictures" and "Fantasy Pieces"

IN its inquiry a month or so ago among a large group of prominent professional singers, MUSICAL AMERICA was able to find out what American concert songs had found favor, and could arrive at some statistical conclusion as to the composers whose vocal works were being most widely sung. Perhaps the casual observer of matters musical has not realized that only in the case of songs could this be done. I doubt whether a symposium on the ten favorite American piano compositions would bring replies from more than a half dozen prominent pianists. For our piano literature is not large.

Moreover, there has been a less ready response on the part of concert pianists to an appeal to play American compositions and this has doubtless had something to do with the rather limited production of piano music by the composers of the country. There is no reason for despair in the statement of this fact, for as Arthur Farwell has repeatedly stated in the columns of this journal, this is not an age of piano composition. In Germany, we have a Richard Strauss, a Max Reger, a Sigmund von Hausegger, giving us orchestral works and songs aplenty. Where are the composers of piano music in Germany today? To be sure Strauss as a youth did an admirable set of pieces, Op. 9, and an early Sonata, Op. 5; Reger has written several albums, "Aus meinem Tagebuch," "Bunte Blätter" and some big Variations, which Max Pauer played here a few years ago. But there is no first-rate genius devoting himself to the piano in that most musical of countries. Only among the contemporary French and Russian schools do we get new piano music that is of intrinsic merit. The trouble is, of course, that the composer of to-day hears things orchestrally, and nine out of ten times, writes them for the orchestra which gives him the greatest possible freedom for his imagination.

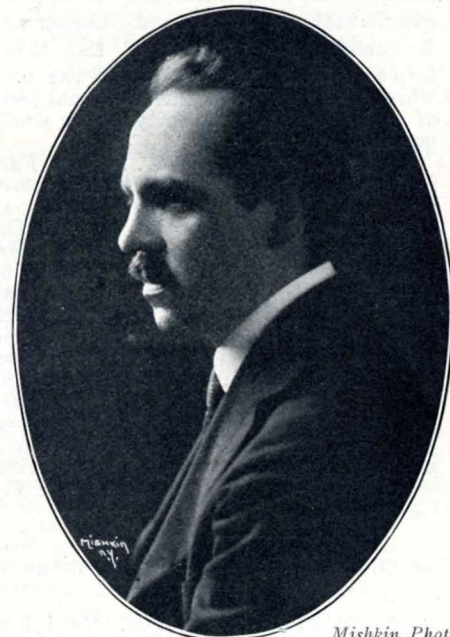
We, in America, need not bemoan our fate. We have had an Edward MacDowell, who has left us the important legacy of four noble sonatas, the "Tragic," "Eroica," "Norse" and "Keltic," and a treasury of individual shorter pieces; among the older men, still alive, we have Homer N. Bartlett, who has put to his credit a number of worthy piano works, and George Chadwick, with a limited output, including some excellent pieces. Henry Holden Huss has given us his Concerto in B Major, for piano and orchestra, a work which matches MacDowell's D Minor, in the opinion of many connoisseurs. Henry Hadley, Noble Kreider, F. Morris Class, Arne Oldberg, Charles Wakefield Cadman, Arthur Bergh—all of these men have contributed music for the piano that will stand the test. Yet their combined productions are but small compared with America's song output.

And so one welcomes a newcomer in the ranks of our composers for the piano. The composer we have in mind is Charles T. Griffes. He has labored conscientiously in America since his return from Europe and has hidden himself carefully from the light of publicity. Some eight years ago he published a set of songs for solo voice with piano accompaniment; but these did not bring him before the public. At present in charge of the music at the Hackley School at Tarrytown, N. Y., he gives himself to his scholastic duties, composing of course at such times as he finds available.

In the last few years, Leslie Hodgson, the gifted American pianist, has been acquainting those music-lovers who attend his recitals with Mr. Griffes's music. Mr. Hodgson has believed in this man's talent and his belief was corroborated last winter when no less an authority than Ferruccio Busoni waxed enthusiastic over Mr. Griffes's compositions. Mr. Busoni saw their merit and

aided the composer in bringing them to the attention of one of this country's large music publishers, with the result that they are now to be had through the house of G. Schirmer, New York.

Idle indeed were it to attempt here to describe the pieces individually and in detail. Such a procedure would neither aid the interested lover of new music nor assist the composer in what must of necessity be an uphill road to recognition. The pieces are not obvious; they



Mishkin Photo

Charles T. Griffes, a New Voice in American Piano Music

are subtle and there will always be plenty of opposition to the utterance of a man who refuses to follow beaten paths. I shall content myself therefore with suggesting what seem to me some of the general characteristics of Mr. Griffes's two sets of piano pieces, "Three Tone-Pictures," Op. 5, and "Fantasy Pieces," Op. 6.\*

First let me warn those persons for whom music ended with Beethoven that this composer is a modern—a full-fledged one! He has no desire to write fluent, pretty pieces; he is interested in vital modern music. And I know few native creative musicians who can compare with him for proficiency in doing so. Whether you take "The Lake at Evening," with its reiterated rhythmic figure, the effect of which is gripping in spite of the repressed character of the composition; his "The Vale of Dreams" with its swaying thirds, component parts of a very engaging secondary harmonic scheme; his "The Night Winds," in which he has pictured completely Edgar Allan Poe's "terror of the lone lake," when "the night had thrown her pall" and "the mystic wind went by," you will find musical thoughts that strike you with their individuality. There is no mistaking their physiognomy. You may say "modern French," or you may not; if you do, you declare yourself a narrow musical spirit, unwilling to allow a contemporary musician to employ in his writing a vocabu-

\*THREE TONE-PICTURES, "THE LAKE AT EVENING," "THE VALE OF DREAMS," "THE NIGHT WINDS." For the Piano. By Charles T. Griffes, Op. 5. Price, 50, 60 and 75 cents each. FANTASY PIECES, "BACAROLLE," "NOTTURNO," "SCHERZO." For the Piano. By Charles T. Griffes, Op. 6. Price \$1 each. Published by G. Schirmer, New York and London.

lary which, to be sure, has been made familiar by the efforts of Debussy, Ravel and Florent Schmitt, but which in reality belongs to all the musical world.

I have gotten the keenest pleasure in studying these pieces from the viewpoint of their intrinsic musical values. Mr. Griffes is himself perhaps too close to them to realize what a tremendous freedom of expression he has gained since his songs, published, as I have noted before, nearly a decade ago. Only one shock have I experienced and that was in learning that he was a pupil in composition of the genial composer of "Hänsel and Gretel" and "Königskinder," Engelbert Humperdinck. It was akin to being informed, as I have been, that John A. Carpenter who no longer recognizes the existence of diatonics, had worked in composition under Sir Edward Elgar. Griffes and Herr Humperdinck, like Carpenter and Sir Edward, are at opposite poles in musical thought. It is refreshing to observe the freedom which an American, still in his younger years, can command in his creative work.

Barcarolle, Notturmo and Scherzo are the titles of the "Fantasy Pieces." I should say that their scope is somewhat larger than that of the "Tone-Pictures." Mr. Griffes need never fear being charged with writing a barcarolle that sounds like somebody's else essay in this form. His is the only one I know that is not related by blood to some other composer's! When Leslie Hodgson played this composition in New York last year I found it engaging from a single hearing. Now that I have made myself familiar with it, I must add that it is one of the most inspiring pieces I know. The climax lifts one up, while the careful development of the theme, its subtle harmonization, its treatment

in canon and a host of other ways makes one confident that its composer knows well what he is about. Percy Grainger finds this music very American. There is considerable discussion as to what is American in music and what is not. I am sure I do not know. But there is a quality in this Barcarolle—I should like to call it "punch"—that suggests the live character of our country and it must be that that has made Mr. Grainger find it typical of this land, which he has studied carefully in the time he has been here.

The piece is inscribed to Gottfried Galston, the German pianist, with whom Mr. Griffes studied when he was in Berlin.

Frankly the Notturmo interests me less, though it is very beautiful impressionism, based on Verlaine's exquisite "L'étang reflète." But the Scherzo! Here is music of muscle and sinew; it is a veritable bacchanal. Mr. Griffes scores in this from the rhythmic side as in none of the other pieces. The whole plan seems to build up to the tremendous clashing of empty chords. Thematically very strong, it is a triumphant achievement. One sees all kinds of fantastic things dancing and whirling before one. Never once does the impression vary; it is tense from the opening measure to the end.

Let my words have failed to convey it, I wish to make clear that these six Griffes compositions are for the concert-pianist, and for him only. They are difficult, technically as well as musically, and must be understood thoroughly before they are attempted for performance. They are a notable addition to our piano literature, for in them Mr. Griffes has combined the gift of having something to say with the ability to write it splendidly for the piano.

A. WALTER KRAMER.

## MERLE ALCOCK PLEASES SAN ANTONIO AUDIENCE

Contralto's Vocal Charm and Interpretative Ability Disclosed in Diversity of Selections

SAN ANTONIO, TEX., Nov. 21.—The many music-lovers who were looking forward to the coming of Merle Alcock, the New York contralto, were rewarded with an evening of rare pleasure. The program seemed altogether too short, although in number of songs it was not, but the beauty of Mrs. Alcock's voice charms one so that the minutes fly by all too fast. Nor is it the sweetness and power of her voice alone, which attracts, but her interpretations, which set forth the real meaning of the song with much power of expression. Purity of enunciation is one of her important assets.

The program opened with a group of German songs by Brahms. The second group, in English, consisted of "Peace," Hawley; "How Many Thousand Years Ago," Huhn; "Only of Thee and Me," Bauer, and "The Unremembered," Class. Two arias from Verdi showed her splendid dramatic power and a seemingly unlimited amount of reserve force. The program concluded with a lighter group of English songs, of which "Dancing on the Hilltops" had to be repeated. The last number, "Flower Rain," by Loud, made a fitting close. Mrs. Alcock added several encores.

Oscar J. Fox, under whose management Mrs. Alcock appeared, was also her accompanist. His work was skillful and sympathetic. C. D. M.

## Breathes Spirit of Self-Reliant Americanism

(Redfern Mason in the San Francisco "Examiner")

The Special Fall Issue of MUSICAL AMERICA is one of the most notable performances of musical journalism I have ever seen. There is as much in it as one of the old three-volume novels of

the circulating library variety. If I wanted a bird's-eye view of the condition of music in these United States in the month of October, 1915, it is to this number of MUSICAL AMERICA that I should turn. From Maine to California, from New York to Florida, the whole country is covered. And the hopeful feature of the publication is that it breathes from cover to cover a spirit of self-reliant Americanism.

## FINE PLAYING BY MALKIN

'Cellist the Soloist with Boston Orchestra in Cambridge

BOSTON, Nov. 16.—The Boston Symphony Orchestra, Dr. Karl Muck, conductor, gave the second of the annual series of symphony concerts in Cambridge at Sanders Theater, Nov. 11. Josef Malkin, 'cellist, was soloist, playing Lalo's Concerto. The orchestral numbers were Brahms's E Minor Symphony, Berlioz's "Carnaval Romain" Overture and the first "L'Arlésienne" Suite of Bizet.

The music was admirably played, Mr. Malkin's performance of the Lalo Concerto making the occasion especially notable. He has all the qualities essential for the worthy interpretation of this concerto—a polished technique, a tone that is big and commanding, or as soft and as smooth as silk, and the taste of a musician born as well as made. He was roundly applauded and recalled after his performance. As usual, the theater was filled, and the concert greatly enjoyed by music-lovers of Harvard and of Cambridge.

Fritz Malata of Cologne is this year's winner of the Mendelssohn Prize.

CHARLES GILBERT  
**SPROSS**  
 PIANIST-ACCOMPANIST  
 COMPOSER  
 Address: 38 W. 123th Street, NEW YORK

**VICTOR HARRIS**  
 TEACHER OF SINGING  
 in all its branches  
 THE BEAUFORT 140 West 57th Street  
 Telephone, 3053 Columbus

**LILA ROBESON**  
 CONTRALTO METROPOLITAN OPERA COMPANY  
 CONCERT Address c/o Metropolitan Opera Co. RECITAL

**Granberry Piano School** George Folsom Granberry, Director  
 Instruction in All Grades  
 Interpretation. Normal Methods. The Faelten System. Address: Carnegie Hall, New York

**JULIA CLAUSSEN** Mezzo Soprano  
 Available Festivals, Concerts, Entire Season 1915-1916. Exclusive Management: ALMA VOEDISCH, 1425 Broadway, New York