

LEOPOLD GODOWSKY I



Leopold Godowsky I (1870–1938) was considered one of the greatest piano virtuosos of this century, along with Sergei Rachmaninoff and Josef Hoffman. Rachmaninoff once wrote: “All of us pianists sit at Godowsky’s feet. He is the only musician of this age who has given us a lasting, real contribution to the development of piano music.” Godowsky made few recordings, but his reputation is sustained by his compositions, among which his 53 elaborations of Chopin Etudes are still considered fiendishly challenging. His original works also include a picturesque *Java Suite* of 12 pieces, a large-scale piano sonata, and shorter salon pieces for piano and violin with piano.

THE EASTMAN-GODOWSKY PIANO COMPETITION



THE GODOWSKY SOCIETY

Patrons:

Shura Cherkassky

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji

Ronald Stevenson

Don't rush to file in your applications - the competition took place on 22 February last, just missing the anniversary of Godowsky's birth.

My ten year old son could have written a more convincing Prospectus for this piano competition. Although like the author not very musical, at least he is literate. For instance, he would never have written that Leopold Godowsky I was considered one of the greatest piano virtuosos of the century - he knows Godowsky is.....

Oscar (for that is my son's name) is painfully aware that his dad does wish that Godowsky's reputation was sustained by his compositions. Indeed he knows (for he hears his dad bemoan the fact so often) that most of Godowsky's music is so difficult to obtain that it is a wonder that anyone plays it). But he is glad that apart from a picturesque Java Suite and a large-scale piano sonata, he composed some shorter salon pieces for piano and for piano with violin.

He also hopes that when the prospective candidates for the competition managed to dig out a copy of the thirty-year old magazine, the library of the Eastman School of Music actually had the music.

From which you will gather that I think this tawdry affair does little for Godowsky - in fact I think it does his cause more harm than good.

Thanks to Joseph Banowetz, I have just obtained copies of some pieces Godowsky edited for the Art Publication Society. Entitled Educational Adaptations they are predominantly simple arrangements of National Dance and Folk Tunes for Grades 1 and 2. They are and completely pianistic and all are directed to



Repertoire requirements

1. *One* Chopin-Godowsky etude (for one hand alone or for two hands).
2. *One* transcription or original composition by Leopold Godowsky I. In the case of a multi-movement suite, one movement will suffice.
3. *Three* works or movements from works from three different style periods (baroque, classic, romantic, early 20th century, or contemporary), with a total duration of not more than 15 minutes.

The five pieces are to be played from memory and will be heard in their entirety. (A complete listing of the music of Leopold Godowsky I is found in the March 1957 issue of *Music Library Association NOTES*.)

All contestants must fill out a copy of this application form. It must be signed by the applicant's current teacher by way of recommendation. The form should be sent or delivered to the Chairman of the Piano Department, Eastman School of Music, by 1 February 1986.

in Kilbourn Hall at the
Eastman School of Music

open to the public

First Prize: \$3000 Second Prize: \$2000
Third Prize: \$1000

Eligibility
All undergraduate or graduate students enrolled as degree candidates or as Special Students at the Eastman School of Music at the time of the competition will be eligible. Pianists from anywhere, high school seniors or older, who have completed application for admission to the Eastman School for the following academic year are also eligible.

The judges will include the major piano faculty of the Eastman School of Music.

Deadline for applications: 1 February 1986.

thus encouraging neat finger work by allowing the pupil to concentrate on a finger legato without having to learn discriminating pedaling which (see Ronald Stevenson's book review below) is a study in itself. The pieces are all edited with the care Godowsky lavished on his original works and his transcriptions. Scattered among them are some delicious Godowsky touches in the harmonies although with characteristic modesty, Godowsky calls these pieces "adaptations" rather than "arrangements". These pieces were published just three years prior to the marvellous Miniatures about which Godowsky wrote "My aim is to interest while U instruct; to educate while I entertain." This is just what these delightful adaptations aspire to.

Another correspondent, Gilles Hamelin (correspondance with Godowsky buffs and piano buffs is one of the perks of my self-imposed task) gives the answer to the mystery of the recording of the Greig Ballade Douglas Millar mentioned (see VolVIII no 1) which was made in 1906. Gilles writes: "A reference from the British publication "Recorded Sound" in which Busoni speaks of making Hupfield Rolls in 1908 and mentions: 'listened to Godowsky and myself in the machine'. So we can conclude that Godowsky "recorded" Hupfield rolls in 1908 or before but I have never been able to secure a list of these rolls except the ones Methuen-Campbell mentions in his Chopin book. I deeply believe that the so-called 1906 recording of the Greig Ballade is in fact a Hupfield roll. Two-sided discs, not to speak about multiple-disc sets were a long way off in the future then. And it took a while for the idea to come about of combining parts I and II of one work on both sides of a record."

And whilst I am quoting and on the subject of recordings, Jeremy Nicholas writes: ".....and following on your report of Methuen-Campbell's excellent discography, members (and Mr. Methuen-Campbell) might like some information to add to their Godowsky record catalogues. In addition to the four known recordings of Godowsky playing his own work (the two Schubert lieder, the Gardens of Buitenzorg and the Star Spangled Banner) there are other unpublished recordings. The most important, and by far the best, is of Godowsky playing his arrangement (never published) of Home Sweet Home. He made an Ampico roll of this, of course, which I have not heard; whether this unpublished Brunswick green label recording is exactly the same I am therefore not able to say. What I can attest is that this, in spite of its unprepossessing material, on a footing with the Schubert recordings in terms of pianism, piano sound and recording quality. The three copies that are in the possession of the Godowsky family have three different numbers, Brunswick 5667, 8 and 9.

"Other unpublished Brunswicks are a piece entitled Romance (that I have been unable to identify further - Brunswick 3857) and a further 10" coupling of the Hunting Call and Marche Militaire from the Miniatures, played in his solo versions (These are also unpublished - the music as well as the record - Ed). This record has the number Brunswick 5240.

Also unpublished in their original duet form from the Miniatures, the Humoresque and Polka in which Godowsky is joined by his son Leopold II - Brunswick 5877 is given to the former, the latter is a private recording.

Lastly, two mysteries, as unfathomable as are the reasons why these historic documents have never seen the light of day: an unpublished Brunswick of Godowsky playing the Albeniz Tango in its original version - played, I might add in a manner which is so lumpy, badly phrased and unsympathetic as to question whether it is the pianist on the label - coupled with a piece that in spite of the best endeavours of the Godowsky family, Jorge Bolet and others, no-one has been able to put a title to. (There's no number for this disc). And another (single-sided) Brunswick (no.1247) labelled "Cradle-Song - Schubert, NOT arranged By Godowsky/pianist Leopold Godowsky."

some of the Studies by Ian Hobson, of the transcriptions of the Albeniz Triana, and Die Fledermaus by Abbey Simon, the Kunsterleben, Wein, Weib und Gesang, and Die Fledermaus by Janice Weber, the same three Strauss pieces plus the Symphonic Metamorphoses of the Schatz-Walzer themes from The Gypsy Baron for the left hand alone. It is hoped that the next newsletter will have reviews of these records.

A little news of our Patrons: Shura Cherkassky has recently been giving a series of concerts celebrating his 75th birthday. Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji has been unwell recently and has been in hospital where he spent his ninety-fourth birthday - we wish him well. Ronald Stevenson has been to China and Australia (see his letter to me on the back page of this Newsletter) as well as providing a book review.

I have just heard that Gregor Benko has consented to become a Patron. Mr Benko was one of the founder members of the International Piano Library and he was Vice President during its formative (and most exciting) Years. He is at present engaged in writing a biography of Josef Hofmann. His sleeve notes for the Leopold Godowsky piano recital on Veritas contains some of the most sympathetic writing on Godowsky that it has been my pleasure to read. It was Gregor who kindly supplied the photocopy of Godowsky's manuscript of Franzozisch which appeared in the Newsletter Volume V no 1.

Re Ronald's letter on page 21, a photograph of Zakharoff appears on page 10. I'll try to get some information on him to include in the next Newsletter.

Harry Winstanley
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extract from:
FAMOUS PIANISTS of
TO-DAY and YESTERDAY
by
Henry C. Lahee

London, G.P. Putman's Sons, Boston, L.C. Page & Company, 1902.

¹Leopold Godowsky is a native of Russian Poland, having been born at Wilna on February 13, 1870. Showing remarkable talent for music at a very early age, he was taken upon the road as a "child wonder", and travelled all over Russia and parts of Germany, with pronounced success, until he was twelve years old. At this point he fell under the notice of a wealthy banker of Konigsberg, Germany, who undertook to provide for his education. Accordingly he entered the Hochschule at Berlin, under Joachim, where he remained for two years. At this time he determined to come to America, and he toured this country in connection with Ovid Musin, the violinist, and his company. But the young artist soon tired of the monotony of travel, and made strong efforts to return to Europe for further study. He realised that Saint-Saens, the great French composer and pianist, would serve his individuality best and set about to procure an audience with him. After hearing one of Godowsky's own compositions entitled "Das Maerchen," he instantly accepted him as his pupil. Saint-Saen's interest in the gifted young artist grew from day to day and the protection and favour which Godowsky thus enjoyed served to introduce him to the most exclusive musical and social circles in the French capital.

In connection with his Paris career the following incident is characteristic of Godowsky. Baron Alphonse de Rothschild sent Godowsky a most flattering invitation to play at one of his midwinter soirees. The invitation was in itself a handsome compliment, but the young artist had promised the Countess de Lesseps to play the same evening in her salon, and declined the invitation. Baron de Rothschild offered to secure a release for him from the Countess, but Godowsky again declined, stating that his regard for the Countess would cause him to give her the preference to even so distinguished a family as the de Rothschilds. The Countess de Lesseps was best aware of the handsome compliment Baron de Rothschild had paid Godowsky and was much affected by the latter's conduct in so delicate a matter, preserving for him to this day an almost motherly affection.

From the salons of Paris to those of London was but a step, and in a very short time Godowsky had captured London. Ere long his art was revealed in the most aristocratic homes in London and in the Palaces of the Duke of Westminster, the Duke of Norfolk, at Grosvenor, and Marlborough House. It was during the many festivities in connection with the Queen's golden jubilee in 1887 that Godowsky was ordered to play at Marlborough House, when no less than thirty crowned heads formed a part of his audience. On that occasion the Princess of Wales was so pleased with Godowsky's "Valse Scherzo" that she accepted the dedication of it by a special court order.

In 1890, at the age of twenty years, Godowsky returned to America, and in 1891 he married Miss Fredrica Saxe, a lady of New York. A wedding journey to Holland and England followed, and then he took up his residence in New York City where he remained until, in 1895 he accepted a position in the Chicago Conservatory of Music, as head of the piano department.

1 By kind permission of Mr. Maurice Aronson.

Godowsky has been heard repeatedly with every important musical organisation of the United States and Canada, and has earned everywhere the most flattering comments. On account of his transcriptions of Chopin's studies, Godowsky has been called the "Apostle of the left hand." These transcriptions are of great difficulty, and even De Pachman, the great Chopin player, was so impressed with them, and with Godowsky's original compositions, that he declared he would go home and study them for a year, and then he might be a finished artist.

There is no ostentation or frivolity in Godowsky's playing, but rather largeness and broadness of style, brilliance, grace, fluency and poetic feeling. He has an immense repertoire, and it is said that he can give from sixteen to twenty different programs without repeating a single number, and every selection a more or less important classical work."

As a 'filler', here is an extract from a delightful work, "The Blind Piano Teacher" - a monograph by Edward Isaacs M.A., Mus.B and a Honorable Fellow Royal Manchester College of Music. The monograph was part of a composite Braille volume entitled "A Handbook for Blind Teachers of Music" published, copyright 1945, by the National Institute for the Blind, London. This monograph was published by William Maclellan of Glasgow.

"....I began this chapter with an anecdote about a great pianist and conductor. I will end it with another concerning Leopold Godowsky, one of the very greatest technicians as well as one of the finest pianist-musicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I had known him abroad in my student days and later on, when he was playing in Manchester in 1907, he came to practise on my piano at home as he could not get one sent to his hotel. Finding the manuscript of a new and difficult staccato caprice lying on the piano, he asked me to play it to him. "You have a good staccato," he said when I had finished. "So loose and easy. Is that how it feels to you?" I deferentially took the opening he offered me and asked him to show me how he produced his prodigious staccato touch and endurance. "So loose and easy," he said as he sat down at the piano. When he had played half of a Rubinstein staccato study he stopped and said "Perhaps not really what is meant by loose." Greatly daring, I jumped in with "I feel it as a sort of controlled vibrating." He thought and tried various touches at the keyboard and then said "Yes, you see, we don't always find the right way to describe what we feel when we play instinctively, do we? What you call controlled vibrating and what I call loose and easy - well, they are the same thing." And, knowing what a great teacher he was as well as a great player, I have remembered the incident to this day, particularly his implied admission that our teaching-jargon contains many anomalies."

*****lovely, is it not?*****

The following is an extract from "The Adventure of Chess" by Edward Lasker originally published by McClelland & Stewart Ltd in 1949, now under the Dover imprint.

Before the extract relating to Godovsky, I quote from the beginning of this book:

It has been said that man is distinguished from animals in that he buys more books than he can read. I should like to suggest that the inclusion of a few chess books would help to make the distinction unmistakable.

Not if they are like this one.

Leopold Godovsky and Mischa Elman

A lifelong competitor of Rosenthal's on the keyboard as well as in battles of wit, was the pianist-composer Leopold Godovsky, who, prior to living in this country, had held the envied position of Director of the Imperial Music Institute (Kaiserliche Musikhochschule) of Vienna.

Godovsky was a pianists' pianist. Apart from his phenomenal virtuosity, he had the composer's deep insight into the musical content of the works he rendered, and his playing never failed to bring out thrilling, subtle nuances which other virtuosi had overlooked. Thus, for the critical audiences of the Vienna, Berlin, or Dresden of the first quarter of this century, a recital by Godovsky was always a musical event of the first order. Tickets were sold out far in advance, and getting in on a student's pass, as I had to do, took the tenacity of youth, which does not shrink from standing-in-line marathons, rain or shine. Godovsky was particularly famous as a Chopin player; so much so, that he was freely mentioned as the equal and eventual successor of Vladimir de Pachman, who, prior to Godovsky's ascendancy, had been the god of all obsessed and singleminded Chopin devotees, of which, at that time, I was one.

I remember a very funny incident to which this rivalry gave rise at a Godovsky concert that included all of Chopin's Preludes and Nocturnes. As usual, a galaxy of professional pianists were in the audience. Among them was de Pachmann, who, in the company of a younger musician, had come for the second half of the program. De Pachmann had a rather disturbing way of whispering so loud that everyone within a radius of ten feet could hear him. As Godovsky was playing, de Pachmann raved to his young friend: "Marvellous! Extraordinary! What wonderful finesse! This is the greatest Chopin Playing I have heard!" and many other words of high praise inspired by the unconscious urge not to appear jealous. The young man remained silent until Godovsky had finished and the ovation which followed had died down. Then, as he and de Pachmann got up and walked toward the artist's room, he remarked: "Yes, you are right, Godovsky is the greatest Chopin player we have." At this, de Pachmann stopped short, and with ill-concealed offended pride said: "Well! There are other Chopin players too!"

I did not meet Godovsky personally until some years later, after a recital he gave in Chicago, where I was connected with Sears, Roebuck and Company in an engineering capacity. Mischa Elman, with whom I played a good deal of chess in those days, also happened to be in town, and Max Adler, a vice-president of Sears and a fine violinist himself, invited both Mischa Elman and Godovsky to go through the Sears plant, with myself acting as guide.

The two famous artists were overawed by the vastness of the great industrial establishment, and when they saw how many thousands of orders were going

through the plant at one time, most of them calling for merchandise which had to be gathered from many different departments, they could not understand how any customer ever got what he ordered. I told them that H.G. Wells, upon being conducted through the plant had made the same observation, but that after the system had been explained to him in detail, he had said: "Now I don't understand how a mistake can ever occur."

The tour was supposed to last about an hour, and Mr. Adler had suggested the departments I might show. But there had been a flaw in his calculation. The furniture department was included in the tour, and part of the furniture department consisted of a line of pianos. That should have been the last thing on the list. As it was, we reached the pianos after about a half-hour's tour, and that was the end of it. Godovsky and Elman would not budge another step. It was a good thing the pianos were in a room separate from the rest of the furniture. Each one of them was tried out, and Godovsky was much surprised at the action of some of them, which, even from his exalted viewpoint, was good. He would run off some complicated figures at fantastic speed, and then play them in thirds; and Mischa Elman, radiant with admiration, would say: "Do that again, Papsie;" and Sears, Roebuck was completely forgotten.

"Papsie" (sic) Godovsky (sic) is lovingly remembered by all who knew him. He had a sharp wit, but though sometimes it touched others to the quick, he never really meant to offend them. In fact, as often as not, his best friends were apt to be the victims of his epigrams. He seemed to get a sort of detached, artistic pleasure from his witticisms, free from author's pride, as if he listened to someone else uttering them. This was the case even when Roseenthal was concerned, who had frequently taken a sarcastic bite at him.

One day, Harry Brunswick Loeb, a mutual friend of ours who for years had been the guiding spirit of all musical activities in New Orleans, was in New York on a visit, and he told me he had just been to see Papsie Godovsky and had shown him an absurd review of a recital Rosenthal had given in a medium-sized town in the Mid West. The reviewer, probably a baseball editor doubling as music critic, had called Rosenthal the "Napoleon of the Piano." "Did you ever see anything so ridiculous?" Harry Loeb had asked Godovsky. "You consider it ridiculous?" Godovsky answered. "I don't at all. The piano has always been Rosenthal's Waterloo!"

Best known of Godovsky's bon mots is probably the remark he made in a box at Carnegie Hall to Mischa Elman, with whom he was listening to Heifetz's first performance in this country. Heifetz had just finished the first movement of the Brahms Concerto, and tremendous applause rocked the house. Elman took out his handkerchief and, drying his forehead, said: "It's awfully warm here, Papsie, don't you think?" -- "For violinists, yes," Godovsky replied. "For pianists it is quite comfortable." Even if Elman's place in the hall of violinistic fame had not been thoroughly secure, so that this remark might have stung him badly, Godovsky probably would have been unable to refrain from making it.

He delighted in all sorts of practical jokes, and Elman was often their butt, because he was an intimate friend and Godovsky knew he would be readily forgiven.

Elman is a very good chess player, and he once invited me to stay at his house for a week so that we could engage in prolonged battles. On Sunday of that week he had asked Josef Hofmann for lunch. About fifteen minutes before lunchtime the telephone rang and I heard Elman say: "Oh, hello, Harry! Are you in town? You are at Papsie's? You want to come here? Fine! But come after lunch. Edward Lasker is here, and we are waiting

for Josef Hofmann to come any minute. I am sorry, the cook told me he has only three lamb chops, or I would invite you to eat with us." About ten minutes later Hofmann came. We had barely sat down to eat when the doorbell rang and Harry Loeb appeared. "Hello, Mischa," he said. "I know you have only three lamb chops, but I came anyway; and I hope you don't mind, but I brought Papsie too." Before Elman could say a word, Godovsky entered and added: "mischa, I was sorry to hear you have only three lamb chops. They are difficult to divide into five parts, so I brought Josef Levhinne!" He pulled Levhinne, who had been hiding in the hall, into the room, and Elman could do nothing but join in the general hilarity and divide the lamb chops in two. I doubt that four of the greatest virtuosi of the world were ever gathered at lunch in a similarly unconventional manner.

New Orleans was the scene of another elaborate joke which Harry Loeb played on Elman. The latter arrived on the afternoon preceding a recital he was to give, and Loeb called for him at the station to take him to his house for dinner. In the car Loeb said: Mischa, I know you don't like to listen to music unless it is played masterly. But I want to ask you a big favor. Make an exception and listen to a young girl, a dear friend of mine, who is studying to be a professional pianist. You can tell me frankly what you think of her. I may be prejudiced in her favor."

Elman's expression showed that he was not very happy about the suggestion, but he could not very well refuse. As the car drew up at Loeb's house, they could hear, coming from an open window, the sound of a piano. It was a well-known little piece, rather easy to play; but the tempo was wrong, the accents were wrong, even some of the notes were wrong; in short, it was awful. Elman was visibly writhing in pain. "Is this the little Girl?" he asked, composing himself with difficulty. "Yes. Isn't she wonderful?" said Loeb in a voice of joyful exaltation. "Come up and meet her." The terrible music continued as they walked up. They entered the room, and at the piano sat - Godovsky, his sides splitting with laughter.

A weakness of Godovsky's which I could never understand was his interest in occult matters. One time I was sitting with him at a chess table in my house, and he remarked that the table seemed excellently suited for experiments in levitation. At first I thought he was joking, but he told me quite seriously that he had been present at several table-lifting seances and had actually seen tables rise up unaided by any visible application of mechanical forces. My argument that obviously he had looked in the wrong direction did not impress him. He would take me with him some day and let me witness table lifting, he said.

When sometime later he did telephone to ask whether I wanted to accompany him to see a medium perform, I naturally assented. He said he did not know the medium, but a doctor friend of his had heard that the man was really remarkable. A French painter, a friend of Godovsky's came with us. While we were waiting for the medium at the doctor's house, we were shown a lacquered tablet on which some roses had been painted by a lady patient of his. The doctor seemed very proud of it and asked the painter what he thought of the work. The Frenchman was noncommittal. When the doctor added that she had never really studied painting, but had learned it all by herself, the Frenchman coolly remarked that he had thought so from the first. Godovsky listened, his face beaming. The doctor, trying to save the situation, pleaded that his friend still had to add some finishing touches. But the painter was pitiless. He said "Whistler once remarked that a masterpiece is finished at any stage. I am sure you want me to be honest with you. I cannot say I like the painting." Here Godovsky could no longer restrain his glee. "I think we might summarize the case," he ventured, "by calling this picture a brilliant example of self-taught incompetence."

This gem consoled us for the complete fiasco of the mediums performance. He was obviously one of those loathsome crooks that prey on ignorant people who look for messages from "The beloved" to learn what fate has in store for them. He simulated some sort of trance and told Godovsky he should not worry, his efforts would bring him success if he stuck to his work. When we burst into laughter, told him that was all, and paid him off, he hurried away with a scared look on his face. That this experience affected Godovsky's spiritualistic leanings in any way, I doubt. He was not the first man of a high order of mentality whom I had seen caught in the intriguing net of occult nonsense.



ZAKHAROFF

On Leopold Godowsky"

by
Paul Howard

The Four Poems

"...my four Poems for both hands, - they are the quintessence of my lyric muse."

(Letter from Godowsky to Oaul Howard, from Cannes, 2/5/33).

These sublime works were written after fate had bludgened him most cruelly. In a letter to me dated October 4th, 1932, the Master said:-

"My four Poems I think would interest you: They are very personal - highly sensitized emanations of a battered soul."

In them he attained what he had aimed at for so long and only hinted at in Franzosisch of the Walzermasken. Exquisite and immortal, they are wonderful portraits of Godowsky's soul, personality and aspirations; and when he told me he was dedicating them to me I replied:- "Your dedication of these works to me, dear Master, overwhelms me. I feel that life is giving me more than it owes." And Paul II said:- "Now Dad, your name will go down the centuries..."

Here is part of the Master's letter to me.

"It is just like you to try to mobilize the Gramophone concerns to reproduce my compositions. And what you are doing for the Miniatures is simply wonderful. My gratitude to you is as great as your enthusiasm for my achievements. My compositions will appear in volumes, carefully revised and improved whenever it is possible. Several volumes are out already with prefaces. The volume of six poems will be dedicated to you. Two of this set are not finished yet. The poor condition of my health and the consequent lack of energy prevents me from doing the work I would like to do, while the terrifying happenings all over the world paralyze my spirit. (1938).

By the same mail I am sending you several photographs of mine. To make up for the long delay! I hope that you and your entire family are in the best of health and spirit.

With a heart full of gratitude and love, I am proud to call myself your devoted friend.

(sgd). Leopold Godowsky.

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Leonard Saxe, nephew of Godowsky, wrote to me, August 16, 1939):-

"I shall do all that I can to see that the dedication for the Poems to you is placed upon further printings. I have already spoken to Mrs. Saperton and will take the matter up with the executor of the estate, (whom I represent) and the other two children, as well as with Walter Fischer."

And a little later, (October 31, 1939):-

"I have spoken to Fischers and told them that the Poems are to be inscribed as dedicated to you when they are reprinted."

THE ULTIMATE IN PIANOFORTE COMPOSITION

Every single note is independently spoken and coloured.

In a letter to Godowsky, 5th. January, 1934, I wrote:-

"I have been working assiduously on Poems 1, 2 and 3. They are so wonderful. I find your works must be studied from an unusual angle, that is, the pedaling and all the other subtle indications must be read as notes, I mean as of equal importance to the notes: the tenuto, the Sf., the emphases, the phrasing, the crescendos, etc., and again, the most mighty and all important pedaling by which you give successive chords and individual notes the benefit of the overtones and at the same time clear them for the next following note or chord so that there is warmth, as well as clarity. The general effect of the observation of all these indications is to give your works that brilliance, inner sparkle, glitter, diamond-clear highlights, half-tones, graded half-tones shadows, and deep shadows, still full of detail, owing to the clearing by transcendental pedaling.

But it takes profound study. It is no good learning your works note perfect and just trusting to one's instinctive pedaling and colouring, or learning note perfect and going through again afterwards to observe and learn the colouring and lighting. If this is done, one has a still greater task than the original learning of the notes. Each work must be studied in all its detail, inflection, pedaling, and lighting right from the first opening of the cover - that is the quickest and most economical way."

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FIRST POEM - Devotion

The first Poem, Devotion, may be learned in a few hours or days, but there is plenty trailing out and matching in, and it will take a year or so to master and mature. In Nov. 1934 I wrote to Rosa Widder of Cleveland, Ohio, that the Poems "are the most perfect music, the greatest scope for thought ever penned. Every note in every part requires considering, shading and colouring. After playing a lot of other composers, however beautiful, and returning to the Poems, one finds such a vast superiority in the thought, curvature of expression, the subtle climbing through the curtain almost to the unseen. That does not quite express what I mean. Take No. 1 Poem. It does not depend on rhythm though rhythm is there - it depends more on everything else. All other music than Godowsky's depends largely on rhythm. Take any Chopin work, you cannot get away from it. In the No. 1 Poem the curvature of the phrases suits the curvature of thought, feeling, the sweep of the notes seems to follow a complete line uninterrupted by the separation of notes, tones and half-tones, or even quarter-tones, the sound is as continuous as a drawn line, as one might think the idea. The same thing is so evident in Franzosisch (Walzermasken No.17) in which the piano can produce sinuous inflection of intonation possible previously only to the voice of the violin. Godowsky gets his thoughts to slide. Playing the first Poem after the finest works of Chopin, Schumann and all and sundry, one feels and immense superiority, advancement into an entirely higher sphere of musical thought, satisfying because so expressive.

On the 27th October 1941, I wrote to my "Most Valiant Knight of the Pen and Dear Friend Gray-Fisk":-

"One important point I want to make about Godowsky's works is the need for propagating his original compositions, because they are as poles asunder in relation to the various paraphrases, allowing of course the Bach recreations as original works. And the most important are the four Poems, the Passacaglia, the Java Suite, the Suite for the Left Hand Alone, the Capriccio (Patetico). In these, the Capriccio, ect., and particularly the fourth Poem, he touched heights, depths, and intensity of expression never attained by anyone who ever lived.

I am thrilled to hear that you play Avowal, there is so much in it, that you will keep on discovering as the years go by more and more that you can put into it; the phrases crossing each other so cunningly, the acute articulations of the tenutos, accents, the sudden little crescendos against the decrescendo of another voice; it's magnificent breathing, the phrases within a phrase, and crossing and interlocking and nuance within a nuance, the commas, and the singing undertone which you have got to stretch like the devil to hold. Only on its first occurrence does he arpeggio that chord of the 10th, the first chord for the right hand on the second line, on the next page second measure, and later no arpeggio, and the three notes of that long stretch have got to go down ever so softly, all together in one crystal clear sound after the effusion of the preceding measure. My hand is not very long and that's all I can stretch, and trying very intensely over a period of four or five years to whisper those three notes down with no suspicion of a break, developing a pain in the thumb muscle that has not quite gone yet. Two of my sons, Peter and Paul, have much larger hands than I, and can comfortably stretch more than a 10th. In fact they play with an almost motionless hand Whitecaps and Watteau Paysage - both from the Triakontameron containing long rolling arpeggios.

But the third Poem is technically a holy terror. The rushing successions of fourths, fifths, and thirds, of the left hand, all to be articulated in the clearest speech, are terrific, and on page 5, line three, second and third measure, there is a duck of a passage for the left hand, and though I have been playing the Poem for years it was only last week, when I gave myself a few hours on these two measures far into the night that I succeeded in systematising them and getting them so that I could do anything I like - fast, slow, heavy or light, and with or without the right hand part and the big held ground tone."

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And later (May 1944) from a letter to Gray-Fisk re. 2nd Poem:-

"No. 2, isn't it exquisite - that punctuation, the commas, the pauses, the breathing! It turns musical utterance into a succession of softly spoken meaningfulness - (what!). Such a priceless Etude in articulation, enunciation, and repeated avowal. Pianoforte performance too often is a colourless succession of tone, tone, tone, someone is playing the piano; what is he saying? Oh! he is just playing the piano. Like a stream of sound resembling a long sausage, same thickness all the way. For entertainment and relief you look at flying hands."

THIRD POEM - Adoration

31st May, 1944

Very dear Clinton Gray-Fisk,

Re. the third Poem. I beseech you not to be scared. Take it into practice

and give it five years' occasional, leisurely reflection. Don't push it, be content. First take the 3rd line, page 5. Learn the left hand part alone without the ground bass note. Learn the phrasing, work out the fingering; that given in the copy may not altogether suit you. To differ with the Master in this respect is not blasphemy, just commonsense, because no two hands are alike. I have pictures of his hands on the keyboard. They are very small, just stretch an octave, but his playing seem to stretch two octaves - incredible speed of the break by the combined use of the three movements comprising the universal socket, the vortary, the rotary, and the lateral - the same process is required to play the last two lines of Rachmaninoff Prelude 10, opus 23 - pardon the digression. To resume, get the left hand notes and fingering established: then practice them perhaps a minute every day, with the base note held by the pedal, with phrasing, fingering and piu a piu calmando.

After that, study the right hand part, which is easy and will fit on without trouble. I suggest this preliminary because it is the part which will stick you up when you have mastered all the rest of the Poem if you take it in rotation ordinarily. If you try to learn all the text of that line in the ordinary way, you will still be biting yourself when you stand before St. Peter.

The left hand passage, bottom line of the first page (numbered 2), the left hand lines 1, 2, 3 of the page numbered 3, need to be treated in the same way. But all practice softly, sotto voce, PPP no effort, all relaxed.

When you have them growing as you grow, all the rest will present little trouble.

The page numbered 7, 3rd line, the Cantilina. Exquisite and ravishing subject hidden among the decorations.

The accented notes present a beautiful mood, not a tine, a mood. The two hands play ball with the subject.

When I played it to Hugo Bauer who had been studying it for six months, he jumped up most excitedly and shouted, "Where is that, I did not see it!" That was because I played the subject mood clearly, all the rest of the notes disassociated as distant misty background. The travellers of course would play all the notes in the foreground; you cannot give the public incense, they only want that at Mass, those who are Catholic; the rest, for the most part, don't know what it is, and the artists won't educate them. Perhaps they don't know.....

But to do the 3rd Poem they have not to introduce a long work, they have only to learn to play a comparatively short work of mighty tone, softly polyphonically. You will notice that it is nearly all P or PPP the whole way through, but isn't it a "stinker"! Just very seldom does the tone rise for a mere measure, immediately dropping again to its PP, an ever so softly complaining volcano breathing a seething passion of earnest adoration.

What a Poem, just one little thought, the repeated rise and fall of a major 2nd, simply the in and out of breathing. (Forgive my colloquialism - I said once to Harold Bauer, "This Godowsky work is a snorter." He replied, "I thought you said it was a sonata".)

Continuing the matter of the 3rd line of page numbered 7 of the 3rd Poem, it continues over page Pianissimo in buried octaves. Note the first three notes, "a tempo", and immediately Meno Mosso. Beautiful subtlety!

Did you notice how Godowsky uses octaves with such effect, seldom free,

nearly always hidden, the same as in Hedge Rose; it has wonderful richness. Up to date most composers knew little of that, they use octave passages as octave passages from single notes to octaves, no intermediary stage. The Master's way is a chromaticism or do I mean Chromaticization? - of building tone, and instead of naked octaves, clothes them in royal raiment. That cannot be done by just turning over an octave into a chord.

The last page of the 3rd Poem is an immortal. Wagner never approached its aristocracy of thought, feeling, exaltation, a veritable ascension. It is the reward of Heaven while still on earth. But of course it has got to be played that way with full observance of every microscopic indication with which it abounds, and by an understanding soul to whom these notes and indications are not an unknown language.

A woman who had listened for some hours, a very good actress, a very intelligent woman, with considerable affectation of manner, said to me very earnestly, "Tell me, Mr Howard, what is the secret of such achievement?" I said, "Just sweat and guts." She said that did not sound very aesthetic, and I replied that there was nothing aesthetic in the means employed to attain the heights

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And I continued my "correspondence lesson" (as C.G-F. called it) on 7th August, 1944.

Dearest Gray-Fisk,

3rd Poem, 3rd line, page 5. How is it going?

The lower voice of the right hand and the lower voice of the left hand are playing a chromatic scale in 6ths downwards (first note 7th). Left fingers go 5454 all the way. Practise the lower voice of the left hand alone very much because you will never play the passage till you can listen to the left hand lower voice by itself when you are playing all the voices together.

You must also be able to listen to the lower voice of the left hand and the lower voice of the right hand together, and hear that downward scale of the 6th, not listening to the other voices which will take care of themselves by the time you can do that.

FOURTH POEM - YEARNING

"Who can fathom the indefinable tearful longings of a passionate soul?"

Godowsky's Preface

From a Letter to Leonard Lieblich.

"I have at last succeeded in learning the 4th Poem, Yearning. Took a little time daily for years, and I thought I would never get it. Most elusive. Doesn't look anything, just four pages, but elusive. I got it only tonight. There it was, just as though I had Always been able to play it.

In this Poem dear Popsy has solved the great problem, he has achieved a complete vehicle in notes for the expression of the most subtle thought. Direct. Actual. As though there were no barriers between the most vital thought and its pure and perfect expression in tone. Every note, and there are so few of them, so indispensable, and all-important. You cannot see that the ink, paper, fingers, mass of wood, ivory and string, are as though

ation unscathed and untarnished; his sublime cunning has devised a collection of notes lending themselves to nuance and colouring to the nth. degree, possible previously only to the Violin or singing voice.

But this work sings in all voices at once, or can be made to by the player, as though by one voice. It makes the piano more than a keyed instrument. He hinted at that sort of thing years ago in Franzosisch of the Walzermasken."

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To another I wrote:-

"While the 3rd Poem is a great work and terribly difficult - it took me some attention every day for nearly four years, that is, to know it from the inside - the 4th, only four pages, appearing to be lightly sketched, has proved more terrible, and I have only just mastered it. In this great work he has conquered barriers of ink, paper, wood and steel, and sent a great inspiration from the heart to hang in the air unspoiled, unconfined, by its vehicles.

It carries everything one thought could only be felt, the heartache, protest, revolt, determination, aspiration, flight, all pure expression unburdened by one singly unnecessary note that does not help.....doesn't seem to be made of notes but only waves of sound. I don't mean anyone will realise this on reading it, nor even after working at it for six months, Realisation comes later."

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And to Gray-Fisk on 20th March, 1942:-

The fourth Poem is 4 pages and looks lightly sketched. So deep is the dimension, so complete the independence of every note, which nevertheless welds into the whole, that it will take about 4 years to play it with all its content. If you leave it alone for 3 months you will have to learn it all over again. The trouble is its content. The third Poem is difficult enough, but hard work masters it. The fourth eludes you. Too, it must be dreamed out. The held tone may have the several notes of another Voice diminishing note by note, each one matching in tone the waning value of the held note above it, right to the last note forming a chord, but which is just a breath; and so measure after measure and phrase after phrase. It takes a long time even to find out how great it is.

No, it is not propagandistic hyperbole, I mean every word of it.

The music must not come out in masses of tone, all voices rising or falling together in bulk of sound as in Schumann or Brahms.

An accent applies only to the particular note it is on; a crescendo or decrescendo sign only the voice it is on - only to all voices when in dead centre and obvious.

The pedaling must be exact and most delicate; pedaling in which the dampers never actually leave the string. No, this is not finniky at all, and as the pages progress and other voices are added, the difficulties square and multiply.

The notes learned and played without the microscopic colouring or with only perfunctory attention thereto, will sound little better than other composers.

repetitions, alone, and with a listener, to be sure of those notes, and then constant restudy from copy for colouring to be sure of detail.

then to so deeply habituate the whole performance and think it out, till you discover what it means, the idea, and to be able just to dream out of those sighs and protests, as a deeply felt human expression, takes a lot of doing and time. Too, it is punctiliously fingered.

The first Poem is easy, a few days or weeks of work, but plenty trailing out and matching in.

The second Poem ditto, but a little more difficult, priceless example of phrasing and breathing.

The third Poem, real hard work and hard study and strenuous work to play, but mostly clear and lucid whispering with punctilious utterance of every note and double note, the voices speaking independently. But it can be done.

The fourth Poem rises miles beyond them all in subtlety and elusiveness. This one isn't concert room stuff, it's the Holy of Holies."

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To Leo Pavia in June, 1940.

"The first Poem Devotion may be learned in a few hours, mastered and matured in a year or so.

Number two, Avowal, is the most concentrated and intense speech and pointed significant utterance - the Polish "sal" is in this Poem in the Melanconica section.

The third Poem, Adoration, will take Horowitz, Petri, or anyone else, about three years hard study. It is an epoch.

In the fourth Poem, Yearning, he has achieved the impossible. It hangs in the air, a tearful, ravishing, polyphonic picture, which in its soft and mercurial curvature can only have been shaped from molten substances, and has left behind it every trace of ink, paper, wood, steel and ivory; it was not born of them. Only four pages, apparently lightly sketched. View it on a Monday and say, "Oh yes, I will play it without copy at next Saturday night's recital." But if in four years of daily battlement you can do as you will and as you should with that Poem, you will sure be no mut!

All these later works mean transcendental pedaling, as indeed does any Godowsky work, but these more so.

I place Godowsky as the greatest composer for the piano in all history, and Dr. Ackley Bower says that I have completely understated the case for Godowsky.

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Much of the above is a bit thick unless read with copy of the work in hand for reference.

I hope, dear Member, that it may prove helpful, sometime, somehow.

PAUL HOWARD

Banowetz, Joseph (with contributions by Dean Elder, Mark Hansen, Maurice Hinson and William S. Newman) : THE PIANIST'S GUIDE TO PEDALING. Indiana University Press / Bloomington, 1985. x + 309 pp. 498 music examples (including some diagrammes and facsimiles).

Mark Hambourg in his vastly entertaining autobiography From Piano to Forte / A Thousand and One Notes (Cassel, London, 1931) recalls a 2-piano recital in which he participated in Australia in 1895 :

'... it was rather dark on the stage, so the other instrument was difficult to see. I ceased playing, and the second piano took up the orchestral part. At which the following remark was overheard by a friend of mine in the audience, "What a wonderful pianist ! He takes his hands off the piano, and it still goes on playing." To which the reply was, "Oh yes, but you see his feet are playing, he's such a wonder on the pedals !" '

The stupefaction of the backwoodsman might well be shared, I'd guess, by the average piano teacher who reads Banowetz's book : such is the dazzling array of pedal effects it presents.

As the lately-lamented Sidney Harrison wrote in his review of Banowitz in the EPTA PIANO JOURNAL (vol. 7, no. 19, February 1986): 'This is a book for top teachers, university professors and budding virtuosi. Many of our members will say to themselves, "How can I teach some of this in relation to a child doing Grade 5 ?" Harrison, who had a Graingeresque way of solving pedagogic problems by breezy, drastic solutions, also wrote :

'A few years ago, after a festival class, I decided I must do something about pedaling. Facing the youngsters who were seated in the front row, I put the piano stool near the edge of the platform and said, "Watch me. I'm going to hit my knee and, at that very instant, my right toes will rise. Let me do it once, and then we'll do it together." This being accomplished, I said, "Now the next thing is that when I hit my knee again my toes will rise and then go down and will stay down until I hit my knee again." Five minutes later, several of the children were able to play a succession of chords with syncopated pedaling. This is not a very difficult trick and it is basic.'

Banowetz ascribes the first published description of that procedure to Louis Kohler in 1862.

In an interview in MUSICAL LIFE & ARTS (vol.1, no.3, Oct. 15 1924, Winnipeg, Canada) Moriz Rosenthal declared : 'Anton Rubinstein originated the "syncopated pedal" ... Even Liszt achieved his triumphs in spite of a bad use of the pedal.' (This quote does not appear in Banowitz.) Now that statement of Rosenthal is a whopping one, but I do not doubt its veracity, as he was a Liszt-pupil and knew Rubinstein personally. (As for so much, I have to thank my spendthrift-hearted pen-pal Percy Grainger for sending me this article years ago.)

'The pedal is the soul of the piano.' This is the superscription on the title-page of the Guide to the proper use of the Pianoforte Pedals/ with examples out of the Historical Concerts of Anton Rubinstein / translated from the German by John A. Preston (Bosworth, London, 1897). Yet the only Rubinstein mentioned in the Banowitz book is Beryl of that ilk (a delightful, unrelated, minor figure in relation to the Promethean Anton). Oh, Artur is mentioned too, as one might expect (his name is spelt with an 'e' - Ruben, not Rubin). The great Anton's word was 'soul', not 'sole', though the 'flat-foot-floogy' pedaling of some pedestrian, prosaic pianists may make one wonder ! The soulless will naturally be unaware of what 'the soul' of the piano can possibly be - just as they will exclaim, 'Come off it !' if they read Busoni's description of the pedal as 'a photograph of the sky' (in his A New Aesthetic of Music, translated by Dr. Th. Baker, Schirmer, NY 1911). A photograph : yes, for a photo has focus - passages relatively in or out of focus ; and that is exactly what the pedal does - its precise employment defines sound into aural focus and its sustained employment blurs sound out of aural focus. And the 'soft' pedal veils sound, as such a master photographer as Edward Steichen at the beginning of this century veiled his print by smearing his camera lense with vaseline and printing on matt surface instead of on glossy finish.

Banowitz and his collaborators have achieved a vast tale of research. One incidentally gleans a history of piano construction. Adam Beyer refined on the damper action of knee-levers by introducing a cleft pedal in London in 1777. This was further developed by the Scots-born John Broadwood in London in his patented pedal of 1783. Johann Stein followed suit in Augsburg in 1789. Mozart played Stein fortepianos, but Mozart died in 1791 : most of the pianos he played would have knee-levers. No wonder Beethoven found Mozart's playing 'choppy'.

Clementi was truly 'the Father of the Piano' because he was a piano manufacturer as well as a great composer/pianist. He anticipated Beethoven's blurred pedal effects (the sonic equivalents of the painter's sfondo sfumato or 'fumed background', as in the Mona Lisa). William Newman has much to teach in his chapter 'Beethoven's Use of the Pedals'.

Maurice Hinson contributes a perceptive chapter on Chopin pedaling ; Banowitz on Schumann and Liszt ; Mark Hansen on the Catalan school of pedaling (in which de Larrocha is quoted as saying that the style is 'intuitive') ; and Dean Elder, a Giesecking pupil, is full of ideas in his exegesis of his master's pedaling in Debussy and Ravel. This treatment of special cases - each composer, each style demanding an unique pedaling - is the book's great virtue and avoids obscure generalisations.

If any one person has read (and digested) all the sources listed in the exhaustive bibliography, he would be an authority indeed !

Unfortunately Godowsky doesn't get a mention. Disappointing. Yet even the biggest Godowsky-buff must admit that his pedaling indications aren't as revelatory as other aspects (textures, fingering) of his transcriptions and original works.

Banowitz does have a section (pp.130-135) on 'The Pedal in Transcriptions'. He talks great good sense there :

'... with a growing sensitivity to authentic performance practices of earlier music, as well as a renewed interest in historical instruments, both performers and musicologists rejected the transcription as justifiable art form. In their rush to reject the interpretative freedom and, at times, admitted licence of the nineteenth-century Romantic performer, their harsh attitude often degenerated into snobbery. But now much of this extreme rejection seems to have passed. Such major artists as Fischer, Gilels, Hess,

Rubenstein and Sándor have recorded transcriptions of Bach's music.'

Bravo, Banowitz ! And bravo again for this opinion of Busoni :

'... a pianist of genius whose ideas on pedaling are startlingly original for his time and in some respects have not been surpassed.'

He's also good on Grainger, 'whose ideas on pedaling still prove to be extremely advanced.'

The section on the middle pedal, which draws heavily on Busoni (with full credit given) is excellent.

Not enough attention is paid in the book to interdependence between pedaling and touch. More pedal may be used in direct proportion to the incisiveness of the touch.

And something might have been said about concerto pedaling. I mean, the symbiosis between orchestral and piano sonorities. Cortot, in his notes on Chopin's F minor Concerto, demonstrates how he clamped the right pedal down before the soloist's first entry, so that the piano's sonority could be reinforced by the preceding identical harmony on the string section. The same goes for the opening of some concerto cadenzas : those that begin on the harmony of the orchestra's final chord before the cadenza.

Joseph Banowitz is Piano Professor at North Texas State University and teaches intermittently in Hong Kong. I hope to meet him on his (or my) globe-trotting. If I do, I guess he and I will watch each other's feet at the piano, more than our hands! He is to be congratulated full-heartedly for bringing a unique book into the still too limited literature on the piano's most neglected aspect.

If I ever have the good fortune to hear him play, I think my response may well be as incredulous as Mark Hambourg's backwoodsman !

Ronald Stevenson. March 1986.

上海音乐学院

SHANGHAI CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

Harry Winstanley, Esq.,
Godowsky Society, U.K.

Dear Harry!

Greetings from Godowsky's
old stomping ground! Didn't he
transcribe one of the Bach Cello Suites
here in this populous city (now 12 1/2 m.)?
They tell me here that
he would stay at the old International
(now the Park) Hotel. I've been there.
The band still plays Chattanooga Choo-choo
and Hold that Tiger.

This Conservatory was China's
first institute of higher education in music,
founded in 1927. In 1929 the Russian
émigré Zakharoff became head of the
Piano Department. His present head
Madame Wu Li-ye, and a number
of the former piano students of the
Thirties vintage, told me with pride
that, as Zakharoff had been a
student of Leschetizky and Godowsky,
they were grand-children of that
illustrious lineage. The Library
holds many Godowsky gramophone
records.

Alexander Tcherepain
also taught composition and piano
here in '34-5. He had been an
Isidor Philipp student.
I send photos of Z.
and T. for the Godowsky Newsletter.
Cheers!

Ronald S.

October 1985