

PADEREWSKI: A CRITICAL STUDY.



PADEREWSKI is unquestionably an inspired and a phenomenal pianist. He possesses the power of interesting and arousing the enthusiasm of an audience of the highest musical culture, as at Berlin, and of giving pleasure and delight to one of less musical intelligence and simpler tastes, as in some English provincial town. This is a fact of great significance, for it shows the rare combination of the various qualities which in the aggregate make up a great and unique artist whose ardent and poetic temperament is admirably proportioned and well balanced.

Within the last few years we have been favored with the presence of many pianists of the first rank, such as Joseffy, Pachman, Rosenthal, D'Albert, Friedheim, Grünfeld, Rummel, Scharwenka, and others, and among our own resident players Fanny Bloomfield-Zeisler, Adèle aus der Ohe, Rivé-King, and many others who compare favorably with the best from foreign lands. While fully recognizing the high artistic merit of all these, and acknowledging the great pleasure their performances have given, it may be said without invidious distinction that an artist of such a distinctly pronounced individuality as Paderewski is an exceedingly rare occurrence — indeed phenomenal. The mechanical part of piano-playing has of late years been so systematized, and the methods of acquiring a high degree of skill have been so improved, that the possession of mere technical facility is a foregone conclusion, and has in a great degree lost its interest unless combined with a discriminative and poetical conception and a true musical interpretation. Of two pianists possessing an equal technical equipment the one whose personality is the most intense, and at the same time lovable, will be sure to delight and interest. Music is in its nature emotional, and hence requires intense expression of feeling in its genuine interpretation; but this must be kept within due bounds by the exercise of an intelligent and intellectual conception and a discriminative touch, thus combining in proper degree both the qualities of heart and head. The most successful results will surely follow when a nice balance between the two is established and maintained in due proportion, while an undue preponderance of either will lead to disastrous results, even if the performer be possessed of genius.

The playing of Paderewski shows a beautiful and happy blending of these essential qualities. He mirrors his Slavonic nature in his interpretations, with its fine and exquisite appreciation of all gradations of tonal effects. His marvelous musical touch, a great, mellow, and tender voice, chameleon-like, takes on the color of the dominant mood. He is a thoroughly earnest and at the same time an affectionate player, and too much stress cannot be laid on the humanism of his style, which is intensely sympathetic, and so eclectic that it embraces all schools. His never-failing warmth of touch and his vivid appreciation of tone gradations and values result in wonderfully beautiful effects. In addition to these qualities, his magnetic individuality puts him at once in sympathy with his hearers, and this magnetism is felt and acknowledged even by those who do not entirely and uniformly approve of all of his readings and interpretations of the great composers.

Since Bach's time, and no doubt long before it, two distinct schools have wrangled over the question of subjectivity and objectivity in the interpretation of great works of art. The discussion as to the musical significance of the various works of Richard Wagner has already begun, notwithstanding the fact of his comparatively recent death, and, this being the case, we can easily understand the difference of opinion as to how Bach and Beethoven should be played. I remember hearing Moscheles play Beethoven's sonatas, as also the preludes and fugues of Bach, especially those from "Das Wohltemperierte Klavier," and his performance of the latter was especially beautiful and satisfying. Discarding all pedantic, austere, and stiff methods, his treatment was simple, graceful, and flowing in design, each voice being distinctly heard, but in due proportion, and not in too assertive a way. The angular fashion of playing Bach must have had its rise from the old German school of organ-playing, in which no variation of registration was permitted; but a fugue was played, as it is now, with full chorus stops from beginning to end. However this may be, Moscheles preferred a feeling and warmly colored interpretation of Bach's works on the pianoforte, and so expressed himself to me in private conversation; and he was much closer to the Bach tradition, as set forth in Forkel's biography, than we are to-day. He could look backward to within a generation of the great Leipsic cantor, and he had listened to Beethoven's playing.

Rubinstein is even more fond, tender, and caressing in his playing of Bach, bringing out all imaginable beautiful shades of tone-color in his rendering of those works. And why should this be otherwise, since Bach's compositions are so full of exquisite melody? Surely such emotional strains should receive a loving and musical rendering. As Moscheles played Bach a half-century ago, and as Rubinstein played him later on, so does Paderewski play him now—with an added grace and color which put these great contrapuntal creations in the most charming frames. It is great, deep musical playing combined with calm, quiet repose and great breadth of style. Paderewski has an advantage over Rubinstein, however, in the fact that he is always master of his resources and possesses power of complete self-control. This remarkably symmetrical balance is entirely temperamental, and may be discerned in the well-shaped contour of Paderewski's head, his steady gaze, and his supreme command of the economies of movement. In Rubinstein there is an excess of the emotional, and while at times he reaches the highest possible standard, his impulsive nature and lack of self-restraint are continually in his way, frequently causing him to rush ahead with such impetuosity as to anticipate his climax, and, having no reserve force to call into action, disaster is sure to follow. He does not economize his strength to good advantage, but uses up his power too soon. Comparisons are not always profitable, but may be permitted in mild form on account of the instruction they convey. Thus, of five prominent pianists, in Liszt we find the intellectual-emotional temperament, while Rubinstein has the emotional in such excess that he is rarely able to bridle his impetuosity. Paderewski may be classified as emotional-intellectual,—a very rare and happy blending of the two temperaments,—and Tausig was very much upon the same plane, while Von Bülow has but little of the emotional, and overbalances decidedly on the intellectual side. There must always be two general classes of pianists—those whose interpretation changes with every mood, while the playing always remains poetic, fervent, artistic, and inspired, because it is impossible for them to do violence to the musical nature which they have received by the grace of God, and others whose playing lacks warmth and *abandon*, notwithstanding the fact that it is careful, conscientious, artistic, and in the highest degree finished. The performances of the latter are invariably uniform, and are exact to such a degree that one can anticipate with great accuracy each accent, emphasis, *nuance*, and turning of phrase from beginning to end. Of these classes Rubinstein and Bülow present good illustrations in contrast.

This leads to the consideration of Paderewski's playing of Beethoven, and on this subject I beg leave to repeat, with slight variation, what I said in a recent article in "The Musical Courier." Whenever a pianist makes his first appearance in public as a Beethoven player, he is at once subjected to strictures on all sides by numerous critics who seem to have been lying in wait for this particular occasion, and there immediately arise two parties, each holding positive opinions, of which the one in the negative is usually the more numerous. This is by no means a new fad, but quite an old fashion, dating back, at least as far as the writer's experience goes, something over forty years, and probably much further. Is the ideal player of Beethoven a myth, or does he really exist? If so, who is he, and where is he to be found? In short, are we not looking for something that is much in the imagination? Or, perhaps (be it said with due reverence), are not the compositions themselves responsible in part for this mystified state of things? Forty years ago my teachers, Moscheles, afterward Dreyschock, and finally Liszt, used to say that Beethoven's piano compositions were not "klaviermässig." This word has no precise English equivalent, but might be translated "pianofortable." In other words, they are not written in conformity with the nature of the instrument. Musicians generally have agreed all along on this point. Beethoven's musical thoughts were symphonic, so to speak, and require the orchestra for adequate expression. Many of his piano passages lie most awkwardly under the fingers, and certainly would never have been written by a skilled virtuoso who was simply a pianist *per se*.

Moscheles has always been an acknowledged authority as to Beethoven, and he once told me during a lesson that he considered Liszt an ideal, or perhaps his word was a "great," Beethoven player. As is generally known, Liszt had a prevailing tendency in his piano-playing to seek after orchestral effects, and thus found himself all the more at home in these compositions. But when has the world ever found another player of Liszt's magnificent caliber who could so intelligently and ably adapt himself as an interpreter of all kinds of music, who was always and ever master of his resources, and who never fell into the error of anticipating his climax? Or, if perchance he found himself in the least danger of such an event, he would readily arrange and develop a new climax, so that at the conclusion of his performance he was always sure to have worked his audience up to a state of almost crazy excitement and unbounded enthusiasm. He was at this time—1853—forty-two years old and at his best estate. But even Liszt, who possessed in such an unexampled degree all of the

faculties which in the aggregate make up the equipment of a perfect and even phenomenal player, had his limitations in certain directions and details, and, notwithstanding the opinion of Moscheles, many of the critics of the day maintained that he was no Beethoven player, and that his interpretation, instead of being severe, dignified, and austere, was too sensational. His touch was not so musically emotional as it might have been, and other pianists, notably Henselt, Chopin, Tausig, Rubinstein, and now Paderewski and some others, excel him in the art of producing beautiful and varied tone-colors together with sympathetic and singing quality of tone. It seems to me that in this matter of touch Paderewski is as near perfection as any pianist I have ever heard, while in other respects he stands more nearly on a plane with Liszt than any other virtuoso since Tausig. His conception of Beethoven combines the emotional with the intellectual in admirable poise and proportion. Thus he plays with a big, warm heart as well as with a clear, calm, and discriminative head; hence a thoroughly satisfactory result. Those who prefer a cold, arbitrary, and rigidly rhythmical and ex-cathedra style will not be pleased.

Without going closely into detail, there are certain matters concerning Paderewski's mechanical work which deserve the attention of students and others interested in piano technic. In many passages, without altering a note from the original, he ingeniously manages to bring out the full rhythmic and metrical effect, also the emphasis necessary to discriminative phrasing, by means of a change of fingering, effected either by interlocking the hands or by dividing different portions of the runs and arpeggios between them. In this way the accents and emphasis come out distinctly and precisely where they belong, and all of the composite tones are clean-cut, while at the same time a perfect legato is preserved. His pedal effects are invariably managed with consummate skill and in a thoroughly musical way, which results in exquisite tonal effects in all grades and varieties of light and shade. In musical conception he is so objective a player as to be faithful, true, and loving to his author, but withal he has a spice of the subjective which imparts to his performance just the right amount of his own individuality. This lifts his work out of an arbitrary rut, so to speak, and distinguishes his playing from that of other artists.

The glissando octave passages near the end of the C major Sonata, op. 53, he performs as originally designed by Beethoven and with the desired effect, notwithstanding Dr. Hans von Bülow's assertion that this method of execution is impossible on our modern pianos, on account of their heavy and stiff action. Paderewski,

however, has the secret of a thoroughly supple and flexible touch, resulting from a perfectly elastic condition of shoulder, elbow, arm, and wrist, together with the power of keeping certain muscles, either singly or collectively as may be desired, in a state of partial contraction, while all of the others are "devitalized" to a degree which would delight the heart of a disciple of Delsarte.

The heartfelt sincerity of the man is noticeable in all that he does, and his intensity of utterance easily accounts for the strong hold he has over his audiences. He does not give us a remote and austere interpretation of Beethoven, but one which is broad and calm, manly and dignified, while it palpitates with life and is full of love combined with reverence. On this account it sometimes fails to please those who would strip music of its outward vestments,—its flesh, so to speak,—and skeletonize it. Paderewski's playing presents the beautiful contour of a living, vital organism.

Naturally, being a modern pianist, he is in close sympathy with the works of the Romantic school, his poetic personality finding its supreme utterance in the compositions of Schumann and Chopin. He plays Schumann with all the noble, vivid fantasy which that master requires, though perhaps lacking a little sometimes in his reckless humor. In Chopin's music, the finest efflorescence of the Romantic school, Paderewski's original touch is full of melancholy pathos, without sentimental mawkishness, and without finical cynicism. He has his robust moods, and his heroic delivery of the A flat Polonaise, taken in the true and stately polonaise tempo, is tremendously impressive. It possesses that subtle quality expressed in some measure by the German word *Sehnsucht*, and in English as "intensity of aspiration." This quality Chopin had, and Liszt frequently spoke of it. It is the undefinably poetic haze with which Paderewski invests and surrounds all that he plays which renders him so unique and impressive among modern pianists.

Paderewski has one quality which Chopin always lacked in degree—namely, the power of contrast; and, as pertinent to this, I remember that Dreyschock told me that many years ago he, in company with Thalberg, attended one of Chopin's concerts given in Paris. After listening to the delicately exquisite touch of the great Polish artist and to his gossamer arpeggios and dainty tone-embroideries, Thalberg, on reaching the street, began to shout at the top of his lungs. Dreyschock naturally asked the reason for this, and Thalberg's reply was, "I have been listening to a *piano* all the evening, and now must have a *forte*."

Little fear of a forte being found lacking in Paderewski's playing, which is at times

orchestral in its sonority, the most violent extremes of color being present when required. Listen to him in the Rubinstein Étude or the Liszt Rhapsodies, with their clanging rhythms and mad fury, and ask what pianist since Liszt has given us such gorgeous, glowing colors—

such explosions of tone, and the unbridled freedom of the Magyar.

Paderewski is an artist by the grace of God, a phenomenal and inspired player, and, like all persons of large natural gifts, a simple, gracious, and loving character.

*William Mason.*¹

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PADEREWSKI: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.



IGNACE JAN PADEREWSKI is the son of an old Polish country family whose home is in Podolia, a province of Russian Poland, where he was born in 1860. Although his father was

able to provide in some degree for the education of his children, young Ignace soon found it necessary to support himself. But—better than money—aristocratic instincts, high breeding, high spirit, indomitable will, the love and power of work, those blessed heritages of good blood, were his by birth and training.

The lad owed his musical organization to his mother; his father, who was a gentleman farmer, had no musical tastes.

One class of mankind is born to receive its strongest impressions through the eye, another from words and thoughts, a third from bodily sensations, and a fourth through the ear. If we could follow each class into its mental life, we should find that a large part of its memory, thinking and doing, was dependent on its ruling sense. Paderewski's world is preëminently a world of tone. Every sound he hears makes a clear, abiding mental impression. But he is great because he is symmetrical enough to live also in a world of sights, ideas, and actions.

Our artist passed the early years of childhood in the country. He was motherless, but "Him by the hand kind Nature took." She showed him her gracious silences, her sounds of forest, field, and brook, her stir of living growth, her various skies and motions. To this first, best music lesson his imagination owes much of its objective material.

From earliest infancy he could "hear." At three he stole to the piano to touch the keys and to listen. At six he began to study. The teacher was a fiddler who helped out his living by giving lessons on the piano, which he could not play. It did not even occur to him to bestow upon his pupils that peculiar treasure of his own instrument, the power of recognizing tones. But it was not necessary. Young Ignace knew the pitch of every sound he heard. He could identify not only the notes in every chord, but each separate set of vibrations that goes to

make up that variable compound we call tone. "I *must* hear them, because I try to color my tone," said he, when the writer put the question; and added, "I do that largely with the pedal."

The creative instinct was alive in him as soon as he could think at all. He did not long to stir his fancy by singing and playing the literature of music, but to make the music himself—to express his ideas and emotions through his own musical forms. After a year or two another teacher was engaged, an old man who came down into the country once a month. He had as little notion of technic as his predecessor. He thought it sufficient to bring with him a collection of four- and six-handed pieces,—pot-pourris from popular operas,—which the little boy and his sister played at sight. There his instruction ended. The children were left to find their own way among the keys, and to stumble as they went. But though genius may stumble, it does not stick in the bog. "Art," says Emerson, "is the path of a creator to his work," and certainly genius is the faculty of making a short cut thither. Within, it possesses the image of the object to be arrived at clear and bright; and it has the woodsman's instinct by which it threads the jungle of ways and means. The young student always knew what he wanted to do; he played, listened, compared, and thought till he found the right way. Paderewski's marvelous tone-quality is an example. Its perfection has been the work of his life, but it has been wholly his own discovery, guided by an exquisitely sensitive ear. When a boy of twelve, Paderewski went to the conservatory at Warsaw. There he studied harmony and counterpoint with Roguski, and took piano lessons (he never studied any other instrument) of Janotha, the father of Natalie. Janotha was then eighty years old. His notions of technic must have been those of his own generation. But how mellow the culture bestowed by contact with this old musician's lifetime of musical experience and tradition, and with his objects of veneration! Paderewski moves among the old forms of music with the freedom of early good musical breeding. The creations of the past are flex-



DRAWN BY IRVING R. WILES.

IGNACE JAN PADEREWSKI.