Stravinsky Day by Day

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degree of quickening up, violins (like voices), can only produce tones that are thin and wanting in penetration. In this case, the rather awkwardly written semiquavers of Mendelssohn's accompaniments become absolutely inaudible, and the run down near the end, intended to be the climax of the storm, turns into a poor trickle, though it is marked *ff*. The more sustained notes of the brass chiefly dominate the whole show. And it is just the same with Bach's choruses. Treat an *allegro* movement as if it were marked *presto*, and not only is the dignity of the whole impaired, but the balance of the material employed will be upset.

Here has been given, as I hope, a temperate statement of the disgruntled feelings which afflict some of us at times during the performance of sacred music. Let me add that it may be better to ventilate than to repress a grievance.

NEW FIDDLES FOR OLD

It is a great pity that Mr. W. J. Farrell has considered it necessary to overstate the case for modern violins in his singularly stimulating volume, *The Truc-tone Violin* (Cassell). There is little to be gained by exaggeration in the best of causes; protesting too much must needs excite suspicion. If Mr. Farrell were content to tell us that some modern fiddles are infinitely better than some old fiddles, he would win the assent of all sensible people. But he is tilting at shadows when he generalises on 'old violin cranks.' After all, the best judge of a violin is the violinist, and all the greatest violinists have invariably shown a very marked preference for old fiddles. The fact that there is a good deal of misconception and downright deception going on as regards old violins does not alter the fact that not only Stradivari, but Amati, Guarneri, Stainer, Maggini, Guadagnini—to name only a few—produced instruments that experience has shown to be excellent. Nor can the public be blamed if it turn a deaf ear to the claims of certain modern makers, for hardly a modern maker exists who has not 'rediscovered' something of the so-called Cremona secret. The gist of the matter is that not all old violins are good, and not all new violins bad. That is what the public often fails to understand. Stradivari's own violins were new once, and also excellent. Age alone does not constitute a proof of merit. That is the golden rule that the buyer with the limited purse ignores to his cost.

The author has our full sympathy when he pleads for the modern maker, and we quite agree that something ought to be done to open the eyes of the public in respect to the craze for old violins, which has reached absurd proportions. Utterly worthless instruments are sometimes treasured by quite intelligent people in the belief that being in a dilapidated condition they must be old, and because old, therefore good, and worth a fortune. It is a common experience not only for dealers, but for violinists generally, to be shown some disreputable German fiddle labelled Stradivari, with a request to name its present price in the market. Bad violins are worth a few shillings when they are new; when they are old their value is the current price for firewood—not a farthing more. A good modern fiddle is worth any amount of old bad fiddles. But it does not follow that it is also equal to the best of the old fiddles. Mr. Farrell claims that his own instruments are best because constructed as Stradivari himself would

construct them to-day. That claim can only be decided by actual test—and time. For if it is true that Stradivari's violins were excellent from the first, some modern fiddles which appeared excellent at first have lost much of their quality after a couple of years' use.

Failing the actual test, it must be said that in his book Mr. Farrell shows at least that he possesses all the qualities of a first-class luthier. Above all things he is not prejudiced by the countless experiments of scientists, which, as we all know, have led nowhere. Stradivari was not a scientist, but a workman endowed with an amount of commonsense and love of his profession that, combined, amounted to genius. Mr. Farrell is also gifted with penetration, commonsense, and genuine affection for the tools of his trade. He is said by those who know him to possess also rare discrimination in the choice of wood and varnish—a most important qualification. Years of experience have taught him that the modern maker obsessed by the fame of the old is apt to forget or misunderstand certain laws. Modern makers, he says, for instance, believe that the old masters 'worked on the principle of how much wood they dare take out,' whereas the principle, according to Mr. Farrell, was of 'how much wood they dare leave in,' for enough wood must be left if the instrument is to stand well the strain imposed upon it by the strings. It is, of course, impossible to follow here all the innovations indicated by the author. They sound logical and reasonable, but if the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the proof of the fiddle is certainly in the playing. If Mr. Farrell's violins confirm his theories and establish his claim, fame will come to him in his lifetime as it came not only to Stradivari, but to Vuillaume and to James Tubbs.

F. B.

STRAVINSKY DAY BY DAY

BY ALFRED KALISCH

Certainly M. Stravinsky is something to be thankful for. *The Fire-Bird* and *Petrushka* are gifts of price; but he has done far more to increase the gaiety of nations since he took to explaining himself. Not only is each of his utterances startling on its own account, but the attempt to reconcile it with the preceding one is a fascinating intellectual exercise for agile wits. When we do agree with him, it is generally for reasons the very opposite of those he adduces. We are reminded of the story of Lord Justice C. who, after Lord Justice A. had delivered judgment in favour of allowing an appeal, and Lord Justice B. had said it ought to be dismissed, tersely said that he concurred with Lord Justice A., for the reasons so ably enunciated by Lord Justice B.

Let us briefly review his recent pronouncements. First he told us that he had discovered Tchaikovsky, and in praise of him said things which are, in effect, a scathing denunciation of his own music and that of his followers. Then he told us, through the medium of the *Musical News and Herald*, that the orchestra is dead, because previous composers—groping, poor things, in outer darkness—knew nothing of 'sonorities' and 'tonal values' and 'individualizing' the various instruments of the orchestra. We ask ourselves what on earth had they been after that they did not find it out sooner—in fact, what did they think they were doing? And then he said that music should be played without expression!

Now we read in *Musical America* the most important news of all. He told somebody in Spain

that 'Beethoven created no music' and that 'music did not advance a single inch through Wagner.'

This requires careful examination, and the more we examine, the more we are bewildered. Stravinsky's argument is, roughly, this: Music has been trying to express moods and philosophies. It has become a means instead of an end in itself. Its true end is 'the participation of auditory impressions.' By neglecting it, music has been hampered for centuries. The Germans, he said, have never understood music; they are philosophers, and deal only in 'musicality,' which is not the same thing as music at all. M. Stravinsky does not deny that Beethoven was a genius, which, indeed, is vastly civil of him; and he admits—more civilly—that Wagner 'lent the orchestra new elements,' but he was 'all that he should not have been. He was neither a philosopher nor a musician.' The reason was that he had learnt too much Greek, and therefore could not take a natural view of music. After this we learn with some surprise that Mozart and Schubert were real, simple musicians, because 'the ear delights in them.'

How much better than the way of such mere clumsy fumblers is that of Stravinsky, who follows the light, conveying to an eager world 'auditory impressions' which are quite his own and original. His harmony 'is something altogether unconventional and arbitrary' (we suspect a mistranslation here), 'bubbling forth every moment in a different manner.' He will not formulate it, for to do that would be only 'to add another academy to those already existing.' In conclusion 'he is sure that he has opened up new paths'—and he is seemingly amazed at his own indiscretion.

He is, furthermore, convinced that the wealth of folk-song is inexhaustible, and he proudly adds that he 'takes over folk-wise value as it stands.' This, of course, is the most tremendous, the most epoch-making innovation of all. Other composers may have used folk-songs, but has anyone 'taken over a folk-wise value'? Again there seems reason to suspect the translator. I cannot help thinking the German text of Dr. Istel said something about 'Volksweise,' which only means a 'folk-tune,' and possibly we ought to approach the whole translation with caution.

If M. Stravinsky had not written some really valuable music we should be inclined to dismiss the whole with a shrug of the shoulder; but he has earned the right to be considered seriously, and he deserves that we should make an honest effort to understand him.

M. Stravinsky's verdicts on Beethoven and Wagner are particularly worthy of study. As we have seen, he admits that the former was a 'genius,' but clearly not a musical genius, for he wrote no music. Then what kind of a genius was he? We are told he 'had a great soul and expressed it in notes which say nothing to the ear.' If notes say nothing to the ear, how can they express a great soul? we may ask. If they express a great soul, what meaning can there be in saying that 'Beethoven created no music'? If Beethoven's music says nothing to M. Stravinsky's ear, we are driven to the conclusion (which some of his latest music supports) that he is endowed with a set of auditory nerves so vastly different from those of the normally musical human being that it is hopeless to argue from him to any other listener. It is clear, too, that he uses the word 'music' in a sense so totally opposite to that which most people give to it that discussion becomes

impossible. One has no need to believe that all Beethoven's works are necessarily deathless to say this much.

In the case of Wagner the inconsistency is still more obvious. If the elements he gave to the orchestra were new, surely they must have helped the advance of music. If they did not, what is the sense of saying that they were new? Here, too, M. Stravinsky obviously uses the word 'music' in a purely esoteric and personal, not to say Pickwickian, sense.

Perhaps he will explain still further, and, in particular, tell us how it comes that a race which never understood music could produce a Mozart and a Schubert? It is a mere quibble to reply that they were Austrians, not Germans; and, besides, he has deprived himself of the right to use the argument, by the way in which he has mentioned them. Stravinsky the composer commands more respect than Stravinsky the commentator and controversialist.

Occasional Notes

A recent issue of *Musical America* contained an article by Mr. Francis Rogers on music in London. It was so ludicrously inaccurate that we pigeon-holed it for reference, but have so far been unable to deal with it. Fortunately it met the eye of Mr. Kaikhosru Sorabji, who promptly replied to a letter to the Editor. Briefly, Mr. Rogers opined that there was 'nothing doing' in London so far as music was concerned, and he seems to have been led to that view by the fact that just now the operatic stars in their courses prefer America to England—which is not surprising, seeing that America is the only large country with loose dollars lying around. Mr. Sorabji begins by telling the Editor of *M.A.* that 'it is really staggering to see the impudence with which people who come to London from abroad proceed to wallow in wild generalisations about musical activity here.' He then pointed out that the past year had seen London visited by practically all the outstanding figures in contemporary music, and that we have had performances of new works from all but a very few of the leading composers, many of whom have actually taken part in or conducted such performances. Mr. Sorabji, now thoroughly warmed up, then goes on (with a slap at us poor writers in passing):

This activity in *music*—as distinct from mere exhibitions of technical funambulism in effete and hackneyed trivialities which pass for music with the worshippers of the fat-box-office-receipts, fiddling, or keyboard-dribbling 'star,' which have as much connection with the great world of music as the Grub street journalistic hacks who scribble what with preposterous flattery is called 'musical criticism' have with literature—has been remarkable, and in spite of terribly adverse conditions and crushing expense, which shows a disinterested reverence and love for the art very different from the purely commercial instincts of the purveyors of musical *saltimbanquerie* whose doings occupy such an inordinate amount of space—duly paid for, let us hope!—in the American musical press.

Mr. Rogers, by the way, backed up his contention that London was dead musically during 1921 by pointing out that 'even the Promenade concerts under Sir Henry Wood did not continue through July'—which is not surprising, as they never begin until the middle of August.