

BERLIN, February 22, 1920.—One well remembers the days when Richard Strauss was considered modern—nay, “cacophonous.” Who would have thought, then, that he would figure in a musical report of February, 1920, as the antithesis to modernity, as understood in the said year of our Lord? That, indeed, is the intention of the present scribe, who has heard a week of music and music and—Schönberg. Three concerts stand out in one's memory of that week, concerts that illustrate with astonishing force the accelerando of musical progress (admitting for the moment that there is such a thing as “progress” in art).

On Monday one heard Beethoven and Spohr, under Nikisch at the Philharmonie—perfect Beethoven and perfect Spohr; on Saturday one listened to Strauss conducting his latest concert work, and one of his earliest, at the Singakademie; and on Sunday—today—Schönberg was led out for review before a very numerous assemblage at the Volksbühne, the great people's theater in Berlin east end.

To expatiate upon the distance that separates Beethoven and Strauss would be a bore; a century lies between them, that's all. But what of the distance between Strauss and Schönberg? Not one century but five might lie between them—and these men are contemporaries, born within ten years of each other! How is the phenomenon to be explained? That there is such a thing as progress in art is open to question, certainly. Change there is, even development. The change from Beethoven to Strauss is development, but the difference between Strauss and Schönberg cannot be explained by “development;” it is a departure, a change of basis, of premises—what you will. Not music—art alone is subject to change, but “change” itself as well, both in tempo and essence.

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY.

This, dear reader, is not a lecture or a homily; I shall stick to my last and report on the music of the week. But today is Sunday, and Washington's birthday to boot. If one works on such a day as this there is good reason for it, and it is precisely that reason which gives me license for a personal expression, an avowal. It is not long, only this: I have come to the conclusion that the work of three hundred years is about to be finished, that the vein struck in A. D. 1600 is dry. Workmen have sunk new shafts, and the first of their ore is up. One of these workmen is Arnold Schönberg—ipsi dixit, I have said it.

Now the circumstance that has occasioned this outburst was this morning's performance of Schönberg's “Kammersymphonie” by fifteen members of the Berlin Philharmonic under Heinrich Scherchen. (Sunday concerts in Berlin start at church time.) The Chamber Symphony is not a recent work; it belongs to Schönberg's “transition period” and is fifteen years old, or more. Nevertheless, its performance in Berlin at this time is an event—an event that would not take place at all except for the activities of the revolutionary left wing in music, led by Hermann Scherchen and his New Music Society. Such men as he and Meyrowitz alone will save Berlin from musical petrification.

SCHERCHEN DISCOVERS SCHÖNBERG.

Scherchen is a valiant and determined pioneer. Convinced that Schönberg is the prophet of the new gospel—not merely a new voice rising out of the perennial conflict between the traditional and the new—he boldly asks his audience to forget what they know and listen with new ears. He told them this today in a terse half hour speech that carried conviction in every phrase. Before and after the speech he conducted the symphony. The great auditorium was very nearly filled, and every mother's son stayed for the second hearing. There was genuine appreciation at the end.

Splendidly played by the fifteen musicians selected for the job, conducted with a perfect command of the material and an enthusiasm that drew the dregs of beauty and emotion out of every bar, this young conductor gave a reading which clarified, as no other interpretation of a Schönberg work that I have heard, the style, the construction and the meaning of this music. New inspirations, new longings, new joys, a new philosophy in terms of music—nothing less—speak to the open minded listener through this maze of melody—yes, melody. Those who assert the contrary are those who do not see the forest because of the trees. But then, the musical stomach that is gauged for the digestion of two themes at a time cannot be expected to thrive on twenty or more. Themes follow each other at minute headways, and the worst of it is that they lack the customary harmonic base. Polyphonically conceived, they must be “horizontally” heard; and then—here is the wonder—the harmony, too, begins to “sound.”

There is harmony in Schönberg, whatever one may say; these series of fourths piled up like blocks of granite have a cubistic profile, an organic strength that holds them together of their own weight. Poor, weakly, tempered thirds, why have you been made the base of all consonance?

Here is a widening of the harmonic horizon that frees the fettered fancy of the melodist. If it necessitates new incidents of consonance (together-sounding), one must accustom his ears to these, as an earlier generation had to accustom its ears to ours. (Who can listen “perpendicularly” to Lasso or Palestrina without a strange taste in his mouth?) Then one shall hear what this man can give in personal expression, in variety of musical thought, in originality of style; chromatic harmonies that are not Wagnerian; whole-tone progressions that are not Debussyesque; melodies—gushes of melody—that are not even reminiscent of anyone else; things, in fact, that no one suspected of existing; dream fragments of a beautiful world of unreality.

YOUNG SIEGFRIED STRAUSS.

Some twenty years before this chamber symphony of Schönberg, Strauss composed the one which he conducted here yesterday. It is called a suite for thirteen wind instruments, and in it Strauss revealed, at nineteen years of age, all his astonishing talent and technical mastery, with all the romantic ardor of his personality. All the soul elements that seek expression in the Schönberg work are also present here; the same seriousness, the same thirst for beauty, the same lyric pathos. Strauss drowns it all in a sea of intoxicating sounds; Schönberg seeks to realize every delicious detail in separate strands of musical thought; he broods and gropes, and opens vistas to the

MUSICAL COURIER

BERLIN AUDIENCES ARE INTRODUCED TO A NEW SCHÖNBERG

Hermann Scherchen, Convinced That Schönberg Is the Prophet of the New Gospel, Asks His Hearers to Forget What They Know and Listen with New Ears

STRAUSS SUPERINTENDS REHEARSALS FOR BERLIN PREMIERE OF HIS “DIE FRAU OHNE SCHATTEN”

fanciful eye. Strauss satisfies, Schönberg rouses new desires. Both are romantics, but an age apart.

Romantics with a sense of humor. And here again is a difference. In his second quartet, Schönberg, after moments of heart wringing pathos and desperate struggle, turns upon himself with a sardonic quotation of “Ach, du lieber Augustin.” What's the use of your talking this way, he seems to say. After all, you're only a poor Schlemihl. And while the violin still soars toward the gleaming heights, the cello keeps grunting away with “Au-gus-tin, Au-gus-tin.” That is Schönberg. Strauss dispenses his humor in broad masses, spraying fountains of wit, instrumental caricature, comic tone painting, frank, obvious yet graceful buffoonery. But it is all in the day's work, and it concerns the jester not. He makes music, that's all.

Such is “Till Eulenspiegel,” such are the two comic scenes of the “Rosenkavalier,” and such, again, is the music to Molière's “Bourgeois gentilhomme,” on which I reported



HERMANN SCHERCHEN,

Who calls Schönberg the prophet of the New Gospel of Music.

in a recent number of the MUSICAL COURIER. Yesterday for the first time Strauss conducted this work himself, and gave his audience a delicious twenty minutes or so of pure enjoyment. Ruddy and white haired, more robust than last year, he treated the whole affair of conducting with the peculiar listless, “I-don't-care” attitude that exasperates even his friends, and yet not let a detail escape. Again the sheep bleated, more realistically than ever, and the birds warbled naively above Straussian thirds, cantabile horns and masses of mobile brass.

Especially beautiful was the “Intermezzo” described on the program as “Fashionable society—without Monsieur Jourdain—gentilhomme—salon—A major.” And the appearance of Cleonte was never portrayed with more graceful, dainty elegance. Was it to emphasize his musical ancestry that Strauss placed ahead of the suite a Mozart divertimento (No. 17, D major)? No one saw anything unseemly in advertising the concert as a “Mozart-Strauss Evening.” Were he alive, Mozart, in his simple humility, would no doubt be grateful to Brother Richard for taking so much trouble over his little divertimento, his musical trifle.