The Emperor

Author(s): Thomas Wood

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WHICH?

SIR,—In answer to a recent letter of mine, averring that Beethoven was the greatest of all composers, Mr. Oscar Browning has written from Palazzo Simonetti, Rome, to the Press, stating that in his opinion, and in that of Joachim, Mozart is the first of all composers, and Bach the next. Of course, this is entirely a matter of taste and conjecture, and I myself have, as every musician must have, the very highest admiration for both Mozart and Bach, but I should here like to quote the tremendous homage paid by Robert Schumann to Beethoven. After eulogizing Bach, Schumann writes (translated from the German) as follows:

‘And shall not a whole nation, taught patriotism and greatness of heart by the creations of a Beethoven, make public evidence of gratitude that should be greater a thousandfold? Were I a prince I would build a temple in the style of Palladio, to his memory; ten statues should stand within it, and if Thorwaldsen and Dannecken would not execute them all, they should at least see that all were executed under their superintendence; nine they should be, these statues, like the number of the Muses, and of his symphonies—Clio the Eroica, Thalia the Fourth, Euterpe the Pastoral, and so on—himself the divine Apollo. There the German people should assemble from time to time, to celebrate festivals, and there his own works should be performed in the highest stage of perfection. Or else take a hundred century-old oak-trees, and write his name with them, in giant letters, on a plain, or carve his likeness in colossal proportions, like Saint Borromeus on Lake Maggiore, that he may gaze above the mountains, as he did when living; and, when Rhine ships pass, and foreigners ask the name of that giant form, every child may answer—“It is Beethoven.” Or would you dedicate to him a living monument, build in his name an academy for German music, where *music*, his word, may be taught, not as a trade that any mechanic may choose, but a school of poets, a school of music in the German sense, to be opened by the hands of a pure priesthood to the chosen ones only. Rise, throw off your indifference, and remember that the monument will also commemorate yourselves.’

And these glowing words emanate from a composer only very little less great and illustrious than Beethoven himself.—Yours, &c.,

ALGERNON ASHTON.

22A, Carlton Vale,

Maida Vale, N.W. 6.

April 19, 1921.

‘THE EMPEROR’

SIR,—Would ‘Feste’ allow me to smile with him at those stout champions of the second-rate who say that a classic’s platitudes are greater than a modern’s strength? Each man must naturally have his own views, but he has no need contemptuously to gird at those of others; and the blind adulation of works like the ‘Emperor’ Concerto (quoted in a recent *Musical Times*) is, apart from the amusement it gives, a little trying.

Again compared with architecture and sculpture, with their early perfection, music is still in the short petticoat stage; and it is surely a little unwise to thrust immortality (in large capital letters) upon a work only a century old. I am sure Beethoven would not approve; he was far too great a man to think that music stopped when he died, or to wish that all he wrote was for ever. Finally, cannot enthusiasts realise that adjectives are not argument? And they use such long ones! Perhaps a short course of Masefield. . . . But this is beside the point.—Yours, &c.,

THOMAS WOOD

(Director of Music, Tonbridge School).

Lansdowne House,
Tonbridge, Kent.

March 17, 1921.

THE SACKBUT, ETC.

SIR,—I am sorry to have to disappoint the hopes of ‘Feste,’ but there is unhappily no prospect or possibility that the contingent future agreement of the newspaper reporters with myself will result in the transference to them

of taste and discrimination! If only *this* were necessary, the production of a race of critics would be easy, for even I could find quite a number of things whereon to agree with, for instance, ‘Feste’—though far be it from me to rank *him* with *ces messieurs* of the usual quill-driving tribe.

If it really amuses ‘Feste’ to believe the implication in the last half of his letter, I have not the heart to deprive him of this simple pleasure and hope he may go on having lots of fun with it. But if he wanted his readers to believe it too, he should have followed the example of certain illustrious colleagues of his, and have taken the precaution first to suppress my letter. Yet he evidently considers honesty of more value than the making, or rather counterfeiting, of a journalistic point, and all honour to him. *O si sic omnes!*

My point is and remains this (and ‘Feste’ has not succeeded in destroying it), that, opposed to ‘Feste’s’ ‘practically unanimous approval,’ there were a few of very considerable critical insight and keen judgment who did *not* regard the ‘Planets’ as a work of any importance or significance.—Yours, &c.,

KAIKHOSRU SORABJI.

175, Clarence Gate Gardens,

Regent’s Park, N.W.1.

April 10, 1921.

BEETHOVEN AND KNITTING

SIR,—‘Barbellion’s’ caustic comment on female knitters at symphony concerts, as quoted in your April number, recalls an amusing literary parallel in Stinde’s ‘Buchholz Familie,’ where that humorous old philosopher Frau Buchholz also lets herself go on the subject of Beethoven and knitting:

‘Das Konzert begann, und kaum fingen die Musiker an zu spielen, als die Bergfeldt einen Strickstrumpf aus der Tasche holte und darauf los strickte, als wollte sie das Entree wieder verdienen. . . . Ich bin ja sehr für den häuslichen Fleiß und hasse das Müßiggang, aber wenn man seinen geist im Konzert bilden will, kann man doch die Aufmerksamkeit nicht zurschen Einer Symphonie und dem Strumpf teilen. Auch glaube ich nicht dasz Beethoven seine himmlischen Eingebungen Komponierte, damit dazu gestrickt werden sollte.’

Last winter in this town we had a course of University Extension lectures on ‘Modern Music,’ where ladies knitted. I have also noticed them knitting at Church Congress meetings, though so far not actually in church. Ladies I have asked say they can enjoy the music better when they knit. The matter might be an interesting subject of psychological inquiry. What, for instance, is the exact effect on a *solo* performer when he spies knitters among the audience?—Yours, &c.,

E. GORHAM GEE.

Granville House,

Granville Road, Leicester.

April 10, 1921.

‘TA-RA-RA-BOOM-DE-AY’

SIR,—The resemblance between a feeble popular song tune and a theme in classical chamber music is hardly a subject deserving a long correspondence, but as more than one writer has shown interest in the matter in your columns, it seems worth while to draw attention to a small point which has been apparently overlooked. Beethoven did not compose the theme, ‘Pria ch’ io impegno,’ upon which the last movement of the Clarinet Trio is founded. It is taken from an air in Joseph Weigl’s ‘Amor Marinaro,’ which was no doubt itself a popular song at that time. Beethoven must have seen the possibilities of development latent in an otherwise somewhat crude tune, and therefrom produced the undoubtedly attractive variations already mentioned.

Beethoven’s use of this tune is in no way a plagiarism. The title of the air is prefixed to the movement in printed editions of the Trio, and its origin is given in Grove’s Dictionary. The one important point is that, though he found the tune useful, Beethoven was not its composer, and never pretended that he was.—Yours, &c.,

‘Oakhurst,’ Harrow-on-the-Hill.

HUGH GARDNER.

April 5, 1921.