

After Midnight Thoughts

On Leopold Godowsky

etc.

By Paul Howard

To The Members of The International Godowsky Society

Instalment 1

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PREFACE

“...Your indomitable enthusiasm for my work is an ever present encouragement to me. I have some great musicians and good friends who believe in the serious mission of my art, but you, a musical hermit, teaching and preaching in the deserts of the antipodes, are a musical Ghandi; a saintly fanatic...I consider my Passacaglia and my Suite, the latter for the left hand alone, my most mature compositions, while I believe that my Etude Macabre is my most tragic and the Capriccio Patetico my most humanly touching. My Four Poems I think would interest you: They are very personal – highly sensitized emanations of a battered soul. I have a large number of other works, too numerous to mention, which require sympathy, compassion, and wisdom to approach them rightly.”

(Extract from Letter of Leopold Godowsky to Paul Howard October 4, 1932).

“...My compositions have such a personal idiom, involved inner voices, complicated contrapuntal and polyrhythmic devices, sonorities of a new kind, that the hoi polloi of pianists keep away from them. They are too indolent mentally and physically to make the supreme effort. It was not my intention to be involved. The technical side of music, though it interests me, it not the one to attract me at the expense of the emotional. I am convinced that emotion is the prime requisite of art, though it may be tempered by knowledge and intelligence. I have never written a note that I did not feel. My music is my self divulged through sound...”

(Extract from Letter of Leopold Godowsky to Paul Howard, dated from Cannes, France, May 2, 1933).

THE PROPHECY

(From programme notes on Bach and Godowsky in my 22nd. Recital at St. Dominic's Priory, North Adelaide, November, 1915.)

Bach! O wonder of the world, and star of stars! Can our tortured globe shelter one who will be to this epoch such an epitome of all that has been, and a Blazing beacon shining far into the future and inextinguishable through all time?

Some seem to promise, but appear to be jealously called back into the infinite ere their work can gather that body and momentum which ensures perpetuity. And yet I know I see one who will, if he be spared, leave a brilliantly indelible mark upon this age despite its distractions. What may he not attain if he brings to bear fortitude, and perpetual motion, and be given good health and long life? It usually takes all these and more to produce that wide range and substantial bulk of varied works stamped by genius to stand robustly forth, head and shoulders above the elite of the ages and never fade... There is no note in "Ein Dämmerungsbild" which could possibly be altered to advantage, and that, perhaps, is the severest test of perfection. In these exquisite pages is the spirit and atmosphere of lovely twilight truly mirrored.

Long may Godowsky live to carry on the work of his great predecessors so valiantly into the future... Oh this glorious Barcarolle-Valse! It is an immortal achievement and ranks easily among the most important works. To measure it among the Barcarolles of the world, it is without peer or parallel. Substantial, brilliant, true to name, glinting and glistening throughout, with every shade and nuance conceivable, it reveals a coda and crescendo finale that Chopin would envy...

Long live Godowsky

Paul Howard.

THE FULFILMENT

(Twenty one years later)

X The following is a letter from Paul Howard to Dr. James Francis Cooke, Editor of "The Etude", Philadelphia, Pa., October 24, 1936. Printed editorially in "Musical Courier", New York, January 2, 1937.

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

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 seperate 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 skyscrapers was the work of a giant, a service to mankind and an unequalled tribute and compliment to Bach.

Then the 46 Miniatures for four hands! 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.

X 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 fiisted 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.

X With God-like charitableness, Godowsky has so often stooped by the

+ with God-like charitableness

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. X

All ^t 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. ^A as a pedagogue and pianist he has excelled in the same measure. X

His music sets a new standard in piano playing, creates a new era every whit as marked as, and more so, than that of Bach, calling for an independence of finger work never before 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. X

My evaluation is not that 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 composer's works, and have, in my music-shelves everything of note written for the instrument, from Purcell to Satie, in most cases their 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." X
ever X

Leonard Lieblich added the following generous compliment:

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