

RE-CREATING FAMILIAR PIANO PIECES

How Hofmann, Bauer, Novæes, Paderewski and Other Noted Artists Discover Hidden Beauties in Even Hackneyed Compositions—Infinite Variety of Tone Color and Endless Pains with Phrasing the Secret of Great Interpretation

By HARRIET BROWER

A MUSICAL work is a silent force until vivified and made alive by the hand or voice of a master. An actor, through his art, puts the play before his audience; he vitalizes the part. That which we have read from the printed page is now a living reality before our eyes; we see as well as we feel, and through seeing so vividly we feel more deeply and intensely.

In the same way a great pianist re-creates a piano piece, through his trained hand, his command of tonal variety, of velocity, of delicacy and power. The student who has labored long to master the technical difficulties has brought the piece to a certain stage of development. He may feel pleased with his achievement and think he knows that piece from beginning to end. He may even be able to repeat or write the notes of it. His friends praise his interpretation of it. One day he goes and listens to the artist, and finds a new world has opened to him; for the artist has illumined the composition through his greater comprehension of what can be done with it and his far more complete equipment. Perhaps it was principally a question of tempo. Have you ever considered what a vital matter the tempo of a piece can become? The trouble with the efforts of very many young players can be traced at once to that source; they cannot play the piece rapidly enough to make it sound like anything. For this reason they do not greatly like the piece, because they have not the ability to play it as it should be done. In fact, they really have no conception of how the piece should sound un-

til they hear it illumined by a master. Only think of the thousands who struggle with the Mendelssohn "Spring Song," or his Rondo Capriccioso. If they are fortunate enough to hear Fannie Bloomfield-Zeisler play the one and Josef Hofmann the other, they perhaps for the first time get an inkling of these well known pieces, that have suffered so much at the hands of incompetence.

Bauer Transforms Schumann

An illustration of how a master pianist may transform some of the simple things, which are given to beginners, into works of art, was offered recently when Harold Bauer played part of Schumann's "Album for the Young," Op. 68. There are forty-three pieces in the set; the pianist chose fourteen of them. The player was in his happiest mood on this occasion. By his refined art he illumined each one of these little pieces. In his hands they became pictures, poems, flowers, moods, now gay, now tender, now touchingly sweet and plaintive.

Of course, every teacher uses the "Happy Farmer," the "Wild Horseman," the "First Loss," the "Hunting Song," and some of the others. But we venture to say she gets little more than the notes of these precious bits from her younger pupils. (The older ones would feel insulted to be asked to learn anything so simple!) In fact, if the small pupils are able to compass correct notes with reasonably correct time, she feels much relieved; yet here was a great pianist who was not above interpreting these tiny gems.

And how he played them! As a proof, when the "Happy Farmer," which stood first on the list, was finished, a shout of delight went up from the big audience, which contained many young people.

They could appreciate that piece, for they knew it and could love it when it was offered them so charmingly. They almost wept over the "Poor Orphan," (No. 6), it was so sad and tender. The "Hunting Song" (No. 7) started off with horns which sounded near and then far away; then the hunters scampered away, keeping pace with those staccatos. They were really short staccatos, you see. Young players seldom make sufficient difference between legato and staccato touches. The "Wild Horseman" flew like the wind. How different it would sound if the young players were able to take it at that rapid tempo. The Folk Song, (No. 9) was full of tenderness, while the middle portion was light as a summer breeze. Next came the "Bogie Man" (No. 12.) Here was something fearsome. The sixteenths were fast and loud with sharp accents, the chords rattled like clanking swords. It was a real band of robbers that stalked over the keyboard. By way of contrast the middle section was hushed and uncanny. When the minor key returned one might imagine a troupe of bears and lions were let loose, so descriptive were the tone qualities.

The next to follow was a "May Song" (No. 13). Were ever tones more silvery-sweet and alluring? One could smell the sweet scents as one trod the soft green sward and listened to bird voices. They were all there in the music, drawn forth by the genius of the interpreter. And then the "First Loss" (No. 16)—what a touch of simple pathos filled its brief measures! After the double bar, the left hand sang the little theme, in answer to the upper voice, then both together. One drew a sigh at the close and wished a repetition of so sweet a verse.

Then there was the "Rider's Song" (No. 23), full of life and excitement; "In Memoriam" (perhaps of Mendelssohn—(No. 28) was touchingly pathetic; the "Merry Vintage Time," like a Watteau picture, so quaint and dainty; and finally the "Italian Mariners' Song" (No. 36).

In this garland of posies gathered from Schumann, the player had given a glimpse of almost every emotion; we saw and felt them, as it were, in miniature. As one critic put it: "He found the precise tones that tell us of their (the children's) games, their fears and fancies, their little dances and the sudden tiny flight to maternal skirts when the horrid 'bogie man' is abroad. The dramatizing of each tonal mosaic, the naïve untroubled spirit of early youth, these fitting shades of feeling the great artist that is Harold Bauer, pictured in his most eloquent manner."

What Bauer did for the Album, and on former occasions for the "Scenes From Childhood," many other artists have done for pieces of moderate difficulty, which the amateur or unskilful player vainly tries to make "sound like something" and invariably fails. Try and remember how Paderewski—that master magician—used to play that "Song Without Words," No. 22, of Mendelssohn. Those poignant, searching tones permeated one's very marrow; they would have melted a heart of stone, if there were any in the audience. Yet the notes are simple enough. But who plays them so that there is any longing, any sadness in them?

Richard Epstein's Art

As an illustration of tonal variety on the piano, the work of Richard Epstein might be cited. Watch him as he plays in the Elshuco Trio, or accompanies a voice. He seems to have at his finger tips infinite gradations of color, from the softest murmur through the whole gamut to the strongest touch. Through his understanding of arm weight all is easy and natural, the absolute expression of the mental conception of what is needed at the moment. His fingers obey the mind. Every player should strive for this control.

And while we are using living illustrations, let us keep in mind the power of illumination possessed by the young Brazilian, Guiomar Novaes. With her the outstanding virtue which first arrests attention is the wonderful tone quality she draws from the instrument. It is so rich and colorful, so plastic and responsive, that it transfigures whatever she touches. Take the Nocturne in G Flat, from the

Chopin-Liszt "Chants Polonais," or the Tenth Rhapsody of Liszt. What variety, what atmosphere! Her touch seems liquid gold upon the keys. Such quality can only come from the right adjustment and balance of relaxed weight, from constant testing and listening combined with close study of effects and their cause, in tone production. Indeed one can draw lessons from the artist at every turn, to prove how he is able to illumine a composition, so that it will become something entirely different from what it seems to be in the hands of the less skilful.

Secrets of the Artist

In what way is the work of the artist so entirely "different"? If we could discover his secrets the enjoyment of music would grow by leaps and bounds.

One of his secrets, perhaps the first in importance, is a beautiful tone. His tone comes from thorough control of his physical playing mechanism and from an understanding of relaxation. He knows when and how to relax. He has learned what the feeling is in arms and wrists which is produced by relaxation. He listens to the quality of tone he is bringing out of his music-box, the piano, and he strives to make it singing, sympathetic, poignant or powerful. If the young player or the amateur would strive for these things, the very effort to acquire them would improve his playing immeasurably. "Always listen to your own playing," is the advice of master teachers to their pupils; it is a good one to follow.

Again, the artist has various qualities of touch at his command. His playing would be very monotonous if he had but one kind. Yet many amateurs try to play without variety of any kind. Next to a tone of good quality, the player should have a touch capable of variety. Standard touches may be known, but there are many variations of them, in fact, the great artist must have infinite gradations of touch, just as the painter must have infinite shades of color. For the artist in tones paints pictures in sounds, just as his brother paints with brush and pigment.

The interpreter who transforms the well known piece into a new-created thing of beauty, knows about phrasing. With him this element of piano playing is an art in itself. Yet many a young student who has come under my observation, knows little or nothing of this art, some have never even heard the word, let alone knowing what it means. A new world of light and intelligence is opened to them when this subject is explained and they learn that phrasing is the punctuation of music, that before they can make their music expressive they must learn to punctuate it—in short to make sense out of it.

Is it any wonder then, that the player who lacks sympathetic touch, variety of tone, ability to punctuate, should fail to perform effectively?

Young pianists and teachers, I summon you to intelligent study of the instrument you have chosen. Why not make your playing effective and artistic? Why not turn your attention to making beautiful tones on the keyboard? Why not listen and listen, and listen again, and not be satisfied until your tones are beautiful, expressive, sympathetic?

With beautiful tones, variety of touch, delicacy and power, a warm heart, a desire to create something lovely out of your music, you, too, can illumine and make it live again!

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Flonzaleys Captivate East Orange, N. J.

EAST ORANGE, N. J., Feb. 1.—The Flonzaley Quartet, again under the local auspices of Mrs. Urn S. Nelson, gave a concert last night before a large audience in the East Orange High School. The audience was quite enthusiastic in its reception of the subtleties of string quartet music.

The Haydn Orchestra, under S. van Praag, gave the first concert of its twenty-sixth season on Wednesday evening. A program of wide range pleased the auditors, as did also the singing of Mrs. Dorothy Howkins Burke, who was accompanied at the piano by Alice Quimby. P. G.

Guiomar Novaes Gives Pleasing Program at Holyoke, Mass.

HOLYOKE, MASS., Feb. 6.—A recital by the Brazilian pianist, Guiomar Novaes, was given last evening at Holyoke in the City Hall as one of the concerts in the series under the direction of the Chamber of Commerce, the Music Club and Mount Holyoke College. Through their beneficent co-operation many fine artists have been brought to Holyoke, but none of more delightful quality than this gifted Brazilian girl.

Piano teachers cannot afford to ignore the subject of Public School Music Credits. It is a matter that so vitally affects their work and their future success that they owe it to themselves to make a thorough investigation of the whole question.

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