

Pupils, Prodigies and His American Visit, as Viewed by Auer

Venerable Celebrated Russian Violinist and Pedagogue Comes to Our Shores When War Prevents His Friends and Pupils from Visiting Him Abroad—Treating Every Pupil Individually, According to Latter's Natural Aptitude, This Master's Only Pedagogical Secret—Deplores Prejudice Shown to Prodigies—Believes Russia's Modern Composer's Guarantee Country's Musical Future—To Remain for Present in New York Teaching Special Pupils

THE war has thrown many a significant personality on our shores, but rarely one so interesting as the eminent Russian violinist and teacher, Professor Leopold Auer of Petrograd. Time has not passed unnoticed over the distinguished artist since the writer of these lines heard him play the Tchaikowsky Concerto in the Berlin Philharmonic for the first time in the year 1896. Though being perforce more venerable to-day, he still resembles the celebrated virtuoso of yore in more than one respect. Nothing but death could ever make an impression on the compelling temperament or the indomitable personality of this unique artist who holds the record of having been the Imperial Court Violinist of three Russian Czars: Alexander II, Alexander III, and the lately dethroned Nicholas II. The mental elasticity of the master, who speaks English, French, German and Russian with equal facility, is remarkable. He evinces an interest and understanding for any topic that can be broached.

Prof. Auer, who arrived on the "Bergensfjord" at an Atlantic port on Monday of last week was for forty years the head of the violin department of the Petrograd Conservatory. This institute was founded by none other than Anton Rubinstein. And it was on Rubinstein's initiative that our most recent distinguished guest, Prof. Auer, was called to the Petrograd Conservatory to replace the renowned Wieniawski.

In Russia When Revolution Came

Auer remained in Russia for the first three years of the war, that is, until the outbreak of the Revolution. And then it was only through the personal intervention of Miliukoff, the first Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs after the Revolu-

tion, that Prof. Auer was granted a special diplomatic passport to leave the scenes of sanguinary strife for the Scandinavian countries. There, in Christiania, he spent the summer surrounded by many of his devoted pupils, repeatedly concertizing with Mme. Wanda Stein, one of Russia's foremost pianists, throughout the three Scandinavian countries, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. But when then he decided to return to Petrograd in the fall, as he had been in the habit of doing ever since the outbreak of the war, he received word that in view of the great political disturbances in Russia the Petrograd Conservatory would not be reopened for the present.

"It was then," says Prof. Auer, "that I decided to live up to the Mohammedan proverb of going to the mountain which could not come to me. For many years friends and pupils had urged me to pay America a visit. But I had ever found such a trip dispensable, inasmuch as my friends and pupils invariably made it a point to come to me in Europe. But now, as Americans were prevented from coming to Europe, I thought it was my turn to come to the 'mountain,' recte, America."

When asked whether he attributed his remarkable success as a teacher to his successes with his original pupils which might have tended subsequently to attract other especially talented pupils, or whether he instructed according to some particular method which he had found especially efficient, Prof. Auer laughed outright.

His Only Pedagogical Secret

"Yes, yes, I know," he exclaimed. "Many, even specialists in violin pedagogy, think that I owe my results to some secret of teaching. Well, my only secret is that I always make it a point to study every one of my pupils and never attempt to interfere with the course for which he or she seems to be predestined. In other words, I treat every pupil individually,



Photo by Bain News Service

Professor Leopold Auer, the Celebrated Russian Violinist and Pedagogue, Who Arrived Last Week in America. (Photographed Especially for "Musical America")

that is to say, according to his fundamental aptitude. Perhaps that is the reason why none of my pupils really resembles another. I don't think anyone ever recognizes an Auer pupil by his playing. Technically, of course, they must all be adequately trained; all must be equipped with a big technique, as an indispensable fundamental requisite. But then when the repertoire is taken up, the artistic exposition of the *chefs d'oeuvre* is to be considered, the pupil's personality is conscientiously fostered, even though he should evince a leaning contrary to my own conviction. Yes, as long as this individuality in the pupil does not verge on the anti-esthetic, I even try to further his progress along the lines of his original initiative. You see, I merely strive to assist nature, instead of dogmatically forcing a pupil's natural inclinations into any particular system or channel that I may have found acceptable."

In response to a request kindly to specify the characteristics of this or the other of his pupils, Prof. Auer benignly replied that he could not do that as he had the same fondness for all of them. Just like a father who, though being fully cognizant of his children's respective merits as well as their shortcomings, he had the same affectionate regard for all of his pupils. In this connection, Prof. Auer confided that he had long since made it a rule never to pass final judgment on any of his pupils, but that he left such an ultimate decision to the public and press.

And then the inevitable question was launched: "What is your opinion of prodigies?"

A Plea for Prodigies

"Ah," replied the venerable master, "now you have hit upon a subject in which I have always been keenly interested. For I deeply deplore the prejudice which generally is shown prodigies, both by the public and critics. If we follow the history of music, we see a vast number of the greatest masters in music, like Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, Rubinstein, d'Albert, Hofmann, Scriabine, Wieniawski, and others, who, in their tender childhood, were conspicuous as prodigies. But please do not misunderstand me. Far be it from me to assert that every prodigy may be expected to become a great master. No, I simply contend that a prodigy is to be considered as an example of pronounced natural human predilection for musical art. The mental artistic force and development, however, are not to be expected until maturity. I am therefore of the opinion that every prodigy represents a musical phenomenon deserving to be treated with the keenest interest rather than, as it is so frequently the case, with prejudice, not to say with distrust."

When the subject of Slavic music was broached, none being more qualified than

the famous Petrograd master to discuss this theme, the professor's interest was fully aroused.

Russia's Musical Future

"Throughout my long experience," said he, "I have been interested pre-eminently in everything representing youth in music, and Russia, as the United States, is to be considered the youngest of the countries musically. In America you have come to the front only rather recently with your MacDowell (one of whose piano pieces, by the way, I transcribed for violin), your Parker, Chadwick, Foote, Loeffler, and others. And in the same way Russia has existed musically virtually only for the last seventy or seventy-five years. But during the last fifty years, with the advent of Glinka, Russia in rapid sequence has manifested such extraordinary musical phenomena as Rubinstein, Moussorgsky, Borodine, Rimsky-Korsakoff (at the present time with Tchaikowsky, Russia's most popular opera composer) and then more recently, Rachmaninoff, Scriabine and (with a humorous little chuckle) the musical Bolshevik—Stravinsky! This imposing array of musical power should guarantee the musical future in store for Russia."

It is only natural that the advent of such a celebrity as Professor Leopold Auer should have created something of a stir, especially in violinistic circles. Since his arrival in America he has been inundated with requests to grant violinists a hearing. For the present the master is to remain in New York and confine his pedagogical activities to those of his professional pupils seeking his advice and a few other distinct talents. For the fall, Prof. Auer is planning to give a series of Beethoven sonata recitals together with Mme. Wanda Stein in the larger cities of the United States.

O. P. JACOB.

Zoellners Play in Philadelphia

PHILADELPHIA, PA., Feb. 21.—The Philadelphia Chamber Music Association offered as its seventh attraction, on the afternoon of Feb. 17, the Zoellner Quartet. The latter played numbers by Sgambati, Napravnik and two Sketches by Goossens. The association, although in its first year of activity, has already 950 members. The concerts, which are called "meetings," are held Sunday afternoons in the ballroom of the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel and have already brought before the musical public of Philadelphia all the prominent chamber music organizations of the country.

SEATTLE, WASH.—Montgomery Lynch, director of the First Methodist Church choir, has been appointed musical director for the Bremerton navy yard and the training camp at the University of Washington.



Photo by Bain News Service

Professor Auer with Two of His Pupils, Thelma Given, Left, and Tascha Seidel, Right, with Mme. Wanda Stein, Noted Russian Pianist, Who Is Auer's Associate in Concerts. (Photographed Especially for "Musical America")

...of the human sense which the hated country is more easily colonized

when their managers have planned