

The Book of the Piano

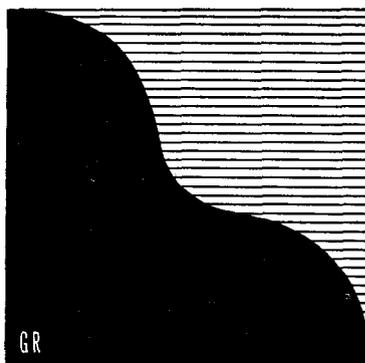
NOTES ON THE LITERATURE OF THE PIANO. By Albert Lockwood. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 235 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLARD RHODES

THE publication of a posthumous work is not always a kindness to an author. This book, several times rewritten by Mr. Lockwood and left in an incomplete state at the time of his death in 1933, has been presented to the public without the addition of new material to bring it up to date. In a charmingly written introduction the author disclaims any attempt at encyclopedic coverage of the piano literature and states, "If this book will guide taste and stimulate the spirit of adventure, the inclination to browse in strange pastures, and the esthetic curiosity indispensable to artistic growth, it will achieve its aim." Addressed to students and teachers "guilty of a certain mental indolence and consequent lack of scholarship in the matter of becoming acquainted with the piano literature" it occupies itself with a field that has long been eschewed by serious writers on music.

In a few nostalgic paragraphs Mr. Lockwood pays his respects to Tekla Bardarczewska, composer of "The Maiden's Prayer," Mr. DeKontski, sire of Op. 115, "The Awakening of the Lion," and other journalistic purveyors of *Weltschmerz* and emotional purgatives in an age of naivete before proceeding to a more serious consideration of the great Titans and the host of secondary figures who have created such a voluminous literature for the piano. Even a cursory perusal of the body of this book should suffice to inspire the student to a happy exploration of music that has been outside his experience. The list of compositions of such forgotten men as Dussek, Hummel, and Clementi, and the little essays which summarize their work make pleasant reading.

One hesitates to accept Mr. Lockwood's guidance as a mentor of taste. After reading that Scriabin's later compositions as a group "may be compared with the Well Tempered Clavichord and with the sonatas of Beethoven or the works of Chopin, for it represents another peak in the literature" one shudders at the thought of the mentally indolent student and teacher rushing to the music store to procure in quantity the works of this fevered Russian, long defunct. In evaluating the piano music of Haydn the author writes, "The only work of Haydn the pianist need study is the Variations in F minor, which is certainly his most important work; it is effective in recital," thereby displaying not only an



appalling insensitiveness to the delicacy and charm of this Viennese master, but a norm of value (effective in recital) which has been operated too long in determining the teaching repertoire of the piano studio.

In the domain of American music Mr. Lockwood frankly begs the question by giving "a list of what seems important, omitting comment." Of the major contemporary composers, Bartok, Prokofiev, and Ravel are the only ones who have rated discussion, this despite the fact that Cyril Scott, Ireland, Bax, Bridge, and Goossens have been treated at length. Perhaps Hindemith, Stravinsky, Schonberg, Shosta-

kovitch, Sibelius, and others might have been included had the author lived to revise his own manuscript. The use of the term "atonal" to "designate a style of writing in which the harmony is difficult to define," the discussion of the Clavecinists, the essay on Debussy, sympathetic, though it is, lead one to question not only the author's taste but his scholarship.

"Notes on the Literature of the Piano" will undoubtedly give much pleasure to Mr. Lockwood's many friends and former piano students but its value and usefulness as a guide is questionable. The format and printing of the book is a delight to the reader and the University of Michigan Press is to be congratulated for the making of a fine book while being taken to task for the advertising ethics which allow the author's modest and accurate title to be inflated on the jacket to a "comprehensive guide to the rich realm of compositions for the piano."

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The Men on the Podium

DICTATORS OF THE BATON. By David Ewen. New York: Alliance Book Corporation. 1943. 305 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by CHALMERS CLIFTON

MR. DAVID EWEN is already well known as an informed and urbane writer on a variety of musical subjects. He has a smooth clear style, free from snobbery and egotism, examining his temperamental subjects with tolerance and friendliness and when his enthusiasm is kindled, as in two notable instances in his more or less intimate portraits of virtuosi of the baton, his writing has engaging warmth and persuasiveness.

"Dictators of the Baton" is shrewdly planned, neither as a work of pure scholarship, although the scholar will note between its covers much invaluable information, painstakingly gathered, nor as a superficial, popular book of reference of which there are a distressing number, full of trivial judgments and inaccuracies. He is writing for an intelligent public, none of whom will find it difficult to read this book which for the professional and amateur musician is of absorbing interest and timeliness.

There is a short introductory chapter in which the position of the conductor of the present day is analyzed, a position which commands the greatest influence, municipally, regionally, and nationally. Mr. Ewen does not seriously question whether this influence is invariably in the public interest. He does, however, recall some of the hys-

terical exhibitionisms of the twenties, when one super-maestro after another arrived on these shores, each determined, apparently, to outdo the other in loudness or softness, fastness or slowness, a veritable orgy of competitive vulgarity, encouraged by a public greedy for this sort of tonal bread and circuses. Mr. Ewen might have recalled the instance in Carnegie Hall, in the closing chorale of the Overture to *Tannhäuser*, when five trombones, on the last and highest platform on the stage, rose from their seats with clock-like precision, pointed the bells of their instruments pugnaciously in the direction of the gallery, and subjected the delighted audience to a pitiless and nerve-shattering blast.

We have progressed, although I doubt that we are quite so near the millenium as Mr. Ewen would lead us to believe. The late Richard Aldrich, commenting on salaries of fifty, seventy-five, and even one hundred thousand dollars for conductors, used to deprecate, not so much the salary, as the desperate effort of the conductor in question to earn it. Mr. Ewen discusses conducting from memory and with score, with a reasonable and judicial estimate of the pros and cons. I am grateful that he reminds his readers in passing, of a very great conductor, Dr. Karl Muck, who, whatever his failings as an individual, approached his calling with the dignity, integrity, and impressive scholarship which the "Conductors for Tomorrow" of whom there are many more than the three, for whom Mr. Ewen has found a place, might well take as a model.

There is a great deal of pertinent information in this introductory chapter, which is a curtain raiser for "Paragon" who, as you may have guessed, is none other than the fabulous and legendary Mr. Toscanini. In this chapter, Mr. Ewen is at his best. He has an unqualified admiration for the great Italian and writes with tolerant affection of his outbursts of temperament, his moods of frustration which some more literal minded individuals might qualify as plain bad temper. It seems to this reviewer that Mr. Toscanini's excellencies are founded on no mysteries whatsoever. With a secure reputation as a conductor of opera, he arrived in the United States to take up his duties in a city which was surfeited with a long procession of rival guest-conductors who had subjected the arch familiar classics and the few contemporary composers, to whom they may have made a disdainful gesture, to a thorough manhandling. Into this confusion, Mr. Toscanini brought a prodigious memory, a respect for the composers' intentions, expressed or under-

stood, a sensitive ear, and an endless capacity for work. I leave the reader to Mr. Ewen for a kindling description of the more ecstatic and indefinable elements of Mr. Toscanini's art. After "Paragon" Mr. Ewen discourses upon Stokowski, Koussevitzky, Mitropoulos, and Iturbi. The picturesque and volatile Sir Thomas Beecham, whose many brilliant qualities are reviewed under another heading, might well have been included in this category. Mr. Ewen evidently feels for the profession of conducting and its many practitioners, such an abiding affection that he is able to make use of the caption "The Showman Conductor" with cool objectivity and no apparent distaste. His admiration for Mr. Koussevitzky, the conductor of the incomparable Boston Symphony, whom he examines under this heading, is only second to that for Mr. Toscanini. In the case of the mercurial Mr. Stokowski, Mr. Ewen's generous enthusiasms are decidedly qualified. The reservoir of even Mr. Ewen's enthusiasm is exhaustible. However, Mr. Ewen assembles his criteria in an effort to separate what is capricious and ephemeral from what is stimulating and valuable in this supremely talented musician.

After "The Showman Conductor" Mr. Ewen proceeds to evaluate some of the lesser luminaries in his constellation, whose light may not shine so brilliantly, but may prove at least as enduring. It is a little hard on the genial and musical Walter Damrosch to make his sole virtue the "selling" of music to the American public. To this reviewer music is still an art, not a commodity. Surely Mr. Damrosch's ripe and well-nourished musicianship has other virtues. However, in his evaluations of those of the thirty conductors considered who do not occupy so much of the front stage are to be found Mr. Ewen's best critical judgment. The hero-worshiping public which listens only too often with the eye, rather than the ear, and finds that it must lift its musical demigods to dizzy heights, in order to enjoy its concerts or even broadcasts, will read the chapters on Toscanini, Koussevitzky, Stokowski, Mitropoulos, and Beecham with the most avid interest. A more reserved intelligentsia will find more solid meat in the chapters on Reiner, Walter, Iturbi, and Busch. Mr. Ewen pauses at the end, to give a well deserved pat to Izler Solomon, Sylvan Levin, (who has done yeoman work with the Philadelphia Opera Company), and Dean Dixon.

Mr. Ewen has written a valuable and readable book. The layman reader will find it easy going, since whenever the subject matter becomes technical, it is sweetened with anecdotes, and in the case of Sir Thomas Beecham, a few amusing flashes of wit.

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