

THE PROFESSOR LOOKS AT MUSIC

THE MacDowell Professor of Music at Columbia University, Daniel Gregory Mason, contributes a new volume entitled *Tune In, America*,* which he subtitles *A Study of Our Coming Musical Independence*. Since it emanates from this apparently dignified source, we open the book expecting here, at last, to receive an authoritative and constructive view of our contemporary American scene as far as American music is concerned. All we get is a rehash of what has always been known, accompanied by a mass of personal bias, ignorance, bigotry, untruth and Main Street.

After an introduction which promises well, we are confronted by a chapter on "The Background" which covers fairly completely our varied musical resources. We meet shortly some of the Professor's bugaboos. Apropos of the operatic situation: he finds that opera does not thrive here as it "has always been an exotic" and "seems likely to remain so. Perhaps that will be no great misfortune, since of all forms of music, opera is the most adulterated with non-musical elements, and the least satisfactory." A rather curious statement from a musician. Let the learned Professor show us wherein an *Orfeo*, *Meistersinger*, *Nozze di Figaro* or *Carmen* is inferior to an *Eroica*, *Unfinished* or *Pathétique* either in musical substance or form.

Elsewhere in this chapter he informs us that "In Germany, most musical of all nations, Schönberg and Hindemith are a poor substitute for Schubert and Schumann." We cannot understand why he should "substitute" the former two for the latter any more than you might "substitute" Schubert and Schumann for Beethoven and Mozart, or Wagner and Strauss for any other two. After all, musical evolution has brought us to the age of a Schönberg, Hindemith, Stravinsky and Prokofieff not for "substitution" purposes but as part and parcel of musical history.

In the following chapter, "American Music," we find our Professor not always correct in his figures or rather his figures not thoroughly reliable or complete. From this writer's own

* *Tune in America*. By Daniel Gregory Mason. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931.

knowledge for example, in regard to Figure II on pages 20-21, he can point out that Whithorne's *New York Days and Nights* received its American premiere in 1926 with the Philadelphia Orchestra. This same body also played Gershwin's *American in Paris* in 1930. There is no indication of this by our author.

Discussing the scarcity of American composers on the lists of works produced by the Philadelphia and the New York Philharmonic Orchestras, our Professor takes the opportunity to criticize rather bitterly the points of view of their two conductors, Stokowski and Toscanini. Here it is obvious the Professor has not the slightest idea of the situation and because of his complete ignorance his attack is unwarranted and unjustifiable.

Concerning Stokowski, whose "interest in eccentricity is open and unabashed," who has a "tendency to sensationalism in the policy of the Philadelphia Orchestra, coupled often with indifference to solid but un-lurid works," etc., it behooves us to inform our Professor that no conductor, either here or in Europe, is more keenly interested in what contemporary musicians are producing. Besides works programmed, Stokowski goes through hundreds of scores each season, scores European and American, before he finally chooses what he finds best among them. Furthermore, wherever possible, composers are invited to these rehearsals whether their works are finally programmed or not, so that they may benefit by hearing them played by a first class orchestra. As to the works chosen, it seems very childish on the part of the Professor to attack Stokowski for the titles of these compositions. We might call the attention of the Professor to the fact that the composers use their own titles, and, if they choose, as is evident from the list quoted on page 30, to write music of a descriptive or exotic nature, why blame Stokowski?

Concerning Toscanini, our Professor again has failed to understand this maestro's attitude. Had he realized that Toscanini plays very little of our contemporary Americans because he plays very little of all contemporary music, he might have found the true reason. As a matter of fact Toscanini, who worships in music only the beautiful, finds too little of this in contemporary works and hence his programs, in the main, are chosen from the classics and romantics. Regarding those Italian composers whose

cause he espouses, it should be borne in mind that they are contemporary not in their music but in the fact that they live today. We have not as yet heard Toscanini conduct Malipiero or Casella, both of whom are musically far more of our day than Respighi, Pizzetti, Tommasini and company. Our Professor further accuses Toscanini of playing the works of his friends. We fail to see the wrong in this or whereby Toscanini differs from other conductors, past or present. After all, if these works are poor, *tant pis* for Toscanini's judgment. Damning conductors who play their friends, it is strangely inconsistent of our Professor to praise the policy of the New York Philharmonic in engaging Bruno Walter (an excellent conductor, we admit) when he knows Bruno Walter had already conducted the Professor's *First Symphony* during a past visit to America and evidently had promised (a promise since fulfilled) to conduct the *Second Symphony* during his present sojourn. Has not Toscanini the same rights to friendship as our Professor? Knowing Toscanini, it gives us great pleasure to assure the Professor that he is actually, and has been for some time in the past, examining quite a few works by our leading American composers. As for the "operatic Rossini and the academic Cherubini" who find themselves on New York Philharmonic programs, let us submit, as our own view, the suggestion that both these composers have enough genius to warrant their re-appearance from time to time.

In the earlier "Background" chapter our Professor informs us that modern music has lost, among other values, its emotional quality. Later on ("And a moral") he presents us with a conception of Anglo-Saxon character which, were it true, would be sufficient to damn all Anglo-Saxon art. His idea that the essential Anglo-Saxon traits are repression of emotion, reserve, restraint, moderation, sobriety, reticence, plus sense of proportion and dislike of ostentation, is sheer nonsense when they are considered as the actual environment of creative genius. To mention offhand three specific examples of American genius, how do these so-called characteristics explain Poe, Whitman or Whistler?

As we progress in our reading of this book we are confronted by so many statements showing a lack of knowledge of facts, by so many errors of judgment and false conclusions, that it might

be more to the purpose to write a similarly sized volume which would serve as a criticism and complete rebuttal of all the faults of the present work. With the limited space at our disposal, we must conclude this writing by calling attention to our Professor's climactic folly, perpetrated on page 160, wherein we are warned of the "insidiousness of the Jewish menace to our artistic integrity." The allegation herein contained is a falsehood, pure and simple. As our Professor has no facts to prove so serious a contention, we need not give this matter further consideration. In view of his conviction does it not seem strange to our Professor that both the publisher of his book and the New York interpreter of his symphonies are Jews?

Considering the general mediocrity of the Professor's mental processes we strongly urge him to ponder Shakespeare's lines:

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."

Alexander Smallens

MEDITERRANEAN STRAVINSKY—A NEW MYTH

THIS writer has never participated in the general overrating of Stravinsky's creative pitch and diapason, but has always maintained that he is a great artisan rather than a great artist; a keen and brilliant laboratory pathfinder, aware of the market value of any newness, rather than a possessed builder lashed by the divine insanity of genius.

Nonetheless, I wish to call attention to a new and ardent book* on Stravinsky by the gifted, young Domenico de Paoli of Milan, whose writings and progressive zeal place him in the forefront of the young Italian musicians.

De Paoli sees Stravinsky's creative kernel as a peculiar will-tension that has resisted his racial predilections and has gradually brought him into the cosmopolitan fold where his spiritual affiliations naturally lie. De Paoli very subtly juxtaposes this will-tension of Stravinsky to Reger's stubbornness, to Strauss' megalomania to the "agressive drive of Wagner permeated by theatricalism."

**Igor Stravinski*. By Domenico de Paoli. Milan: 1931