

After Midnight Thoughts

On Leopold Godowsky.

etc.

By Paul Howard.

To The Members of The International Godowsky Society.

Instalment 4.

The Sonata in E minor.
A Letter to Leonard Liebling.

THE SONATA.

Around 1912 I had on my piano desk the Sonata of Cyril Scott, and the Godowsky Sonata. I had played them through many times and was enraptured of both, the Scott for its provoking variation of time signatures and the exquisite five and seven phrases; no two measures are in the same time, but every measure is barred on the phrase. 50 years ago the great René Lenormand said that composers should do that. I was in the Seventh Heaven over the wonders of the Godowsky Sonata, and held the Scott in one hand and the Godowsky in the other, and demanded a decision of myself as to which I would do, decided on the Godowsky at the price of the Scott, and it was a high price too, but so worth it. I held the heavy copy of the Godowsky on my chest with both hands - I shall never forget that moment - I knew the thrill of the hot tears of ecstasy that I would one day be able to play the Godowsky Sonata.

That I could stay the course I knew, and it is a precious thing to know that you possess the persistence, the ^{energy} and drive to go on and on. And today, 35 years later, I am still going on and finding new light in it: although I have played it in recital many times, and to visitors hundreds of times, it is a work that is never finished, but always intrigues and offers new points of view, new aspects to be mastered. It is like some lovely person showing new charms day by day and whose surprises are never ending.

Paul Howard.

THE GODOWSKY SONATA

SONATA in E Moll, (published 1912, "Meiner lieben Frau gewidnet").

1st. Movement (Allegro, non troppo, ma Appassionato, Epilogue, Andante tranquillo)

2nd Movement Andante Cantabile

3rd. Movement Allegretto Vivace e Scherzando

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4th Movement. Allegretto Crazioso e Dolce

5th. Movement (retrospect, (Lento Mesto)

(Larghetto Asmentoso)

(Fuga on theme B-a-c-h-.)

(Maestoso Lugubre)

(Dies irae).

Rev. Prior Meehan, O. Carm, after listening to the Sonata, Murmured:-

"Ring out, ye ch~~r~~ystal spheres,
once bless our human ears,
If ye have power to touch out senses so:
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
And let the base of heaven's deep organ blow;
And, with your ninefold harmony,
Make up full concert to the angelic symphony."

JOHN MILTON, "On the morning of Christ's Nativity"

"...The Godowsky Sonata with its subtle intimations of Brahms, Chopin and Liszt, and its altogether Godowskyian colour and rhythmic life - he is the greatest creator of rhythmic values since Liszt - and that is a large order..."

James Gibbons Huneker, "Unicorns", Page 181.

"Its opening subject - a few bars of falling chords of undream~~ed~~-of majesty. like the dignity of chaste marble pillars opening into some old and beautiful Greek temple; for it is beauty that is enshrined in this wonderful Sonata. Strength there is, the strength of a giant rejoicing to run his race and be free, ~~the~~ederness and wonder, but most of all beauty, beauty that is restrained, Grecian, that never says a word too much, and yet that somehow glows with serene and unutterable happiness, and makes you feel the truth of Boethius' wonderful definition of eternity: 'the complete and perfect possession, all at once, of unending life.'"

Edward F. McMahon. (My priceless Hon. Sec.)

"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 ~~the~~ Master to write another ^{Sonata} would be redundant."

Paul Howard.

(From a letter I wrote to Dr. Cooke, Philadelphia, 24/1/36).

PROGRAMME NOTES to my 20th recital, St. Dominic's Priory, North Adelaide,
August, 1914.

"My Dear friends,

Just

2 This mighty Sonata unst published and written by a composer of our own generation is sure to administer a physical and mental shock and stimulus to a good many musicians, especially to any
 2 who may be smugly in a tut, for there is nothing equivocal about it, at once storming the judgement and calling for earnest concentration.

There's much *more* to do and think about in this work *OK* than either serious pianists or public are accustomed to, but every note of it is welcome and wonderful. About the colossal opening movement I know not what to say - words and superlatives fail, as words must in the face of great musical expression by a great personality.

At least I must say this Sonata is titanic and infinitely sweet, compelling, of thrilling interest, and of resplendent majesty.

It expresses in tone those moods we could only think, since they seem to have no other possible life, and things we have not thought, but are glad to. It digs into deep recesses, and reveals treasures and mysterious wonders of which we had no inkling.

Even to the unimaginative it will reveal the unseen, and bring to the cheek a flush of apprehension, or pleasure, at the weirdness of beauty of strange visages that arise.

No note is wasted on packing; through and through it is alive, parts moving against and through each other in an ever fascinating restlessness. New tones, deeper tones, and strange fragrances, come and come, till the few sweet bars of the two-line Epilogue, exquisitely simple, fittingly conclude this grand first movement.

What wondrously rich colouring there is in the Andante Cantabile 2nd movement: it holds the piano in its grasp as a giant and seeks to expand itself to infinity, and is a first-class recital number taken by itself.

The 3rd. movement, Allegretto Vivace e Scherzando out-rivals the Scherzi of the world for pure racing frolic, feathery lightness and freshness, a "Puck" indeed, and as mischievous, followed by the 4th movement, Allegretto Grazioso e Dolce, a real "Ariel", delicate tracery, glimmering in the sun as a thousand glistening strands, an enchanting Viennese Waltz, with lightness, speed and sting.

X Follows a Retrospect, a perfect précis of the first movement, and all the marvel of it condensed to a few lines. Did Beethoven ever write a greater page? Dear friends, fellow countrymen, and those in far lands, do not be wrath, I only ask the question without desire to hurt the feelings of anyone, and if you study the page you will forgive.

This ruminating giant opens the fifth movement, which is perhaps a whole Sonata in itself. The Larghetto Lamentoso, Shades of Dante! But why waste words, only the keyboard can tell; The

Fuga follows, on the revered theme B.a.c.h., and a fugue ^aworthy of the name, cheerful, brilliant, ~~x~~ broad, brave and interesting, leading to the Maestoso Lugubre, upon the majestic Dies Irae, an awe-inspiring and tremendous movement, merging into a Dolcissimo passage of sweetness reminiscent of Schubert, the heavenly Schubert of the Polonaise Op.75, No. 3. When was there such loveliness as this? Surely Schubert's spirit breathed on Godowsky as he wrote this passage, which returns to the Dies Irae, The Sonata finishing in a passage of quiet and expansive sublimity, adding the last stone to stamp the work with the indelible marks of immortality and the composer as one who shuns the meretricious: a Brahms elevated and sweetened by the best Chopin influence; nature's descendent of Bach and Palestrina, and one who writes in modern garb with all their depth and strength.

Why say a Sonata is too long because it takes an hour or more to play, when a recital of two hours is not too long, in fact is accepted the world over? A sonata is composed of several different parts of pieces, and these, if the work be a good one, are sufficiently varied in style and manner to give the relief and contrasts necessary to hold interest just as much as a two hour recital ^{of} of a dozen of so different works. A big sonata such as the Godowsky E minor is more varied in interest than many an orchestral symphony which takes as long and seldom contains more than three movements.

Many great works in literature are of such a length that they can only be perused at a great many sittings, as is also the case with some operas. It is reasonably held that to come within the bounds of a true art form, a composition in music or literature should be performable or readable at one sitting, otherwise there will be a succession of climaxes, robbing the work of unity, and rendering it a collection of small works or separate experiences or sensations.

We think nothing of attending a historical or other drama or play engaging tense observation for three hours; surely the music lover will not say an immortal sonata occupying an hour is too long. It may tire, but gloriously. (The Sorabji Op. Clavicembalisticum takes three and a half hours.)

The Worshipper of the Muse is surely not so flippant as to desire a recital of a large number of small pieces, for these, however beautiful and perfect, cannot make a deep or lasting impressions on the mind, nor can morsels become immortal after the manner of a great creation, and a composer cannot be expected to give the world in a small scope a mighty theme developed grandly and running the gamut of human emotions and intellectual comprehension. No, the healthy person who will weary of a great work because of its length has no musical sincerity."

From PROGRAMME NOTES to Recital in Lady Colton Hall, Hindmarsh Square,
Adelaide, 22/5/20.

"Godowsky's Sonata is not particularly neologistict, and he does not run himself to a dead end and in any new form of speech of his own making, but using liberally of the wonderful treasure chest there is today, he has given the world this colossal, tremendous and astounding Sonata in E minor. This historic landmark was published about 1912. Its five movements are so varied as to make it equivalent to any programme of as many different works, so that its length of about an hour counts nothing against its interest. The usual reproach against Beethoven's Op.106 is that it is too long, but that sonata certainly has not the variety of the Godowsky E minor... As Ernest Newman has

aply said: "There ^{have been} ~~are~~ some been some tremendous things said in a poetic quatrain and some seminal things in a distich, but music requires space to deploy itself in before it can strike with overpowering strength."

From a Letter to John Stokes of the royal Australian Navy, 22nd. May. 1942.

"My Dearest John,

We all love you very much, and we are perfectly delighted with your letter to Leo; I count the minutes till such time when you can again honour and adorn our domestic hearth-rug, and listen to the Master's immortal Sonata, particularly the Fifth movement, which I feel is beyond all praise -
 X its one page ^{cat}retrospect, which I feel to be the greatest one page Adagio to be found on paper, X
 X melting into the priceless Lamentoso; the Fugue so quiet, cold, sane and dimensional, sinking into
 X the Dies Irae, to which is added a ribald superstrucer of mockery, merging into a Dolcissimo of X
 such ravishing charm, with its multi-rhythmic core, as though perfect charm and peace were
 composed of restlessness and chaos; and then the perfectly sublime few pages of piassimo covering
 both ends and the middle of the keyboard all the time. I wonder if the great Master was thinking of
 the Devine comedy?

You know Liszt wrote a Sonata entitled "After Listening to a Lecture on Dante", and I now come with the Years to realize that it is far loftier than his B minor Sonata. I have often played both of them in recital...

Affectionately,

Paul."

From a Letter to Clinton Gray-Fisk, 31/5/44.

"...For I told Harold Bauer that I felt that the artists themselves were to blame for the public apathy to the pianoforte recital, that is, the bigger public, because pianists would not educate them. They would "follow my leader", play what the previous traveller had played, only louder and faster and with more flashing of hands, making their programmes a succession of titbits, a dozen or more small works with only one solid work and that seldom more than about 15 minutes, the player seeming to need the stimulant of senseless hand-clapping every few minutes to sustain him.

People would follow, and pianists would gain a greater musical public, if they would have the courage to play the sonatas funning into an hour, or a Suite taking a couple of hours. The public thinks nothing of going threenights following from 5 to midnight to hear Wagner. They go from 7 to 11 o'clock to see "Gone With the Wind". It is not the public's fault, it is the pianist's..."

Here follows a letter of Leonard Liebling re Huneker.

In the No.5 Instalment the subject will be the 24 Walzermasken, and in No. 6 and 7 maybe I will deal with some interesting correspondence before going on with the Master's other works.

Kindest regards,

Paul Howard.

3rd October, 1945

The Editor
The Musical Courier,

My Dear Leonard,

In your learned editorial on Hunaker in the July 1945 issue of the Courier you did not mention his greatest achievement, i.e. his championship of Godowsky, which elevates his standing as an appraiser of values perhaps more than any of his other summations, and that is a matter which ~~myst~~ interest all of us above anything else he wrote, since it is of the first importance today as news.

On page 206-109 of "Steeplejack" he says: -

"It must be nearly twenty years ago, anyhow eighteen, (1900). that I entertained Vladimir de Pachmann in my Dream-Barn on Madison Avenue at Seventy-sixth Street. The tenth floor, a room as big and as lofty as a cathedral. Alas! Where are such Old-fashioned apartments today? After eating a duck, a kotchka, cooked Polish fashion, and borsch, beet soup, with numerous Slavic side dishes, preceeded by the inevitable zakuska - those appetite-slaying bonnes bouches - de Pachmann fiercely demanded cognac. I was embarrassed. Not drinking spirits, I had inconsiderately forgot the taste of others. De Pachmann, who is a child at heart, too often a naughty child, dried to heaven that I was a hell of a host! He said this in Russian, then in French, Italian, German, Polish, spanish English, and wound up with a hearty Hebrew "Raca", which may mean hatred or revenge, or certainly something not endearing. But the worst was to come. ~~There~~ stood my big Steinway grand piano, and he circled about the instrument as if it were a dangerous monster. Finally he sniffed and snapped "My contract does not permit me to play a Steinway." I hadn't thought of asking him, fearing Chopin's classic retort after a dinner-party at Paris: "Madame, j'ai mangé si Peu!" Finally I saw the hole in the mill-stone, and excused myself. When I returned with a bottle of abominable cognac the little man's malicious smile changed to a look of ecstasy, and he was not a drinking man ever, but he was accustomed to his "petit verre" after dining, and was ill tempered when deprived of it. Such is human nature, something that puritans, prohibitionists, and other pernicious busy-bodies will never understand. And then this wizard lifted the fall-board of my piano, and quite forgetful of that "contract", began playing. And how he did play! Ye gods! Baccus, Apollo and Venus, and all other pleasant celestial

! like him
clay!

X

persons, how you must have revelled when de Pachmann played! In the more intimate atmosphere of my apartment his music was of gossamer web, iridescent, aerial, and aeolian harp doubled by a diabolic subtlety...

And what did Vladimir, hero of double-notes play? Nothing but Godowsky, then new to me. Liszt had been his god, but Godowsky was becoming his living deity...

He has restored polyphony to its central position, thus bettering in that respect, Schumann and Liszt. I have called attention elsewhere to Godowsky's solo Sonata... pianists of calibre might profitably introduce the Godowsky work. He is too modest of else too indifferent to put it on his programme. It "lies" so well for the keyboard, yet there is no denying its difficulties, chiefly polyphonic: the patterns are intricate, though free from the clogging effects of the Brahms sonatas. De Pachmann delighted his two auditors that night from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. It is safe to wager that the old Carrolton never heard such music making before or since. When he left, happy over his triumph - I was actually flabbergasted by the new music - he whispered: "Hein! What do you think! You think I can play this wonderful music? You are mistaken, Wait till you hear Leopold Godowsky play. We are all woodchoppers compared with him..." It was the sincerest sentiment I had ever heard from his often insincere lips. We were all surprised to find a score of people camping out on the curved stairway and passages, the idealist, a coloured lad who ran the elevator, having succumbed to sleep. This impromptu Godowsky recital by a marvellous pianist, for de Pachmann was a marvel in his time, must have made a hit with my neighbours. It did with me, and when Godowsky returned to New York - I had just heard him in the middle nineties of the previous century - I lost no time in hearing him play in his inimitable manner those same works, A pianist who can win the heartiest admiration of such contemporaries as de Pachmann and Joseffy and Josef Hofmann - I could adduce many other names - must be a unique artist. *abd that Godowsky is."*

X nothing like him as far as I know is to be found in the history of piano playing since
Extract from "Unicorns", Page 180.

2 "...I once called Godowsky the superman of piano play in Chopin. Hi is an apparition. A Chopin doubled by a contrapuntalist, Bach and Chopin. The spirit of the German Cantor and the Polish tone poet in curious conjunction. His playing is transcendent, his piano compositions the transcendentalism of the future. That way, else retrogression! All has been accomplished in ideas and figuration. A new synthesis - the combination of seemingly disparate elements and styles with innumerable permutations he has accomplished. He is a miracle worker...his ten digits are ten independant voices, recreating the ancient polyphonic art of the Flemings. He is like a Brahma at the piano. Before his serene and all-embracing vision every school appears and disappears in the void. Nothing musical is foreign to him. He is a pianist for pianists and I am glad to say the majority of them gladly recognise the fact..."

What would Huneker have said had he lived to know the Walzermasken, the Java Suite, the Bach elaborations, the Poems, and Passacaglia, and all the other master works that stand without peer or parallel in the annals of pianoforte composition?

Rachmaninoff, without the gift of eloquence just simply said:

“Godowsky is the only musician of this age who has given a lasting, a real contribution to the development of piano music”

And de Pachmann, whom we septuagenarians know to have been the one supreme player of Chopin, said:-

Godowsky is the greatest of them all, greater than Bach.”

And another time you, Leonard, reported him in the Courier as saying:-

“I was gone 70 years of age when I discovered those wonderful Walzermasken of Godowsky. I made a selection of six of them and practised them assiduously several hours every day for seven years. They revived my interest in life and art when I thought all the possibilities of pianoforte playing were exhausted.”

Yes, indeed, if these men without eloquence were so ablaze, what tragedy the iridescent Huneker had passed too soon to his ancestors.

In your great goodness and generosity, and as an ardent admirer of this great and lovable man, you will, I hope find space in your valuable columns for this.

I very much endorse your view that Scribner should make renewed output of Huneker's books as an asset for the Musicians, students, and Music Lovers of today, for every sentence he wrote had life, his outlook was all-embracing: he never made a false judgement, in this being as unique as Shaw in his music criticism of the eighties.

Affectionately,

(Sgd). The Apostle Paul.

P.S. Dear Leonard,

My long delayed Annual Letter to Members, owing to the assistance of the Honorary Secretary, Edward F. McMahan, alias Mountain, is assuming the dimensions of a 500 page book which is going out in instalments. The first two instalments are already mailed to you by ordinary mail. Could you please give me the address of J. Campbell Phillips? I have to ask his indulgence for reproducing in it his beautiful sketch of the Great Godowsky.