

After Midnight Thoughts

On Leopold Godowsky,

etc.

This Instalment 5 was to be on the 24 Walzermasken, (5, 6, 7, being already proofed) but I had to alter the numbers because of the passing of Leonard Liebling intervenes.

In the 4th Instalment you had my letter to him about Huneker's evaluation of Godowsky, and here follows Leonard's answer dated 25. October, 1945. He died ere the dawn of October 28th.

By Paul Howard.

To the Members of The International Godowskt Society.

Instalment 5.

Vale Leonard Liebling, alas!

Dear Paul,

It was good to hear from you after so long a lapse, and to know that you and yours passed safely through all the holocausts and horrors of recent years. I had your silence down to the fact that much mail must have gone lost on sunken vessels and planes, for otherwise I surely would have received a few Godowsky reminders - as well as scoldings - from you.

I am making use in next VARIATIONS of the material just received under date of last month.

A new convert to the Godowsky cause is Henrietta Schumann (Mrs. Thomas Barber, Millbank Road, Bryn Mawr, Pa., U.S.A.) and I have written her to join the I.G.S. I also sent her a copy of your latest letter and gave her your address. I was her house-guest recently, and she played a stunning performance for me of the Schubert-Godowsky Passacaglia and Fugue. She also does great things with the Chopin and Strauss transcriptions.

You can reach J. Campbell Phillips care of the Lotos Club, 110 West 57th Street, New York City. I saw him there the other day, and told him that you had asked his address. He said that it is all right for you to use the Godowsky picture. However, you might write to him just the same, for formal permission.

What a world this has been, and what a world it is. It leaves some of us old-timers decidedly breathless. At the moment New York is a bedlam, with almost seventy vessels of our victorious fleet in port, reviewing tomorrow for the President and Admiral Halsey. Thousand of sailors are milling in the streets and the city is packed with visitors from all over the country.

How are all the family? How is your piano playing? How is my niece-sweetheart Mary?

Well, I'm off to a luncheon for Admiral Halsey, and so, finis to this script.

With love to all of you, and my best wishes as usual,

Your doddering old pal,

(Sgd). Leonard



The same mail brought the first of November issue of the Courier showing that Leonard had passed to his ancestors just after writing me, and although you most likely have the Courier of that date I copy here the Obituary article, and Leonard's posthumous editorial.

MUSICAL COURIER: NEW YORK. NOV. ISSUE.

LEONARD LIEBLING PASSES.

Leonard Liebling, editor-in-chief of the Musical Courier for 33 years, and associated with this publication since 1902, passed away suddenly on the morning of Oct. 28 at his home in New York of a heart attack. He had acted as master of ceremonies on the previous evening at a Victory Festival of American-European Friendship, Inc., in Town Hall, when he was apparently in good health and spirits, and his flow of witty anecdote and reminiscence was unimpaired. Afterward, he passed an hour or two with a small party of friends and then was driven home to his hotel in their car. He was found dead the next day, still wearing his formal attire.

Mr. Liebling was born in New York, Feb. 7, 1874, the son of Max Liebling and the former Mathilde de Perkiewicz. His father was a musician, as were his uncles Emil and George, all three known as pianists and composers. Following graduation from College of the City of New York in 1897, Mr Liebling went to Berlin to continue his musical studies in piano with Godowsky, Theodore Kullak, and K.H. Barth, and composition with Heinrich Urban. This was a brilliant musical era in the Prussian capital, a centre of concert and operatic life, and the young artist made many friends among the most eminent musicians of the period. He made appearances as a concert pianist and taught in Europe before returning to the United States, where he was active in Utico, N. Y. for a time, and then made his home in New York.

From 1899 Mr. Liebling devoted himself principally to literary work, in which field he was noted not only for his critical writing but also as a librettist and playwright. He wrote the English books for several successful comic operas, among them The Balkan Princess, Vera Violetta, The Girl and the Kaiser, and the American Maid. In 1902 he became associated with the Musical Courier, first as successor to Huneker as writer of the column The Raconteur, and later as conductor of his column Variations, printed in these pages regularly for more than 40 years. The final instalment, written several days before his death, appears on the next page.

Mr. Liebling was chief music critic of the New York American from 1923-4 to 1935. He was known for his wide sympathies in music, and while trained in the older school of composition, kept an open mind in relation to the work of younger men. As a genial raconteur he occupied a particularly prominent place, and was in constant demand as a speaker before musical clubs and conventions. With the advent of Radio, he extended his activities to include microphone appearances and served as musical editor for the Radio Guide from 1937 to 1940.

He was guest commentator for some of the New York Philharmonic Sunday broadcasts and appeared as judge on the program So You Think You Know Music? He served three years on the Council of The Lambs, was an active member of the Lotus Club, whose musical programs he regularly arranged and introduced, was a member of the Bohemians and other musical clubs.



Mr. Liebling is survived by his widow, the former Eda Baxter, and by his sister, Mrs. Arthur Mosler, known to the music profession as Estelle Liebling, prominent New York voice teacher. His daughter Viva, who was for some time before her death Radio Editor of the Musical Courier, died last year.

OK A true champion of the best in music, a kind but keen-eyed critic of its foibles, at which he aimed his gentle barbs surely but never with rancor, he will be missed in artistic circles.

The policies of the Musical Couries will continue unchanged, just as Mr. Liebling would have wished, retaining the best features of the past and welcoming fruitful new trends.

And here is Leonard's last word:-

THE MUSICAL COURIER: NEW YORK.

(The last instalment of Variations written by Leonard Liebling is herewith printed as a memorial and tribute to his ever-youthful spirit and the kindly sympathy which he never failed to show in the Welfare of American Music, of which he was for nearly a half-century a devoted servant.

- Staff of Musical Courier)

VARIATIONS: By Leonard Liebling. Nov. 1. 1945.

In the July issue of the Musical courier I wrote an editorial recommending that Huneker's books (now out of print) be re-issued by the publishers for the benefit of young musicians who might not have read them. In that article I listed some of the achievements of Huneker in championing then misunderstood new music and pointing out the significance of unfamiliar novel developments that made for the progress of art.

All the way from Adelaide, comes Paul Howard's letter (October 3) chiding me for not including mention of the pioneering which Huneker did for Godowsky as a creative force in piano-playing and in his writings for the instrument. Paul, as you probably know, is the militant founder of the International Godowsky Society devoted to furthering the knowledge and performance of that master's music. Hundreds of prominent musicians all over the world are members of the I.G.S.

Paul sends me three typewritten pages of quotations from Huneker on the subject of Godowsky, and I wish I could reproduce them here, but this department has its compelling space limitations. I recommend, however, especially to pianists, the reading of Huneker's two biographical volumes called Steeplejack, in which he lauds Godowsky to the skies both for his playing and his piano works that carry polyphony and technic far beyond Chopin, Schumann and Liszt. Huneker says that Godowsky's lofty uniqueness was enthusiastically endorsed by his contemporaries, de Pachmann, Joseffy and Hofmann. He might have added later that the list was increased by Rachmaninoff, Lhevinne, Rosenthal, Grabilewitsch, Bauer, and many other topnotchers of the keyboard. It was Rachmaninoff who declared: "All of us pianists sit at Godowsky's feet. He is the only musician of this age who has given a lasting, a real contribution to the development of piano music."

It is a mystery to me why Godowsky's name appears so seldom on recital programs today, and it is something of which our piano heroes ought to be ashamed. When I speak to them of Godowsky, they are unanimous in admiration, but they do not perform him. What is the answer?

Before the war, Paul Howard and the Antipodean Godowskyites made it compulsory for every public-appearing pianist in that part of the world to put at least one of his works on their programs. I hope the practise is being continued. The same course might be advisable in this country.

To mention only one Godowsky work that is comparable with the best piano music since the time of Brahms, there is the Variations and Fugue on the opening theme of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. Any serious pianist who has not become acquainted with that Godowsky opus is unfair to his art and to himself. Besides, the work is sure-fire material for success for any recital-giver with wide musicianship and a first-class technic.

Leonard Liebling.

oOo

How amazing that after about 2 years silence, my letter should reach him on the 25th. November, the eve of his going, and that his last written letter should be to me, and his last editorial, posthumous, a great stroke for the Master. Men and music will miss him very much.

He was a devoted friend of Godowsky, and a champion of his supremacy, in his chosen field, and this is shown in his correspondence as well as many Courier articles. In the issue of December 1st, 1938, Leonard wrote:-

"As this department goes to press, comes shattering news of the death of Leopold Godowsky, my dear friend and teacher. My heart is filled with sorrow. I cannot write about him just now on this page."

The following extract from the Musical Courier of 15th. Jan., 1939, is a letter from Godowsky to Liebling. Liebling made me a gift of the original which is entirely hand written as were so many of the Master's letters to me.

VARIATIONS.

By Leonard Liebling.

In a letter written to me (L.L.) by Leopold Godowsky a few days before he died, the lamented genius said:-

"I am in constant gloom, and my despair is growing daily, due to the unprecedented barbaric happenings all over our little wobbly planet, happenings which make the Dark Ages seem like expressions of transcendental liberalism.



And what is the future of our beloved music?

Is the source of inspiration completely exhausted?

Is all culture going to be with a "K"?

Where is fate driving us?

Is this the dusk of the Earth?

OK. Is the ~~annihilation~~<sup>er</sup> of all human achievements ahead of us?

When I allow my thoughts to deepen, life becomes unbearable...

Paul Howard, my abidingly admiring disciple and champion in Australia persists in making ~~he~~<sup>me</sup> feel more and more conscious of my unworthiness of his adulation. Not because I am so modest, but owing to my theory that no human being CAN be great. We can only be LESS insignificant!"

(Godowsky's last line goes down in my personal record of prized and touching memories. L.L.)

Let us get together soon for one of our luncheon chats about everything in which we are so greatly interested. I have a genuine affection for you which I have for few ~~people~~. And friendship is like superior wine; it gets stronger and mellower with age."

oOo

Here is Leonard's great tribute to the Master in "Variations", Dec. 24, 1932.

"Leopold Godowsky has returned to town, and that is cheering news for all the pianistic devotees of high and medium degree who are privileged to enjoy communion with him. In Chicago, New York, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, where Godowsky has lived, his studio served as headquarters and an open forum for the brethren ~~and~~<sup>ren</sup> and sisters of the keyboard.

"I have seen the greatest of the fabulously fingered gentry seated about the piano with Godowsky and discussing the problems of mechanism and interpretation. There were Lhevinne, Rosenthal, Hofmann, Grabilowitsch, Horowitz, de Pachmann, Hambourg, Bauer, Rachmaninoff, Paderewski and others. All acknowledge his masterful art, authority and uniqueness. He is looked upon by them as an innovator, a scholar, a prophet, a Buddha, if you like.

"In true bigness of artistic spirit, Godowsky never fails to give generously of his vast store of knowledge; anyone can come to him and profit. His religion is art, and he spreads the gospel with God-like charitableness.

Towering savant.

has  
 “The piano, and the cause of music, are enriched by the presence and contributions of Godowsky. He is the eminent one of the living, who ~~is~~ not only played the piano grandly, but also carried it to greater heights in its technical possibilities and musical expansion. Others are pianists, Godowsky is a creator, a constructor, a developer, a discoverer in pianism. What Godowsky has done to enrich the literature of the piano is too well-known a story to need retelling for musical readers. His output of original compositions, adaptations, arrangements, transcriptions, studies is truly stupendous. His industry never flags, and busies itself as vitally with the ancient styles as with the most advanced examples of the moment. To study all the works of Godowsky is to commune with the entire spirit, nature, purpose and mechanism of the piano, and to sit at the feet of a towering musical savant, teacher, philosopher.”

oOo

(I wrote in Nov. 1938 that Liebling's style was the aristocracy of English and his versatility a miracle. Rosa Hubermann-Widder told me of his rich voice and ingratiating manner, always saying the right thing at the right time and never lost for a word. And I commented, The ways of God are wonderful, He gives some people everything.)

oOo

On 5th. December, 1933, Godowsky wrote to me, his writing rather jerky and thicker than usual, agitated in fact:-

“I had the misfortune to lose Mrs Godowsky. She was ill for a long time, but her death came suddenly. It is a hard blow to me. I feel terribly unhappy and lonely. One tragedy follows another... I have had too many frightful knocks.

Affectionately,

(Sgd). Godowsky

P.S. Kindly give my affectionate greetings to your little Mary.”

My Dear Paul,

By this time you probably will have heard of the death of Mrs. Godowsky, wife of our Leopold.

She has been ailing for several years, and passed away suddenly on Dec. 5th., with all her family at her bedside.

The funeral took place yesterday. Hofmann and Elman played, and I delivered a short eulogy. Leopold is bearing up well, but, of course, is terribly shaken. I have just returned from lunching with him at the Hotel Ansonia; Hofmann was there, too. We cheered him up all we could.

He spoke of you with gratitude and affection. I told him that I had cabled to you.

Poor Godowsky! The demon of misfortune has steadily stalked the great man, and of all persons in the world, he least deserves harsh treatment, for he is a gentle, charitable soul, and a heaven-born artist.

I wish you and your family a very happy New Year, with all the blessings of health and contentment,

Always yours cordially,

(Sgd). Leonard Liebling

oOo

Another letter from Liebling fits in here (there are hundreds of them) in which things seem a little brighter.

August 26th, 1937.

My Dear Paul,

Your August 5th. letter's just arrived, and gave me much pleasure. Especially the cheery tone, and the news of your continued fine work for the Cause.



By a coincidence, I spent last evening with the Master and his present executive assistant, Mr. F. Sard, and we three had dinner together. The Master looks well, and seems in good health, with no perceptible handicap except a slight limp. His spirits were high and we cracked plenty of jokes.

? His appetite was good, for he ate celery, young onions, artichoke, stuffed with crab meat (as hors d'ouvres), a half Lobster Thermider, green peas, salad and Coupe St. Jaques. A Martini cocktail preceeded the dinner, and demi-tasse coffee ended it. Pretty good for a sick man, eh?

*original  
or edit?*

We spoke about you, the Master's remarks being deeply complimentary and affectionate. He is warmly appreciative of your efforts <sup>in</sup> his behalf.

Thanks for asking about my was-tossed family. The wife and daughter are in St. Jean de Luz, France, and the son-in-law is on Franco's staff in Salamanca. His wife and he met recently for three days in San Sebastian, she then returning to France. She and her mother will visit me here shortly, as I could not spare the time to go to them this Summer.

I hope that you and yours are happy, well, and thriving.

With love to all of you, as always,

Your pal,

(Sgd). Leonard.

oOo

Leonard's tragedies mounted; the son-in-law died for Franco, and his daughter, Viva, just recently. She was on the staff of the Courier with Leonard.

Leonard was consistently mindful of the Master we loved so well, and the following is just typical of his many "gentle barbs".

Extract from Musical Courier, 15, 1940

### VARIATIONS

By Leonard Liebling.

David Saperton's All-Godowsky piano recital in New York on October 5th., might have reminded pianists that the mighty Leopold wrote a number of outstanding original works for the keyboard, made some of the finest transcriptions, and developed technic further than anyone else since the time of Chopin and Liszt.

*or technique*

I used to see nearly all the great pianists at Godowsky's home and hear them rave about the Walzermasken, Miniatures, and compositions for the left hand, as well as his transcribed Bach and other ancients, Johann Strauss, and his arrangements of the Chopin Etudes.

- X If all the admiration was sincere, why do these virtuose practically ban the Godowsky music now?  
 X Of that eminent band only Josef Hofmann consistently does his reverence. (I would be interested to know what Godowsky Josef plays. P.H.)

Aside from Hofmann and Saperton, the remaining regular Godowsky performers seem to be Nadia Reisenberg and the indefatigable Paul Howard of Adelaide, South Australia. (He hadn't found Henrietta Schumann then. P.H.)

oOo

I have written to Henrietta Schumann greeting her across the memory of Leonard. How delightful to secure a new member with a name of such lovely association. I wonder if she is any relation to Robert.

Who will now worthily write Liebling's Biography and Memoirs, who has himself written so many Obituaries so exquisitely?

oOo

I was sitting on the floor with my back to the piano, playing the Cadenza from Balakirev's exquisite "Au Jardin", and got in such a rage because I couldn't get my little finger on the B alt., that I awoke from this nightmare at 2.15 a.m. and went into the garden, turned the hoses on the tennis court, and watered all the lovely Zinnia beds. An angry, full red moon setting, and lightning flashing around the entire horizon for the whole time, a ring of fire, was an eerie prelude to 6" of rain the next day.

Then to my desk to finish this; it is just breaking day, 4 o'clock, so a cup of strong tea with a "stick" in it, and to bed for a couple more hours sleep.

Sincerely,

Paul Howard.