

THE GODOWSKY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

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THE GODOWSKY SOCIETY

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The front of this issue is adorned with a picture (rather blurred, I'm afraid) showing Karol Szymanowski (front) between Mrs Leopold Godowsky and daughter (Dagmar?). Leopold is first from left, standing, with a natty line in headwear. This is reproduced from Szymanowski, by Teresa Chylińska (Twayne Publishers Inc., New York, 1973).

This particular issue of the Newsletter gives me particular pleasure as all three pieces are by members of the Society. Ronald Stevenson's piece on Szymanowski is not confined to that composer (whose centenary year this is and who is to be the subject of a series of programmes on BBC Radio 3 to which Ronald Stevenson will be contributing by playing the Variations on a Polish Folksong op.10) but also gives interesting sidelights on our Leopold Godowsky. Andrew Cockburn contributes a major piece on the Godowsky - Bach Elaborations, and to complete the issue there is a reprint of Douglas Miller's Centenary tribute to Godowsky, which was originally published twelve years ago in the Musical Opinion. As a pendant to Mr. Miller's piece I have added the brief correspondence which followed its publication, plus the answer to the little mystery concerning Godowsky and Rachmaninoff.

There are a few interesting developments concerning a projected book (yes, another! First comes the famine, then the feast), recordings and a couple of dissertations. However, for reasons of space (this is quite a long issue) and of time (I have not been able to gather the threads together satisfactorily) this must await the issue of the next Newsletter. This should be published April/May 1983.

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7 October, 1982.

SZYMANOWSKI AND THE PIANO

by

Ronald Stevenson

On a wall of Karol Szymanowski's log cabin in Zakopane in the Polish Alps, just to the right of his modest, upright piano, hung a framed photo of a sculpted head of Chopin: a detail from the Chopin monument in Warsaw's Lazienki Park: Chopin sitting, listening, under a bronze tree; the winter wind has blown and frozen both hair and branches. It was the work of Wacław Szymanowski, the composer's uncle. Chopin was the éminence grise behind Szymanowski's mission to forge again the lost conscience of Poland. Even the titles of music by the two composers are identical: Preludes, Etudes, Mazurkas.

In front of Szymanowski's piano was his writing table. On it stood a small, oval-framed photo of Paderewski: in some ways the only link in the chain that Szymanowski would forge from Chopin to Poland's musical future. Paderewski as Premier of the resurrected Poland after World War I - the white eagle become phoenix - was a symbol of his country's rebirth. As composer and pianist he was a symbol of the conservation of a great tradition. Paderewski encouraged the young Szymanowski and recorded and frequently performed his early Etude in B flat minor, op 4 no 3.

Szymanowski's family circle numbered so many pianists as to predestine him to compose piano music, if he were to compose at all. The composer's father was himself a pianist as well as being a scientist and made copper-plate copies of the son's early compositions. There were five children: two boys and three girls. Karol's brother Feliks was an even finer pianist than Karol himself, and Feliks also composed operettas and became an operateteur. (One of the sisters, Stanisława, became an opera singer.)

One of Karol's early music-teachers was Gustav Neuhaus, father of Heinrich (Harry) Neuhaus, who later became Director of the Moscow Conservatoire and one of the great piano teachers, his students including Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels and Radu Lupu. Harry Neuhaus's uncle was Felix Blumenfeld, pianist, composer and conductor, who taught first in Petersburg then in Moscow and was the teacher of Horowitz (whom Szymanowski met and liked, later.) Blumenfeld wrote a Study in A flat for piano, left hand solo, dedicated to Godowsky. It was through Blumenfeld that Harry Neuhaus studied with Godowsky in Berlin and Vienna just before World War I; and Neuhaus introduced Szymanowski to Godowsky in Vienna in 1912. From Vienna on 3 February 1912, Szymanowski wrote to a friend: "Our only really friendly home is Godowsky's; the place oozes love towards us." Godowsky asked Szymanowski to write a piano concerto for him. He began it in 1914 - sketches are extant - but, always a Chopinesquely fastidious composer, he never finished it.

Another bosom crony of Szymanowski's from early on, and a fellow-member of the Godowsky circle, was Arthur Rubenstein, dedicatee and performer of a number of Szymanowski's works; as was Jan Smeterlin, another pianist-friend

So Szymanowski was, as it were, 'enscaled' by pianists!

His professor of composition at the Warsaw Conservatoire was Moskowski, a pupil of Moniuszko. Another student of Moskowski, Rozycki, remembered the young Karol's working on his first Piano Sonata: "I often found him at

the piano, studying meticulously the structure of Chopin's and Scriabin's piano passages."

The librettist for Szymanowski's opera King Roger, Iwaszkiewicz, recalled overhearing the composer at work in an adjoining room: "He always worked at the piano, striking a few notes from time to time, from which one couldn't really form any definite impression of how the music was growing; and he sang softly in a characteristic falsetto, as he played."

Szymanowski was born in 1882 to a cultured Polish family of the landed gentry in the Ukraine. During the October Revolution, a gang of marauding Bolshevik soldiers sacked the family estate. Seeing two grand pianos as hateful symbols of affluence, they lugged them into a nearby pond. Szymanowski never owned a grand piano again: he hired an 'upright' or played a friend's piano.

He was mainly a private pianist. His was no virtuoso temperament to exult in public applause, though he could conceive virtuoso music in the privacy of his study. His Symphonia Concertante (1932) was the nearest he came to writing a piano concerto, though it was something less than that, something not too difficult for him to play in public; a score that shielded the pianist.

Szymanowski therefore belongs to that small, select group of piano composers which includes Alkan, Brahms, Franck and, in our time Bax and Sorabji. Alkan, Brahms and Franck all retired early from concert-giving. Bax, reputed to have been a consummate score-reader, able to sight-read a huge full-score and convey its content and colour in the black-and-white of the piano, nevertheless never had any ambition as a solo pianist. And Sorabji's public performances and one single broadcast recital - now legendary - were abandoned very early. Sorabji and Alkan could boil their alchemical cauldrons of diabolical pianistic improbabilities in solitude.

Franck, the tyro-piano-virtuoso, went into the meditational retreat of his organ loft in St. Clotilde, Paris. His few, late, great piano works sound like piano transcriptions from the organ. Two hands are expected to do what they can only do ideally with the addition of a pedal board.

Could it be that Brahms's notoriously awkward piano-writing might have been made more grateful if he'd had to play it in public? Might he have realised that the added tension and excitement of public performance demanded some pruning of textures?

Compare the piano writing of Rachmaninov before and after he embarked on his virtuoso career (which he did late, in his forties): the earlier work is sprawling; the later, pianistically organised. Rachmaninoff himself admitted this in an interview he gave to the American music magazine Etude in 1923.

A conjecture of mine is that the great virtuoso composer/pianist Godowsky was a main influence on Szymanowski. After all, they met. Szymanowski visited Godowsky, you recall, in Vienna; which means he would hear him play the piano, because Godowsky always practised, even with a room full of guests! (This may be verified in Mark Hambourg's Memoirs, volume I.) Szymanowski also heard Godowsky play in public. Harry Neuhaus must have shown Szymanowski Godowsky's 53 Studies on the Chopin Etudes, which Neuhaus in his master-book The Art of Piano Playing describes as "absolutely transcendental in their difficulty and incomparable for musical humour and inventiveness." He might have added: for their contrapuntal super-skill, also. Szymanowski's first two Piano Sonatas aspire to the Godowskian grandeur of pianism and polyphony. They have arguably a higher musical 'voltage' than

Godowsky but do not have his mastery of piano facture (scoring for keyboard, which includes that distribution of notes between the hands which best achieves the required tempo and dynamics). Certainly, Szymanowski's op.33 set of 12 piano Studies (1916 - 18) evinces much more sophisticated piano facture than his early op.4 set (1900 - 02); and his third (and last) Piano Sonata (1918) is much more refined than the earlier two.

There is a parallel between the creative careers of Szymanowski and Godowsky: both began by writing monumental, polyphonic piano works; and both later embraced a highly individual quasi-oriental Impressionism, an art of transcendental arabesque. Listen to Shéhérazade from Szymanowski's Masques op.34 (1915 - 16) and then listen to Godowsky's International Piano Archive recording of his own Gardens of Buitenzorg from the Java Suite. This Godowsky piece dates from 1925, so perhaps there is a parallel development at work here, rather than an influence. I doubt whether Szymanowski began to influence Godowsky. Szymanowski was the kind of composer who had to struggle through influences - Scriabin, Strauss, Reger, Polish folk music... whereas Godowsky was sure of where he wanted to go from the start. Godowsky wrote almost exclusively for piano (as did Chopin and Medtner): Szymanowski wrote in every form and for most media - symphony, concerto, opera, ballet, quartet, choral music, songs and so on. Both Szymanowski and Godowsky evince a striking number of affinities (which have not been pointed out before, as far as I know): both Polish, both respecters of classical form and both masters of arabesque, voluptuous ornament.

The duality of Slav and Latin - the Polish birthright - is present in all Szymanowski's music; perhaps most potently in his opera King Roger, which presents the conflict of Christianity and paganism. Szymanowski's musical polarities are grace and fierceness

Szymanowski's grace reaches its apogee in one of his unique achievements: that of suggesting an orchestral, multicoloured, silken sheen as of an oriental carpet, on the piano. With him the keyboard becomes an oriental carpet. No wonder the Parsi composer Sorabji so loves Szymanowski's music! More than any non-oriental - more than Messiaen - Szymanowski has transformed the keyboard into a casket of oriental jewels, a resplendent music-box that miraculously sings like the voice of an Eastern night.

The polarity, the fierceness reaches its apogee in some of the Mazurkas op.58, written in the Twenties. In his otherwise splendid, indeed indispensable, book The Music of Szymanowski (Kahn & Averill, 1980) Jim Samson shows more interest in the more complex music than in that of the nationalist period. This is a generally held view. It isn't mine. Szymanowski was writing Polish nationalist music long before the Twenties, as B.M. Maciejewski points out in Szymanowski: his Life & Music (Poets' & Painters' Press, 1967) and as I myself discovered when the BBC invited me to give a piano recital in their 1982 Szymanowski centenary series on Radio 3. The main work I recorded was the Variations on a Polish Folksong op.10 (1903), a work I didn't previously know; one that was a revelation in its poetry and magnificence. Though with the hindsight of my Godowsky studies, I discreetly re-wrote some few details in the pianistic facture, that didn't obscure for me the greatness of this music. Indeed, some of the variations are worthy of Chopin at his best; and I have no higher praise. They sometimes - rarely - go beyond Chopin technically, in, for instance, one polyrhythmic variation which combines this compositional technique with the most exquisite delicacy of texture and tone. The opus 10 also includes a funeral march of heroic nobility that uses the keyboard more extensively than Chopin's celebrated funeral march.

The Szymanowski Mazurkas are the wild music of the Polish Highlands, unlike Chopin's which are the melancholy-merry music of the Polish Plains.

Szymanowski, who had a considerable gift as novelist (!) and essayist, wrote a revelatory article on the góral music (the mountain music of Poland) which is published in English translation by B.M. Maciejewski and Filix Aprahamian in Szymanowski's and Smeterlin's Correspondence and Essays (Allegro Press, nd - early 1970's?). It should be read in full. Much British music criticism is uncomfortable with folk content in concert music. But Polish góral music, relative to Polish Lowland music, is as little known as, for example, Scottish Gaelic music (the great bagpipe music, the piobaireachd) relative to Lowland Scottish music. The musics of the Polish and the Scottish Highlands are complex and 'weird' and totally new to the outsider. The received parameters of 'nice', 'jolly', easy folk music simply do not apply. Both of these Highland musics warrant a great deal of study. Nearly all the musicologists I know are more innocent than infants about these questions.

I remember when I was practising some of the Szymanowski Mazurkas when a daughter of mine was a tiny girl. She bounced up and down with delight. Charming, an infant's wisdom. The child responds to 'strange' music, whereas the wiseacre's brain is as still as his feet, addled in pseudo-academic neurosis.

Szymanowski's contribution to 20th century piano music is one of the most considerable. After all, two of the generally accredited 'modern masters' - Stravinsky and Schoenberg - have produced almost nothing of real import in solo piano music: certainly not great piano music. Szymanowski's masterpieces await discovery.

He died in 1937. His last wish was that a Polish Highland bagpipe band should play at his funeral. The first wreath - red and white roses (Poland's national colours) - was placed on Szymanowski's coffin by the friend of his youth - Paderewski.

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THE SIX BACH-GODOWSKY SUITES AND SONATAS FOR
(RESPECTIVELY) UNACCOMPANIED VIOLIN AND 'CELLO

by

Andrew Cockburn

About a year ago, a young Australian pianist gave an unusual piano recital in London. It consisted entirely of Bach Transcriptions for the piano: Bach-Brahms, Bach-Tausig, Bach-Liszt, Bach-Busoni and Bach-Rachmaninoff. And Bach-Godowsky? Alas, not a single note. What a marvellous opportunity was missed!

I had better put my cards on the table at the outset and state that it is my conviction that these six works, comprising thirty-seven movements in all, are Godowsky's greatest and noblest oeuvre. This is to say that they are among the greatest works in the entire literature of piano transcriptions. I speak not as a professional musician but as an amateur; one who has played and studied all of Godowsky's piano works for forty years.

Although I have come across a number of references to the Bach Transcriptions in articles and, less frequently in books, I have never heard of any of them being played in public recital. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, whilst they may be known and admired by a select group of pianists and musicians, they are never "aired" and thus remain virtually unknown.

I would like in this article to pay tribute to the labour of love that went into their making because for me they have been an absorbing and deeply enriching musical experience.

Strangely enough, the original unaccompanied Violin Sonatas and 'Cello Suites are not particularly unfamiliar or out-of-the-way works in the Bach repertoire these days. There have been many recordings made of them and, of course, the Bach-Busoni Chaconne from the D minor Sonata is an established classic. Godowsky did not essay this work but transcribed three Violin Sonatas, in B minor, G minor and A minor and three 'Cello Suites: in C major, C major and A minor.

Whilst there have been some fine commentaries and appreciations of these compositions, notably from K.S. Sorabji in his Chapter on "Godowsky as Creative Transcriber" in Mi Contra Fa (of which more later). These have been about the works in a collective sense. I would like to break new ground by discussing individual movements (in a note-like format) as well as attempting to outline their overall character.

Godowsky wrote them in about sixteen months, from December 1922 to March 1924. It seems characteristic of his way of working that, to judge by the notes he appended to each movement (see below), their composition occupied some of the spare time he had when travelling between countries in the Far East whilst on recital tours. Presumably the seas were calm enough to enable him to concentrate, although this never seemed to be much of a problem as on land he had the ability to detach his concentration from a crowded roomful of people in order to compose.

Godowsky's preface to the Bach transcriptions is indispensable to an understanding of them. Here he voices, in his very personal style, his

artistic aims and methods. Here speaks the artist of true dedication and humility who heads his forward with a quotation from Confucius:

"I am not concerned at not being known;

I seek to be worthy to be known".

(In parenthesis, it occurred to me that there might be some significance in the choice of this quotation and the fact that a number of the transcriptions were conceived and written either in China (the B minor suite) or in Oriental waters.)

"FORWARD

It was with awe and reverence that I approached these imperishable works of Johann Sebastian Bach, which he created for violin solo and violoncello solo. The six violin sonatas (also called partitas) and the six violoncello suites (also called sonatas) are the most significant compositions for unaccompanied solo stringed instruments in the literature of music. While the mighty genius of the cantor of the Thomaskirche is everywhere apparent in these works, yet the unsurmountable limitations of both instruments were obstacles to the free unfolding on the master's supreme powers in contrapuntal style and emotional polyphony. The transcendental nature of his music, the profundity of his ideas, the grandeur of his vision and conception are inseparable from the mightiness of the organ and the vastness of a cathedral. Only the orchestra, and to a lesser degree the piano, can express as impressively as the "thunderer of instruments" the monumental ideas and the bewildering complexity of Bach's compositions. In these sonatas and suites one feels a colossus in chains, a giant endeavoring to adjust his powers to the limitations of his medium of expression.

To explore inner meanings; to probe hidden beauties; to give utterance to vaguely suggested thoughts; to project undivulged ideas - inarticulated subconscious impressions - was for me a labor of love and an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

In venturing to transcribe these works I fully realized the burden of such a responsibility. I likewise took into consideration the possibility of the adverse critical opinion which I was courting by treading on such sacred soil, by trespassing the portals of tradition.

In a number of instances Bach himself has shown that he approved of transcriptions, arrangements, adaptations and diversified versions of the same work. Nor has he limited himself to his own compositions, for he has not hesitated to arrange freely works by other composers of his period for instruments other than those for which they were originally intended.

However, in the present instance I may be accused of greater audacity in that I have not merely transcribed, but have created new contrapuntal parts and introduced occasional harmonic modifications, while fully availing myself of the developments of our modern pianoforte and the strides we have made in the technique of piano playing.

In extenuation of such procedure, may I state that my endeavor has been to develop the polyphony and the harmony in the spirit of the master and his period. At times aesthetic considerations have prompted me to deviate slightly from this reverential attitude, a course I believe Bach would not have disapproved, in view of the amazing harmonic modernisms so frequently found in his compositions and considering his very free amendments of his own and other composer's works.

On several occasions I have been tempted slightly to modify the architectural design in order to give the structural outline a more harmonious form. Thus, when the return to the first subject of a movement seemed imperative, I have interpolated a part of the main idea before the close

of that movement.

I wish to make it clear that I have never introduced any themes, motives, or counter-melodies which are not a logical outgrowth of the inherent musical content. Appended to each transcription will be found the complete original text of Bach's composition upon which these free elaborations were made. The performer is thus enabled to discriminate fully and intelligently between the original thought of the composer and the adaptations and elaborations of the transcriber.

Bach, like his predecessors and contemporaries, rarely supplied indications as to the interpretations of his works. The tempo and metronome marks, the dynamic and agogic signs, the phrasing, and all other marks of expression found in the published works of Bach, were injudiciously put into the original text by his overzealous editors. The longer those editions remained unchallenged, the firmer became their hold upon the music student. The result was a standardized tradition for interpreting Bach which had nothing to do with the composer's own conception of his works.

The enormous advance in the science of interpretation, the considerable strides serious-minded musicians have made in the art of re-creating the works of our masters, enable us today to define more clearly, exactly and minutely the nature, character and aim of each composition, and to indicate more precisely the most subtle and intricate nuances. In editing these piano versions of the violin sonatas and violoncello suites of Bach, no effort has been spared to make these editions as complete as was within my power. Since infallibility is foreign to human nature, I believe that in some instances my own conceptions could be replaced by interpretations of a different character without injury to the art-work. However, I do request the performer to notice and observe all marks of expression, and to disregard them only when there is a logical reason for the divergence. In conclusion I wish to make the following special observations:

Repetitions may be omitted in long and slow movements when repeat marks are indicated. For example: Allemande of the B minor Sonata; Allemande of the C minor Suite.

All trills which have been translated into a definite number of notes may receive more notes and thus be played faster.

When the pedal is marked in parentheses (Ped) it should be understood that the alternative is given the performer to renew the pedal or to continue holding it till the next pedal mark is reached. The pedal cancellation in parentheses (*) should be similarly treated: The pedal is either to be released or held over to the next pedal indication. Nothing in the treatment of the piano is so elusive as the use of the pedal. The quality of the instrument; the size and acoustics of the auditorium; the performer's degree of clearness, evenness and accuracy; his dynamic and agogic adjustments; his general conception of the work - all influence the use of the pedal in its distribution of harmonic and coloristic values.

When there are small inner and large outer slurs, the small slurs show the inner articulation while the large slurs indicate the phrases in their broader conception.

The given fingering should be carefully observed, unless it is unsuited to the hand of the player.

The minimum and maximum of speed shown by the metronome should be interpreted as permissible tempo fluctuations in defining the rate of speed at the beginning of the movement and also as tempo undulations during the

movement. Occasionally my tempo indications had to be at variance with the prevalent tempi adopted by violinists and 'cleists, due to the character of the pianoforte tone, the augmented volume and range of dynamics, and the added polyphony.

All dynamic nuances, unless followed by a subito, should be played in concordant proportion to circumjacent dynamics. At no time should there be angularity or jerkiness of accentuation. A sf mark, being analogous to an exclamation mark, is the only exception to this rule.

While clearness and expressiveness in the upper, lower and middle voices are a sine qua non in performing polyphonic music, yet it should be understood that bass-notes demand even greater attention and discrimination.

Some movements have gained in characterization by a change of nomenclature. For example: the Gigue in the C minor violoncello Suite is more in the character of a Siciliana.

There is no objection to public performance of selected numbers of any of these sonatas or suites, provided the selections are logically combined. In some instances I even favor a readjustment of the prevailing succession of movements. As a good illustration of the aforesaid I would quote the C minor 'cello Suite. This work could begin equally well with the Allemande, while the Introduction and Fugue would make an imposing close, following the Gigue, which in its present version ends the composition rather timidly.

The collective title of these violin and violoncello compositions perplexed me considerably; the same works have appeared under different titles without any plausible reason for such inconsistency. The sonatas were published as suites and the suites as sonatas, while some of the sonatas were designated as partitas. Suites and partitas were practically synonymous, both having consisted of a series of pieces mainly in dance forms and mostly in the same key. The sonatas differed perceptibly from the other cyclical compositions, even before the sonata form, as known to us, had been developed.

The cyclical works which could more appropriately be called sonatas, were sometimes in four movements, one of the movements being a fugue.

Having said all I deem essential to the proper understanding of my versions of Bach's masterworks, I take leave with the hope that the student may derive as much inspiration from the study of them as I did while transcribing them.

March third, 1924.

Leopold Godowsky"

Sonata in G minor (no.1. violin)

The first thing to make an impression here is the arresting, and to my mind aesthetically beautiful, facsimile reproduction of Bach's autograph of the opening movement. Then, on the opposite page, you have as it were a twentieth century counterpart to this-- not, of course, in autograph, but in Godowsky's quite unmistakable pianistic style. What is this style? It consists of a striking combination of complexity and clarity - complexity of polyphony, and clarity of layout in which phrasing, dynamics, fingering and pedalling are unambiguous. Yet, however complex the piano writing is, it is amazing to discover how comfortably the music 'lies' when you lay your hands on the keyboard. I think this is what he meant by "pianistic". The fascination of Godowsky's music in general, and the Bach sonatas/suites in particular, lies in 'working out' the polyphonic strands. This applies especially to the "intermediate" voices: that is, those which occupy the middle-lower

register and which calls usually for careful to-and-fro negotiation between the two hands.

Since Godowsky had the foresight to print the Bach solo originals at the end of each sonata/suite (henceforth entitled "sonatas" for convenience) one can easily engage in the absorbing task of comparing the original with what Godowsky has done and the alchemy, the wizardry is there before one's eyes - and ears. I mean by the latter that, having become familiar with the Godowsky versions and really absorbing them into my fingers/musculature and musical system, the experience of reverting to the original solo stringed instrument is stunning. It is like playing a record of a "music minus one" piece. This brings to mind K.S. Sorabji's telling commentary in the chapter on Godowsky in Mi Contra Fa:

".....as far as I am concerned these Bach solo-violin and 'cello works are nightmares; grinning, dry, rattling skeletons of compositions; bloodless, fleshless, staring anatomies. Godowsky clothes them with flesh and blood and makes of them magnificent and indeed tremendous musical organisms having the sweep and grandeur, the profundity, solemnity and richness that is indeed associated with the greatest of Bach, but of which I can discern little or no trace in the bald, bare sketches of the originals."

The sonata in G minor is dedicated to Franz Kniesel.

1. Adagio (Fantasia). Composed New York City, November 17, 1923. The rising scale passage in octaves (page 4 top line) is a key motif, reflected possibly in the sweeping arpeggio at the commencement. This is repeated on page 6 and also in the delicious cadenza (an invention of Godowsky, marked pp veloce e sciolto). The fuga subject of the second movement is briefly introduced, molto tranquillo, on page 4, bottom line. There are a number of repeats of this subject in the course of the movement which ends in a blaze of tremendous chords concluding with a sumptuous allargando "trill".
2. Fuga. Allegro con brio. Composed New York City, October 27, 1923. The memorable fuga subject is built up into a work of large-scale proportions. What is notable is Godowsky's deployment of the bass, giving the movement as a whole a balance and sonority which is notably lacking in the original. This is one of the finest movements in the whole series, culminating in a magnificent climax
3. Siciliana. Andante espressivo. Composed New York City, November 8, 1923. This is very fine. The original is utterly transformed into a poem of subtle, delicate loveliness, with its murmuring trills and effects of canon. Towards the end there is a meltingly beautiful "dying fall".
4. Presto. Vivace, con fuoco. Composed New York City, November 8, 1923. This goes at quite a spanking pace in which it is somewhat difficult to maintain the accented off-beats and inner rhythms. However, Godowsky's clearly marked fingering helps considerably as once your fingers get the span of the phrases in their grasp it 'goes' much more smoothly. Bach is evidently more "pianistic" than one had supposed!

Sonata in B minor, no.2, for violin

This sonata has eight movements, which is the greatest number of any in the set. A number of the movements are quite short. It appears to be the first of the sets to have been written, and in some respects is the least mature. There seems to be a slight mystery about the dedicatee. In my printed copy published by Carl Fischer it is Sergei Rachmaninoff; but in the list of works issued by Schirmer (included in a previous issue of this Newsletter) it is stated to be Heriot Levy.

1. Allemande. Maestoso, largamente. Composed Haobin, Manchuria, December 15, 1922.
This is the outstanding movement of the sonata. The phrases are long, with a number of phrases within a phrase. This calls for careful articulation to maintain continuity of line.
2. Double. Moderato. Composed S.S. Gorjistan between Hong Kong and Singapore, February 5, 1923.
There is a predominant semiquaver figuration throughout in which the violin-like instrumental character of the original is evident. But then, at bar 13, the mood changes in an instant as Godowsky brings in a lovely countersubject and with it a shift from 'quasi-staccato' to 'sempre-legato'. Towards the end there are some tricky fingerings and hand positions to be negotiated.
3. Courante. Andante cantabile, molto espressivo. Composed S.S. Gorjistan between Singapore and Batavia, February 10, 1923.
Here the basic figuration is in quavers, and from this Godowsky has 'elicited' or 'coaxed' a very attractive tune. The whole piece may be played without pedal if desired, and the fingering is cleverly contrived so that the melody can be sustained mainly by the upper fingers of the right hand without any sostenuto pedalling.
4. Double. Presto, con fuoco. Composed S.S. Gorjistan near Singapore, February 7, 1923.
Here we have rippling, scale-like passages which are required to be played equalemente e ben articolato: not easy when also at presto! The piece has a somewhat 'five-finger exercise' flavour initially, but as soon as Godowsky introduces his counter subject (bar 19, p.20, marked espressivo) this vanishes and the pianist has to concentrate on keeping this subject flowing back and forth between the thumb and first fingers of the left hand and right hand while at the same time maintaining the tempo without slackening.
5. Sarabande. Largo. Composed Shanghai, China, January 1, 1923.
This comes as a welcome relief after the Double. What a glorious offering to the New Year! The opening phrase sounds very like the opening of the Chopin Prelude in C minor: it has the same kind of noble and solemn grandeur, played piano molto espressivo. It is in two parts, repeated, with the second rising to a fine climax. In my opinion the ossia indicated at bar 33 (p.28) is preferable.
6. Double. Allegretto vivace. Composed Shanghai, January 2, 1923.
This is in 9/8 time, marked leggiero, staccato and senza pedale. It requires nimble movements of fingers and wrists to play crisply.
7. Bourrée. Allegro con spirito. Composed Shanghai, China, December 31, 1922.
8. Double. Allegro. Composed Shanghai, China, January 5, 1923.
These two concluding pieces fall below the level of the others in this, and the other, sets. As this was the first of the Bach transcriptions to be composed, perhaps this is understandable. There is a mildly crabbed, apprentice-like quality in the piano writing which is entirely absent in the later pieces. Certainly the B minor sonata lacks the organic and thematic unity of the others.

Sonata in A minor, no.3, for violin

This sonata was completed in New York in March 1923 and was the last to be composed. It has an overall thematic unity and consistency which make it

1. Grave (Fantasia)

This is a wonderful movement, opening with a descending phrase in the scale of A minor. This quickly reaches a climax whereupon the bass crochets dissolve into throbbing quaver beats with contrapuntal, scale-like passages abounding. Towards the end there is a marvellous section marked p subito e tranquillo, in which a swaying octave figure is introduced as a kind of organ-point and repeated for four bars. This is a motive which predominates throughout the entire work. The sequences of chords in sixths and in octaves give an effect of almost Alpine grandeur and serenity.

2. Fuga. Allegro con fuoco. Composed in Chicago, March 2, 1924.

The swaying motif of the Fantasia proves to be the opening motif of the Fuga, the longest movement of the whole set of sonatas, but in a sprightly assegro. Fortunately the polyphonic strands are not too complicated here although there is practically no opportunity for slackening speed during the fugues' 292 bars. Only one riteunto, which lasts for a bar before the final cresc. e accelerando, is permitted!

3. Andante (Aria). Molto espressivo e cantabile.

This is sublimely beautiful. Both repeats are directed to be played ma coda. With Godowsky's clarity of phrasing, accentuation and fingering as a guide, one can hardly go wrong as one lovingly weaves one's way through the concluding strophe.

4. Allegro (finale). Composed New York City, January 9, 1924.

Godowsky cunningly adds the subject of the fuga as a counterpoint in the bass to the allegro theme (to be repeated). It is marked marcato and, miraculously, fits the main subject like a glove. There are a lot of chords in fifths and sixths which are not easy to negotiate. In the second half (also to be repeated) the movement mounts to a tremendous climax, marked martellato and fff with a sudden subsiding to p subito e molto espressivo just before the conclusion. A tremendous piece and the greatest contrast imaginable to the preceding Aria.

Sonata in D minor (no.2 Violoncello)

Although not the greatest, this is possibly the most genial of the six sonatas. There are six movements (counting the minuets as one movement) and it is dedicated to Jean Gerardy. It is fairly evident that the lower tonal range of the 'cello results in these suites being much more naturally suited to the sonorities of the piano than is the case with the violin sonatas.

1. Prelude. Andante cantabile. Composed New York City, December 28, 1923.

The opening motif, an arpeggio-like phrase on the triad of D minor, is repeated in ever-more intense, sweeping phrases. After a superb climax the piece ends in three octaves in D in the bass, exactly as it begins.

2. Allemande. Allegro moderato. Composed New York City, December 11, 1923.

This figures an attractive, jaunty theme treated with characteristic contrapuntal skill.

3. Courante. Allegro energico. Composed New York City, December 10, 1923.

Much the same can be said for this movement. The staccato and pedalling indications require careful attention.

4. Sarabande. Largo ma non troppo. Composed New York City, December 16, 1923.

This is a gem; gently glowing with poignant yet simple harmonies, it has a way of lingering in the mind afterwards like some of the movements of

of Mozart's piano concerto do. It is marked mainly piano molto espressivo and never rises above mezzo piano. (I now find it difficult to listen to the original without clothing it in my mind with the Godowskian felicities I have come to love so well).

5. Minuets I and II. Composed New York City, November 29, & 30, 1923. These are presented in the form ABA, the second minuet in D major really serving as a trio. Each has a striking melody, and are not too difficult, though Godowsky marks the accompaniment pp staccatissimo quasi pizzicato.
6. Gigue. Allegro deciso. Composed New York City, December 1, 1923. Godowsky's contrapuntal weavings and elaborations to this seemingly lighthearted piece are truly astonishing. No doubt his detractors would accuse him here of 'gilding the lily'. But what added depth and richness there is! It's damned difficult to play, but well worth the work required.

Sonata in C major (no.3 Violoncello)

This sonata, the only one in a major key, is dedicated to Mario Paci of Shanghai, China. More so than in any of the other five sonatas of the series, many of the individual movements are predominantly diatonic in mode. It would be interesting to know more about the dedicatee. What, one wonders, was the nature of the association with Godowsky who presumably must have met him at about the time he was composing the sonata?

1. Prelude. Allegro maestoso. Composed S.S. Siberia Maru, between Yokohama and Honolulu, May 5, 1923.
This begins with a phrase which is virtually a descending scale in C major. The semi-quaver figuration persists, rising to a climax con fuoco. This involves deft passing of the fingers of the right hand over the thumb and back again, requiring quite a lot of skill for smooth execution. The result is to reproduce the "shimmering" effect of the bowing of the 'cello.
2. Allemande. Allegretto scherzando. Composed Osaka, Japan, April 7, 1923. The motif C B C, which concludes the preceding Prelude, figures in the Allemande, which is buoyant and with touches of gaiety and humour.
3. Courante. Maesto. Composed Honolulu, Hawaii, May 16, 1923. This movement has a strong resemblance thematically to the Prelude, as it were slowed down to quaver "arpeggios" instead of semi-quaver "scales". The phrases are grand and sweeping and in the p subito section Godowsky achieves some remarkable and exquisite sonorities.
4. Sarabande. Largo. Kyoto, Japan, April 9, 1923. The architectonic grandeur of Bach is most notably reproduced in the Sarabandes of these sonatas, and this is no exception. The subject is a glorious melody and it is marvellously "set" by Godowsky.
5. Bourrée I. Allegro moderato. Composed Shandhai, April 1, 1923. The subject of this movement is one of the best known tunes in Bach. It is not quite as easy to execute as it looks, however. It leads into
6. Bourrée II in which the same tune is cast in the minor key. (This was composed on the following day, April 2, 1923).
7. Gigue. Vivace giocoso. Composed Kobe, Japan, April 12, 1923. A glorious, rollicking conclusion requiring firm, supple wrists for

its execution. The concluding pp mormorando section is memorable for its delicate and beguiling sonorities. Great evenness is required here and it is not at all easy to achieve this at the required softness, but it makes a lovely contrast to the main section. In all there is a slightly homely Handelian quality about this sonata.

Sonata in C minor (no.3 for violoncello)

In his tribute to Godowsky as Creative Transcriber in his book of essays, Mi Contra Fa: the Immoralisings of a Machiavellian Musician (the Porcupine Press, London mcmxlvii) to which I have already made reference, K.S. Sorabji singles out the C minor sonata as being exceptional.

"If from these sparse hints Godowsky can evolve his 'transcriptions' of the C minor 'cello suite, a re-composition of imposing magnificence, of a hieratic and artistic grandeur and large splendour of style, then this to my mind is a creative artistic achievement for which only one word is adequate - genius."

The sonata is dedicated to Pablo Casals. In his forward to the sonatas, Godowsky suggests that this work could begin equally well with the Allemande, "while the Introduction and Fugue would make an imposing close, following the Gigue, which in its present version ends the composition rather timidly."

1. Prelude and Fugue. Grave (Prelude). Allegretto espressivo (Fugue).
Composed Shanghai, March 31, 1923.
The Prelude is grave indeed. Suffused with rich harmonies in the bass and rising and falling chromatic harmonies in the treble, it is difficult enough to play. But the Fugue which follows is tremendous: without question one of the most formidably difficult movements in the entire oeuvre. Here Godowsky is in his polyphonic element, the contrapuntal weavings growing ever more fascinatingly complex. In all it impresses as one of the greatest fugues for the piano ever written.
2. Allemande. Maestoso, Largamente. Composed S.S. Maui, between Honolulu and San Francisco, May 19, 1923.
Maestoso seems to be the key-note of this sonata, and in the Allemande in particular I am reminded of Godowsky's own phrase "pianistic skyscrapers" which he penned in a letter to Paul Howard of Adelaide. The letter is dated October 4, 1932: "It will give me real pleasure to send you my Bach elaborations (they are not transcriptions!)You will notice that in the six volumes I transformed the Bach violin solo and 'cello solo works into musical and pianistic skyscrapers...."
3. Courante. Moderato. Composed S.S. Tjikembang near Hong Kong, March 14, 1923. The mood and tension relaxes here and also in the glorious
4. Sarabande which follows. The latter, marked Mesto, was composed March 12, 1923 (on the same ship as above). It is one of my favourite movements and is characterised by a gently soaring quality, slightly reminiscent of Brahms.
5. Gavotte I and
6. Gavotte II. Composed March 11 and 12 respectively aboard S.S. Tjikembang. The sprightly first Gavotte is followed by a delicious movement in 12/8 time with murmuring chords in thirds and sixths.
6. Gigue. Andantino espressivo. Composed aboard S.S. Tjikembang March 10, 1923. The final movement is, mercifully, not too difficult. It concludes the sonata in a spirit rather similar to that in which the final movement of the Brahms B flat Concerto does. That is to say, something like (to quote Donald Tovey): we have done our work - let the children play in the world

which our work has made safer and happier for them."

Godowsky did his work out of love and reverence for Bach and out of his conviction that the modern piano repertoire was deficient in works of this calibre and genre. I very much hope that these wonderful recreations of Bach may be reprinted and made more accessible.

(C) Andrew Cockburn 1982.

THE GODOWSKY CENTENARY
(BORN FEBRUARY 13, 1870)

by Douglas Miller

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in *Musical Opinion*, March, 1970

At the end of 1906, my piano teacher in Liverpool, Frank Bertrand, who had been a pupil of Leschetizky in Vienna, suggested that I should try to become a pupil of Godowsky.

I saw Godowsky in Berlin on January 2nd, 1907, and I was accepted as a pupil and remained under him until May, 1910, coming home for August each year.

He was a man for whom I had enormous respect and affection.

I was a rather shy young man and I was often surprised to find how comfortable one felt with him. He was a happy man, completely at ease and yet very alert. His facial expression hardly varied but his eyes were very alive. In spite of the legendary technique he seemed the exact opposite of the emotional virtuoso. He sat almost motionless at the piano, intensely concentrated, a little reserved, and the characteristic "Godowsky sound" was, I think, due to a sense of unusual control. Apart from end-of-programme items, he did not display his technique - you couldn't miss it.

While I was with him his concertos were the Beethoven 4 and 5 and the two Brahms and the Liszt E flat. I heard him play both the Beethoven concertos at a concert in Charlottenburg. Later I heard him play the Tchaikovsky in the Albert Hall. His solo repertoire seemed unending. When I was at a recital he gave in Southport, I noticed that he had a programme on the piano and kept looking at it in between items. I asked a member of the local music firm, who had to do with arrangements for the recital, about this, and he told me that, when asked to send his programme, he sent a booklet of his repertoire and asked that the items should be chosen for him. No doubt he would not have done this in Berlin or Vienna. My informant may have been exaggerating but he said that the booklet contained, among other things, "practically the whole of Chopin, including the four Ballades and the four Scherzi". If I had to say which performance of his I enjoyed most, I think I would choose the Liszt Sonata that he played at a recital in Chester. He had the proofs of his own Sonata with him and, after the recital, his thoughts seemed much engaged with it.

As to his technique, he could make ordinary scales sound quite startling - just the combination of speed and evenness. Ernest Newman once said, in a criticism, that he thought no other pianist could match his playing of the Chopin double-thirds study. I have heard him play this and it was quite uncanny.

Josef Hofmann, who lived in Berlin at that time, was an intimate friend of his. I had tea with Hofmann at a party at Godowsky's flat. He spoke English with a slight American accent.

Godowsky admired Busoni and Pachmann. Of the latter he said that he had no great physical strength, but that one never felt that the climaxes should have been louder, as he graduated his tone so well.

The one pianist he could not stand was Eugen D'Albert. Not knowing

this, I once said the wrong thing to him - and soon found out. "I haven't a pupil who plays as badly as D'Albert!" he said. Later, in Vienna, on going into the artist's room after a recital in the Grosses Musikvereinsaal, I found him dancing-mad. "Who do you think was sitting on the platform? - right at the end of the keyboard? - watching everything I did...D'Albert!"

I thought he had never played better.

The last time I heard him was at a Hallé concert in Manchester. He had flown over from Paris and his papers had been wrong and he had been kept hanging about at the airport. He managed to have a bit of a rehearsal but had had next to nothing to eat since leaving Paris, also he had made a little fluff in the last movement of the Beethoven 4th that nobody would have noticed who didn't know the work. He seemed tired and I was sorry. He gave me a final piece of advice: "Don't forget that what you are playing at the moment must relate to what has gone before and what comes after."

As an encore he had played the A flat Study of Chopin, op.25, no.1. That was the last time I heard the "Godowsky sound".

I don't think it was very long after that he had that tragic stroke that stopped him playing.

A happier memory is of two recitals he gave in Liverpool (afternoon and evening, with different programmes). Afterwards, we walked down to the old North Western hotel in pouring rain under an outsize umbrella he carried, and when he got there he changed his cloths and had a shower. As he turned on the shower he said, "I am washing off the wrong notes".

Physically, Godowsky was a rather small man, but one always felt that there was something big about him. He was, however, quickly sensitive to small things.

His waiting-room in Berlin (Kurfürstendamm) had an open double door on to the music room. Once, when it was my turn for the next lesson, it happened that I had just had my boots soled and heeled and they squeaked. My progress across the two large rooms was a distressing experience for him and when I eventually arrived at the piano he took a deep breath and said quietly "squeaky boots".

In the summer of 1909, when I was having a lesson, he said suddenly and with great force and apropos of nothing "Don't have anything to do with colleges of music and conservatoires". As no such thoughts had entered my head I expected an explanation - none came and we went on with the lesson. Shortly after this I heard that Godowsky had been appointed head of the Vienna Conservatoire in succession to his friend Emil Saur. It dawned on me that he had been ruminating about this appointment and had temporarily decided against it, at the time of his sudden outburst.

When Godowsky went to Vienna I went also and continued as a private pupil. He lived at No.9 Arenberg Ring, in the Third district.

But to return to the Berlin days:

One day in April, 1907, Godowsky gave me the alarming news that Grieg was in the next room, that he had come to ask him to make a record of the Grieg Ballade in G minor and that Grieg was staying in his flat while they discussed the work, which its composer considered his best piano piece (presumably apart from his concerto).

The B.B.C. broadcast this record about 1940 or 1941, with a description of Grieg's visit to Godowsky. It must have been one of those cylindrical

records? There was a good "78" of Godowsky playing the work at a public recital, later.

I heard Grieg accompanying some of his songs, sung, not by his wife who was, I should think, getting past it, but by one Ellen Gulbranson.

That was on April 14th and it was the last time Grieg appeared on the concert platform. On his return to Norway he got as far as Kiel, where he fell ill, and was taken to a hospital. He lingered some weeks and died. It would have been a cause of satisfaction to him that his favourite piano work had been recorded.

In Vienna, in September, 1909, I played the Rachmaninov C minor concerto to Godowsky. He didn't know it but, when I produced the copy, he said, "Oh, I know Rachmaninov" but said nothing about giving him lessons. When were those lessons given? I remember that when I had finished the concerto he was silent a moment, and then said with feeling "He known all about a piano."

I introduced myself to Rachmaninov in Leeds in 1910 (I was playing the concerto in Liverpool in October and I wanted to hear him play it at the Leeds festival). Rachmaninov spoke fluent German but no English at that time. When I spoke of Godowsky I got an impression that he knew and admired him, but he also said nothing about lessons. He dedicated the "Polka" to Godowsky in March, 1911. Were the lessons later perhaps, in America?

I do not remember ever seeing Godowsky's son and daughter in Vienna. I remember them in Berlin - the son as a little boy whom I had tried to help with his homework, while I was waiting for a lesson. He became one of the inventors of the Kodachrome colour-film process.

The daughter Wanda (we called her Vanda, the mother was American) was a happy little girl and rather plump, and was a few years older than her brother, but younger than me. I remember skating round a Berlin rink with her to the tune of the Merry Widow Waltz (then all the rage). Little did I imagine that I was accompanying a future "star" of the silent film.

Godowsky did not, as a rule, play during lessons, but once I had the opportunity of watching his hands at close quarters.

Pianists seem to manage well with whatever hands nature has provided for them. His hands were smallish but he stretched the tenth with ease. The fingers were a trifle thin and very strong and more of an equal length than is usual and he could pass one finger over another with great dexterity. The thought occurred to me that nature had indeed provided him with hands that were ideal for a pianist.

His technique was a beautiful thing in itself - as much in gentle music as in bravura passages. He could, in addition, play the big work in a big way, without losing the general conception.

But there are also great pianists today and the standard has, apparently, not gone down. The long-playing record and the radio have had an effect on both performers and the musical public. The sophisticated showmanship that, in the past, could cast a spell over an audience, would not have done so if the audiences had been more critical. There may be some loss of spontaneity and the feeling of the immediate occasion, in connection with the new outlook, but there has been a change of direction in piano-playing and Godowsky had anticipated it. If he were alive now, his playing would be much the same and this could not be said of most of his contemporaries.

If one had to pick out one particular feature in which his playing excelled, and would still excel, it would probably be in his wonderful control of the piano itself, which seemed to give his playing a characteristic sound. Piano technique may well have reached its high-water mark in his sensitive and comprehensive handling of the instrument.

A small personal note to conclude. Driving to the station in Chester, Godowsky found he hadn't change to pay the "cabby". He insisted on paying, so I changed some money for him. Somehow we got in a muddle over it and I felt I had sixpence too much and handed him a sixpence. Half humorously and ceremoniously he gave it back and said "Keep it, as a memento of me".

I meant to keep it! Alas, I lost it! If I had it today, it would be on my watch-chain, as a memento of this good, happy man and great artist.

(C) Douglas Millar

But keep with it please, for there was one statement of Mr Miller's which aroused some controversy and provoked some correspondence. This follows:

Sir, - Godowsky died in 1938 when I was merely 11 and I never had the joy of hearing him. I have read that he was a "pianists pianist" who played better in private than he did in public. I do have some of his playing on a record, but the recording is so old, dim and scratchy that it is not possible to obtain any real idea of his art. He must have been an amazing technician: I have seen the scores of some of his transcriptions of Chopin's Etudes and I cannot understand how anyone is expected to play them - yet I believe he did!

But Mr Miller implies that Godowsky gave some lessons to Rachmaninov, a statement that Mr. Miller, who obviously knew Godowsky well, would not have made without good authority. Yet I can find no reference to this in either the leading biography of Rachmaninoff by Bertensson and Leyda (which contains but one reference to Godowsky in its 464 pages), nor in John Culshaw's book on Rachmaninoff (which contains no reference to Godowsky at all).

By 1910, when Mr. Miller met Rachmaninoff, the composer was already 37, with three piano concertos already written and a good deal of other piano music, the op.32 Preludes dating from that very year. Rachmaninoff had undergone a rigorous and thorough training many years before in Russia and would hardly have stood in need of piano lessons from anyone in 1910. Certainly after Rachmaninoff left Russia permanently seven years later eventually to become one of the world's greatest concert pianists, he worked long and hard on his piano technique, but I can find no evidence that Rachmaninoff either sought or needed assistance with this from any other pianist.

It is not for me to doubt the statement of one of your writers who had the advantage denied to me of living in that period and of being on terms of personal acquaintance with its leading musicians, but in view of the lack of any reference to lessons with Godowsky in the Rachmaninoff literature, Mr Miller's statement is strange, to say the least, and I should be most interested to know his authority for making it.

Sevenoaks, Kent, March 8th, 1970

Keith Fagan

Sir, - Mr Keith Fagan, in his letter, asks what authority I have for

suggesting that Rachmaninoff had piano lessons from Godowsky.

I should say, at once, that Godowsky never mentioned any such lessons to me and the first and last time I heard of them was when I read the following extract from Cyril Smith's "Duet for Three Hands", page 79.

"In spite of his (Rachmaninoff's) genius, he was always very nervous... he even took lessons in an attempt to cure it. His teacher was a much lesser pianist, Leopold Godowsky, chosen by Rachmaninoff for the simple reason that Godowsky was capable of performing every bit as well in public as he did in private."

With very great respect to that fine pianist, Cyril Smith, I must say that this does not tally with the generally expressed opinion of Godowsky's playing. Thus Schöberg in his book, The Great Pianists, states that "concert work inhibited him", and he quotes Josef Hofmann as saying "It is tragic that the public has never heard Popsy (!) as only he can play".

However, Cyril Smith goes on to say that the lessons ended when Godowsky gave a recital in New York and "advertised" himself as teacher of Rachmaninoff.

No one who knew Godowsky would believe that he had anything to do with this advertisement. In the business side of the art there are, as we know, many who are involved in selling the services of those who attract the public. All Godowsky had to do was to be at the right time at the right place. His part-time secretary and the concert agents did all the rest. The very last time I saw him, after a Hallé concert in Manchester, he was complaining bitterly about a man who had been acting for him in a way that had annoyed him.

As for Rachmaninoff, there was for him a crucial time when he had completed the last nine Etudes-Tableaux, op.39, and had already begun the 4th concerto.

Up to this time he had always thought of himself as a composer and he then decided that henceforth he must be a pianist. It was for him a tremendous decision to make. It was not until 10 years later, in 1927, that he completed the concerto (op.40) and there was no original work in between. At the end of his life he had only reached his 45th opus.

It was natural that he would want a few lessons some time, to clear his mind about points of piano technique that he had not previously bothered about and it would be interesting to know in what year these lessons took place.

It is all a long time ago but when the dour six-foot-five Rachmaninoff and the small and bright Godowsky settled down at one piano to talk about piano-playing, it was quite a moment in musical history. There might not have been much that either could have taught the other, but one would have given a lot to have been there.

Liverpool, 8, April 14th, 1970

DOUGLAS MILLER

Sir, - I first heard the story of Rachmaninoff contemplating studying (taking lessons is so inappropriate a term in this connection!) with Godowsky in the 'thirties from my uncle, Watson Lyle, who was then engaged upon the first biography of Rachmaninoff when the author died. It was subsequently published in incomplete form by Reeves in 1938.

Now I come to search my own bookshelves on the prompting of Keith Fagan, I find no written evidence, yet am sure it has been in print somewhere! My impression is that the Russian at one time contemplated that step, but that is as far as it went.

As to the reasons, who can say with any certainty what Rachmaninoff, seemingly the peerless technician of his generation, espied in Godowsky's musicality that could be imbibed with profit? A similar question arose a century before when Chopin contemplated going to Kalkbrenner. It, too, has never been answered satisfactorily.

Godowsky was a master technician with his own devoted band of professional admirers, just as was Rachmaninoff. I recall vividly the

great admiration and respect which Leff Pouishnoff always felt for the Pole and who frequently and regularly played the Godowsky arrangements in public.

Under favourable conditions Godowsky's electrical recordings on Columbia 78s give an indication of the wonderful qualities he must have displayed in his heyday.

As a very young man in the 'thirties, I have always awaited his reappearance in London (Friedmann was the other giant of those days who never came back), not knowing that Godowsky was in poor health having suffered a coronary which finished his public career.

Perhaps you will kindly convey these thoughts to Mr Fagan - not that they do very much to prove the point!

Birmingham 13, April 19th, 1970.

WILSON LYLE

Sir, - In considering the question of Godowsky's having given piano lessons to Rachmaninoff, your correspondent Mr Wilson Lyle attempts to illustrate the situation by stating that "a similar question arose a century before when Chopin contemplated going to Kalkbrenner". May I point out that Kalkbrenner's excellence lay in business technique. The facts of our case would indicate that it was he who approached Chopin on the subject of lessons, and that even if Chopin had considered the proposal, any tuition might well have been on the lines of "How to succeed in the Paris salon world".

It was most probably out of positeness and interest for overall expansion of scope that Chopin attended a few of Kalkbrenner's classes, while the dedication of the E minor Concerto was, I suggest, a friendly gesture. Such works of Kalkbrenner as I have personally ever played in public have been chosen purely as a combination of light-weight showpieces and historical curiosities, e.g. the "Introductory March, and Variations upon the air, "Will you come to the Bower"". From contemporary references and personal acquaintance with his piano works, the general impression I have formed of Kalkbrenner is far distant from that of Godowsky, whose greater musicianship, especially in terms of his approach to counterpoint, can easily be perceived by a glance at any such work as his Metamorphosis on Strauss's 'Artist's Life' Waltzes.

Here was a figure one might well imagine as commanding the respect of the great Rachmaninoff - and let us hear more of his piano works - rather than a typical virtuoso teacher whose approach could have aroused little more than general interest on the part of Chopin. A lot may be learned from both Kalkbrenner and Godowsky by way of piano-virtuosity, but of the two it is the latter who commands the monopoly of genuine musical genius.

The University, Hull, July 5th, 1970. JAMES G. FARROW

And so the question got a good airing, but answer was there none. But - twelve years later, the eagle-eyed Ronald Stevenson has come up with the answer -

AN EXTRAORDINARY LESSON

On a day when Leopold Godowsky relaxed after his concert the previous evening, it was announced to him that a man about forty years of age who did not wish to give his name desired to speak to him. A little intrigued by the anonymity of his visitor, Godowsky told his servant to have him enter. The mysterious personage was brought into the studio and Godowsky saw approaching him, Sergey (sic) Rachmaninoff.

-What an agreeable surprise, my dear colleague! What brings you to my house?

-It is an honor to meet you again and I am going to tell you immediately the reason for my visit. I so admired your playing during your concert last evening that I am asking you please to give me what I would

like to call a lesson.

Godowsky, flattered but completely mystified, asked his visitor to be seated and to explain to him his strange request.

"You are a wonderful pianist and known all over the world!"

Turning a deaf ear to the compliment, Rachmaninoff answered:

"I observed in your left hand something I have never seen in any other pianist and that I myself do not possess. Would you be generous enough to reveal your secret to me?"

Godowsky was surprised, but the calm of his compatriot was so imposing, and the humble request so sincere, that after some hesitation, he began, according to his habit, to speak volubly:

I am left-handed, and perhaps it was that which made you notice that I carry the left hand with great facility towards the middle of the keyboard (while applying naturally a light crescendo as I ascend towards the treble in order to remedy the weakness of the instrument), while in general it is with the right hand that one plays in the powerful register in the middle, and with the left in the bass, which is already very sonorous.

"If I understand you correctly, you maintain, as in the orchestra, a sonorous mass coming from the bass of the piano and covering three quarters of the keyboard, and you play in the treble by attacking the key from a small height, which produces the timbre of high-pitched instruments calling for a light attack.

A broad smile from Godowsky accompanied several words of admiration for a colleague who, thanks to his fine ear, had so well grasped the power of pronation, and he said to him:

"I accept with pleasure your compliment, but I must say to you that your right hand surpasses mine in clarity. You have, in your right hand, that light attack from a short distance, without throwing towards the treble.

The pianists exchanged glances with the air of accomplices.

"Of course, we are speaking about the same thing; it was necessary simply to realize that with your prolonged pronation of the left hand, you maintain a perfect equilibrium between the bass and the treble which is the least sonorous part of the keyboard.

"For a left-handed person like myself, this equilization is executed naturally. For you who need to strive for perfect equilibrium between the two hands it is the ear alone which must establish it. The left hand soon follows easily because, even with a non-left-hander, it is the strongest, although in general terms less dextrous. It is certainly significant that my left hand plays absolutely glued to the keys and that from time to time my right hand executes, as you say, the attack at a light distance. And is it not amusing to juggle with the keys which can thus be transformed into instruments?"

When, twenty-five years later, Rachmaninoff told us of his visit to Godowsky, he glided modestly over the remaining course of his conversation with the greatest technician of the epoch.

The lesson that can be drawn from this encounter is the fact that Rachmaninoff, at the age of forty-five years, did not hesitate to study the playing of his confrères and consult them, a habit he kept all his life. But this man had the rare virtue of never criticizing another artist; he always found a word of praise, sincerely convinced that everyone works seriously and with his whole heart. Such a person was Rachmaninoff who, through his professor, Siloti - himself a student of Liszt - continued the tradition of Weimar.

Abstracted from Music, the Mystery and the Reality by Paul Roes, (E & M Publishing, 6711 East Avenue, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20015 - 1980?).

Is this the end of the story?
