

AT LUNCHEON WITH PIERRE MONTEUX

The Distinguished French Conductor States His Point of View and Displays a Charming and Generous Personality

"YOU see," said Pierre Monteux, the new French conductor at the Metropolitan, as we sat together at lunch at Delmonico's, and he drew a picture of his wife and child from his pocket to show me, "it was this way. I was called from the front line trenches, where I had been for two years, by the Minister, who sent me to this country in reply to a request for a French conductor for the Russian Ballet. You may remember I conducted it. Then, you know, I conducted the concerts of the Civic Orchestra and now I am with the Metropolitan. In some respects, without in any way desiring to abrogate the rights of a critic to his opinion, I think I have not been justly criticized in MUSICAL AMERICA."

"When I came over to conduct the Russian Ballet, the first thing they asked me to conduct was Strauss's 'Till Eulenspiegel.' Now when Strauss came to Paris he expressed himself very ungenerously about me and my work," and here Pierre Monteux pressed his hand to his heart. "To ask me, a Frenchman, who had just come out of the trenches, to conduct for his first performance the work of a German who was sending the money he was making in this country to furnish the powder that was shooting down my countrymen whom I had left in the trenches, so many of whom had died, while I had fortunately escaped, was asking too much of a man. Oh, yes, to conduct the works of the great masters of the past, whether they were French, or German, or Italian, that I would do. But it was too much to ask me to conduct Richard Strauss, under the circumstances. For that, you may remember, I was adversely criticized in MUSICAL AMERICA."

In all this Monteux spoke with a courtesy which was typical of the highly cultured, polite Frenchman, who, even when he disagrees with you, will do so with that quality which has always distinguished the French people, to wit, exquisite good manners and their equally exquisite good taste. While he was talking, too, Monteux brought out a whole package of photographs. I noticed they were mostly of children. This gives one an idea of the type of man. Finally he found the one he wanted. It was one of his eldest son, a young man of eighteen. Monteux himself has a very youthful appearance, and scarcely looks his age, which is, I believe, forty-two, to be exact.

"Another thing," said Monteux, "for which I have been criticized was with regard to the Civic Orchestra, that I had not attempted to give any composition by an American composer. There again I think, when you hear my side of the story, you will agree with me that the charge was not properly made. I was suddenly called upon by Mr. Otto Kahn, who is *très artiste*, you know, a man not only interested in music but exceedingly artistic himself, to form and rehearse an orchestra with ten days' notice. This orchestra I made up largely from the Metropolitan, with some additions. What could I do, with the limited time at my disposal? I could only take up compositions with which they were already fairly acquainted. And with regard to compositions by an American, I did make an effort. I wrote to several, but I received no satisfaction whatever. Had time and opportunity permitted I should have been only too happy to present a worthy composition by an American."

"Yet, you know I was severely criticized not only in MUSICAL AMERICA but in other papers for not having done so."

"Finally comes the question of the French opera. And I suppose I shall be again criticized for the manner in which I am conducting. In the first place, permit me to give you my point of view. I am here, as I understand it, to conduct French opera. What does that mean? Surely it means that I shall, to the best of my ability, give French opera in the French style, with the French atmosphere, and as it is done in Paris."

Here, to give Monsieur Monteux a chance to get along with his lunch, I interposed and said I realized that not only the critics but the public, accustomed to the virile and vital manner of Toscanini, of Polacco, of Hertz in German opera,

and later of Bodanzky, would perhaps find a Frenchman's conducting somewhat tame in comparison.

"That is all very good," retorted Monteux, "but remember that just as I would not expect the Italians and Germans to conduct Italian and German music in the French style, so it is not right to expect a French conductor to conduct French opera in the Italian or

others there was Delaunoy, who, of course, knows the French style, and Rothier the same. Well, of course, Rothier not only knows the style, but is an artist of the first rank, *du premier rang!* Mme. Farrar speaks French excellently. Her diction is fine. She has sung in Paris, you know. Of the Americans, while Mr. Chalmers does not speak French what we call fluently,

conductors. Incidentally, too, he expressed his admiration for Mme. Matzenauer.

Then he got to talking about his experiences in the trenches, and said:

"Do you know that in the twenty-five months that I was in the *premier ligne*, that is the first line of trenches, I did not touch a cigarette or a glass of wine?"

That perhaps was not so hard as it would have been to others, for Monteux neither smokes nor drinks. That is, he has already acquired the mild cocktail habit before a lunch or a meal, but he smokes not at all and drinks next to nothing.

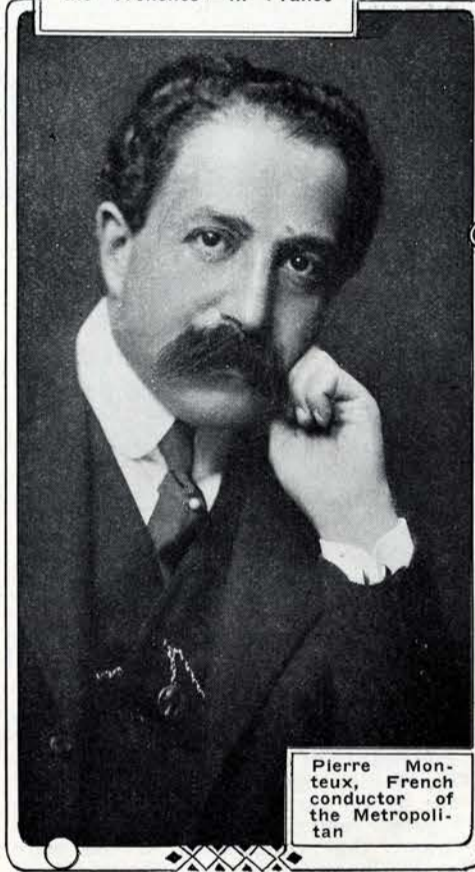
Then we returned to the subject of the Civic Orchestra concerts, when Monteux declared that he would not have cared so much for the criticism to which he had been subjected, but appearing as it did



Pierre Monteux's "Band of the Trenches" in France



Jean Monteux, son of the conductor



Pierre Monteux, French conductor of the Metropolitan

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M. Monteux's wife and their daughter, Denise



Denise Monteux at home in France

German style. Each has its style. Each has its defined character. With the operas that are already, as you might say, 'fixed' in the repertory, such as 'Carmen,' I cannot do anything. Perhaps I may be able to do a little with 'Thaïs,' but I expect to show what I stand for and what the French opera stands for when 'Marouf' is produced. And, by the bye, I think Mme. Alda, who, you know, has a leading rôle in that opera, will score a success. She has a fine voice and great talent."

"I trust," continued Monteux, "that in the course of time many of those who now criticize me will come round to my point of view, for, to tell you the truth, French opera, while it has often been given in this country, has not always been given in the French style. Many of the artists have not given the correct interpretation. They were Italians or Germans or Spaniards or Americans, who sang it, may be well, who gave their view. But it was not the French view."

"I did what I could with the production of 'Faust.' I must frankly admit that both the orchestra and the artists gave me every possible assistance. As for Mme. Farrar, *elle est très musicienne*. She is a fine musician, as well as a fine artist. Then, you know, of the

yet his French in the opera was fine and his diction splendid. And with regard to Mr. Whitehill, who will appear later, *il est tout à fait précieux*. He has the French style thoroughly. Of course, he also made a great success in Paris. He understands the French idea, the French taste, the French atmosphere. Indeed, he is a splendid artist."

Here I intervened, to again give Monteux a chance to eat something, and so asked him whether he did not find that as a rule the French spoken by Italians was rather heavy and hard to understand.

"Not so with Caruso," replied Monsieur Monteux. "Caruso's French is excellent, if you will follow him carefully."

"And Signor Gatti-Casazza?" I asked. "Oh!" replied Monteux as he kissed his fingers, "*Il est grand Seigneur!* a great gentleman!"

With respect to the orchestra, Monsieur Monteux said that he had been at first a little diffident how they would meet him, because such a large number of them were Germans, and yet, he said, he had received the finest treatment, great courtesy from the members. He appreciated it very much. And so, in the course of conversation, touching upon other artists, he had a splendid word of appreciation for Papi, one of the Italian

in a musical paper like MUSICAL AMERICA, which went all over the world and was read by musical people, he had felt it.

"Do you know," said he, "that the orchestra got up a document which they all signed, not only expressing their confidence in me but expressing their disapproval of what had appeared in MUSICAL AMERICA with regard to my conducting, especially as to the manner in which I followed the singers?"

And then, when I expressed my willingness to print the whole thing, with that kindly smile which accompanies about everything Monteux does, he said:

"Oh, no! The matter is passed. Let it go. Simply I carry it next to my heart as a consolation to me that the musicians are with me, even if the critics are sometimes not."

Noticing a pocket book which I have, which had been presented to me by one of the artists, he pulled out books from the various pockets of his coat and vest. One had been given him by the orchestra in Budapest, another by the orchestra in London, another by the orchestra in Paris, another by the orchestra of the Ballet Russe, and still another by the orchestra in Dieppe. He carries all these souvenirs, with the various photographs of his children and wife, about on his person.

Altogether, Mr. Monteux impressed me as a man of culture, of unquestioned musical ability, who, however, is distinctly French, and of that highly polished charming and gracious style that suggests the *ancienne noblesse*, the old