

WHY IS MUSICAL CRITICISM AND WHAT CAN IT OFFER?

The Approaching Riches in Music Used as a Pretext to Explain What the Critic Can and Cannot Pretend to Do

THE second season of music which the EVENING LEDGER has the pleasure of reviewing, began yesterday with the first concert of Philadelphia's greatest musical institution—the Orchestra. Announcements, which have been sent to the music editor and which have appeared in the newspapers and musical journals, indicate a year of splendid activity for Philadelphia. Last year the Orchestra alone fulfilled itself. The opera was curtailed and the concert season was a disgrace. This year, beside the Orchestra and the Boston Symphony and Mr. Damrosch's New York organization, all of which were heard last year, we shall have two series of operatic performances, and at least one series of afternoon concerts. Two new organizations for chamber music have been formed and the plans of local musicians and of amateurs are full of promise. The reviewer of music would be something less than human if he did not take a vast deal of pleasure in this prospect. He can feel, in the first place, that his work justifies itself more thoroughly when music is being heard frequently and by great numbers. Mere numbers, of course, mean nothing. If 10 times the population of Philadelphia heard all the bad music written since Jean-Jacques Rousseau—a terrible thought!—there would be very little gain. But if all the citizens of Philadelphia had a chance to hear a great deal of good music every year, and took advantage of the chance eagerly and with deepening appreciation of what music means, that would be a far better thing than for a thousand Philadelphians to progress to the point where they could honestly say that they preferred Stravinsky to Beethoven.

That point should be made clear. The reviews of music in the EVENING LEDGER are written not for the trained musician, nor yet for the man with a trained musical ear. When a technical question is vitally important it is given due consideration. But in the main the criticism is written for those who go to hear music because they like it and not because they are exceedingly intrigued by a succession of exploding thirteenths. The purpose of the reviewer is always to interpret the music in intelligible human terms—not particularly in literary terms, although that is often the easiest way to make a meaning clear.

Letters are frequently written to critics of plays and books and statues and symphonies, asking how it is that another reviewer of the same object said precisely the opposite thing. Sometimes, by placing the opinions of critics in parallel columns a noteworthy satiric result is obtained. "She was in exceptional voice," says critic A. of Mme. Highnote. "Mme. Highnote was seldom heard to so little advantage," says critic B. A puzzled auditor who rather enjoyed Mme. Highnote's recital finds in the first place that he didn't half appreciate his opportunities, and in the second that he is a stupid fellow for having enjoyed the performance at all. So he wants to know.

Now, concerning a certain number of things, the writer does not admit that there is room for difference of opinion. In fact, opinion itself has no room in discussing the structure of a given symphony nor in determining the accuracy of the bass drum in the second movement. These are matters of pure fact. Opinion, or better still, taste, has its proper place in criticism. It is the critic's bounden duty to say so if he thinks Tschalkowsky is shoddy—which I hope no critic really believes in the depths of his heart—and it is his duty to tell why. But that critic is not at liberty to deny that Mr. Blank's oboe playing in the Tschalkowsky number was perfect. The reader, too, has a certain duty here. He must be at least as liberal as the critic. He must not refuse to give him a hearing because the critic disagrees concerning a favorite composer or a favorite performer. So long as prejudices are frankly stated there is no objection to their intrusion. The reader can always discount Mr. Finck on Wagner or Mr. Huneker on next year's succes de scandale, because he knows just where these critics stand on the questions at issue.

One of the lesser-known Whistler stories concerns an unhappy fool who bored the painter for three hours and as he rose to leave, said: "Jimmy, don't you think that that panel ought to hang a little higher on the wall. But I suppose that's a matter of taste, after all."

Whistler swung around at him. "Great heavens! That's the first sensible remark you've made today—and you had to spoil it. It isn't a matter of taste, it's a matter of judgment. Of course, it ought to hang higher!"

The matters of judgment are the crux of musical criticism, and they are its salvation. Musical criticism too often consists of calling things no one cares about by names no one understands. It is only when judgment is exercised that criticism becomes self-respecting. The meaning of music and its interpretation, its significance and its value, these are the materials on which judgment operates. On

the soundness of these judgments the critic must rest his case.

Humble before the great work he hears, humble before the people whom he addresses, the critic is none the less confident in the sanity of his judgments because (he hopes) they are the judgments of a normal human being. He can have no purpose beyond that of making the meaning of music a little clearer, if that is necessary, and revealing its grandness and its glory to those who may not suspect their existence. He must write not for the few who already know, but for the many who may know. He has many consolations. He is constantly in the presence of beautiful things—and he pays for this by hearing them brutally misdone at times. And he is constantly in search of a greater and clearer beauty. He has the pleasure of saying what he sincerely believes—and has the pleasure of discovering, about once a day, that he is all wrong. But the great and serious happiness of his work is in the belief that it spreads a light not so useful as an economic treatise, nor so effective as a tract, but a light which burns clearly and warmly somewhere in the human spirit. G. V. S.

THE PLAYWRIGHT INTERVIEWS HIMSELF

Continued from Page One

"Here, wait a minute," said the interviewer, "let me ask an occasional question, or this won't seem like an interview. * * * If the success of 'Under Cover,' as you infer, is based on fooling the audience, and so maintaining your suspense, I suppose that once having seen it no one ever comes back a second time?"

"I am very glad you asked that question," the author answered quickly, "because, curiously enough, many of those who have been deceived like to come next time with some one who does not know the plot and watch their friends get fooled, too. I suppose the desire to be behind the scenes, as it were, to be in the know, is a more or less universal trait in human nature."

"We seem to be talking a lot about 'Under Cover,'" said the interviewer, "let's be more general. What do you consider the trend of the modern drama?"

"I believe," the author replied instantaneously, evidently riding a hobby, "that the day when a merely good, well-made play, with an interesting story, will register a real success is past. There was a time when such a play, proceeding along well-balanced, technical lines, taking the audience into its confidence, with a last act that only tied together the loose ends, would amble along pleasantly enough for its 10 or 12 weeks in New York and then go on the road to 'clean up.'"

"And nowadays?" interjected the interviewer in order to break up the paragraphs.

"Nowadays, there are so many theatres, so much competition, so many productions, while all the time the theatre-going public has not increased proportionately, that only the very best plays succeed. The theatre is the only business I know of where no one takes account of the demand, but is concerned merely with the supply. Other businesses in bad times run on half time, turn out half their usual product, but the theatre, with conditions cheerful or depressing, war or no war, goes on merrily producing, each for itself, with no spirit of co-operation or combination. There have been 57 new productions in New York this season, and the season proper is not three months old! So it has come about that only plays with a real idea, with some different twist, some genuine novelty, are making successes, and the proof of it is in the New York failures just now. I believe, too, that more and more, the method of the novelist will predominate in the theatre—that is, not telling the audience what is going to happen or even suggesting it, but letting character and plot develop themselves. I feel, too, that more and more a play's last act must be its best, for it is their impression of the last act that the audience take home with them."

"Are you," asked the interviewer abruptly, "trying to 'uplift' in your plays?"

"Don't make me laugh," replied the author. "I'm trying to entertain. I believe the theatre is first of all a place of entertainment, and if in the course of that we can point a moral, or instruct, so much the better. Personally about my own work I should like to feel that every audience which goes out from any play of mine has been a bit taken out of itself; cheered up a little, made somewhat more contented, and goes home feeling happier perhaps than when it came in. If that may be true, or any part of it, I am more than content."

"By George," said the interviewer suddenly, "you're co-author of 'It Pays to Advertise,' and we haven't said a thing about it."

"No," said the author, "but we've used up more than a thousand words. So let's let it go that IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE UNDER COVER."

TRYING THE DOG ON THE DRAMA



With Mr. Hodge in "The Road to Happiness" appear Shep, the collie; the old horse, Senator; Henrietta, the hen, and a canary named Dick.

MR. HODGE has a dog—in "The Road to Happiness." Not to mention a hen, a horse and a canary. But the dog is the main thing, because the dog makes Mr. Hodge feel quite Shakespearean, even though he is playing "rube drama."

"You see," says Mr. Hodge, "it is like this: William Kempe was the leading comedian of Shakespeare's company. Kempe had a dog; his name was Crab, and so the Bard wrote a part of him in 'Two Gentlemen of Verona.' Well, when Lawrence Whitman was writing 'The Road to Happiness' for me, he insisted that my dog Shep should have a part in the play. But Kempe's dog was evidently not a dependable animal, for we read in the stage direction, act 2, scene 3: 'Enter Laurence, leading a dog.' Laurence was one of Kempe's famous roles; yet his dog Crab had more to do than merely be led about on the stage. Some people seem to think, by the way, that the dog star in the theatrical firmament is an innovation. This is hardly so, since it began with Shakespeare."

"My dog Shep has been acting in 'The Road to Happiness' for three years, and has never missed a rehearsal or a performance—and now comes along Jasper in 'Young America,' the latest New York success, and proves like Crab and Shep that the dog star is something not to be barked at. This calls to mind the fact that a dog, whether seen or spoken of in a play, is of some consequence. Ask any dozen persons you meet whether Schneider appeared with Joseph Jefferson in 'Rip Van Winkle,' and he will tell you that Schneider was there in person. The fact is, however, that Mr. Jefferson never utilized a dog in the play. Mr. Jefferson was once asked why he did not have a dog in the play and replied that he 'disliked realism in art, and realism alive, with a tail to wag at the wrong time, would be abominable.' Asked if the public would not like to see Schneider he said, 'The public could not pay him a higher compliment, for it shows how great an interest they take in an animal that they have never seen exhibited.'"

"I am informed, however, by an old actor that when Charles Burke, Mr. Jefferson's half-brother, appeared in 'Rip Van Winkle' in 1850 he made use of a dog, impersonating Schneider. Another old actor also tells me that when Robert McWade appeared as Rip he also led forth poor Schneider in real life. These matters of fact I must leave to the theatrical 'sharp.' There is no doubt, however, that when J. H. Hackett, the elder, appeared as Rip in 1839, Schneider was on view; that is, Schneider's remains. When the elder Hackett woke up in the mountains the skeleton of Schneider was on view tied to a bush."

"My old actor friends tell me that the dog star enjoyed considerable popularity in the legitimate drama half a century ago. During the old days of the Bowery Theatre, E. L. Blanchard was a tremendous favorite in a play called 'The Forest of Bondy; or, The Dog of Montargis.' This play, it appears, was not at all popular with the leading man, for it was the business of 'The Dog of Montargis' to dash at him in the last act and grab him by the throat. A little later, when E. L. Davenport presented 'Oliver Twist' and appeared as Bill Sykes, he was accompanied by the redoubtable Bullseye. Then Lyn Harding also had a day. It will be remembered by theatre-goers of our day that J. K. Emmett utilized in his various plays a strikingly handsome Newfoundland dog. The same is true of 'Romany Rye,' in which drama a Newfoundland dog was the protector of the heroine. In Julia Marlowe's early presentation of Shakespeare's 'Much Ado About Nothing' she made striking use of two impressive greyhounds."

"The dog star has come more and more into use during the last two or three seasons. The most important utilization of a dog in a play up to the present season was when Laurette Taylor appeared in 'Peg o' My Heart' with her famous Michael. Dog stars and dog acts, how-

ever, have ever been tremendously popular in vaudeville. Claude and Fanny Usher, with their dog Spareriba, have been the delight of vaudeville audiences for many years. We also have had innumerable impersonators of dogs on the stage. One of the best of the latter is Alfred Latell, in 'Hands Up,' at the Lyric.

"There is one advantage of employing dog stars. They are oblivious to favorable or unfavorable criticism and are not likely to suffer from megacephala. Another thing, the dog star is not likely to cause trouble on account of his billing. I have never known of one who did not prefer a blanket to a three sheet." And then—the "bloodhounds in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'"

"The Musical Glasses"

Reviews of all concerts which merit attention appear the following day in the regular news columns of the EVENING LEDGER. As soon as the season is sufficiently advanced a calendar of events will be published each Saturday. For the present announcements are here given of concerts in the more or less distant future.

The Philadelphia Orchestra concerts of Friday afternoon and Saturday evening, October 22 and 23, at the Academy of Music will present the first soloist of the season in the person of Josef Hofmann, pianist, who will play the Beethoven Concerto No. 5, in E flat, the so-called "Emperor" Concerto. Mr. Hofmann has appeared in Philadelphia with the orchestra no less than six times, playing concertos by Liszt, Rubinstein, Beethoven and Schumann. However, he has not as yet appeared in the "Emperor" Concerto, which is rightly considered as the greatest test of musicianship any pianist can undergo. Mr. Hofmann's popularity as a player will doubtless attract a large audience.

The program of the entire concert is as follows:

Tragic Overture Brahms
Piano Concerto No. 5, in E flat Beethoven
Josef Hofmann.
Symphony No. 4, in F Tschalkowsky

Two organizations new to Philadelphia.

IS IT TRUE TO LIFE?

YOU CAN DECIDE AFTER YOU
HAVE SEEN THIS FEATURE

The Unwelcome Wife

AT YOUR LOCAL THEATRE

BOOKED THROUGH THE
GREAT EASTERN BOOKING
OFFICE, 127 VINE STREET,
PHILA. PA.

WANTED!

Your Ideas for Photoplays and
Stories! BIG REWARDS!
No experience needed. We CRITICISE FREE
and submit to Leading Editors. Hundreds
making money. GET BUSY! WRITE TO-
DAY for details.
Story Revision Co. 700 MAIN,
SMETHPORT, PA.