

# PROFESSOR LESCHETIZKY AND THE VIENNA CONSERVATOIRE.

BY D MINOR.



Conservatoire of Music in Vienna, although it has considerable renown, is less noteworthy than the Conservatoires of St. Petersburg, Leipzig, and

others of first-class rank. It is an institution which in many respects resembles the Royal Academy of Music, although on a lesser scale.

Nevertheless, it does excellent local work under the able directorship of Herr Fuchs, and has at present 900 students on its books. Professors Epstein and Gänsbacher are the members of the staff best known to the outside world. They are both excellent teachers in their respective departments, and their pupils usually do them credit afterwards. Vienna is quite a Mecca for students who have ambitions, and not a few of our leading recruits to the concert-room and opera-house have received their training at the Conservatoire.

The dominating personality of the Vienna Conservatoire, however, is M. Leschetizky. He is not only the centre and inspiration of musical circles in the Kaiserstadt, but he is beyond doubt the greatest pianoforte teacher of the age. Though he is a German-Pole by birth, he is an Aus-

trian by nationality, and has resided in Vienna for the last fifteen years. His appearance is indicative of a strong character; flowing locks of white hair, piercing eyes, a mobile face, and strikingly beautiful hands, are the features which specially impress one at first sight.

The success which he has achieved as a musician has received nothing like adequate recognition owing to the fact that his talents have been devoted to developing the musical genius of others. He was at one time a great public performer, but the nervous agony which he suffered when appearing in public caused him to give up the life. Since that time he has confined his energies to teaching, first, for twenty-seven years, at St. Petersburg, and, for the last fifteen years, in Vienna.

Paderewski is, of course, the most famous of his pupils; but mention must also be made of Madame Essipoff, whom he trained when at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, and Mark Hambourg and Gabrilowitch, all of whom have attained great popularity in England. M. Leschetizky was in his youth a pupil of the great Czerny, and one of the most important features of his method is the thorough drilling of his pupils in Czerny's "*Die Kunst der Fingerfertigkeit*" studies. It is said that Paderewski devoted six hours a day for a whole year to mastering the difficulties of these exercises. At the same time it should be stated that Leschetizky himself is no advocate of lengthy pianoforte practice. He frequently remarks to his pupils, "Think



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[Krzimanek, Vienna.

PROF. LESCHETIZKY.



ten times and play once"—a fresh, active brain being as necessary to success as agile fingers.

His method of technique is quite original,

room, which is full of the busts of the great musicians of the past, there are two grand pianos; the pupil sits at one, and the master plays at the other. M. Leschetizky becomes



From a photo by]

THE CONSERVATOIRE, VIENNA.

[Czihak, Vienna.

and consists of certain special movements of the hands and fingers which render them more pliable. Yet it must not be supposed that he is merely a technical trainer, or a musical drill sergeant, if one may use such an expression; he has, on the contrary, distinctly original and artistic ideas as to the rendering of the whole range of pianoforte music, from a Bach "Fugue" to a Liszt "Fantasia."

To his pupils M. Leschetizky is rather a formidable personage. Like many geniuses, he is eccentric, and sometimes betrays his eccentricity in embarrassing ways. He is frequently very brusque in manner, and when a lady pupil shows more than usual inaptitude, he has been known to tell her that the profession of a cook would be more profitable to her than that of a musician. In his music-

very restless when a pupil disregards the laws of rhythm. An American musician who studied with the great master told me that on such occasions M. Leschetizky would walk round the room, and on hearing a false accent would stumble as though he had tripped over something. On another occasion, when a young lady was playing one of Chopin's compositions very badly, M. Leschetizky, after pacing the room in a most irritating manner, suddenly knelt down before a bust of Chopin, which stands in the corner, and, to the astonishment of the fair culprit, said a prayer aloud for her forgiveness. For once in his life, however, Leschetizky found a pupil who was not afraid of him. After the young lady in question had exasperated him by a very bad performance, he seized her music



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[Löwy, Vienna.

HERR EPSTEIN.

(Professor of the Pianoforte at the Conservatoire.)



and tore it to pieces; whereupon the young lady retaliated by seizing some of his music and promptly tearing it up, scattering the pieces on the floor. Her professor expressed himself delighted that she should show such pluck.

M. Leschetizky has about eighty pupils, of whom fully one-half are Americans. The remainder are English, Russians, Poles, Roumanians, and Austrians, although, curiously enough, there are only one or two of the latter nationality. Mark Twain's daughter is one of the Americans now studying with him, and the English pupils include Mr. Waddington Cooke, who is well known in London musical circles. M. Leschetizky devotes only three hours a day to teaching, and, like Mozart, finds his chief relaxation in playing billiards. Although now

sixty-six years of age, he is in full possession of his mental and physical powers, and looks quite ten years younger. On his visit to London during 1897 he was warmly welcomed by British musicians, who crowded to the receptions given in his honour. He was persuaded to play in the Salle Erard, and the result was delightful to all present. It was many years since he had visited this country, and on that occasion he played at the Musical Union concerts. He speaks Russian, German, Polish and French with equal facility, although German is the language he prefers to use. The Professor considers that Liszt and Rubinstein are still unapproached by modern pianists, although he regards Paderewski as a marvel. He prophesies great success for another of his pupils—Martin Knutzen, a Norwegian.



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HERR GÄNSBACHER.

(Professor of Singing at the Conservatoire.)

