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MUSICAL HOURS IN WEIMAR WITH
THE PIANISTS OF THE FUTURE.

NO. II.

REMMERT, PINNER, ZAREMBSKI, THE SHER-
WOODS, GAUL, GURICKX.

[FROM AN OCCASIONAL CORRESPONDENT.]

WEIMAR, ~~May~~, 1875

A few days after our arrival in Weimar Mr. Pratt of Chicago, who, like ourselves, had put up at the Rüssicher Hof, engaged the drawing-room of the hotel and placed in it the new Chickering grand which he had brought over from America with him. Then he gave a standing invitation to the artists of the class to drop in on any or every evening informally; and accordingly there they congregated more or less every night for ten days, so that we had the most charming impromptu soirées imaginable.

It was so very interesting to observe the different schools in which these young pianists had been trained. There was Fraulein Remmert, who had been a favorite pupil of Kullak's in Berlin for years and years, besides coming every summer to Liszt. Her hand was a little strained, so that we heard but one piece from her, Kullak's Octave Study, but she played that astonishingly, not missing a note, with Kullak's own elegance and finish, with a wrist like a feather, and with an almost devil-may-care fire and dash of her own that would do much for her in a concert-room.

Max Pinner, when very young, had studied both at the Leipsig Conservatory, and in Berlin with Tausig. Then he had spent an interval at home in New York, and for the last year or two he, with Zarembski, had been with Liszt. They two and Tishmanhoff rivalled each other in their tremendous practice, spending each from seven to nine hours a day at the piano. Pinner's memory is immense, and his repertoire is something amazing. He can pour out piece after piece by the hour, and at the end seem to have as many to play to one as at the beginning. He plays any number of things of the extreme modern romantic school,—Liszt, Tausig, Rubinstein, &c., and I doubt if any living pianist except Von Bülow knows so much of Liszt's music as he, such is his passionate love for the great master. But Pinner's hand is so excessively small

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(a mere woman's hand) that, after all, I found him best in the more tranquil classic masters, as Beethoven. These fist-full compositions require either iron fingers or masculine hands, shoulders and muscle generally,—brute force in fact,—whereas Pinner's realm is rather the delicate, the dreamy, or the tender. Pinner, however, is so steeped and soaked in music; he is so modest and wanting in self-hood; his culture of mind and heart are so far above those of most of his fellow-artists, that it is a pleasure to hear him play anything. He has his moods of *imagination*, too, for just before we all left Weimar he played at a private soirée where he came out in a manner that astonished everybody. Whether, therefore, he succeeds brilliantly from the first, or is a long time coming to the surface, he must eventually prove in America a musical *power*, a genuine centre of musical light and heat.

Of Zarembski's playing at our evening concerts, we had not enough for our own enjoyment and profit. He improvises better than any of the class, and may not impossibly continue for his romantic country the musical succession which, since Chopin, seems to have been left vacant, for we heard that Liszt rates his talent as among the very first. I do not know that Zarembski has been a pupil of Rubinstein, but he has the physique, the hand, the touch and the easy way of taking difficulties which characterize that master, though not his intensity. Instead, he has a peculiar, soft strength of his own, which reminds one of the powerful but elastic and muffled tread of the great feline genera. Maas had been trained by Kullak, and as he had been on a concert tour with Hoffmann, one of the well-known concert managers of the continent, he must be presumed to be good. But at this time he was not in practice, so we did not hear him at his best. I thought his playing rather colorless; or rather, the colors were blurred; the conception was not well defined. His compositions, however, were highly promising, particularly some charming ones for four hands, which he played with Fraulein Rielke at one of Liszt's matinées.

Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood, both pupils of Kullak, were among the stars of these impromptu evenings. Mrs. Sherwood has a startling vitality in her touch, a beautiful technique and a truly musical conception. She could be a brilliant and exciting concert player, and win for herself an enviable reputation did she care enough about it. But, woman-like, she prizes her baby's smile more than the applause of the public, and, while anxious for her husband's success, is wholly indifferent to her own. Sherwood himself has a truly original gift in composition, and will earn a name if he can settle down to severe work, and if, for some time to come, he will cut his compositions to about half the length he wishes to make them. That writer or that composer has the best chance of an enduring reputation who has the courage to excise a paragraph, or a phrase, however fine, that takes away

from the effect of the work as a whole—and critics know that they are rare enough! To young composers especially it never seems to occur that brevity may be the soul of *their* music, at any rate. They get hold of an idea, and instead of letting it tell itself in four pages, as it naturally would do, they spin it out to fifteen, and drag it through all the keys of the "well-tempered clavi-chord." Who, under these conditions, they expect will ever play their things but themselves it is hard to imagine. Sherwood's present style of composition is in this sketchy, extempore and, to my sense, undisciplined school; whereas the best thing he has done—his Prelude, and his first composition—is entirely classic. It is perfect, and I have heard my friend say that she never hears it without feeling that the tears are not far off. As a pianist, Sherwood may be called an exquisite rather than a great player. The modern *tours de force* are hardly effective from him, as his touch has neither depth nor brilliancy. Like Pinner, he seems not to have the physical strength and *organs* for this kind of excellence; neither has he the spiritual earnestness for Bach, though he is very fond of attempting him. But nothing can be finer in their way than certain of his conceptions of Beethoven and Mozart, and I cannot imagine a more beautiful rendering of the first movement of Beethoven's concerto in E-flat major, than his solo pouring out of its rambling wealth of ideas and illustrations, as if it were a personal improvisation. He is perfect also in scherzo and in musical revery, so that my friend doubted whether Liszt himself could have given better his own dreamy arrangement from Tristan and Isolde than did Sherwood. Sherwood's nerve in the concert room is said to be complete, but in private the enjoyment of his performance is generally marred by his refusing to play the thing you do want to hear, and his insisting upon playing the thing you don't. Pinner, on the contrary, ever gracious and unegotistic, always lends himself to your mood, and gives you whatever you ask for, regardless of any expenditure to himself.

The cool and collected little Timanhoff did not grace the Rüssischer Hof reunions. She had already concertized several seasons, and in her native Russia is a great favorite with her public. So perhaps she felt above our circle of neophytes, or perhaps she held a little evening court of her own. At any rate, I only heard her again at the Sunday matinées, where she played once the same Schubert March by Liszt that Zarembski had done, and not nearly so well; and at the third and last, Liszt's Spanish Rhapsody, a terrific concert composition which she had *learned by heart* in four days, but which, in playing, exhausted her strength before she got to the end, so that she gave it no suitable finale. Both of these are, properly, pieces for the other sex, and I was sorry not to have heard her in something at once brilliant and within her power, so that I could have compared her on equal terms with Fraulein Gaul.

inspiration

endurance

As it was, the latter was the queen and M. Gurickx the king of our musical evenings. Fraulein Gaul, who is the daughter of an accomplished violinist, besides her early excellent home instruction in America has been four years at Stuttgart under Schert's instruction, varied by coming to Liszt in the summer. Schert has taken the same unwearied pains with her that he did with his remarkable pupil, Anna Mehlig, and I think with even more striking result, for Little Gaul is musical sensitive personified, whereas Miss Mehlig is emphatically a made player. Miss Gaul described to me Schert's vehement and intense way of teaching her and making her feel the emotion of the piece she is rendering, so that after such a drill one cannot much wonder at the delicate nuances, at the variety of light and shade and the brilliant climaxes of her playing. Liszt, too, has been interested in her talent in a way that has made him give her earnest instruction, very different from the hints and crumbs of suggestion he bestows on most of those who call themselves his pupils. From him she has caught grace and poetry, and her own nature supplies her with passion and abandon. I heard from her two nocturnes of Chopin's and his "Andante Spiniato and "Polonaise"—the latter a concert piece of the most exacting description, and yet peculiarly suited to the feminine technique. I must confess that I never heard Chopin rendered so much after my own idea, and I should be surprised if any artist now before the public could better satisfy the composer himself, were he on earth to judge between them. Her tone is something immense, and her playing, as my friend phrased it, "like lava." She also gave us most magnificently Beethoven's G-major concerto with Von Bülow's cadenza, though we thought there was too much anxiety and endeavor in it, since Beethoven should be played as the eagle soars, very high up and very calm,—not of, but over, the storm. To give an idea of the labor sometimes spent upon one of these great compositions, I will mention that Fraulein Gaul had had this concerto under preparation nine months before she finally played it to Liszt; but then she had acquired it for life. Fraulein Timanhoff, on the contrary, would have played it brilliantly and by heart in as many days, so quickly does she learn even the most tremendous things; but how much the work would have really entered into her is a different question. Little Gaul has already played more or less in concerts, and her nerve is of that best kind which finds its inspiration instead of its terror in an audience. Nor will her small, oval face of marble paleness, lit with black eyes, and set in a frame of waving black hair, nor her slight and swaying form, lessen the artistic impression she is bound everywhere to produce on the first hearing, and probably always upon the "brute public." After a time her style palled upon me, while the Stuttgart method of lifting each finger

to its greatest height, and so making the hand look like a great spider stalking over the keys, as Mehlig's did, is so hideous as to be in itself a condemnation, since whatever is absolutely true must be beautiful.

As for our other great artist, Gurickx of Brussels, he is simply "colossal," one of those pianists who, as Ferdinand Strakosch said of him, "will one day drive his carriage and horses, and dictate his own terms." Gurickx is short and firmly built, with a broad hand that knows no fatigue, and fingers that seem to know no difficulty, though in him the clearness of the passage playing is not that to which your attention is called any more than in Fraulein Gaul's, but rather, like hers, to the vividness with which "the points of a piece start out," and to its effect as a whole. His best performances are in Bach, Scarlatti, Schumann and Liszt. He also plays what have seldom been played in concert except by their composers, Liszt's enormous and brilliant concerto, and Dupont's dazzling studies called "Toccata" and "Staccato." I did not hear Chopin from him, and I found him too excited, not *posé* enough, for Beethoven. But he is the concert-player *par excellence*,—one of those artists whose glory it is to fuse the "leaden thousands," as Chopin called them, like one man, and make their veins glow with the fiery pulses that leap within his own. His touch is electric, and his volume of tone might come from Thor's hammer! I never heard such climaxes, and, in fact, his whole style, piling up and leading on, as it does, to the very last note of the composition, may be called the "cumulative." I am sure no one but the composer ever played Liszt's second Rhapsodie Hongroise as he does; I think it would set an American audience crazy. He adores Schumann, also, and in that composer's pathetic little adagios he is enchanting, perfect. He almost makes the piano itself cry!

When Gurickx plays any great work, it is with his whole body, his hair falls forward, and during his performance his face sharpens and grows older with the intense concentration of all his energies which he puts into it. He has no affectations, mannerisms or small jealousies, but is the simplest and most modest of young men. Not only has he the great gift of music; he paints in the masterly Belgian school in the same manner that he plays,—i. e., he is a *colorist*. Though neither in this is there anything slap-dash or unfinished in his work. Gurickx is now twenty-six or eight years old, and is a graduate of the Brussels Conservatory, of which Dupont is the head. He came to Liszt in the summer of 1873-4, since which he has been playing in concerts and forming his own style. Now he may be considered the finished artist, and this season Liszt, who previously had not taken much notice of him, as soon as he presented himself made an appointment with him, at which he kept him playing for two and a half solid hours, and thereafter sent for him nearly every day of his stay in Weimar.

[Since the above was prepared for the press, it is pleasant to have heard that Pinner, Sherwood, Fraulein Gaul and M. Gurickx have all made their marked successes in concert, the three former in Berlin, Hamburg and Leipsic, the latter in Antwerp, where "the young and already eminent pianist," as one of his critics called him, played with the greatest *éclat* before an audience of three thousand people.]