

The Godowsky Society



Newsletter

VOL. 2 NO. 2

Andrew Cockburn's Piece on the Walzermasken in the last issue of the Newsletter has stirred a welcome response: there is a sad postscript in that the music for this has been out of print for some time and is very difficult to obtain second-hand. A couple of years back, the writer tried to obtain a copy through inter-library loan, but only the third book appeared to be available through that source, that being in the possession of the Westminster Library. However, I hope to be able to offer members photocopies of the Walzermasken (and of other Godowsky works at present out-of-print) at cost price plus postage in the near future pending the outcome of enquiries regarding the copyright position. More of this in the next issue

Dr. Cockburn's mention of the incredible de Pachmann had me digging out my copy of Steeplejack, the autobiography of the American critic and man of Arts, James Gibbon Huneker, where he writes of de Pachmann and Godowsky: "It must be nearly twenty years ago, anyhow eighteen (this was written in 1918 - Ed.), 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 to-day? After eating a duck, a kotchka, cooked Polish fashion, and bersch, beet soup, with numerous Slavic side dishes, preceded by the inevitable zakuska - those appetite-slaying bonnes bouches - de Pachmann fiercely demanded cognac. I was embarrassed. Not drinking spirits, I had inconsiderately forgotten the taste of others. De Pachmann, who is a child at heart, too often a naughty child, cried 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; certainly something not endearing. But the worst was to come. There stood my big Steinway concert 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 mange si peu!" Finally I saw the hole in the millstone, 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 busybodies 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 persons, how you must have revelled when de Pachmann played! In the more intimate atmosphere of my apartment his music was of a gossamer web, iridescent, aerial, an æolian harp doubled by a diabolic subtlety. Albert Ross Parsons, one of the few living pupils of Tausig, in reply to my query: How did Joseffy compare with Tausig? answered: "Joseffy was like the multi-coloured mist that encircles a mighty mountain; but beautiful." So Pachmann's weaving enchantments seemed in comparison to Godowsky's profounder playing.

And what did Vladimir, hero of double-notes, play? Nothing but Godowsky, then new to me. Liszt had been his god, but Godowsky was become his living deity. He had studied, mastered, and memorised all those transcendental variations on Chopin studies, the most significant variations since the Brahms-Paganini scaling of the heights of Parnassus; and I heard for the first time the paraphrase of Weber's "Invitation to the Valse," a much more viable arrangement than Tausig's; also thrice as difficult. However, technique, as sheer technique, does not enter into the musical zone of Godowsky. He has restored polyphony to its central position, thus bettering in that

respect Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt. I have called attention elsewhere to Godowsky's solo Sonata, which evokes images of Chopin and Brahms and Liszt - Liszt only in the scherzo. Instead of exhuming such an "ungrateful" unpianistic composition as Tchaikovsky's Sonata in G, pianists of calibre might more profitably introduce the Godowsky work. He is too modest or 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 pm to 3 am. It is safe to wager that the old Carrollton 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!" Curiously enough, the last is the identical phrase uttered by Anton Rubinstein in regard to Franz Liszt. Perhaps it was a quotation, but de Pachmann meant it. It was the sincerest sentiment I had heard from his often insincere lips. We were all three 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 last 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. And that Godowsky is."

In his book Unicorne, Huneker wrote this of Godowsky:

"....I once called Godowsky the superman of piano playing. Nothing like him so far as I know is to be found in the history of piano playing since Chopin. He 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 independent 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....."

But de Pachmann was not the only pianist to play Godowsky in private as the following extract from Sergei Rachmaninoff by Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda (George Allen & Unwin - 1965):

"More visitors were reported on May 4: "Day after tomorrow the Horowitzes arrive here, intending to stay about a month. Haven't seen him yet, for I missed him in Basel." Some four-hand playing with Horowitz, recuperating from a long illness, was anticipated in the second item of a list of needs sent to Somov:

At the first opportunity, send me:

1. My 4th concerto, the score, only the score.
2. The Godowsky pieces for 4 hands. I believe I have 24 of them."

Now, remember that these four-hand pieces, the Miniatures, are essentially teaching material in which the primo parts (and which of these towering virtuosi sat at the treble?) are based on a five note compass.....

Not that Godowsky thought of his Miniatures as a purely pedantic exercise, far from it. In the Preface to those forty-six pieces, the publisher quotes from a letter from Godowsky regarding these pieces: "I have given a great deal of thought and loving care to the Miniatures, and though the pieces are smaller and considerably less complicated than anything I have ever written, they represent the best there is in me. The experience and assimilated knowledge, the aims and aspirations, the hopes and ideals, the disappointments and yearnings of a sensitive nature and an artist's soul are all to be found in this series of simple five-finger pieces. Working within such self-imposed limitations has convinced me that economy of means leads to a superior form of concentration, and the resulting concentrated effort produces the quintessence of human endeavor, materially and spiritually. The resourcefulness needed in dealing frugally with the means at our command often opens up unexplored and unsuspected regions of imagination. In working on the Miniatures I have been amazed at the possibilities created by the adopted restrictions. I have done my utmost to give the same attention to melody, harmony and counterpoint. I have tried my best to make the pieces as simple and as easy as was compatible with the intrinsic value of the inspiration and idea. I could have made them simpler and easier for the teacher, but the result would have been artistically less satisfactory, and much of their attractiveness would have been lost. I wish to inaugurate a new era in pedagogy, particularly as regards the earliest and early grades."

These self-imposed restrictions are considered in the article reprinted in this issue of the Newsletter, by Leslie Hodgson. This was first published in Musical America on December 10, 1938 as an obituary notice. While the editor has his reservations regarding some of the conclusions - for instance, I believe that Godowsky's penchant for limitations of form was for him necessary, as it was for Berg, whose operas are built up of fugues, passacaglia, etc. Despite this, I feel the piece well worth another airing. The cover on this edition of the Newsletter is by George Hager, and appeared as an illustration to this article.

The last Newsletter saw the last of the series on the Published Music of Leopold Godowsky: for those of you who are trying to locate just some of this music, with all the difficulty involved, the news that there is a quantity of music still unpublished. This was held by the Composer's son, Leopold Jnr. and it is not known if any of the manuscripts were lost during the recent fire (see Newsletter no. 1). Attempts to contact Leopold Godowsky Jnr. have so far met with no success.

There are the three Chopin A minor Etudes, combined (for two hands) and played simultaneously; the two a minor Etudes, Op.25 nos. 4 and 11, also for two hands played simultaneously; the Chopin Etude, Op. 25 no.8, in sixths turned into thirds, one for the left hand alone and one for the right hand; Chopin Etude Op.25 no.6, in thirds (inverted) for left hand (also for the right hand); Chopin Etude, Op. 25 no.7, an Elegie for left hand alone; arrangements of the Etudes, Op.10, no.11 in E flat (another version); the F minor Etude (the first of three composed for the Moscheles method) in variation form; and the Etude op. 25 no.12 in a version for two hands - the published one being for left hand alone - ten altogether, besides the fifty-three published by Fischer. Besides these, there are six songs in French, a violin sonata in G minor and a violin Ballade in A minor. Also in manuscript are a Toccata, Romanza, Intermezzo, Nocturne, Humoresque, Bagatelle and a big sonata - and there is probably some more! I'm sorry to thus whet your appetite without being able to do anything about it. But there is plenty to be getting on with, if you are lucky enough to be able to get your hands on it.

Also in this issue are some eye-witness (and ear-witness) accounts of Godowsky's sensational Berlin debut in 1900, another view of Godowsky at a Master-class: this latter kindly sent on to me by a new member. Miss Gillian

Halse, and forwarded to me by Harold Taylor (whose book "The Pianists Talent" -Kahn & Averill, 1981- is running into its second edition: a state of affairs more valuable to an author than a first!), another of our members. The Newsletter also includes an article written by Godowsky, Piano Music for the Left Hand, and a piece by his friend, Isidore Phillipp, Recollections of Leopold Godowsky.

And a piece of news which will be of interest to all members. The following appeared in The Times on 11 September last year.

11/9/81

THE TIMES DIARY



Brass band music devotees among the audience of Three Men in a Boat which opens at the Mayfair Theatre on Tuesday should resist the impulse to

rush off to the bar at the interval because Jeremy Nicholas, the star of the adaptation of Jerome K. Jerome's classic comedy is planning a little surprise.

He intends to serenade his first, and indeed subsequent, night audiences with a recording of one of his own brass band compositions The Blaythorne Suite, played on this occasion by the Grimethorpe Colliery Band.

In addition to being an accomplished actor (Inigo Jollifant in J. B. Priestley's The Good Companions, When the Boat Comes In and The Duchess of Duke Street) Mr Nicholas also turns out to be something of a composer, song writer and pianist.

"I like writing for brass bands", he said yesterday "Music is my hobby." Apart from rehearsing Three Men in a Boat, which was one of the fringe hits of last year's Edinburgh Festival, Nicholas, aged 33, is writing a book on Leopold Godowsky, the neglected Polish-American pianist composer, and contributes musical interludes to Robert Robinson's Stop the Week on Radio 4.

Jeremy Nicholas gave a talk on Godowsky on (if my memory serves me right) 26 March 1978 and a book on Godowsky will certainly be most welcome. In a letter he sent me shortly after this announcement, he said that part of the manuscript was being read over by Leopold Godowsky III, the composer's grandson. This being the case, Mr Nicholas will certainly have access to much most interesting material. I'll keep you posted on this.

Concerning Godowsky, I write more letters than Newsletters, ever on the hunt for information and trying to locate some of this vast amount of out-of-print music. One such lead which I followed up was in an announcement for a concert to take place in the South Bank's Purcell Room. It appeared thus:

Tuesday 29 Jan 7.30 p.m.	ROLF WILSON (vln), ENID GODOWSKY (pno), PAUL SEARLE-BARNES (pno) Op. 12 No. 2; Sarasate Zigeunerweisen; works by Godowsky, Saint-Saëns & Wieniawski £1.00, \$1.50, £2.00	In aid
JHS International Marketing		

Unable to go to London, I wrote a letter to the manager of the Purcell Room enclosing a one pound note and requesting a photocopy of the programme. My hope was that Enid Godowsky would turn out to be a relative. Alas, the composer whose work she was playing was Louis Godowsky! Just one more red herring.

The next Newsletter will be published in September/October and will contain, among other things, an article on the Bach Transcriptions by Andrew Cockburn, and one by Ronald Stevenson on Godowsky and Karl Szymanowski to tie up with this being the latter composer's centenary year. Ronald had hoped to have his article ready in time for this issue but he has become deeply involved in a Godowskian project - he is writing transcriptions for piano of the Sonatas for solo violin by Ysaye, the great Walloon Violinist who appeared on the cover of Newsletter no.2 last year.

A most interesting comment on the article by John G. Hinderer which appeared in a recent issue comes from Dave Smith:

"I was most interested to read the article on Godowsky and Javanese music, since I myself play in the "English Gamelan Orchestra" (Javanese

rather than Balinese) and have also arranged "Gamelan" for tuned percussion (doing the same sort of thing that Percy Grainger did for "Pagoda" and "La vallee des cloches"). Godowsky uses a number of Javanese figurations in "Gamelan" and seems in every way closer to the original than either Debussy or Ravel."

As all can see, there is an encouraging response to the Newsletters and, I'm happy to say, a similarly encouraging increase in the number of subscribers - even the Library of Congress!

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GODOWSKY: GREAT MUSICAL MIND and PERSONALITY
Remembered for Profound Influence on Contem-
poraries and Students - His Intellectual and
Technical Genius as Pianist, Teacher and
Composer Recalled

by

Leslie Hodgson

With the passing of Leopold Godowsky the world of music has lost a figure that occupied a position of an unique character over a long period of years. He was not only a great musician but, as well, a man of culture so comprehensive as to make him a commanding personality irrespective of the boundaries of the specific sphere in which he functioned. It is probable that no other pianist since Liszt has influenced so many of his pianist colleagues or inspired in them so much analytical interest as he did. In an unobtrusive manner he was a dominating figure in the piano playing world.

A many-sided musical personality, he was pianist, teacher, composer, transcriber and editor, and in all these capacities he distinguished himself. But it was as a pianist that he intrigues his fellow-pianists and it was essentially as a teacher that he exerted his greatest influence. After all, perhaps it would be most accurate to say that it was because as a pianist he was always the teacher - though not the pedant - that other pianists watched him so closely. Some of the most outstanding box-office pianists of today undoubtedly learned much from him.

With all his profound musical knowledge, it was technical illumination rather than any transcending new vision in matters of interpretation that Godowsky radiated in his public performances. For his playing probably approximated absolute mechanical flawlessness more closely than that of any other pianist of his generation, while, notwithstanding his long and widely-spreading experience before the public, an audience seemed almost invariably to have the effect of congealing the emotional side of his musical nature. The result of this was that he undoubtedly impressed the majority of his listeners as being a player predominantly intellectual, with a masterful structural grasp, rather than emotional, an opinion not held, it may be noted, however, by those who heard him under more intimate conditions, in the privacy of a select group of congenial souls.

But there would seem to have been another reason, too, perhaps, a more cogent one, for the usual lack of a vitally communicative eloquence in his public playing - the urge of a super-technician who was a teacher as well as a virtuoso to make his technical processes clear to his audiences. This in itself would, of necessity, effectually repress his subjective nature and dissipate the spontaneity so essential to the making of one's performances vivid and emotionally convincing. Perhaps, in the last analysis, all great playing is in reality objective, but the illusion of subjectivity must be created. An isolated few, Paderewski and one or two others, try to create the impression of playing subjectively by giving to their playing the character of free improvisation, as if the composition in hand were just coming into being at the moment, but it seems safe to assume that it has all been worked out objectively beforehand, even though the imagination may constantly try to improve upon it subjectively during actual performance.

Godowsky possessed complete control of tonal gradation by means of objectively created nuance and polyphonic delineation. He evidently realized early in his career the desirability of making one's approach an essentially objective one in order to preserve unvacillating mastery of the situation when playing in public. There have been, and are, plenty of other pianists, probably, who have consciously cultivated this approach, but it is more than probable that there has not been one other who so deliberately has developed

it as a distinctive art in itself. Much attention has been called to the amazingly clean-cut contours of his polyphonic playing, but, without involving the slightest disparagement of his great musicianship, the question might conceivably present itself as to whether the basis of his extraordinarily controlled polyphonic articulation was not primarily pianistic expediency.

He began to develop his colossal technique at a very early age, and he caused a sensation with it in this country during his ten years' sojourn here from 1890 to 1900. Then from the time he settled in Berlin, at the age of thirty, he was recognized in Central Europe, too, as a technical phenomenon. His playing of the two black key etudes of Chopin at the same time, the one with the right hand, the other with the left, was much more than a nine days' wonder. And this was but one of his extraordinary feats with the Chopin studies. He arranged, and played, twenty-two of them for the left hand alone and made a collection of fifty-three additional studies based on Chopin's set. The keen pleasure that he derived from so expanding the Polish master's etudes and elaborating their technical problems to the nth degree bespoke a mentality that experienced a special zest in tackling and mastering the most remarkable mechanical difficulties.

In order to attain such mastery he early discovered the necessity of building up his technique on a basis of fundamental freedom, ridding himself of the impediment of all needless muscular contradiction. It has been pointed out by some of the younger contemporaries of Liszt and Rubenstein that the playing of both of those master pianists was established on the basis of weight release rather than that of a fundamental muscular impetus. But it is exceedingly doubtful that either of them was conscious of the fact. In any case, it seems indisputable that Godowsky and Teresa Carreno, contemporary with him in Berlin, who had evolved the principle from watching Rubenstein practise, were the first concert pianists to systematize consciously, however individual the lines they followed in so doing, a principle that various pedagogues have since adopted and publicized extensively as basic. Godowsky's hands when playing gave the impression of being boneless.

His labors as editor of a large-scale educational series featuring a system of training in general musicianship in connection with the study of individual compositions properly belong within the range of his pedagogical activities, as his achievements in this field have exerted a far-reaching influence in raising the level of piano teaching in this country.

As a creative musician Godowsky possessed a compositional technique that paralleled his playing technique. There seemed to be no problem, contrapuntal or otherwise, that he could not solve with a facility and apparent ease that left no trace of the problem. A really great creative vision was evidently denied him, but he had a massive architectural sense and in many of his shorter pieces he was sensitively imaginative and poetic. His responsiveness to the spirit and external influences of the Orient is vividly evinced in the twelve descriptive scenes of his Java Suite, some of which possess atmospheric charm of truly Eastern subtlety. Among the thirty moods and scenes in triple measure that constitute his Triakontameron, too, there are many of engaging imaginative quality. But the interesting point obtrudes itself that even here he was prompted to place the shackles of an unvarying metric design upon his creative impulses, just as he did in his set of twenty-four Waltzermasken, and just as he deliberately developed the three suites and thirty-four individual compositions of his Miniatures for four hands from five-tone combinations and based them upon "essential requirements of five-finger positions". It is obvious that the fascination which mechanical problems held for him in piano playing proved just as irresistible to him in his compositional activity.

His list of published works for piano is an extended one quite apart from his original compositions, embracing, as it does, a great many transcriptions. And in this specialized field he wrought with consummate artistry, whether in making free transcriptions of Schubert songs, happily devoid of Lisztian extravagances, or of Bach violin sonatas and suites, or in devising simple and infallibly tasteful arrangements of airs of eighteenth century France.

Godowsky's intellect, according to those who knew him most intimately, was like his sympathies, practically all-embracing in range and interests, for which reason he drew unto himself many, and close, friends from many walks of life. In the world of his specific activities it will be remembered as one of the greatest musical minds. His musical and pedagogical erudition will be passed on personally by a veritable army of students who sat at his feet, and it is safe to predict that for many years to come pianists will resort gratefully to his writings for illumination on the many knotty problems involved in the art of playing their instrument.

A COMPOSITE LESSON WITH GODOWSKY

By Robert Agnew Maclean

"Tell me all about your work. How long have you studied? With whom? Have you studied harmony? Are you familiar with musical history? Which are your preferences among composers; do you prefer those who wrote principally for the piano, in the piano idiom, such as Chopin and Schumann; or those whose music often (even when written for the piano) would be more suitable for the orchestra, such as Beethoven? Let me look at your hands."

Thus is a student examined and cross-examined when he commences to study with Godowsky. As he himself says, "Coming to me for a lesson is like consulting a specialist. I must study the pupil's individuality and learn his idiosyncrasies in order to form a correct judgement of his ability and prescribe what he should do to improve his playing."

After examining my hands he said they were too large, that I was like Rubenstein in that one respect. "It was on account of his large hands that Rubenstein struck so many wrong notes. It is a fallacy to assume that large hands are an advantage. If I had to choose between hands too large and too small, I would choose those too small. One should have light hands for playing. Hofmann, de Pachmann, and most pianists of the first rank have small hands." As a matter of fact, Godowsky - who is short and thick-set - has small hands for a man.

In his teaching Godowsky touches on the history of music, musical form and analysis, a knowledge of which he insists all pianists should possess. My first lesson was a long but very interesting and instructive lecture. In these talks he would tell, for instance, of the development of the cadenza.

"Anything a pianist does," says Godowsky, "can be explained - none of his doings are occult. There is a scientific explanation for everything. In order to understand better the mechanism of the human playing apparatus I have had doctors in Vienna show me a dissected human arm and reveal the working of the muscles. Some musicians do remarkable things instinctively, they cannot explain how - just as a child sometimes says very clever things without realising it himself. Some authors write in the same way. I call such individuals talented amateurs. Other musicians can give an explanation of all they do, can analyse their own playing. I believe in the spontaneity of intuitive inspiration, but I claim that it must be thoroughly filtered by the intellect. The mind must control the heart. When I tell you to do certain things, or to do them in certain ways, I should be able to give you the reasons for so doing. Ask, when you do not understand the reasons. If I cannot give a reason why you should do a thing in a particular way, I have no right to tell you to do it."

While a pupil is playing Godowsky walks about the room, and instead of hearing a piece to the end and then criticising, he constantly interrupts, calling out criticisms or suggestions. He is most particular about every detail, and at the slightest flaw the pupil is stopped short. This procedure and his impatience at mistakes at times disturb one's equilibrium, the playing consequently becoming worse, so that the lesson is then an ordeal. The pupil is expected to observe all expression marks or pedal marks that the composer has indicated, but Godowsky thinks little of most editors' markings and annotations. Godowsky is without doubt a greater authority than such editors, but how is a pupil to decide which are the composer's marks - to be observed - and which the editor's - to be ignored - unless the editors follow von Bulow's procedure by printing the added marks of expression in smaller type? It seems that the indications which are to Godowsky's liking are always the composer's, and of which he disapproves are mostly the editor's.

One day while awaiting my lesson I heard the following: - "What did you play there? Play that again - again. No, I will not tell you which tone is wrong, you must play it over till you discover your mistake. Your

fingering is abominable. I cannot make you pay any attention to fingering, you think it of too little value. I think it so important that I have spent a considerable part of my life trying to invent new ways of fingering to make things easier and get more appropriate expression. Yes, you will have to learn the whole composition over again. It is full of inaccuracies. Your work is terrible! - terrible! This cannot continue. If you do not accomplish better work you might as well stop your lessons; you are only wasting time and money."

He does not hesitate to tell a pupil that he is disappointed in him; that he had misjudged him at first and rated him too highly; that the playing of the pupil was considerably below the lowest standard. However, it is sometimes possible to win a little praise, and praise from him is something to value greatly.

"One should not practise the piano more than four to five hours a day," says Godowsky. "With intelligent guidance and proper concentration this should suffice. It is erroneous to think that one can study seven or eight hours a day and work properly. Only a more mature artist can attempt this with advantage, and even he should do it only in extreme cases when necessitated by a large number of compositions which must be prepared within a limited period of time. Furthermore, one should practise something different every day. To-day lay more stress on one side of your work, to-morrow on another. The thing you do first, when the mind is fresh, is generally done best. Only in obstinate cases should you practise certain passages day after day. If they do not improve then, drop them altogether, as the mind gets stale; take them up later, when they will probably come much more easily. All pianists have to do this. Some pianists get into a rut and cannot perform until they have done a certain amount of preliminary playing. At time I have to play without practising at all. Often I come in here and play with cold hands. It is like people going bathing in cold water. Some go in gradually, others plunge right in.

"I divide practice at the piano into three divisions, namely, the mechanical, the technical (which includes all means of expression), and the aesthetic (expression, interpretation, and imagination). Sometimes a critic will say, 'So-and-so has a good technique, but he does not use the pedal well.' That is a contradiction of terms, for pedalling is a part of technique.

"With regard to the mechanical side, there have been three systems of playing, namely, percussion, the finger being raised high and striking the keys; pressure, artificial weight, the fingers being kept close to the keys and pressing instead of striking; and relaxation, the natural weight of the arm resting on the keyboard through contact of the fingers with the keys, the weight being transferred from one finger to the other.

"With relaxation the arm should be perfectly relaxed, the entire weight of the arm resting on the finger-tips, the fingers being raised just enough to clear the keys. Thus continuous weight is transferred from one key to another, as in walking the weight of the body is transferred from one foot to the other." Here he gave one of his graphic illustrations, first walking about the room raising his feet exaggeratedly high to demonstrate how the fingers are used in the percussion system, then sliding or shuffling his feet along close to the floor and pressing on each foot to demonstrate the pressure system, and finally walking naturally to demonstrate the relaxation system and its superiority to the others.

"In using relaxation the fingers should be passive, merely expressing the weight of the arm; elbows and shoulders should be perfectly free." Teachers usually test the wrist to see if it is loose, but Godowsky tests the elbow by feeling it or moving it, and lays more stress than others on the loose elbow and shoulder. At first in using relaxed weight, the fingers, having to support so much weight, become fatigued. He warns one against overlapping tones - not releasing the keys promptly - insisting that one finger should come up as the other goes down, just as with the see-saw arrangement conspicuous in the machinery of ferry-boats, one end must go up when

when the other goes down.

"Tone, therefore, is produced by means of arm weight, except in fortissimo, when pressure is added; but that pressure should come from the shoulder. One can play comfortably with all degrees of tone except fortissimo or pianissimo. In these degrees there is some sense of strain, and for fortissimo one must add pressure or artificial weight, and in pianissimo one must hold back." Here he illustrated by trying to lift the piano, then by lifting a piece of tissue paper which had to be held down to keep it from blowing away, and then by lifting a book, which seemed no exertion.

"The fingers should be curved in playing, so that they point straight down. One should play as if each finger had to fit into a hole in the centre of the key. The hand should not be arched, the knuckles and wrist should be level. At first, however, it is good to sit lower than usual to make it easier to develop the habit of clinging to the keys with the fingers, thus bringing the wrist a little lower than the knuckle. In melody playing one may hold the hands and fingers comfortably; they should be absolutely free without the slightest attempt at a fixed position." Here he struck a note, first with the hand arched, then not arched, and indeed the former tone was considerably harsher.

Godowsky starts a pupil on several things at once. The pupil is expected to divide his study among various compositions instead of confining himself to one or two until they are finished. The work planned includes one or two compositions in which the mechanical side is predominant, such as Chopin's Etudes; something in which various technical problems exist, such as Beethoven's thirty-two variations in C minor; and some composition easy in these respects, so that some attention may be given wholly to the aesthetic side, as in Schumann's Kinder-scenen." He thus treats the three aspects separately. "The Beethoven Variations are each a different problem in technique, and each of the Schumann Kinder-scenen is a different problem in interpretation." I quote from his remarks at a lesson.

Using so little finger exertion, keeping the fingers passive, worried me at first, as my fingers seemed to need a little physical culture to keep them in training. But at the second lesson I found that he had his own finger exercises after all. These consist of various forms, aimed principally at strengthening the weak fingers and making them independent; the fourth finger received particular attention. In some of these exercises a single finger is repeated while others are held down, changing through various chord positions; in others the third finger is held while the fourth and fifth play, or the fifth is held while the fourth and third play, double notes being used. Five-finger exercises are practised, both in close and extended positions, formed by the chromatic or diatonic scale and the diminished seventh chord or a chord made up of major thirds. One should alternate between close and extended positions. If the hand is fatigued from stretching exercises, one should practise close positions, and vice versa.

"Whatever practice you may do for strengthening and individualising the fingers is no more used in general playing than gymnastic exercises are used in your daily life.

Stretching exercises are very good, not only to stretch the hands, but to make them more flexible and pliable; but they must be used with circumspection, as they are dangerous, and if not judiciously done may permanently injure the hands.

"To make a passage more even, practise accenting it in various ways. Get the form of difficult passages well fixed in the mind (mental control) and it will come more easily.

"The lowest bass note of a chord or harmony is always important, and should be emphasised. The bass is second only to the treble in importance. A low bass note, sufficiently marked, may be held - with its consonants - by the pedal while dissonances sound above it. The low tone in such a case acts like a blotter, absorbing the tones that do not harmonise." This law Godowsky demonstrated most convincingly at the piano, for holding the pedal through such a combination of tones did not produce any evident

"The pedal may be used in various ways; it may be gradually released or pressed; a tremolo, or rapid up and down movement of the pedal is excellent for certain effects; by raising the pedal slightly, upper notes may be partially stopped while the bass remains." I was surprised to notice how freely Godowsky uses the pedal.

"There are two kinds of accents: dynamic, accenting by making a note louder; agogic, accenting by making a note longer. Dynamics means tone-shading, agogic means time-shading.

"In addition to logical interpretation and aesthetic discrimination, I try to cultivate in pupils a sense of proportion, in which many are lacking. One with a good sense of proportion may create an illusion that he is playing with feeling, when that impression is due merely to a well-balanced adjustment of dynamics and agogics." In Beethoven's Variations, for instance, he insists that one variation be subdued and another loud, but with slight tonal gradations in each. In the subdued one he allows only a very slight crescendo, and then in another marked *sempre f* he allows only a very slight diminuendo. It is sometimes hard to play as soft or as loud as he demands. If one diminishes too much he calls out, "Louder! Forte! What does it say? *Sempre forte!!!*" In this way the parts are contrasted, instead of making such a wide range of difference in any one part.

Often his hints on interpretation are very suggestive. In one of the Kinderscenen called Important Event he remarked: "This should be rather humorous. It should be of exaggerated importance, something extremely important to the mind of a child; perhaps the doll's head is broken." In one entitled The Poet Speaks he said of the recitative, "Not so loud. It should not be temperamental. The poet is a dreamer."

As to keeping up a repertoire, Godowsky says: "No, there is no system whereby anyone can keep up a repertoire. Each must invent his own system. Some have good fingers and good memories and can retain things for a long time without trouble. Others, of course, must invent some system. Generally those who learn slowly retain what they learn longer. I might suggest spending the entire practice period of every third or fourth day entirely on review and omitting all new work or exercises for that day."

Upon being asked if it were possible for one both to play and teach successfully, he said: "Nearly all great executants were teachers. Those who have not taught were lacking in certain respects. One learns enormously from teaching. It is easier to see faults in others than in ourselves, and thus criticising others' work is bound to make us more critical of our own. If I were teaching ethical culture, for instance, I would try, of course, to practise what I preached. One must not do too much teaching, however, or the playing suffers. If a virtuoso attempted to teach five hours a day it would mean ruination to his playing. When I taught at the Meisterschule in Vienna it was arranged that I should teach 200 hours in the year - that was five hours a week for forty weeks, the other twelve weeks free. During that time I hardly took private pupils."

nb. This piece originally appeared in "Musical America" and was later reprinted in "Musical Opinion". The dates they were first published on is not known.

A GODOWSKY RECITAL

In retrospect of a Godowsky piano recital in the early 20th Century and the emotions of great piano virtuosi before public appearance.

by

Clarence Adler

It happened in Berlin some time during the winter of 1908, after a strenuous rehearsal with the Hekking Trio. I was the pianist of that organization, having just succeeded the famous Arthur Schnabel. I was weary and greatly in need of relaxation from the fatigue I always felt after being under fire of Anton Hekking, master musician and cellist, the leader of our trio. Leopold Godowsky, my teacher, was giving a recital that very same evening. There was always great excitement at a Godowsky concert, so to relieve ennui and fatigue, I purchased a ticket.

I always tried to sit at the left side of the hass, where the artist's hands are plainly visible. The pleasure of listening is thus enhanced, particularly when Godowsky played. His hands were very small, but wonderfully developed and exceedingly expressive. They were rubbery, and he trained them so marvelously he could master wide stretches and dangerous skips with the greatest of ease. After years of observation I became skilled in appraising a pianist simply by watching his hands, even if I were to stop my ears with cotton. I am able to discern if the artist is poetical, energetic, fiery, capricious, graceful or academic - Godowsky's hands always reflected the mood of the music he was propounding. He was less of the showman than any other artist I ever heard. He would never resort to anything theatrical, nor to any external effect in order to bring forth applause. He was a true disciple of the composer, whose message he hoped to convey to his flock. He walked to the piano unobtrusively, bowed courteously to his audience and sat down quietly. The public could not notice any visible sign of anxiety or nervousness, but within himself there was a certain questioning. "Will my memory serve me perfectly - will the limitations of human mind and body enable me to encompass the glories of the music?" There is nearly always a doubt coupled with faith in the truly great artist.

Before one of his recitals in this very auditorium, he was visited by a pupil, who wished him good luck. Godowsky looked as white as a sheet. He said, "I cannot go out there to play, because I do not remember one note of the entire program." This from the lips of a great master whose memory was as infallible as any memory can be.

Godowsky was ready to play. His whole manner changed. His serious attitude, his philosophic countenance was like a Brahma. He began that beautiful Weber Sonata in A flat major. How unfortunate that this lovely piece is so seldom played today. Surely an art work is eternal and speaks a universal language through the ages.

The opening tremolo of broken octaves on a flat in the lower part of the piano sounded like a faint rumbling of double basses; and then the haunting, appealing first theme, so exquisitely and sensitively announced. His crystal pearly scales, played with feathered velvety fingers, his many shades of nuance between piano and pianissimo, his steadily mounting crescendi, and powerful resonant, ringing chords made you realize that he also had wrists and hands of steel, though there were always gloves over the steel. One never sensed any harshness or rough contact with the hammers. In fact, one was never conscious of instrument, keys, hammers, pedals, but just the vision of an Apollian sage, from whose pores the sublimest music was emanating.

PIANO MUSIC FOR THE LEFT HAND

by Leopold Godowsky

Frequently I have been asked the reason for my writing for the left hand alone. Many seem to think it unwarrantable to narrow the piano, with its range comparable only to that of the orchestra and the organ, to the limitations of one hand. They contend that, from the mechanical standpoint, the left hand is inferior to the right, and, from the artistic standpoint, the limitations by the use of only one hand seem calculated for the display of virtuosity. My answer, based on my own experience of many years, is that, from the physical aspect, the left hand is more adaptable to cultivation than the right. There are a number of reasons for this statement. I shall mention but a few to support my theory - if the left hand of every string player is not sufficient proof.

We all know that modern teaching of piano mechanics is based on weight-playing and relaxation. We are also aware that the majority of persons use the right hand for common manual purposes almost to the exclusion of the left. The result is that the right hand is constantly in a state of tension, while the left hand, owing to its freedom from cramped muscles, is in a better condition for the cultivation of the desired relaxation essential to a superior pianistic equipment¹.

Another advantage of the left hand is its more favored position in relation to the keyboard. It has the stronger fingers for the stronger parts: the thumb, index, and middle fingers share the upper notes of all "double stops and chords. Almost equally important is the fact that crescendi, usually associated with ascending passages, are similarly favored.

One of the principal reasons why the left hand is inferior to the right in mechanical and technical equipment is that there is a lack of appropriate material for it in the several branches of the piano repertoire, whether classical², romantic, or modern.

But the left hand is greatly favored by the command it has over the superior register of the modern piano. To support this statement, I need only mention the splendid sonority, mellowness, and tonal sensitiveness of the lower half of the keyboard as compared with the thin, brittle, and tinkly sound of the upper register, a characteristic which becomes more and more accentuated as the right hand ascends the keyboard. Because of the fullness of the lower register, the left hand is easily capable of producing a tone of a more sonorous, less percussive quality, thus attaining quantity and quality with minimum effort.

When one plays with the left hand alone, the damper-pedal becomes so important in its function that it almost replaces the other hand. It sustains bass-notes, chords, and voices which the hand must abandon in order to strike other parts of the keyboard.³

As Bach wrote his unaccompanied Sonatas and Suites for the violin and violincello to express the intrinsic musical characteristics of these instruments individually, so I wished to give undivided musical utterance to the left hand⁴. The concentration of my entire resourcefulness, keyboard knowledge, and musical experience on the left hand alone led me to combinations I should never have written had I used both hands. On the occasion of the publication of my Miniatures for four hands, I wrote the publisher a letter which was reproduced in the preface. A portion of this letter is equally applicable to the left-hand compositions:

"Working within self-imposed limitations convinced me that economy of means leads to a superior form of concentration, and the resulting concentrated effort produces the quintessence of human endeavor, materially and spiritually. The resourcefulness needed in dealing frugally with the means at our command often opens up unexplored and unsuspected regions of the imagination. I have been amazed at the possibilities created by the adopted

RECOLLECTIONS OF

LEOPOLD GODOWSKY

by Isidore Philipp

Many years have passed since my illustrious master, Camille Saint-Saëns, said to me: "Come and hear a young Russian pianist tomorrow, whose talent is quite out of the ordinary and gives me the greatest pleasure." It is thus that I come to know the young Godowsky - and thus that a friendship began that did not draw to a close until the death of this great artist in 1938.

Unfortunately, Godowsky's life as a concert artist compelled him to leave Paris; and it was only from time to time that I received news of the remarkable successes that he enjoyed wherever he appeared. Thus, one day word was brought to me that I had as a visitor Mr. O.G. Sonneck of New York, who proved to be affable, cordial, and courteous, that I immediately felt I was with a friend. After he had conversed with me about a work of mine that had been brought out by the house of Schirmer, of which he was Director of Publication, we came round to talking about musicians in America, and naturally about Godowsky and his compositions, which I was trying, without much success, to make known in Paris.

I saw Mr. Sonneck again on various occasions, and one day he came to visit me with a friend of his who immediately appealed to me, a charming person who spoke a perfect French and whose name, Carl Engel, was to remain in my memory until the time of our next meeting, when our friendship was sealed. And I am doubly happy to be able to say today how much I appreciate his subtle intelligence, his refined culture, his musical knowledge. I am aware, moreover, with what admiration and affection Godowsky regarded him.

But to return to Godowsky. In these times when "the less effort the better" seems to be the rule of the day and when performers - whether pianists or violinists - are satisfied to play the same works again and again, encouraged in their attitude by audiences too much influenced by convention and fashion, when publicity takes it upon itself to discover or create geniuses, it would be refreshing to encounter once more such a really great artist, noble and with a cultivated mind, pursuing, without advertising puffs, a patient struggle to force a hearing for what he regarded as good. One seldom finds among celebrated virtuosi such modesty as Godowsky's. At the piano, he made it a point to disguise difficulties, to be as simple as possible, without any exaggerations of style, without any gesture calculated to attract the attention of the listener, calm and sure of himself, his memory being unexcelled. Like Busoni, he regarded erudition as the necessary basis of interpretation.

Godowsky the composer, far from denying the past, knew - like another great musician of our period, Ernest Bloch - how to write like a "modern" without becoming a convert to the easy cult of wrong notes. And yet he was able to assert himself as one of the most powerful personalities, as one of the strongest composers, among those rare souls who, like Chopin, have confided to the piano the expression of their musical thought. We should be more familiar with the Phonoramas, those twelve magnificent pieces rich in contrast, some grave and noble, others filled with vaporous subtleties, still others with delicate pictorial touches. We should be more familiar with the pieces that make up his Triakontameron - what exquisite sensitiveness in certain pages, what ingenious innovations in others! How well he knew how to evoke the grace and elegance of imperial Austria in his Alt Wien and Sylvan Tyrol! We should be more familiar with his Poems and his charming Miniatures for four hands, a masterpiece. All of this, except Alt Wien, is neglected by our courageous pianists. There is hardly one who would be willing to find the time to work over, plumb, and present to the public some of these pages

in which everything is constructed with unsurpassable knowledge, where everything is forceful or delicate expression.

Three illustrious French musicians have understood and admired Godowsky: Saint-Saens, Charles-Marie Widor - I recall his enthusiasm after an audition Godowsky gave him of his free transcriptions of the Violin Sonatas and the Violoncello Sonatas of Bach - , and Paul Dukas. And the last of these, to whom I mentioned how much I regretted that the works of Godowsky were so little known by the public, answered me: "You may be sure that his time will come." Let us wait.

This piece first appeared in "A Birthday Offering to Carl Engel", Edited Gustave Reese. G. Schirmer 1943 (Privately Printed).

Readers will note that the piece on page fourteen is not the promised account on Godowsky's Berlin debut but something rather different. The account of his debut will appear in a future issue. Ed.