

# When the Critics Disagree

## Some Examples Provided by Contemporaries

By B. H. Haggin

ON a previous occasion I contended that newspaper readers, instead of being disconcerted, perplexed and annoyed by the conflicting judgments of critics, should expect such conflict, be prepared for it, and meet it in the way that it should be met. If I were a reader of the Eagle I would not be upset by the fact that Mr. Downes of the Times called Mr. Barbiroll's performance of Sibelius' First Symphony "exciting and full-blooded" when Mr. Haggin called it a "monstrous caricature" of the work. If I were a particularly observant reader I would notice that by the time Mr. Downes had made allowance for this flaw and that, his review described much the same performance as Mr. Haggin's did. But even as an ordinarily observant reader I would take the attitude that Mr. Downes was Mr. Downes and Mr. Haggin was Mr. Haggin, and that what I must do is decide—

from the qualities of mind, feeling, understanding, and background that each man revealed in his criticism—how much authority each should have for me.

There are instances where the decision is difficult, and where the conflict is amusing. W. J. Henderson and Pitts Sanborn are both expert commentators on everything that has to do with singing; what is one to do but laugh when they reach flatly contradictory conclusions on every possible point, as they did on the occasion of Lotte Lehmann's first appearance in New York? Remark that her capacities as an operatic artist still remained a matter for conjecture, Mr. Henderson went on to say that the recital had provided a demonstration of what she could do as an interpreter of songs; "and there can be but one verdict, namely, that Mme. Lehmann is entitled to a place in the list of eminent recital singers." Mr.

Sanborn, however, reached a different verdict. In her singing of songs, he wrote, "Her most serious defect was her tendency to deliver them all like an opera singer rather than like a Lieder singer. Mme. Lehmann displayed temperament in abundance, but no more than a conventional insight into the content of songs, and her performance was deficient in the finesse and polish of the first-rate recitalist." But on this point Mr. Henderson was equally positive. He found it "impossible to describe in print the infinite gradations of force and timbre with which such a singer employs the voice in song interpretation. The simple surroundings of a recital, away from the glare of orchestra and the distracting accessories of the theatre, demand and at the same time give scope for the finer traits of a singer's art, which may easily be submerged in opera. It was with unceasing pleasure that one followed Mme. Lehmann through group after group and noted the fineness plan for the presentation of each song and the skillful adjustment of her materials to every one."

Following her through group after group Mr. Sanborn decided that "the French group may be dismissed without further ado. Mme. Lehmann was at home in neither the language nor the manner." But for Mr. Henderson "not the least proof of the soundness of Mme. Lehmann's technique was her facile transition from German to French. The difficult Gallic tongue effected no perceptible alteration in the quality of her tones." He commented on her ability to range easily from passionate utterance to communication of archness and charm, and spoke of "her triumphant contrast of the voix claire and the voix sombre in 'Death and the Maiden,' the high finish of her 'Nussbaum,' which had to be repeated, the glorious pas-

—sion and splendor of voice in 'Ich grolle nicht,' which also had to be repeated (and was sung at least 50 per cent better the second time), the lightness and gaiety of 'Auftraege.'" Mr. Sanborn, on the other hand, found her dramatic force effective in "Ich grolle nicht" ("even though the latter was little but 'grolle'"), but noted that she broke up "Der Nussbaum" into "strange bits of phrases (shades of Marcella Sembrich!)," that "Auftraege" was rather poorly sung, and that in fact she had seem bent "on subjecting her art to the test of songs to which it is, for one reason or another, little suited. Thus, she lacked the right kind of feeling for Schubert's 'An die Musik' and 'Death and the Maiden.'"

And so it went down to the very end. "Kurt Ruhrseltz furnished accompaniments which were wholly worthy of the occasion," wrote Mr. Henderson. "Kurt Ruhrseltz provided her with piano accompaniment which will scarcely add to his fame," wrote Mr. Sanborn.

QUITE different is the problem presented by two other reviews that I have found in a collection of clippings. One concerns a recital of Mme. Lehmann two years ago, of which Samuel Chotzinoff wrote: "Miss Lehmann as a Lieder singer gives rise to speculation as to whether an artist is justified in bringing to Lieder the pointedness, the exuberance and the emotional intensity on the grand scale that is so essential in opera... The injection of these qualities in the songs of Brahms, Schumann and other masters of the small lyric adds, it is true, an element of drama and excitement to a song recital, yet it also, it seems to me, tends to displace the concentrated musical and poetic force of the lied... In the small compass of a song the emotion may not overstep the limitations of a new and quite unprepared idea. Perhaps I am all wrong in trying to prescribe an aesthetic for the interpretation of the lied. Yet I felt at times that Miss Lehmann stepped out of the frame of a song and into the larger territory of music drama... However, more often Miss Lehmann adjusted her vitality and her capacity for deep feeling to the scale of her medium of the afternoon; and there resulted finely wrought and poetic expositions of the text and music."

But two or three months ago Mme. Lehmann gave another recital, which led Mr. Chotzinoff to write: "There is supposed to be a tradition of Lieder singing to which practitioners of that special art are expected to conform. This tradition imposes a certain style which had been set by celebrated artists of the past and tended like a sacred flame by their successors. I remember a few of these celebrities well, and recall the tradition as one involving great vocal artifice and a dramatic projection of the lyric or dramatic content of the lied. I also recall that these artists were most impressive, and that they induced wonder and delight with uncanny exhibitions of breath control and a thick underscoring of sentiment and passion. Miss Lehmann apparently knows nothing of this tradition. She has never heard of vocal artifice, and the words 'studied' and 'projection' are not in her vocabulary. Her breath control does not stick out like a sore thumb. She breathes when she feels like it, most of the time in the proper places, sometimes, when she can't help it, in the very middle of a phrase. She underscores nothing consciously, sometimes she sings sharp, and there are moments when her high tones are strident. Yet her singing of Lieder offers something to the listener that

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## Harpichord Soloist Playing Tomorrow Night



Yella Pessl, in the last concert of the Bennington College Series, at Town Hall.



Albert Stoessel, conductor, and two soloists, Rose Bampton, alto, on the left, and Louise Lerch, soprano, on the right, in the performance of Bach's B-minor Mass at Carnegie Hall Tuesday night.

## Premiere of New Stravinsky Ballet in April

### American Ballet to Produce 'The Card Game' at the Metropolitan

THREE ballets by Stravinsky will be produced by the American Ballet Company at two special performances at the Metropolitan Opera House on the evenings of April 27 and 28. The composer himself will conduct; the choreography will be the work of Georges Balanchine, and the settings and costumes will be from designs by Irene Sharoff. The three ballets will be: "The Card Party," commissioned by and composed for the American Ballet; "Le Baiser de la Fee," and "Apollon Musagete." The first named will have its world premiere on this occasion; the second will be performed for the first time in this country, and the third for the first time, as a ballet, in New York.

The scenario of "The Card Party," which Stravinsky devised with the assistance of a friend, centers around a poker game—a favorite diversion of the composer. It has been summarized as follows: "The characters in this ballet are the chief cards in a game of poker, fought out between several players on the green cloth of a card-room. At each deal the situation is complicated by the endless tricks of the perfidious Joker.

"During the first deal, one of the players drops out, but the other two remain with even 'straights.' Although one holds the Joker, he is unable to upset the balance of power.

"In the second deal, the hand that holds the Joker is victorious, thanks to four Aces who, sweeping all before them, beat four Queens.

"Now comes the third deal. The situation becomes more and more tense. This time it is a question of a struggle between 'three flushes.' Although at first victorious over one adversary, the Joker, strutting at the head of a sequence of Spades, is beaten by a 'Royal Flush' in Hearts. This puts an end to his nonsense and knavery.

"Le Baiser de la Fee" (The Fairy's Kiss) was written for Ida Rubinstein

and presented for the first time at the Opera in Paris in November, 1928. Stravinsky writes in his autobiography: "The painter, Alexandre Benois, who did some work for Ida Rubinstein, submitted two plans, one of which seemed very likely to attract me. The idea was that I should compose something inspired by the music of Tchaikovsky. My well-known fondness for this composer and, still more, the fact that November, the time fixed for the performance, would make the 35th anniversary of his death, induced me to accept the offer.

"As I was free to choose both the subject and scenario of the ballet, I began to search for them. In view of the characteristic trend of Tchaikovsky's music, in the literature of the nineteenth century. With that aim, I turned to a great poet with a gentle, sensitive soul whose imaginative mind was wonderfully akin to that of the musician. I refer to Hans Christian Anderson,

with whom in this respect Tchaikovsky had so much in common.

"In turning over the pages of Anderson I came across a story I had completely forgotten but which struck me as being the very thing for the idea I wanted to express. It was the very beautiful story known to us as 'The Ice Maiden.' I chose that as my theme and worked out the story on the following lines: A fairy imprints her magic kiss on a child at birth and parts it from its mother. Twenty years later, when the youth has attained the very zenith of his good fortune, she repeats the fatal kiss and carries him off to live in supreme happiness with her ever afterwards. As my object was to commemorate the work of Tchaikovsky, this subject seemed to me to be particularly appropriate as an allusion; the music having similarly branded Tchaikovsky with her fatal kiss, and the magic imprint has made itself felt in all the musical creations of this great artist."

# Conversation With Rodzinski

## The Philharmonic's Leader Gives an Interview

By Ralph Winett

CROWDED into a small chamber in the Carnegie Hall building, the string section of the Philharmonic was creating the bedlam of which only a great orchestra is capable. Everybody was practicing different portions of the same composition, waiting for the rehearsal with Artur Rodzinski, the distinguished Polish conductor whose arrival would mark his first appearance with the orchestra in two years.

A door opened and Rodzinski entered; there was no abatement in the noise. Quietly, evidently lost in thought, the conductor proceeded to a corner of the room and changed his coat for a worn black jacket of a somewhat ecclesiastical aspect, accentuated by the absence of a tie. A violinist detached himself from the rest and approached, hand outstretched. Rodzinski smiled broadly. "What are you doing here? What are you doing here?" he shouted above the din. Greetings over, the violinist disappeared and the conductor continued pacing the floor in the corner of the room. Finally, Mr. Van Praag strode rapidly through the ranks of musicians, hands raised. "Sh... sh... sh!" Rodzinski, still thinking, walked slowly to his high stool and climbed up on it. Three sharp raps of the baton, and the rehearsal began without a word. A few musicians, taken by surprise, entered a bar or two late.

"People who practice in front of a mirror shouldn't call themselves conductors," Rodzinski explained later, sitting on a couch in his room overlooking Central Park. "Every action must be unpremeditated, must come from here"—and, lifting slightly his lip, he pointed to an inaccurately placed heart, way over to the left. It was a frequent point of reference during the interview. "No acting. If you don't know what you want, no amount of showmanship will conceal the fact from the musicians."

"What do you think, Mr. Rodzinski, of the popular idea that a conductor should be the composer's 'deputy'?"

"Nonsense. How can the conductor know what the composer wants? Sometimes the composer himself doesn't know. After Debussy wrote his string quartet he gave it to a famous ensemble to play, and they suggested a number of important changes. He thought the matter over, and finally decided that this was exactly what he wanted. But that's only an example. How can I make myself the 'deputy' of Mozart or Beethoven? By following the markings? First of all, there's no way of telling whether the markings meant originally what they mean now. Secondly, you just try playing a Beethoven sonata merely according to the signs—forte, pianissimo—and see how far you get. No, there must be something else. Obviously you can't get the something else from Beethoven, at first hand. You must get it from here"—the heart.

"You would say, then, that there are no absolute musical interpretations?"

"None, except the most obvious. Anybody's ideas are as good as anybody else's, so long as they are sincerely felt. Often the composer's conception of his own music sounds strange after some forceful and intelligent interpreter has given another version. Here is a case—it concerns a living composer, so you mustn't give the name: I had heard the piece conducted by various people and had conducted it myself. Finally I heard it given under the direction of the man who wrote it—and I thought that the tempo was entirely too slow. The fact that it was the composer who was directing didn't make my conscience bother me. After music has left the writer's

pen it belongs to the world, and if they like it they can do what they want with it."

A Scotch terrier who had been demeaning himself tolerably well jumped off the couch and set up an ominous barking. There was a telegram for Dr. Rodzinski, who read it with the worried expression of a man reading a telegram; then laughed and handed it to me. Congratulations on the choice of "Till Eulenspiegel" for the first program. Strauss a very great conductor. The message bore a Greenwich Village address. "I get lots like this."

"I would venture to predict, Dr. Rodzinski, that this Strauss enthusiast may not like your interpretation. You have been criticized, you know, for not seeing enough mysticism, enough profundity, in Strauss's music. Have you anything to say on the subject?"

There was only one answer: the heart. "If I don't conjure these things from the orchestra it's because I don't feel them. I don't know exactly what Strauss hears in his music, but if it was anything I didn't hear, I'd conduct it my way nevertheless."

"YOU don't seem, Dr. Rodzinski, to be given to verbal analyses of your musical experiences, and I suppose that's also true of your baton technique. But sometimes conductors have their favorite devices and trade secrets which they occasionally give out for the benefit of students. Have you any?"

"Anything I may do that could be called a device is nevertheless a result of profound feeling on my part. It would therefore do little good to describe such a device to students who do not experience such feeling; and as for those who do, they would inevitably develop their own method of communication. I don't believe in conducting

courses; you either can conduct or you can't, and if you can it comes without teaching. It's like jumping into the water; if you can't swim you stay on top; if you can't swim, and there's little good in having an instructor on the shore shouting directions. Baton technique, conducting courses—"Schleperel! You know what that means? It can't be translated. Conducting involves three things that you're born with or without. Musicianship. That can't be taught. A certain uninhibited physical co-ordination. That neither. The ability to win the co-operation of fellow musicians. That neither. And the same goes for score reading. Nobody can teach you that; it comes from reading scores, nothing else.

"Weingartner, now, has written a book on the conducting of Beethoven. Very interesting, very enlightening. I agree with him in a number of things. But I felt them first. Don't think you can conduct Beethoven from reading Weingartner's book.

"And remember, a true conductor never stops learning. Even after 80 years of it, every rehearsal, every trip to the podium, should hold its lesson for a good conductor."

"What do you think of music critics, Dr. Rodzinski?"

After what had been said, the answer was somewhat unexpected. "I think they're very useful. They're careful, they never pass judgment on new music without several hearings and a study of the score. They are constructive in their analysis of performances. Of course, it's a dangerous subject, this critics business. I might say that they could be more helpful if they devoted less space to discussion of the performance and more to the music performed. Also, there is much to be learned from listening to orchestras rehearse."

## McDonald's Orchestral Poems To Be Heard Here Next Week

The eighth concert by the Philadelphia Orchestra this season in Carnegie Hall will be given on Tuesday evening, March 9. Eugene Ormandy will conduct; the soloist will be Lawrence Tibbett, baritone of the Metropolitan Opera Company, who will sing Gustav Mahler's "Songs of a Wayfarer" and Wotan's Farewell from Wagner's "Die Walkure."

Mr. Ormandy's program will include the Second Symphony in D major of Jean Sibelius and a recent work by Harl McDonald, professor of music at the University of Pennsylvania—"Three Poems for Orchestra on Traditional Aramaic and Hebraic Themes." Mr. Ormandy gave the composition its premiere at the Philadelphia Orchestra concerts of Dec. 18 and 19, 1936. Mr. McDonald has prepared the following note on his work:

"The three poems on the program were sketched a few months ago while I was in the midst of work on a two-piano concerto. The themes I have used are from a fairly extensive collection of Aramaic and Hebraic folk-tunes. They came from two research workers in this field and have been checked for accuracy through comparative study with the findings of Dr. Abraham Idehon, noted authority in Hebraic mythology.

"Of the seven themes I have used in the 'Three Poems,' four are of Aramaic origin and three are Hebraic. These I have woven together, regardless of origin, because of their fundamental similarity of style and spirit. The first is in a happy vein and the opening section may be considered a nature poem. Then appears the theme of an Aramaic chant which is broken by the cry 'Eli, Eli,'

It closes with a suggestion of the opening passage.

"The second is a song of lamentation, based on an Aramaic tune and Hebraic theme of similar character. The third is built on three themes, two of which are dance tunes. While I felt free to reshape the original material even to the point of converting lines, I have tried at all times to maintain the important rhythmic and phrase peculiarities of the originals. In the matter of harmonic language, and to an extent, orchestral style, I have attempted to preserve the character of the traditional material."

## At Town Hall



Eugene List, pianist, playing this afternoon at 3 p.m.

## Tenor at Academy



Frederick Jagel, with Rose Tentoni, soprano, Tuesday night.

## Rodzinski to Give New Music By Barber, Bloch, Hindemith

Artur Rodzinski, who will conduct the concerts of the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra through the balance of the season, has announced a number of interesting programs, including a number of new works, as well as works seldom heard in the concert hall. Outstanding is the Strauss program which will be given on March 18, 19 and 21, and which will consist of Salome's Dance from the opera "Salome," also "Sprach Zarathustra," and excerpts from the opera "Elektra," sung by Gertrude Kappel, Charlotte Boener, Enid Szan- tko, Frederick Jagel, Albert Mahler and Julius Huehn. It was Mr. Rodzinski's original intention to devote the entire program to a concert performance of the whole of "Elektra," but he has come to the view that the work as a whole is not suited to presentation in this form.

A new American work, a Symphony in One Movement by Samuel Barber, will have its New York premiere on March 24 and 25. Mr. Barber is considered the most talented of the younger generation of American composers by Dr. Rodzinski. Under Werner Janssen the Philharmonic has played his "Music for a Scene from Shelley." He is now a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome; in 1935 and 1936 he also received the Pulitzer Prize, the only instance that this prize has been awarded twice to the same musician. His Symphony in One Movement was first performed last year in Rome by the Augusteo Orchestra under Molinari; Artur Rodzinski introduced it to Cleveland on Jan. 21 this year.

Three other works new to the city will be presented by Dr. Rodzinski later in the Spring: "Voice in the Wilderness" for orchestra and cello, the latest composition of Ernest Bloch; "Harnael," for orchestra, chorus and tenor solo, by the Polish composer Szymanowski, and "Schwanendreher," a viola concerto by Paul Hindemith.

On Easter Sunday, March 28, Dr. Rodzinski will conduct the last act of "Farsfall" with the singers Emanuel List, Paul Althouse and Julius Huehn. On Sunday afternoon, April 11, Honegger's oratorio "King David" will be presented, assisted by the singers Agnes Davis, Anna Kaszka and Frederick Jagel, and with Paul Leyssac as narrator.