

The Kreutzer Sonata and Beethoven's Mulatto Friend

George Bridgetower, Son of African Father and European Mother, Prominent in Music of His Day—Noted as a Violinist, He Rehearsed Famous Work with Master—Dedication Said to Have Been Changed After Quarrel Over Young Woman—Musician Played Under Patronage of Royalty, but Died in Obscurity in London

By MAUD CUNEY HARE

SEEN in London during the year 1790, and introduced in high circles, was an interesting character known by the name of Bridgetower, who was familiarly called the "Abyssinian Prince." It is doubtful whether this title was rightfully his or whether (according to Mr. Samuel Appleby's letter to Alexander Thayer), it was given him in the manner of Dr. Johnson's "Rasselas." We have no details of his family history, but it is said that he came from African parts, migrated to Poland, and there married a Polish or German woman, who afterward lived in Dresden. He was the father of two sons, both talented musicians, one a 'cellist, and the other, George, a violinist, who was born in Viala or Biala, Poland, in 1779 or 1780.

In 1790, Bridgetower, the father, visited London with young George, who was then known as a violin prodigy of exceptional gift. The mother at this time lived in Dresden with the other son. We hear nothing further of the latter, except that he evidently became a 'cellist of note, as he took part in concert with his brother in 1803. The limited knowledge we have of the life of George Bridgetower, born nearly a century and a half ago, comes to us principally from Thayer's "Life of Beethoven."

Manuscripts found in the British Museum bear the signature of G. H. P. Bridgetower. His full name was George Augustus Polgreen Bridgetower. We are unable to account for the initial "H." Of mixed blood, the son of an African father and a European mother, this talented violinist was destined to have his name linked with Beethoven, the great German master, and to become the first interpreter of the famous work known as the "Kreutzer Sonata."

Description in Passport

For a personal description of Bridgetower, we rely on the information given on a pass which was probably a permit to travel to Dresden and to London to play. This passport which was found in Vienna police records, was dated July 27, 1803. It reads: "George Bridgetower: character, musician; born in Viala, Poland; twenty-four years of age, middle height, smooth brown face, dark brown hair, brown eyes and somewhat thick nose." From Thayer the information is gleaned that the Bridgetower mentioned by Held is the same person described by Schindler as "a beautiful mulatto, twenty-four years of age, the son of an African father and a German or Polish mother." Appleby speaks of him as a very industrious man, inclined to melancholy.

The boy was said to have been a pupil of Giorn or Jarnowic and at the age of ten showed great talent. In his youth he became a musician in the service of the Prince of Wales, who later became George IV. In 1802, while yet a lad, he visited his mother in Dresden. He took advantage of the baths at Teplitz and Carlsbad, and his permit was extended so that he could spend a few months in Vienna.

On Feb. 19, 1790, George made his first public appearance at Drury Lane Theater, where he played a violin solo between parts of "The Messiah." Here the youthful performer arrested the attention of the Prince of Wales, and in the following June, he and Clement (then a lad of about the same age), gave a concert under the patronage of the Prince of Wales. The same year he played at the Professional Concerts. His studies were continued under Barthélemon, Giornovich and Altwood, while at the same time he became first violinist at the establishment of the Prince at Brighton.

We find him at the Handel commemoration of 1791, seated with young Hummel at the side of Joah Bates, organist, pulling out the stops for him. He was

engaged as a performer at the Hayden-Salomon concerts of 1791, and at the concerts of Barthélemon in 1792 and 1794, when he played a concerto of Viotti. Printed in Bossler's Musical Correspondence of July 7, 1790, a letter of June 6 reads:

"On Wednesday, June 2, I attended a concert in Hanover Square, where two young heroes of the violin vied with each other, and all lovers of art and music for three hours enjoyed the most pleasing entertainment. The interspersed concertos were every time most warmly applauded. The quartet, however, was by young violin virtuosi, whose combined ages would not be forty years, and the playing of which surpassed every expectation. The first violin was played by Clement from Vienna; the second, by Bridgetower of Africa who is ten years old."

Aided by Prince of Wales

Appearances in Vienna were made possible by permission of the Prince of Wales. George spent much time playing in that city. Successful appearances in Dresden, both in public and private performances, gave him entry into the highest musical circles of the Austrian capital. Many appreciative letters were received and at one of the private musicales he made the acquaintance of Held.

Anticipating a series of English concerts, a letter of Jan. 14, 1803, reads: "Billy Cole sent me your sealed letter to Brighton which I myself placed in the hands of the Prince and it was read in my presence. His Royal Highness considered the letter very appropriate and was very pleased to grant him permission. So much for the present." The note is signed by Frederick Lindemann, a member of the Prince of Wales' orchestra.

A concert was given on March 18, 1803, when Mlle. Grünwald was to have sung, but she was unable to appear. A subscription list was opened for this concert by Mme. Eliot who subscribed for eighteen tickets. After several weeks another concert was given, when Mme. Eliot was again a patron. Other concerts were given in 1803, at which time Bridgetower asked the assistance of Beethoven. This was willingly given, and the first of a series of concerts took place late in May.

The following license issued in Vienna was found among Bridgetower's papers: "Under Direction of the Chief of Police. The undersigned musician begs permission to give a concert, for his own benefit, on Monday, May 16, at R. R. Ausgartern, a Musical Academy, at 2 florins per ticket. Reasons for the request are: 1. At present the musician has the honor of being in active service of the Crown Prince of England. 2. He has already played violin concertos in many parts of Europe, and 3. He has received the support of famous musicians and now wishes to publicly add to his reputation. Vienna, 9 of May, 1803. August Bridgetower." The application was signed and approved by the Chief of Police.

"Kreutzer Sonata" Performed

It has not been definitely established when the concert was given, but it probably took place May 24. However, the following statement appears on the reverse side of the permit: "At this (date indefinite) between the 16th and 24th of May, the celebrated A Major Sonata, Op. 47, dedicated to Rudolph Kreutzer of Paris, said by Schrieber to have been originally written for Bridgetower, was performed." The patron list for this included many titled and noted persons. The subscription list was headed by L'Envoyé d' Angleterre, fifty billets; Prince Esterhazy, ten billets; Prince Lobkowitz, twenty billets; Prince Schwarzenberg, ten billets. The list included twenty-four others and the result was a total subscription of 1140 florins.

As the concert date was near at hand, Bridgetower urged Beethoven to complete the Sonata for piano and violin, that he might have his part. Only the first part had been written, the piano part simply sketched in here and there. One morning he called on Beethoven and

again asked for his copy. As there was not sufficient time to complete the work, Bridgetower played the Theme and Variations in F (Andante con Variazioni) from Beethoven's manuscript. This took place in the Hall Ausgarten at 8 a. m. In these days, this was not an unaccustomed hour for rehearsal.

The Allegro in A was said to have been beautifully written and was originally part of Op. 30 in A for Violin and Piano, dedicated to the Emperor Alexander. Later Beethoven took this out as being too brilliant, although the fascinating Tarantelle was in his judgment especially adapted to the temperamental Bridgetower. The variations remained in the Concerto.

In later years Bridgetower spoke to Thayer about Beethoven, and told him that when the Sonata, Op. 47, was composed, all the parts had been collected, and on the first leaf was a dedication to him. Before leaving Vienna, however, he quarreled with Beethoven over a young woman, and Beethoven then dedicated the work to Kreutzer. He further states: "As I accompanied him (Beethoven) in this Sonata, I suggested in the first part of the Presto, eighteen measures for the pianoforte instead of nine. Beethoven jumped up and threw his arms around me and said, 'Again, my dear boy,' and held the pedal down on C during the course of this, unto nine measures. Beethoven's expression in the andante was so chaste, which was always characteristic of his slow movements, that the sympathetic unison demanded a repetition."

"Most Praiseworthy," Said Beethoven

A concert review cited by Thayer is quoted from Freimütigen on Aug. 1, 1803: "Mr. Bridgetower, in the service of the Prince of Wales, had a full house. He is certainly a very powerful violin player. The greatest difficulties he overcomes with a happy boldness and facility. Only, the selections composed by Bridgetower himself were crude, and the striving after the bizarre and the original was carried to the extreme; a method after the manner of many of the

great masters, but to the unprejudiced hearers not pleasing."

About this time, Beethoven wrote as follows: "Monsieur Baron Alexandre de Wetzlar. At Home, on May 18. Although we have never spoken, I do not hesitate for all that to speak of the bearer, Mr. Bridgetower, as a master of his instrument, a very skilful virtuoso worthy of recommendation. Besides concertos, he plays in Quartets in a most praiseworthy manner and I wish very much that you would make him better known. He has already made the acquaintance of Lobkowitz, Fries, and many other distinguished admirers. I believe that it would not be unwise to bring him some evening to Theresa Schonfeld's, who I know has many friends, or else at your home. I am sure you will be thankful to me for the acquaintance of this man. Leben Sie wohl, my dear Baron. Respectfully Yours, Beethoven."

The friendly relationship that existed between the two musicians is further shown by the following letters which were in the possession of Mr. Appleby: "Come, my dear boy, at 12 o'clock to Count Dehm's, where we were day before yesterday. They will perhaps wish to hear you play something—that you will see. I cannot come before half-past one—until then I will take pleasure in thinking about seeing you to-day. Your friend, Beethoven."

A second letter also without date, reads: "Have the kindness to meet me at half-past one at Tarronischen Kaffeehaus. We will go to the Countess Guiciardi's, where you are invited to luncheon. Beethoven."

After the concert appearances with Beethoven, which took place in May, Bridgetower returned to England, and in June, 1811, took the degree of Bachelor of Music at Cambridge. His exercise was an anthem which was performed at Great St. Mary's on June 30. During the later years of Bridgetower's life, he fell into obscurity. The date of his death was not learned until recently. He died in the south part of London in 1860. A daughter, who lived in Italy, was said to be his only offspring.

Shop Girls and Clerks Point Way to Develop Taste for Good Music

NOON hour musical programs in large offices, the bringing of music to tradespeople, and intimate musical association between churches, neighborhoods and clubs were some of the suggestions received by the Community Music Association of Flint, Mich., in answer to a questionnaire relative to the extension of the music activities of the association. The questionnaire was submitted to the public at a music festival held under the auspices of Community Service, Inc. Three questions were propounded by William W. Norton, director of the organization in Flint, who conducted the festival. The questions were:

How can the Community Music Association help my line of business? How can the Association assist my neighborhood, my church, my lodge? What, in your opinion as a citizen, is the most important thing for the Community Music Association to do for the community as a whole?

Many Valuable Suggestions

In many instances, the answers gave evidence that little thought had been given by individuals to the work of the Music Association as it concerned themselves. In such cases the replies were vague and inconclusive. On the other hand many valuable suggestions were received, and the special value of the questionnaire was manifested in the rising interest evinced by citizens in musical activity.

A Flint minister offered two suggestions: furnish a trained orchestra leader, and organize the young people for orchestra and choir work. An officer of

the Association advised that every ward in the city be organized to participate in the work planned. Every playground should be so supervised as to include regular musical programs, suggested another officer.

Asks for Community Hall

Interesting ideas were submitted by shop girls and clerks. "Teach an appreciation of musical art, discriminating between the best and the common," wrote a milliner; and "Build a community hall," said a salesgirl. "Improve music in the public schools," was the suggestion of a housewife; and "Introduce the Community Service music programs into the churches," came from a dentist.

According to W. C. Bradford, field director of the Bureau of Community Music, the system of eliciting the opinions of the people has been found to solve the question of arousing public interest. It is the purpose of the organization to introduce it in other cities.

The questionnaire may be printed in the program of a concert or upon slips accompanying the program. The scheme of providing a blank to be filled out, insures the most ready response. In some cases the discussion may suggest lines of activity in the community music work that the music committee might not have thought of otherwise. When the answers to the questionnaire have come in, Mr. Bradford suggests, it would be wise to tabulate them and have them published in the local paper in the form of a special article. This would help in creating a public opinion to back up such of the projects as seem worthy of being carried out.