

Review: More Schumann Letters (Continued)

Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 32, No. 576 (Feb. 1, 1891), pp. 73-76

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3362075>

Accessed: 15-02-2016 06:33 UTC

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## THE MUSICAL TIMES

## AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR.

FEBRUARY 1, 1891.

## THE "PLACES OF ENTERTAINMENT" BILL.

It is not our desire at this moment to enter into a discussion or criticism of the discretion displayed by the London County Council in regard to their memorable crusade against the music halls of the metropolis. But the London Places of Entertainment Bill, which has been framed and approved by this body, and will in due course of time be introduced before Parliament this session, cannot be passed over without a few words of comment in these columns, considering the formidable indictment against music which is practically contained in its most important provision. In the first place, it is enacted that from April 1, 1892, no theatre, except by virtue of letters patent, shall be kept open unless by license from the County Council. But what will interest readers of THE MUSICAL TIMES a great deal more keenly is the provision that while the Lord Chamberlain shall continue to be censor of stage plays, "one copy of every song intended to be acted, presented, or sung publicly for hire at any place of entertainment shall be sent to a person appointed for that purpose by the Council," and, in case this official shall disallow it, such performance shall be illegal. If this provision means anything, it means that every lessee of a theatre or opera house, and every giver of concerts, *matinées*, or recitals must furnish the censor of the County Council with the text of all the lyrics to be sung at their performances. The new measure has been confessedly framed in the interests of public morality, of which a certain section of the County Council have constituted themselves the champions. As for the spoken dialogue, they are satisfied to leave matters in the hands of the Lord Chamberlain and his licenser. But directly there is any question of musical accompaniment, the County Council claim the right of inspecting and vetoing the text. If our interpretation be a correct one—and the employment of the terms "at any place of entertainment" seems to admit of no reservation whatever—a very vexatious and harassing restriction is sought to be imposed on a species of entertainment which, in this country at any rate, has always been notably free from any ground of offence, simply and solely because the music hall authorities have been guilty of occasional lapses from propriety and decorum. We do not contend that the tone of all songs sung on the legitimate concert platform is invariably healthy and honest, or that the drift of all operatic librettos is in accordance with the dictates of the highest morality; but to place, say, Mr. Henschel on the same level as the lion comique, and to subject the masterpieces of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Sir Walter Scott to the tender mercies of a body principally constituted to attend to such purely material matters as the sanitation and lighting of the metropolis and the regulation of its traffic, seems to us a divergence from the natural fitness of things which can hardly be allowed to pass into the Statute Book without some justifiable opposition. The attitude of the County Council towards music is anything but complimentary towards that art, the only logical deduction from their contemplated interference being that it is the combination of words with harmonious sound that opens the door to license and impropriety. This may or may not be true of the music hall stage, but we protest most strongly against the imputation thus cast upon all music as being a demoralising agency, and the facilities which it is proposed to confer on a

County Council official, possibly of the school of Mr. McDougall, for expurgating the text of the songs performed at the Albert, St. James's, and Princes' Halls. There is, happily, little prospect of such a measure commending itself to the intelligence of our legislators at St. Stephen's. But the County Council have apparently committed themselves to the task of securing Parliamentary sanction for their Bill, and as the effort is to be made in sober earnest, we lose no time in calling attention to the absurdity of the proposal.

## MORE SCHUMANN LETTERS.\*

(Continued from page 11.)

WE have now to deal only with the letters written by Schumann after his marriage. Some of these may be passed, in so far as they express the happiness of a bridegroom, and, in due time, of a father. It is more interesting (because the event is somewhat more rare) to watch the composer's mingled anxiety and satisfaction about the production of his first Symphony (B flat). In the writing of this work he had been "perfectly blissful," and felt as proud of his achievement as, soon after, of his first-born child. "Just fancy a whole Symphony and a spring symphony too! I can hardly believe myself that it is finished." Then he sends for Hilf to come with his violin and play the work over with him, afterwards describing its successful public performance. "How I enjoyed hearing it performed! and so did other people; for it was received with an amount of sympathy such as I don't think has been accorded to any modern symphony since Beethoven." But in this pot of ointment there was at least one fly. Writing to Wenzel, who had reviewed the Symphony in the *Leipziger Zeitung*, Schumann fires up in an unusual manner:—

"Was that your essay in the *Kinderfreund* (a nickname of the journal above mentioned)? I was so much hurt by it. I had been in such good spirits. To point to the *future*, after a work performed with such enthusiasm, and in such cool words! And yet it *surprised* you! I hate those expressions like poison. I have been too industrious and conscientious all my life to be spoken of as a possible future light, and to surprise people. I know that much. However that may be—first I thought of keeping these secret thoughts from you—I should like you, of all people, to speak of me with the respect which is really my due. Well, let's say no more about it, and bear no malice."

Alas, alas! this great man was a member of the irritable genus. The Symphony was assailed, or, at all events, underpraised, in another paper, which angered Schumann scarcely less:—

"If you had heard the Symphony you would, I think, fly out, and swear pretty well at the review in that old *Musikalische Zeitung*. It was written by a well-known (but by no means stupid) flatterer of Mendelssohn, who (the flatterer, not Mendelssohn) was vexed that I should have been the first among the younger artists to have written a symphony which made a hit. Enough of this. I am not fond of writing (about myself), let alone about what has been written for some time."

It was with the critics that Schumann showed a readiness to quarrel, not with the public, against whom he had not a word to say when his second Symphony (the present No. 4, in D minor) and the "Overture, Scherzo, and Finale" were received with comparative indifference. He even looked about for a reason, which was discovered, not in the music, but in the absence of Mendelssohn as Conductor.

\* "The Life of Schumann, told in his Letters." Translated from the German by May Herbert. In two volumes. (Richard Bentley and Son.)

Schumann's opinion of Mendelssohn at that time will be accounted extravagant by many who look at him from the present distance: "I firmly believe that Mendelssohn will return to Leipzig next winter. My dear friend, surely he is the best musician in the world just now. Don't you think so? An extraordinary man—or, as Santini said of him at Rome, a *monstrum sine vitio*."

References to "Paradise and the Peri" are frequent in the letters of 1843. They show how much pleasure the task of composing that fine work gave its author, and how confident he was that success would attend the new offspring of his genius. The rehearsals began in October, the performance being fixed for November 20, between which dates Schumann seems to have been in, for him, a most exuberant mood: "Even the first rehearsals have given me great pleasure. What a joy it is to hear a chorus burst forth in that way! Oh, for texts, texts! I should like to write nothing but this kind of thing." The production of "Paradise and the Peri" did not take place till December 4, when, writes Schumann, "it gave me great pleasure, and, indeed, conferred some honours upon me likewise." In this connection we must not lose an opportunity of doing justice to Mendelssohn, who, because the name of Schumann does not make a figure in his published correspondence, is often accused of unworthy feelings towards his brother composer. Madame Schumann invited Mendelssohn to be present at the performance of "Paradise and the Peri," but the letter did not, for some reason or other, reach his hands till too late. Mendelssohn, who was then in Berlin, at once replied, declaring that but for the delay he would have attended at any cost. He went on to say: "How heartily grieved I am at this I need not tell you and your dear husband. Not only do I love being at Leipzig and love hearing good music, but I should have so liked to come to *that* music, to *that* new work of Schumann's, and now I shall have to wait until he has finished another. I cannot reconcile myself to that at all. I am quite too disappointed about it. Tell your husband all this; tell him how heartily I rejoiced at his splendid success; every one who wrote to me was full of the 'Peri' and the pleasure it had given him. . . . Tell him that it all seems to me like a piece of good fortune that has happened to myself, and mind you both enjoy the performance to-morrow night, and when you and those around you are all very happy, then remember how dearly I should have loved to be with you." These kind and hearty words are a sufficient answer to many ungenerous remarks based upon false conclusions.

In an undated letter to Dr. Krüger (probably written in October, 1844) we see the first intimation of the disease which ultimately wrecked and ended Schumann's life:—

"Probably you do not know how very ill I have been with a kind of general nervous disorder, which I have suffered from for the last three months, and in consequence of which every exertion, even a mental one, has been prohibited by the doctor. Now I am rather better. Life looks brighter again, and hope and confidence are coming back by degrees. I think I had had too much music, and then had been very busy composing the music to Goethe's 'Faust,' and at last mind and body refused to act. I have not been able to listen to music at all of late, it went through my nerves like a knife." These ominous symptoms did not abate, and five weeks later the patient wrote: "I am still very unwell and often feel quite hopeless. I am not allowed to work at all, and must only rest and go for walks, but, sometimes, I have not even strength enough for that. Beautiful Spring, perhaps you will give it back to me." Six

months passed and then Schumann wrote to Verhulst: "I have had a bad time of it since you last heard from me. I was often very ill. Gloomy demons possessed me. Now I am rather better, and am beginning to work again, which for months has been out of the question." There is further reference to the same subject in a letter to Mendelssohn, dated July, 1845: "I have had an awful winter. An entire nervous prostration, accompanied by a host of terrible thoughts, nearly drove me to despair; but things look brighter now—music is again beginning to sound within me and I hope soon to have quite recovered." The obstinacy of the attack may be gathered by observing that these letters, written at intervals of six months, all speak of approaching convalescence. Schumann thus kept his hold on hope: "Sometimes a rosy glow seems to tell me that I shall soon regain my old strength, which will enable me to begin work afresh." The blessing was, however, slow in coming. A later communication to Mendelssohn begins:

"I ought to have written to you to thank you for your affectionate visit, and for many things you said to me. But any sort of writing still fatigues me very much; so forgive me. I am certainly a little better. Hofrath Carus has recommended me early morning walks, which do me a great deal of good; but I am not myself yet, and daily suffer great irritation (?) in a hundred different places. A mysterious complaint! When the doctor tries to take hold of it, it seems to disappear. But I daresay better times are coming, and when I look upon wife and children I have joy enough."

In October of the same year Schumann addressed a very interesting letter to his illustrious brother in art, touching, among other things, upon his continued indisposition: "Unfortunately I have still not recovered my usual strength. Any sort of disturbance of the simple order of my life throws me off my balance, and into a nervous irritable state. This is why I preferred staying at home when my wife was with you—much to my regret. Wherever there is fun or enjoyment I must still keep out of the way. The only thing to be done is hope, hope—and so I will." Here follows a pleasant reference to his wife's relations with Mendelssohn: "It was with real delight that Clara told me how kind and good you had been to her. You know, she is an old admirer of yours, and happy at every sign of approval from you. There is no doubt that she really does deserve any amount of affection and encouragement as an industrious and hard-working artist, and, indeed, as a woman too. She is a gift from above. So she came back from Leipzig quite happy, and you were the chief reason of her being so, as she did not attempt to deny."

A reference to Mendelssohn's organ sonatas comes in here: "These intensely poetical new ideas—what a perfect picture they form in every sonata! In Bach's music I always imagine him sitting at the organ, but in yours I rather think of a St. Cecilia touching the keys, and how delightful that that should be your wife's name! Above all, Nos. 5 and 6 seem to me splendid. It is really a fact, dear Mendelssohn, no one else writes such pure harmonies; and they keep on getting purer and more inspired. Have I been praising you again? Might I? But, of course, what does the world (including many musicians) know of pure harmony?" The last sentence seems to have brought Wagner into the writer's mind, and excited him to a very vigorous tirade against that aggressive master. It is the fashion to cry up Schumann (though he made some conspicuous mistakes) as a true prophet and seer of musical worth, but the Wagner pronouncement which we are about to quote has, no doubt, changed the opinion of many, while, almost as certainly, confirming that of others:—



"There is Wagner, who has just finished another opera ('Tannhäuser'), undoubtedly a clever fellow, full of crazy ideas and bold to a degree. The aristocracy is still raving about 'Rienzi,' but I declare he cannot write or imagine four consecutive bars that are melodious, or *even correct*. That is what they all lack—pure harmony and capacity for four-part composition. What permanent good can come of such a state of things? And now the full score lies beautifully printed before us, and its fifths and octaves into the bargain; and now he would like to make corrections and erasures. Too late! Well, enough. The music (of 'Tannhäuser') is not a shade better than 'Rienzi'; in fact, rather weaker and more strained. But if one says anything to that effect people exclaim directly, 'Oh, what envy!' So I only say it to you, as I am sure that you have known it for a long time."

The foregoing was written after a perusal of the score, but when Schumann witnessed the opera on the stage, the dramatic strength of Wagner made a deep impression, and he was candid enough to own it in another letter to Mendelssohn: "Perhaps we shall soon have a talk about 'Tannhäuser.' *I must retract a good deal* of what I wrote to you after reading the score. On the stage everything is very different. I was quite impressed by some of it." This was followed, in a letter to Dorn, by a passage even more appreciative: "I wish you could see 'Tannhäuser,' by Wagner. It contains much that is deep and original, and a great deal of it is a *hundred times better* than his former operas, though some of the music is certainly very trivial. In short, he may become of immense importance to the stage, and as far as I know him he has got the courage for it. I consider the technical part, the instrumentation, excellent, and it is all far more masterly than it used to be." So much for second and third impressions, even in the case of a man like Schumann. So much, too, for the wisdom of judging an opera by simple reference to the score.

Some of the most charming passages in these letters were written by Schumann to young men who sought his advice. To one Meinardus, who thought to enter the musical profession, he said:—

"I cannot tell you how much it pains me to have to remind you of that passage in your letter where you tell me so openly and confidently about your circumstances. You considered the matter sufficiently important to write to me about it, and so it is. Have you courage to face the long time which will have to elapse before you may *possibly* see your way to a secure position? to bear the thousand deprivations and frequent humiliations without sacrificing your youth and your creative power? Then it seems to me that your ideas are far beyond your capabilities. You would have much, very much to make up—a great deal that young musicians of your age have done with long ago, and you would have to go through a severe training in any case. That you may then do good work, and possibly great things as a composer, I quite believe, from the talent displayed in your compositions. But no voice comes to us from the future, we can make sure of nothing. So I advise you to go on loving art, as you have always done, to keep yourself in practice, and produce things in your mind as much as possible, to follow the lines of our great examples and masters—above all, Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven—and always give the present a kindly glance. But only after the severest self-examination must you adopt the career to which your heart inclines you, and, if you do not feel strong enough to brave its toils and dangers, seek that safe ground which you can always adorn with the fruits of your own imagination, and those of your favourite artists."

These frank, sensible, and kindly words have their counterpart in others addressed to a similar quarter. A young man had sent Schumann a composition for the pianoforte, which was perused and commented upon thus:—

"But every now and then the *pianist* is too much to the fore. As a composer you must throw him overboard altogether, if you aim at a more than merely ephemeral effect. Only that which comes from the heart and is inspired from within will hold its own and outlast time. Please don't be offended at my remarks. It is so difficult to discuss the mysterious powers of creative capacity; indeed, one can but indicate one's meaning. Whatever you do, don't give up working steadily on, even though the world should withhold its approbation for a long time. The other day I read: 'An artist should daily combat his vanity, his ambition, if he would emerge from the struggle bright and strong.'"

In a second letter to Meinardus we read: "Above all things persevere in composing mentally, not with the help of the instrument, and keep on turning and twisting the principal melodies about in your head, until you can say to yourself, 'Now it will do.' To hit upon the right thing all in a moment, as it were, does not happen every day, and the sketch books of great composers, especially Beethoven, prove how long and how laboriously they often worked at a simple melody, and kept on improving upon it."

Under date September, 1851, we find a letter addressed to a young man who had, with the boldness and impertinence of youth, advised Schumann to give up romanticism and write clearly. The amiable master could not let this pass without administering a corrective under which "J. N., of T.," unless very spachydermatous, must have winced. It seems that the more than self-sufficient lad had offered Schumann not only advice, but the libretto of an opera. To this the first sentence in the following extract refers:—

"Although I am obliged to you for the readiness with which you have placed your work at my disposal, I must, on the other hand, protest against the rest of your letter, which, considering our respective positions, seems to me a piece of presumption. How can you, who have given the world no proof of artistic or critical gifts—how can you proffer advice, such as one would give to beginners, to a man who has at all events given some small proofs of his capacity? Have you not thought of this at all? What you write was nothing new to me thirty years ago, and ten years ago I taught it to my pupils at the Leipzig Conservatory. And don't my compositions, especially the greater ones, bear traces here and there of my being more or less acquainted with great masters? I can always go for advice to *them*, and ever have done so—to simple Gluck, to the more intricate Handel, and to the most intricate of all, Bach. Only study the last-named thoroughly, and the most complicated of my works will seem simple enough to you. Haven't you found out that much in my music, that I have got other aims than amusing children and amateurs? As if there were only one or two forms into which all intellectual creations must mould themselves! And as if each thought did not come into existence clothed in a form of its own! As if every work of art must not have a different import, and a different aspect as well! So I will give you your O. von Redwitz ten times over for Jean Paul, and Shakespeare is dearer to me still. This is the answer I have to make to your letter, which was insulting both in style and tone."

It pleases us to wonder how Mr. Impertinence felt in the grasp of the old lion, who clearly had not lost

all his teeth. It is conceivable that he rose a sadder if not a wiser man from the perusal of Schumann's answer to his egregious communication.

In 1852 references to the master's nervous disorder re-appear in his letters: "I was ill for six months this year with a distressing nervous complaint, possibly in consequence of too hard work. I have only been better for the last five or six weeks. But I must still refrain from indulging in any great work, and altogether be very moderate in everything. With help from above, I hope soon to regain my old health and strength." He, at any rate, recovered vigour enough to make another attack upon Wagner's music as distinct from his operas as a whole:—

"What you tell me about Wagner has interested me very much. To put it in as few words as possible—he is not a good musician; he lacks feeling for form and harmony. But you must not judge him from the pianoforte scores. If you were to hear his operas on the stage, I am sure you could not but feel deep emotion in a great many instances. And though it may not be the bright sunlight radiating from a genius, yet there is often a mysterious charm in his music which captivates the senses. But, as I said before, the music, apart from the whole performance, is poor—often downright amateurish, meaningless, and repulsive; and unfortunately it is a proof of depraved artistic taste when, in the face of the many dramatic master-pieces Germany has produced, people try to depreciate them by comparing them with Wagner. But enough of this. The future will decide."

Here we must close our notice of these interesting and valuable letters, though many pages might yet be filled with extracts which our readers would gladly peruse. As materials for *the Life of Schumann*, which has yet to be written, the letters are priceless, while they are essential to a right conception of the master's character. With regard to Schumann as a man, they emit no light save such as increases our respect, and also our sorrow that, in the mysterious orderings of Providence, one so estimable suffered deep personal affliction, and passed away too soon amid horrible clouds and darkness.

## THE GREAT COMPOSERS.

By JOSEPH BENNETT.

No. XXVIII.—WAGNER (*continued from page 14*).

"ONE real gain I bring back from England," wrote Wagner from Zurich to Liszt in Weimar. And what was it? "The cordial and genuine friendship which I feel for Berlioz, and which we have mutually concluded." It was a remarkable coincidence that these two men—so near together in some respects, so far apart in others—found themselves at the head of rival organisations in the same city, and it must be satisfactory to well-regulated minds that their contiguity had an issue of peace rather than war. The two turbulent souls were equally charged with electricity, perhaps, so there was no lightning and consequently no thunder. In the letter referred to above, Wagner "gushed" over Berlioz, to whom he found himself allied by the bond of common suffering and the conviction that the world was treating them both badly:—

"A few days after, we two were the only guests at Sainton's table; he was lively, and the progress in French which I have made in London permitted me to discuss with him for five hours all the problems of art, philosophy, and life, in a most fascinating conversation. In that manner I gained a deep sympathy for my new friend; he appeared to me quite

different from what he had done before. We discovered suddenly that we were in reality fellow-sufferers, and I thought that, upon the whole, I was happier than Berlioz."

A natural comment upon this is that at no moment are men better able to estimate each other than when their faces are reflected by dining-room mahogany. On the side of Berlioz an equally glowing sentiment prevailed. He wrote to Liszt: "Wagner will no doubt tell you all about his stay in London, and what he has had to suffer from predetermined hostility. He is splendid in his ardour and warmth of heart, and I confess that even his violence delights me." Liszt, on his part, was charmed to see brethren "dwelling together in unity." To Wagner he said: "I am delighted at your friendly relations with Berlioz. Of all contemporary composers, he is the one with whom you can converse in the simplest, openest, and most interesting manner. Take him for all in all, he is an honest, splendid, and tremendous fellow."

In September, 1855, Liszt received for Wagner, from the firm of Mason Brothers, New York, an invitation to visit America and conduct a series of Concerts, but the affair came to nothing, for a pecuniary reason sufficiently indicated by the terms of the Master's reply to his Weimar friend:—

"It is a blessing that they do not offer me very much money. The hope of being able to earn a large sum, say 10,000 dollars, in a short time, would, in the great helplessness of my pecuniary position, compel me, as a matter of course, to undertake this American expedition, although, even in that case, it would perhaps be absurd to sacrifice my best vital powers to so miserable a purpose, and, as it were, in an indirect manner. But, as a man like me has no chance of a really lucrative speculation, I am glad that I am not exposed to any serious temptation, and, therefore, ask you to thank the gentlemen of New York very kindly in my name, for the unmerited attention they have shown me, and to tell them that, 'for the present,' I am unable to accept their invitation."

Wagner was busy at this time with the music of his "Walkyrie," and getting along very indifferently with the task. The old spirit of dissatisfaction and complaint had returned. He was again weary of things in general, and almost hoping, though dreading, an end to his career:—

"My mental disharmony is indescribable; sometimes I stare at my paper for days together, without remembrance or thought or liking for my work. . . All the motive power which, for a time, I derived from my dreary solitude is losing its force. When I began, and quickly finished, the 'Rhinegold,' I was still full of the intercourse with you (Liszt) and yours. For the last two years all around me has grown silent, and my occasional contact with the outer world is inharmonious and dispiriting. Believe me, this cannot go on much longer. If my external fate does not soon take a different turn, if I find no possibility of seeing you more frequently, and of hearing or producing some of my works now and then, my fountain will dry up and the end be near. It is impossible for me to go on as now."

This particular attack of low spirits was mainly due to a cause indicated in the closing words of the above extract. Wagner had set his heart upon a visit from Liszt during the autumn, and had been disappointed, the Weimar musician having postponed coming till November or Christmas. But the depression soon passed away, and we even find Wagner congratulating self and friend that the "Walkyrie" would be completed before the two met. There was no longer any talk about the end being near.