

HOFMANN SEES NO INSPIRATION IN MUSIC OF MODERNS; RUSSIAN SCHOOL THE RICHEST

American Public Helps Native Composer More Than the Critic, Says Eminent Pianist — Deplores Mere Mechanical Exercise — Recommends Chopin Etudes as Technical Material — The Evils of Speed—Necessity of a General Education for Musicians—Not an Advocate of Self-Study —Greatly Interested in Municipal Music

By HAZEL GERTRUDE KINSELLA
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AN interesting visitor in Nebraska's capital city recently was Josef Hofmann. A man is known, among other things, by his opinions, and in this connection it is interesting to note some of the statements made by the pianist during a conversation held with the writer previous to his evening recital.

"The people want novelties," said Mr. Hofmann. "They have heard the standard things done so well and frequently, that they show more attention to the novel unless the performance is extraordinary. I see nothing in some of the modern writing except musical contrivance instead of inspiration, and then nothing new. I was for a time, greatly opposed to the modern French school. I was anti-modern, but, through association and more study, I have changed my opinion somewhat, although I still do not place it on the same level as the old classics. The French music is more for the ear than for the mind, but then, one likes to hear things which are not deep, at times and the French music is pleasing to a sensitive ear, to a very high degree.

"Modern technique can best be acquired through the literature of the instrument. Czerny and such things are only good for beginners, but when one is able to play Chopin and Schumann, why should one practice these (illustrating with Czerny, Op. 740) when he can use this (Chopin) and thus be developing just as good technique and much better musical qualities? Too many pupils spend their time playing that which is merely mechanical, wasting much time. The student should not, either, practice the entire composition, but should pick out the difficult passages and work on them to smooth them out, for one must first acquire skill and technique before expressive playing is a possibility."

Technical Material

When asked to suggest musical material to be used for technical practice, Mr. Hofmann replied: "There is nothing better for all needs than the Chopin Etudes. They are what I use myself when I want to study up technical matters, and I always find them full of tonal charm, as well as of technical problems. There is lots of modern technique in



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Josef Hofmann Expresses His Artistic Views Frankly for "Musical America"

Godowsky's modern arrangements of these Etudes. If the young player is unable to play these at the tempos indicated, he may still probably play them slowly, but properly. To play a Czerny study up to time is much more difficult than to play a Chopin etude slowly.

"Anyway, speed is nothing nowadays, in this time of mechanical inventions. I think people even welcome the innovation of a less speedy player. Personally, I do not care for mere speed. There is too much tempo playing, and not enough said! As Rubinstein once said to me, 'If the player will simply say all that is in the notes, he need not run after tempos.'

"I used to say, 'If you want speed, get a pianola,' but nowadays the beauty of so many of the records is that they are made personal, the mechanical element is removed. The correcting of the record, rather than the actual recording, is what develops the expression. No, the best pianist can never play as fast as an aeroplane can fly, so it is no use to compete. Art should develop.

"I once had a very talented pupil who played this way (illustrating great speed). I said, 'Don't you know that piano-playing is not to play as fast as you can?' 'Oh yes I'll play it slower,' he said. Three times he played it just as fast, and I had to give him up as incurable.

Three Essentials

"Expression is the most important thing in music, and the audience makes all the difference in the world in the success of a concert. The elements necessary to have a successful concert are, in this order, good acoustics, a receptive audience and a good piano! Then the proper mood will develop.

"A cold or reserved audience is a strong factor against one's having inspiration. One simply can't give out for two hours without getting something back. Student audiences, such as one

often meets in college towns, are always inspirational. But musical education does not always conform with appreciation, and the general life of the people is usually recorded in their concert attitude. Some time ago I played a series of concerts in Mexico to audiences of people who were manifestly not educated, but the Mexican people were so responsive, so warm, it was a pleasure, indeed, to play for them. Very often too much knowledge kills appreciation. It is not sufficient to know, one must like music!

"However, the audiences are not always to blame for conditions. Recently, I gave several recitals of American compositions. The public took more kindly to them than the critics. The critics should not stand between art and the public. They should encourage it. No, I cannot quite understand the attitude of the critics. American composers receive much more sympathy and encouragement from the public than from the professional critic. Of course, some American composition is not all worthy, some writers have not (apparently) the gift. Some are scholarly and put lots of music together, but it is like a mummy, without life, but it must be given a hearing.

"The Russian school of composers is perhaps the richest in the world in the matter of recent piano literature. The Russian output during the past forty years has been extraordinary in interest and charm.

General Education Essential

"The pianist's general education," continued Mr. Hofmann, "is very important.

Every musician should have some unmusical interest which acts as a recreative power. I myself was, for many years, greatly interested in mechanical devices, automobiles, and so on, but I seem to have less time to devote to them than formerly. As one grows older, music keeps one more and more busy, for one has increased duties toward his art and his public."

Mr. Hofmann is not an advocate for general self-study. "It is not hard to play," he said, "but it is hard to study, and one should have good guidance, especially in all early work. It is not a question of how much time one works, but how that time is employed. People who study by themselves too much sometimes develop distorted ideas. The funniest thing I ever received through the *Ladies' Home Journal* was a letter from a girl who said she was taught to hold her hand in a high arched position because the hollow of her hand would be better for the 'acoustics of her playing!'

Municipal Music

"I am greatly interested in municipal music. Much dormant talent is thus brought to light and recognized. Children must begin the study of music early in life, also. If they wait until they are sixteen or eighteen years old, it is too late.

"One of the greatest helps a municipality can give the young artist or composer is by supplying him with a good musical reference library, in which both classic and modern piano literature is represented. The uses of such a library are many, for the piano student who aims higher than mere key-board dexterity is obliged to study the styles, forms, construction and characteristics of all master composers. By playing one or two of his sonatas the student can no more gain a comprehensive idea of the vast musical meaning implied by the word 'Beethoven' than he could grasp the full significance of Shakespeare by reading only one of his sonnets. The student should, by means of a library, be given an opportunity to become visually acquainted with those many works which he has not the time to master technically. Buying music for purely esthetic study is often out of the question with the student, for financial reasons. Such a reference library would be of still greater value to the young composer, if he would, as have all greatest composers, profit by examples set by others.

"Finally, when the student has become the artist, he will find that no matter how much ability he has, it is essential to have money for a successful pianistic career in these days, the same as if he were starting a manufacturing establishment."

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Wins Enthusiasm for Harriet Ware's Song

Much enthusiasm was accorded Harriet Ware's song, "Dance the Romaika," when it was recently sung in concert by Daisy Allen. Miss Allen was obliged to repeat it three times. The song is meeting with much praise wherever presented.

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