

CHARLIE CHAPLIN PLEADS FOR MORE FUN IN MUSIC

[EDITOR'S NOTE: With the exception of the President of the United States and Theodore Roosevelt, Charlie Chaplin is probably the best known man in the United States. They say he receives \$500,000 a year for his antics on the screen. Some time ago there appeared in MUSICAL AMERICA an article stating that Mr. Chaplin, in his more serious moments, was a discriminating music-lover, conversant with the classics and able to talk intelligently about the latest achievements of Schönberg and Stravinsky. This led to an invitation that he tell the readers of MUSICAL AMERICA what he thinks about music.]

Movie Comedian Thinks Modern-Day Composer Has Lost a Trick by Neglecting the Comic Element—He Explains Why He Prefers the Russian School of Composition—How He Studied the "Carmen" of Gay and Zenatello Before He Dared Burlesque It for the Screen

Written for "Musical America"
By CHARLES CHAPLIN

I HAVE often wondered why so many persons appeared interested in my musical tastes, assuming apparently, that a so-called knockabout comedian must necessarily have a musical streak in him somewhere.

What some folk refer to as "the Chaplin shuffle" has been set to various different sorts of music, of course, though I am in no way responsible for that. A grave and reverend seigneur of the sounding board has been injecting what he calls the Chaplin *motif* into French opera, according to my letters from home. It is introduced with bits of sandpaper and finished with a crash of drums and cymbals. That last, I am informed, is where I am supposed to have fallen downstairs.

Well, all these matters aside, I am a natural born lover of music. My brother will tell you that when we were kids I organized a band that was known as the Hammersmith Hornpipers and we used to pick up quite a bit of money from persons who were anxious to have us leave their premises.

Seriously I have been a lover of music ever since I could toddle. While ignorant of the names of many compositions that appealed to my sense of rhythm and made me shuffle my feet or beat time with my hands, I could always tell whether they were highbrow or lowbrow offerings and I'm not pretending when I say that really good music is my choice.

When I say really good music I don't mean the sort that is so tremendously technical as to be incomprehensible to the lay mind. I'm ready to listen when any orchestra strikes up the Scherzo, Gavotte, Mazurka, Czardas or any other dance stuff that is easy to follow because, first of all, it was danced by the old country folk—the dances having existed before the musicians found out how to express them in terms of sound.

The Clown Neglected in Music

As I figure it out, the rhythm in these musical forms expresses various moods, but up to the present time I do not believe the eccentricities of the clown have found adequate expression in the creations of the composer.

The keynote of funny business is the incongruous, the unexpected, the violently contrasting. The inability of the composer to recognize this most likely accounts for the notable lack of funny music. There is musical treatment for the same widely variant themes as those I have dealt with in pictures in "The Vagabond," "The Immigrant" and "Easy Street," for example. There is always a touch of the dolorous, doleful, fearsome in both the comedy of music and pictures. It is again contrast, contrast, contrast, fitful and violent.

I became so interested in this queer void in the cosmos of the musical composer that some years ago I made a regular study of the causes. I found that while some of the great Russian composers like Glazounoff, Rimsky-Korsakoff and Tschaiakowsky had written wonderful ballet and dance music which has been interpreted by such dancers as Gertrude Hoffman, Pavlowa, St. Denis, Mordkin and others, not one of them had seen the big, wide field of endeavor that is open for the first creator of funny music.

Just think what marvels of comicality these great creative artists might have put over had they, for instance, taken the trouble to study the technique of comicality! I can't see why a fellow shouldn't be as funny with a fiddle as another with a length of sausage or a slapstick. It's all in the way you make your public see you. You've got to



—Photos © Mutual Film Corp.

Charlie Chaplin, World-Famous Film Comedian, Who Confesses to an Ardent Enthusiasm Over Music

create their atmosphere for them and after a few breaths of it, they'll laugh their heads off.

As rhythm is the basis of music, in the vagaries of rhythm and tempo lies the basis of musical humor. I recall that some years ago at the wedding of a friend of mine, the organist played "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," *con amore*, as the musicians say, with strange and weird harmonies, but he failed to recognize the familiar air. It sounded to him like the *Vorspiel* of "Lohengrin."

As the composer is to the librettist, so is the dancer to the composer. Gilbert has his Sullivan, Glazounoff his Pavlowa. Why not the screen artist his interpreter?

A learned musician tells me that my "shuffle," "glide" and other peculiarities require a special orchestration, to wit, violin, oboe, bassoon, bass drum and cymbals. He says that the *pizzicato* of the violin, the cackination of the oboe, the guffaw of the bassoon, with the bass drum and cymbals for heavier business, will do the job when properly concatenated. Some day I'm going to call on this genius for a demonstration of his theory and perhaps I shall laugh. That's something I haven't done for years. At all events, this idea will bear investigation and I'm going into it thoroughly.

His Old Music Teacher

Above everything music means to me an expression of mood and character. The more marked the characteristics of rhythm and melody the stronger the appeal. Perhaps I might have been a great violinist, instead of a buffoon, had my old teacher possessed a sense of humor. I remember this old chap very well. He was my *bête noire*. Remember, I was born in France and know the language. When I say *bête noire* I know what I am talking about. This chap's name was Signor Suino and he had a big, bushy

beard, with long wagging eyebrows. He could play the violin to beat the band. I couldn't appreciate genius at that age, however, and surreptitiously Englished his name into Mr. Pig.

The old chap used to crack me on the head with his bow when I made mistakes. Instead of practising my scales and Pleyel studies, I devoted diligent hours

LOS ANGELES CLUB TO AID OUR COMPOSERS

James W. Pierce Evolves Plan to Assist "Unknown" Natives and Produce Works

LOS ANGELES, July 2.—James W. Pierce has evolved an American Composers' Club idea and he and others are doing their best to make the organization useful in giving a hearing to the works of native and naturalized composers. The features of the club as outlined by Mr. Pierce are: Only those who compose a good grade of music are eligible; meetings are held monthly, at which the works of members are performed; a directory is promised each year, listing the members; also a quarterly bulletin mentioning the works of members; occasional cash prizes will be offered by the club and works of especial merit will be recommended to publishers; all possible assistance will be given the unknown composer in marketing his wares.

In a personal letter to the Los Angeles representative of MUSICAL AMERICA Mr. Pierce (who is the president of the club, Mrs. R. E. Williams being secretary) states that while works having a popular strain may creep in, it is the purpose to weed out such compositions and gradually raise the requirements. His idea

to producing all sorts of imitations of animals, pigs grunting, cocks crowing, hens announcing breakfast, fat men snoring, as well as *pianissimo* touches on the strings that made noises like a swarm of mosquitos. I've had my mother sitting in the dusk slapping herself all over with the idea that the mosquitos were eating her up, when, as a matter of fact, there wasn't one within a mile. Mother just heard the skeeters and slapped herself on principle.

An Operatic Venture

Once I was discovered while engaged in this delectable occupation and my musical education terminated right there. About that same time I had an insane ambition to sing *Koko* in "The Mikado," but my violations of the traditions of this masterpiece did not meet with the approval of the stage director. In spite of my failure to become a Gilbert and Sullivan star I have always considered "The Mikado" the greatest comic opera ever written. *Per contra*, I regard "Carmen" as the greatest serious opera ever composed.

With Apologies to Gay and Zenatello

It may seem strange to some people, but it is none the less true, that one is best able to burlesque that which he most understands and appreciates. It is a fact, too, that when I have the opportunity to listen to some really high class music I do so with the religious fervor of a devotee and often become so absorbed in the music that I am oblivious of my surroundings. Before starting on my version of "Carmen" I made a trip of several hundred miles to see Maria Gay and Zenatello in the production. What I got from the trip made the burlesque "go across." I'm a firm believer in going to the fountain head for inspiration.

I am strong for the Russian school of musical composition. I'm crazy about all those monickers that end in "sky" and "off." They are a wild-eyed lot and that's the way their music strikes me. It's a free milling sort of product and when I listen to Tschaiakowsky, for instance, I am always reminded of a herd of wild animals making for the open country pursued by enemies.

These Russians give full vent to their emotions. They say that the Russian or Polish composer lacks reserve. I don't care much about that. What I like about him is that he is able to let himself go and some of these so-called modern technicians travel all the time with a checkrein under their chins.

Well, I've written more than I intended to write—more than any layman has a right to write about a subject he knows so little of—but my plea is that I love music and am invariably moved to enthusiasm in discussing it.

And I shall not give up the idea that some of these days there will be really and truly funny music. When that happens I'll get out the first line of Chaplin musical comedies. There will be something new under the sun.

is that the fact that a composer has not made a name for himself should not militate against his works, providing they are worthy of being placed beside those of well-known composers. This culling-out process will call for a certain iron-handed discrimination that will be the crucial point of the organization. If this can be done gently and thoroughly, then the publishers will owe a debt of gratitude to the club for its preliminary threshing-out process and for presenting for publication only such works as have a show of success in their various fields.

At a recent meeting of the club, compositions were presented by the following persons: Umberto Sistarelli, Mrs. R. E. Williams, Annie W. Wright, Frances B. Hamblin and Earl Fraser of Santa Ana. In addition, there was an address by N. L. Ridderhof on "The Materials Used in Musical Composition."

Mr. Pierce has plenty of enthusiasm for his plan of extending the Composers' Club and he hopes to have several hundred members this fall from a wide extent of territory.

W. F. G.

Washington Quartet Gives First of Series of Concerts for Army Men

WASHINGTON, D. C., July 5.—The National Quartet recently offered an appreciated program before the Sixth Regimental Engineers, U. S. A., encamped at University Park. This was the first of a series of musical entertainments at the camp.

W. H.