

VARIATIONS

By LEONARD LIEBLING

"Godowsky's works, and I play nearly all of them," writes Paul Howard, of Adelaide, South Australia, "stamp him, from all points of view, as the greatest of all piano composers. . ."

Howard goes on with specific proofs:

"Each thing he has done is so outstanding and far-reaching. The etudes on the Chopin etudes eclipse anything of the kind ever attempted; the sonata is the most learned, majestic, beautiful and profound in existence—others had to write a couple of dozen sonatas to say less; for the Master to write another sonata would be redundant.

"Then the Walzermasken, twenty-four separate master works in one suite, a complete program, unparalleled, not to mention the exquisite charm of the Triakontameron. The Java Suite again rings the bell in history.

"Once more he eclipses all the works of the gods in his Passacaglia, and in this alone immortalizing himself, lifting another great soul, Schubert, with him. Of all the countless pages of great works written since the dawn of music the Passacaglia is the apotheosis.

"His development of the Bach violin and cello sonatas into pianistic sky-scrapers was the work of a giant, a service to mankind and an unequalled tribute and compliment to Bach.

"Then the Miniatures! They alone are a garden of glory enabling little children or grown people to succeed in the path of perfection and to attain cultured taste, exquisite skill and refinement of expression, at the same time achieving a high sense of ensemble.

"In his suite for the left hand, he stands completely alone. A major work in eight parts, a glorious concert number, a main backbone to any program distinguishing any artist who plays it adequately as a real two fisted he-man, a genus previously all too rare, even among the elite.

"His paraphrases and transcriptions have enriched the literature of the piano amazingly. Liebling has spoken of his god-like charitableness. With god-like charitableness Godowsky has so often stooped by the way and taken some small gem by an almost forgotten composer (who did not know what fingers were going to attain, nor what the piano would become) and by a touch of his magic wand has transformed it into a thing of radiant beauty and given a further lease of life for centuries to come to the composer's name.

"All these riches have a background of constellations of other works like the milky way, and from the legion you cannot pick one and say, 'this is trifling, or poor.' He is one of the few without a rubbish heap. As pedagogue and pianist he has excelled in the same measure.

"His music sets a new standard in piano playing, creates a new era every whit as marked, and more so than that of Bach, calling for an independence of finger work never thought of before, for the completely free playing of several independent parts, and an appreciation of the individuality and importance of every note of the text, and the significance of the most microscopic sound; an advance in the progress of art of the most far-reaching import, breaking through tinsel and insincerity, dispersing clouds of uncertainty and groping. His genius has found a way. We know that generations hence will revere his name, but these are not times when outstanding genius need be hidden and the rewards left till he has passed beyond us a century or two. He deserves kind words now while we know that he can hear and benefit by them.

"My evaluation is not of the man in the street, but is based upon a profound knowledge of pianoforte literature. I play, memorized, apart from a few programs of the great Master's works, upwards of twenty programs of other works, and have in my music-shelves everything of note ever written for the instrument, from Purcell to Satie, in most cases composers' entire works, and in several editions. None of these copies went into the shelves till I had put them on the music desk and played them through, a process which has taken forty years or more. Apart from that I have an unerring sense of the value of the content of piano composition. Long ago it needed only the study of one of the Master's to show me that, given health and length of life, he would transcend all other gods."

All the Vereine devoted to exposition of Bruckner, Mahler, Wolf, Brahms, and Sibelius, have not exceeded Paul Howard in the art of honorable and exquisite propaganda.