

GEORGES ENESCO: THE MUSICIAN AND THE MAN

Personal Recollections of the Roumanian Violinist and Composer whose Work is One of the Glories of Present-day Musical Paris.—His Remarkable Memory as a Pianist

By MINNIE TRACEY

IT was MUSICAL AMERICA, always watching for the advent of individuality in music or the birth of new musical genius, which first opened its pages, some five years ago, to my sketch of Jean Sibelius, after my Scandinavian concert tours, which had made me an enthusiastic admirer of his compositions, and proud to be known as one of the first interpreters of his remarkably poetic *lieder* on the Continent. At that time the name of Sibelius was little known outside of Scandinavia, and had just begun to be seen on programs in Berlin, through the personal friendship and admiration of the great pianist, Busoni, who did so much to give an opening to young geniuses or budding composers, in the orchestral concerts he directed in Berlin. And it is MUSICAL AMERICA, which now opens its columns to some of my souvenirs of that other genius, the Roumanian, Georges Enesco.

First, I want my readers to see Enesco, the man. Let me, then, draw a word picture of him, as I know him and have seen him for years, on his constantly upward path to fame and budding glory, a path opened to him by his own talent, perseverance and constant work, unaided by any advertising of himself or individual influential connections.

Enesco stands, tall and powerful, above the average height of men, broad-shouldered and supple of body, crowned with a beautifully formed head, and noble face, lit by deeply expressive brown eyes, luminous and brilliant in conversation when some thought or word awakens and holds his interest; far away, indifferent, slumberous, half-closed, when people or things do not interest him. He has a strange faculty of detaching himself completely from uninteresting people or surroundings, and letting his fancy float to some higher sphere of purer ideality. A wonderfully abundant mass of black hair crowns this splendid head, with its strange eyes, and poetical, half sensual mouth, and clear-cut cameo-like features—the head of a young genius, not unlike the younger Beethoven. His advent in the most crowded hall seems to attract all eyes like a lodestone, although the owner of the fine mind hidden behind this powerful brow passes quietly on, often absorbed in his thoughts, and all unconscious of any interest his presence may have awakened.

A True Friend

As a friend, none truer or better could be found. He is always ready to admire the talent of a fellow artist or composer, or lend a helping hand to one less fortunate than himself, and his door is never shut to one asking advice or aid. Simple in his taste, his apartment in the Rue de Clichy is comfortable, but severe, that of a lonely man absorbed in his work, and his compositions, his studies and his lessons. For he is a master professor of his beloved instrument, the violin, and to have assisted at some of his lessons, as has often been my good fortune, is a revelation of which a real lesson means—not "technique" alone, but through that the birth of the inner poetry buried in the intricacies of every great composition.

Enesco's musical memory is fabulous; as a pianist, his gifts are almost as great



Georges Enesco, the Famous Roumanian Composer

as on the violin and I have heard him accompany from memory the Brahms, Beethoven, Mozart and Max Bruch concertos for the violin for some fellow artist or pupil, and whole acts falling from his finger-tips from "Parsifal," "Tristan" or the "Meistersinger," have held under their charm, almost breathless, small gatherings of those who deeply love music.

I have now in memory a vivid picture of Enesco at the grand piano in my salon in Paris, with his strong profile outlined against a silken curtain, sun-filtered, playing the Grail music of "Parsifal" so divinely, that it almost seemed supernatural to his breathless listeners. Or I have heard his reading for the first time the manuscript of the beautiful Fifth Sonata of the Swedish composer, Emile Sjögren, for it was I who had the great pleasure of making these two great men known to each other in Paris. Sjögren had dedicated this sonata to Georges Enesco. Both Sjögren and the Hungarian composer, Emanuel Moor, met Enesco at my home in Paris, and Enesco read with Moor his last Violin Concerto. Enesco seemed afterward to take more pleasure in playing the delicate and poetical composition of the Swede, Sjögren, than the stronger and more strenuous work of Moor.

Genius for the Violin

Enesco's genius makes the violin, his chosen instrument, a wonderful medium

him so. This has sometimes almost made him angry with me, as he answered, "But, dear friend, the violin is my very own instrument—more than ought else." In this, dear Enesco, must I differ with you!

The first proof of Enesco's fine character is the friendship and admiration he has awakened among all the great virtuosi of to-day, and nothing could be more amusing and interesting than to see and hear a friendly discussion between Enesco and Jacques Thibaut at a luncheon table, each criticising the other's interpretation of a Mozart concerto, ending with the exclamation of the violinist, Thibaut, "Tout de même, mon vieux, vous étiez tout simplement épatant!" ("All the same, old fellow, you were simply splendid.")

Before Fame Came

To end this inadequate pen sketch of Enesco, I would like to add two short personal incidents to show Enesco, the man, before he became so famous, and while he was living sparingly on the purse given him by Roumania's lovely poet-queen, Elizabeth ("Carmen Sylva"). To her Enesco has always given the deepest devotion and gratitude, as she first discovered his genius and sent him to Paris to study with Marsick at the Paris Conservatory of Music. Enesco was often heard in private musicales in Paris, appearing for a modest fee, and I had the great pleasure of securing him an engagement to play in the same soirée in which I sang, at the house of a famous surgeon of Paris, an art patron and himself a composer in his moments of leisure. This was Dr. Gustave Richelot. Enesco's success was so great that each season following he played at Dr. Richelot's soirées and does so still. Although his fee is now six times what he then asked, he has never been willing to accept one cent more, as he says, "For my friends my price does not increase with my fame."

How He Remembered a Friend

Four years ago I sang at the Wagner Festival in Buda-Pesth, and while there received a telegram from an impresario in Bucharest asking me to go there for a concert. But the fee was unacceptable and I telegraphed my price and said I would postpone my return to Paris, awaiting his decision. No answer coming, I left for Paris, and on my arrival at my home there I found a telegram forwarded from Buda-Pesth accepting my conditions for the Bucharest Festival, too late, alas, to go there. I put the telegram away with my other business papers, with a sigh of deep regret, as I had always wanted to sing in Bucharest. In the spring of the same year, at a luncheon party given for me on the Champs Elysées in Paris, I met Mr. Dall'Orso, the Chamberlain of Queen Elizabeth of Roumania, a good friend of mine, who greeted me with the exclamation, "You goose, for a clever woman, why, in Heaven's name, didn't you come and sing in Bucharest, when Enesco wanted you. You would have appeared not in one, but four concerts with orchestra directed by him before the Queen, the court and all Bucharest, and when Enesco heard the impresario could not afford your fee, he guaranteed the surplus out of his own pocket, in remembrance of what you had done to help him in Paris a few years ago."

I had met Enesco constantly in all those months, but no word of his had ever allowed me even to divine this charming act of a fine man, as well as a noble soul truly worthy of the name—Great Artist!



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