

# EACH TONE IS A DEFINITE COLOR TO AUGUSTA COTTLOW

American Pianist Describes the Tint Represented by Note, Chord and Combination — The Scale in Varied Hues — Some Ideas as to Interpretation—Mastering of the Emotions, a Necessity to the Performer

By HARRIETTE BROWER

WE are often told that "music begins where speech leaves off." We know there is a world of expression, of color, of emotion, that is embodied and portrayed in music, the meaning of which can never be explained or put into words. These things are too elusive, too indefinable. Tone color especially is elusive, since the term has a different significance for each player, each listener, since no two people seem to hear or feel in the same way. Various devices have been resorted to, to capture this shadowy rainbow of tints which the imaginative player seems to find in the music, and reduce them to terms somewhat definite and tangible, but without any great apparent success. Still there are artists of the keyboard who are by nature so highly sensitive to tonal coloring, that they see actual colors in the tones of their instrument.

Augusta Cottlow, the American pianist, is especially gifted in this exquisite sense of color-hearing. She possesses absolute pitch to begin with, and besides this a whole palette of colors and shades of tone.

"It is a curious thing," she said, as we were discussing the subject recently, "that I have always had this color sense, even as a child. Tones seem to me definite colors, just as they are definite in pitch. For I have, as you know, absolute pitch; but that one must be born with, of course.

"What colors do the tones represent to me? I will tell you. Single tones are different from chords, major and minor are not at all the same; sharp keys are always brighter and more brilliant, while flats are darker and deeper.

"C seems to me white, C sharp cream white, while C major chord is white with blotches of red. Then C minor has darker red in it, and C sharp major has cream with red.

"The tone D is yellow, while the chord of D major is a bright lettuce green; it is the color of spring, and I feel it aptly portrays the tender brightness of budding nature and opening leaves. D flat takes on deeper tints, it becomes sage green; D minor melts into a soft grey green, as though enveloped in mist. D sharp is brighter, taking on autumnal tints and colorings.

"The tone E is red, E flat a deeper red; E sharp red influenced by blue. The chord of E is cardinal red; the chord E flat warm, deep red, mingled with brownish green. E flat minor is wine color.

"The tone F is blue; F sharp brighter blue. The chord of F major is blue mingled with white; chord of F minor blue grey, of F sharp bright purple; of F sharp minor purplish blue.

"Moss green is the color of the tone G; G flat is grey green. The chord of G flat is brown-green; the chord of G sharp, terra cotta.

"The tone A is grey; the same chord bright grey with cream. The tone A flat darker grey, the chord soft grey. The note A sharp light faun grey—chord the same. A minor quaker grey.

"The note B is brown, B flat a dark vel-

vety brown; B major chord brighter brown; B minor chord olive brown.

"I do not think of all these colors as I play a composition, for then I am too absorbed in the meaning of the music, and what I am endeavoring to express with it. But when I am thinking of abstract tones and sounds, this is the way they impress me.

"Tones have in this way always meant colors to me, almost as far back as I can remember. There is in Clark University, in the west, a Professor John Wallace Baird, who has written and lectured on absolute pitch, and is an authority on these subjects. He was much interested in my case, and said he will write an account of it some day. Professor Baird made many tests and experiments of tone and color memory. Among numerous people who were examined, he selected a group of nine. They proved to be the only genuine cases of absolute pitch he was able to find. All of these nine were more or less highly trained musicians. He has written a very interesting brochure on the subject of absolute pitch, which contains an account of all the tests given the observers, as he calls them. I have it here if you would like to look it over. It seems I was the most successful and led all the others in accuracy of hearing. He writes in one place. 'Miss Cottlow possesses a remarkably clear and definite chromaesthesia (color-hearing). She is a concert pianist of international reputation, a student of the piano since childhood.'"

"Do you think of these color-tones when playing a program?" she was asked.

"Not definitely, during a performance, for I then, as I said before, am fully occupied with the subject of interpretation, a subject which makes the highest demands on one's mental, physical, technical and spiritual equipment. This matter of true interpretation is so intangible, so elusive, yet so vital. It is a thing quite apart from technical mastery. Some players have the most perfect mechanism in the world and yet put nothing distinctive into their playing. They cannot touch the heart with their music. Why is it? We are so often told technique is the medium of expression. It is true we cannot express anything without it; we must have it, but we must have infinitely more. Mere technique alone will not win or hold an audience, though it may astonish them for a time. But when technical perfection is joined to the art of expression, as it was when Josef Lhévinne played the Lindenbaum, recently in his recital, the effect is heavenly.

"It is often said the artist must feel deeply in order to play with expression. But we all know there are players running over with temperament, who cannot put an ounce of it into their performance. Therefore, we must look further than perfect technique or emotional ecstasy to find the cause or the reasons for movingly expressive playing. So far as these can be explained they must consist of a knack or a gift of knowing when and how to use the varied means of expression, the accelerando, retard, rubato, the depth, lightness and variety



Augusta Cottlow, the American Pianist, in Her Home Near New York

of tone. A beautiful quality of touch and tone, as a foundation for all these, is a large asset, indeed indispensable."

"Do you feel the meaning and emotional significance of the music very deeply during performance?"

"Yes and no; that is to say I must have felt it very deeply during my hours of study, and have then learned how I want to interpret the piece. After that it is largely a matter of memory. For it would never do to succumb to deep feeling such as I consider lies within the music, when I am playing for an audience. It would not be artistic; I could not then control myself properly, it would only be weakness.

"It is said of Sarah Bernhardt that in making up a new rôle, she may suffer, weep and agonize over it. But when she has mastered it and is ready to bring it before the public, she has conquered her feelings; she can put emotion in her voice, in her acting, but is mistress of herself at the same time. And it is just so with the pianist. I remember the emotions called up by the study of a great pianistic work, but I must not let them get the best of me before an audience.

"Certain compositions, as well as the playing of certain artists, appeal to me deeply and I have many times been overcome by some heavenly beautiful music. Paderewski's playing often had this power. I have listened to Busoni with streaming eyes. I know, in Busoni's case, people often thought him cold and reserved, at least in America. But, you see, I heard him play so often over there. I studied with him three years, and so heard him under many and varied conditions; I can assure you he can excite the deepest feelings with his inspired performance. To hear him in a Beethoven or a Chopin Concerto or in Chopin Etudes or pieces of larger form, is a great experience. I well remember his playing of Beethoven, accompanied by Nikisch; it was perfection; and so filled with reverent beauty as to be unforgettable.

"In regard to memory study of which you ask: When I take up a new work, I play it over several times, to get a general idea of the scope and meaning of the music. It is then, of course, that I feel the emotional import of the composition. After this I begin to study in detail. When I have once mastered it, I do not easily forget, the notes as well as the emotional content remain. There is the Chopin Concerto in E Minor, which I learned as a child and played with the Thomas Orchestra and other orchestras in America when I was fourteen, afterwards playing it in Europe. It is fast in memory, I could not forget it. And another thing is, that my conception of the work—my interpretation of it—remains practically the same as it was in childhood; that is, I feel the music in the same way. Of course I have gained infinitely in experience, in technical mastery, in power and variety; I can put much more into it now, for I have suffered and lived. But fundamentally, my idea of this work and other compositions of those earlier years, is still preserved. I feel the music on the same lines. In

the first instance I was able to feel the music deeply, and I feel it in a similar way now.

"Does not this prove we should be allowed individuality in interpretations? After long and careful study of a composition, I arrive at a certain working out of my first conception of it. I feel this is the way the piece should be played, or at least it is the way I should play it. Now my conception may not always please the critics, but what is one to do? I see it that way and must follow my settled convictions.

"But we might talk another hour on this deeply interesting subject and only touch the edges of it; it will still remain elusive. And I must catch the next train. Yes, I expect to play much next season, my manager has many engagements ahead for me."

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## GOLDMAN SERIES TO BEGIN

June 7 the Date Set for First Concert at Columbia

The first of the concert series to be given in the city this summer will open on the green at Columbia University on Monday evening, June 7, when the Goldman Concert Band, which has proven to be such an attraction in the past, will again be the feature, with its conductor, Edwin Franko Goldman. In order to accommodate all desirous of hearing these concerts, it has been found necessary to increase the season to twelve weeks, instead of ten, with two additional concerts in various city parks each week.

It is estimated that more than 25,000 persons will attend the opening concert, by the demand for tickets and seating and lighting arrangements have been extended to cover a larger area of the grounds. The enlarged band of sixty musicians is to have a new seating arrangement, modeled after the plan of our symphony orchestras.

Mrs. Adella Prentiss Hughes and Mrs. Martha B. Sanders, sponsors of the Monday morning musicales given in the ballroom of the Hotel Statler, Cleveland, have engaged Mme. Marguerite d'Alvarez, Peruvian contralto, for a recital on Jan. 10. Mme. d'Alvarez will follow her London custom in New York next season and will give a series of song recitals.

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