

contrary, has said all of his well considered and appreciative say, have I any further clue as to what is the real inwardness of this author of strange, enigmatic, exasperating compositions? Says Herr Stefan, for example, "The magic of the song *Herzgewaechse*, poem by Maeterlinck, lies in the wonderfully delicate atmosphere, in the extraordinarily difficult leading of the soprano, which, rising steadily, reaches the high F (Queen of the Night!), and in the disposition of the accompaniment: celesta, harmonium, and piano." Now, that is all very well if you look at the thing that way, but I remember that when I heard it I didn't, and here Herr Stefan in the matter-of-courseness of his own faith, gives me no reason why I should.

In the section entitled *Bedeutung* I read: "Schoenberg is an ecstatic and a believer—but not from extravagance, from joy in the extreme, by no means yielding to temptation; but because, obedient to a duty, he must seek what might bring more of sorrow than of happiness. He destroys in an instant a slice of his own self, while, obeying the call of a problem, a problem that only he can solve, he seeks and forms the new." From a passage of this sort I get nothing which starts the scales in descent from my ears. I gather that Herr Stefan, expounder and panegyrist, has much to say of interest for those who already have passed the barriers that separate the later Schoenberg from the music of an earlier day and so at least have some basis of comprehension to work on. But to the lesser breeds without the law of the cryptic Viennese musician, the book tells nothing positively helpful. In time the scales may yet fall and I may hear Schoenberg steadily and hear him whole. But whether I then find myself accepting or rejecting, it will be small thanks to this little book. Not here is Paul Stefan the missionary who turns the unconverted heathen toward the burning faith which is Arnold Schoenberg.

By Pitts Sanborn

PLACING THE CRITICS

AN amusing thing where professional criticism of music is undertaken is the readers' estimate of the critic. The only thing more amusing, if the truth could be known, would be the

critics' estimate of themselves. All these estimates would be wrong. Neither the critic nor his critics can accurately place him. The critics of course could be assorted roughly in groups—those of the conservative, liberal or radical persuasions. They could be further separated into two classes,—those who work sincerely and those who love to hear their own voices and impress gullible readers.

There they are, critics and criticasters, serving some unknown purpose of the Almighty. In the meantime, the earth revolves on its axis; a few, a very few compositions survive the years, to prove or disprove the contentions of the critics, which in the main have been forgotten.

It is, therefore, evident that so far as critical fortunes of the moment are concerned it is easiest and often most entertaining to write about new music. In this field the apostle of the *dernier cri* is as secure as the most learned and laborious commentator. Guessing is free for all, and there is no criterion by which anyone can be confounded. There is also the good old gag about the genius ahead of his time, misunderstood by the carping Beckmessers of the period. That this is largely fallacy, that the greatest composers, in spite of contemporary opposition, have seldom failed to secure emphatic recognition before they died, is not recognized by the public or by those musicians to whom the legend of persecuted genius has been as balm of Gilead. But it is a good war-cry, and often it rallies public sympathy.

In this field, as in no other, is it held that "one man's opinion is as good as another's." The phrase is misleading, like the phrase about all men being created free and equal. All men have not, intellectually speaking, an equal right to their opinions, and one man's opinion rarely has the same value as another's.

Which brings us back to the preliminary contention. Not only are opinions very different in value, but that value cannot be determined, except on the very broad lines indicated, at the time that they are given. This man, for instance, is labelled by his contemporaries a "radical;" that one is "conservative" and "reactionary." In the light of later progress these positions would certainly be altered; they might even be reversed. Nor do the words "conservative" and "reactionary" have the same meaning. The con-

servative is an indispensable element of artistic progress. The reactionary is not. He is the man who looks backward and will tolerate no departure from the past. The conservative, in the true sense of the word, is aware that the past and the present contain the future, and that the future can neither be understood nor estimated apart from the past. To conserve fundamental principles and develop them is not only necessary, it is inevitable.

In this sense all great art has been fundamentally conservative. The fact that there have been fools who could see no fresh horizons in *Tristan* or *Pelleas* is no warrant for artistic parvenus, ignorant of the glory of Palestrina or the grandeur of the *Eroica*, proclaiming to the world the immortality of a Scriabine or Schoenberg.

These things should be self-evident, but apparently they are not. What should be the attitude and methods of a critic in the discussion of new music, or old music for that matter? There is one short answer. They must be his own. Nothing else is of any use. Nothing less than his own reactions, expressed as plainly as may be, mean anything to anyone. The rest must be left to the public and to posterity. But woe to the man who writes with regard to either of these. If he does, he has failed before he has begun.

The task of the professional commentator is obviously to prepare himself as completely as he can for the hearing of the new music, and then to put himself on record. If he is one of the very rare men of genius who find their expression in writing about an art, then his estimates may be read by succeeding generations because, like any other work of art, they have in them material of more than contemporary value. But this very seldom happens. What the critic who is honest in his work may expect, is to form one of the minute particles of which a period is made, and to find himself in his artistic experiences. Whether he is right or wrong he will never know nor does it matter. But if in criticism he does not discover vistas of beauty he had better drop his work and take a spade or dentist's forceps in hand for a living.

By Olin Downes

