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Henri Temianka Correspondence; (lte)

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Henri Temianka Correspondence; (Ite)

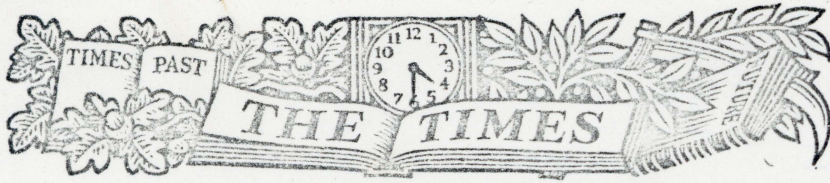
Description

This collection contains material pertaining to the life, career, and activities of Henri Temianka, violin virtuoso, conductor, music teacher, and author. Materials include correspondence, concert programs and flyers, music scores, photographs, and books.

Keywords

Henri Temianka, culture, virtuosity in musical performance, violinist, chamber music, camaraderie, press, February 1, 1974

... some animadversion or critics in the next page!



T.S.

73rd Year

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No. 3,752

Viewpoint

BY DENIS STEVENS

NOT SO VERY long ago, the gold-embossed spine of a large and flourishing paperback establishment told me that, in his valuable opinion, our present-day public pays less attention to books than it should. I have been wondering whether the energy crisis and motoring restrictions will gradually slow down and ultimately reverse this trend, if trend it is. One could argue that the threatened increase in use of light and heat, both essential for such a sedentary occupation as reading away a long winter's evening, would harm rather than help the book trade; and it is also true that certain kinds of books make exorbitant demands upon the energy of the reader, who is quite entitled to a little load-shedding.

In all likelihood, the effects will be subtle rather than serious. With fewer cars on the road, more people will travel by train—abroad as well as at home. It is sometimes forgotten that guide-books, well into the present century, were devised and written not for the motorist but for railway travellers and mountain climbers. Vintage Baedekers in mint condition can still be purchased for a pound at some of the *bouquinistes* by the Seine, and a pre-1914 *Bretagne, Suisse, or Italie Septentrionale* can rapidly reveal information that is otherwise virtually unobtainable. Museums are meticulously catalogued room by room, hotels are priced and commented upon, the names of mountain guides are listed in profusion, and there is always an English church service during the summer.

The museums could have been bombed or the pictures changed round, but it is sometimes useful for the connoisseur to know where

things were. At St Moritz, the Palace Hotel looks like a bargain at five francs a night (including service and candle) until we read that it is "assez cher—beaucoup d'Anglais et d'Américains". Inflation, where is thy sting? The cost of that palatial night's lodging is now barely enough to tip the porter. But the mountain business tends to stay in the same families, and the modern traveller in search of a guide might well pick a name at random and discover that the grandson of Chr. Gyger is ready and willing to take him to the Piz Corvatsch (3,458m) returning via Silvaplana or Sils. The six-hour trek can now be overcome with the aid of a cable-car, whose journey time is less than a quarter of an hour.

Part of the charm of these books—and a major deterrent to the reprint firms—lies in the many detailed maps and pull-out panoramas—"Mont Blanc vue de la Flegère" in sepia, while the Faulhorn and Gornegrat are in two colours. But the real prize in the old Swiss Baedekers is a three-colour triptych for railway enthusiasts: diagrams of the loop tunnels near Wasen on the northern approach of the Gotthard line as it crosses and re-crosses the Reuss, and the two sets of double loop-tunnels on the south side at Dazio Grande and Giornico. Studied with such a guide-book, as the TEE trains Ticino or Gottardo speed silently and stopless between Zürich and Lugano, this magnificent line (1872-96) yields many secrets that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The trick is to supplement the old *vade-mecum* with an up-to-date time-table, and for those who still mourn the passing of Bradshaw there is no better substitute than the *Amtliches Kursbuch*, which provides

complete information about railways, lake-steamers, buses, airlines, cable-cars, and chair-lifts as well as a generous summary of international services whether they pass through Switzerland or not. Well worth 50p, it serves (if need be) as an antidote to cerebral or computerized ratiocination by reason of its bland proposal of facts, all of which seem to interlock. I found, for example, that I could fill in an hour at Filisur (on the narrow-gauge Rhaetian railway) by shunting myself up to Wiesen and back, with sufficient time to walk into a forest and photograph one of those graceful, slender bridges which abound throughout the Engadine if only you know where they are likely to be hiding.

Friends and family who taunt me for my trizophrenic existence in the pursuit of literary, musical, and educational projects can always be silenced (or so I have discovered) by my insisting on the fact that I have two recreations—travel and photography—which demand constant attention since they are officially listed as such in the various dictionaries and biographical works in which I am encoded. But the thousands of miles and the hundreds of colour slides add up to little in the way of recreation since the real goal is usually literary, musical, or educational. And places remind me of people, so that I cannot drive through Stampa without dreaming of Giacomettis, I cannot visit Geneva without thinking seriously about Dufay and Liszt ("born on Parnassus", he once wrote on a *hotel fiche de contrôle*, "coming from Doubt, going towards Truth"), and passing through Clarens I inwardly perform Tchaikovsky or Stravinsky. Even the tiniest places in a small country seem pleasantly haunted. Until recently, an elderly lady in Sils-Maria remembered the measured tread of Nietzsche's nocturnal perambulations as he grappled with *Zarathustra*. And at the same time, towards the end of the 1880s, Brahms over in Hofstetten on the Lake of Thun was busy with the A major Violin Sonata and the *Zigeunerlieder*.

* * *

In the introduction to his thoughtful and stimulating study, *Music and Painting*, the late Edward Lockspeiser makes the point that present-day musical history "is largely based on the idea of technical analysis. This is not surprising since we live in a technological age. The humanistic approach seems to be overshadowed". Many who read, either for business or pleasure, the vast and ever-growing literature about music will surely agree, for it is incomparably easier to write plausible analysis than to give the impression that musical criticism should belong to the sphere of humane letters. Not that there is anything wrong with technology or analysis. It is simply that they are best regarded as a means to an artistic end, and relegated to tables at the back of a volume instead of embarrassing the language and trying the patience of the reader. I recently attempted to absorb an

article in a reputable scholarly journal about a great composer of the fifteenth century, but the prose was so turgid, the thought so confused, and the net yield so minimal that I gave up. Since such writers are not infrequently teachers, one can only shudder at what is happening to their students.

The technical and humanistic elements need not, however, be mutually exclusive. Everything depends upon the genius (or lack of it) in a given author. Sir Donald Tovey, a classical scholar, produced a still remarkable series of essays whose major virtue lies in their ability to hold the reader's attention, whether or not he fully understands the technicalities of the topic. Alec Robertson, who lived for many years in Rome, wrote an illuminating book—*The Interpretation of Plainchant*—with a purely practical end in view, yet he succeeded in bringing clarity, warmth, and understanding to a subject which many must have found forbidding in prior treatises.

Some of the most persuasively literary historians of music began their careers as art historians. Charles van den Borren made the change as a young man, but the discipline learnt in his studies of the visual arts stood him in good stead when it came to the difficult matter of writing about music, and in consequence one can still read his *Guillaume Dufay* with pleasure even though the research must be updated. Nino Pirrotta, another former art historian, demonstrates his continuing concern for a newer and better interpretation of musico-theatrical history in *Li due Orfei*, in which he is ably seconded by an expert in stage design, Elena Povoledo. Although men of letters who turn to music are less numerous than one might hope for, the handful of great names exerts a powerful and perpetual attraction. If Romain Rolland's study of Beethoven is still his most popular musical work, his earlier *Histoire de l'Opéra en Europe avant Lulli et Scarlatti* remains a classic of enormous value.

Then there are the professional historians. Their view of culture and history, as deep as it is broad, sustains the natural development of a critical biography in a way that mere analysis (psycho or musical) could never hope to match. I have many friends who share my admiration for C. S. Terry's *Bach—A Biography*, and for his other distinguished contributions to Bach research, but I often have to remind them that he was a professor of history, not of music. Another classic of musicological literature, F. T. Arnold's *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass*, speaks eloquently for the erudition of a man whose university appointment was not in music, but in German language and literature. In more recent years, Jacques Barzun's inspiring work on Berlioz and his contemporaries encouraged a worldwide revival of interest in the nineteenth century.

Two of my favourite biographies are by men who rank neither as musicologists, critics, or historians. Sacheverell Sitwell's *Liszt* reflects the multi-faceted and bizarre brilliance of an age of virtuosi that

was totally different from ours even though we are still plentifully supplied with musical acrobats. It was the personality that mattered, not the acrobatics, and Sitwell emphasizes this with a superb sense of style. Sir Thomas Beecham's study of Delius, the natural outcome of a lifetime's advocacy of the music, resembles the Liszt book in its total omission of musical examples and technical analysis. Yet the music of Delius is somehow conveyed to the reader in spirit, in an evaluation at once sympathetic and critical, which is not surprising when we recall Beecham's thoughts on criticism. Writing of the cool reception given to *Appalachia*, he says:

Fortunately it is not those who write about music whose opinions ultimately influence its destinies, and one of the anachronisms of our age is the belief, on the part of old-fashioned editors, that it is still necessary to include among their regular staff men who know very little about the fundamentals of music, who cannot distinguish the merits of one work from another, and who rarely lose the chance of mistaking talent for genius and vice versa.

* * *

Academe, academe, schmacademe—as my New York colleagues might say, if they had managed to think of it first. To what extent is the good, the bad, and the indifferent in university music responsible for the kind of criticism attacked by Beecham? Are critics properly trained for their jobs? Do they know anything about the fundamentals of music? Only a month or so ago, a group of music students in a large and famous urban university in the New York area were given ear tests. The results showed that many of them could not distinguish between a major and a minor triad, and several were not sure whether a scale was going up or down.

This being the case, it is hardly worth wasting a raised eyebrow on an American critic of a London musical journal when all he can find to say about a brilliant and stylish performance of a violin concerto by Leclair is that the soloist's intonation was not always impeccable. Not a word about the intrinsic charm of the music, or about the skilful interpretation of ornaments. No hint of praise for the young débutant who could have played an old favourite but chose instead a work rarely programmed. And in any event a playback revealed that his intonation was quite remarkably accurate and sensitive. One would like to send back the kind of answer given by Dr Christopher Tye to Queen Elizabeth when she complained that he played out of tune: "Tell Her Majesty that her ears are out of tune."

Fortunately there are at least fifty good critics for every bad one, and in general the situation in musical journalism on both sides of the Atlantic is improving from year to year. But an all-round improvement in musical education is precluded by poor training in ordinary schools, the effect of which is that students have to be given a music appreciation mish-mash in their first year of university. In our age of radio, discs,

cassettes, and cartridges there is absolutely no excuse for this behaviour. Nowadays, an intelligent youth can get to know a musical repertory a hundred times larger than his grandfather could have heard in an entire lifetime.

Assuming that a fifteen-year-old took the trouble to do this, what more would he need to equip him for music at a university? Obviously, a good grounding in theory and the ability to sing and play at sight. In other words, involvement in and with music. Nearly three hundred years ago, old Roger North touched the heart of the matter when he said: "And grant that a man read all the books of music that ever were wrote, I shall not allow that music is or can be understood out of them, no more than the taste of meats out of cookish receipt books." Yet in spite of the vigorous and widespread choral movement in American universities, I know of at least two with a student body of more than 30,000 but no choral organization. Liszt, who wrote in the *Gazette Musicale* of 1837 about the "benevolent, civilizing divinity" of group choral experience would have been shocked.

My personal sympathies are with the students, who pay dearly for an education whose actual content is virtually ignored by the administrators whom they unwittingly maintain in office. Although my circle of friends includes a number of university presidents, vice-presidents, and deans—men of singular talent and single-minded devotion to duty—it is only too evident that the majority of administrators have no idea of the peculiar problems associated with courses in music. One doty dean inflicted a continuous four-hour class on students barely able to concentrate for one hour, and when a faculty member complained he was told that this monstrous marathon made scheduling easier. Another bright spark turned down a request for a piece of essential equipment and minutes afterwards authorized the expenditure of a centupled amount of money for shifting an office along a corridor.

As a result the students are short-changed over an unnecessarily long haul. Many complain of sitting in so-called seminars and reading their own reports to each other, while the tenure-protected professor hardly opens his mouth in two hours. Many more find themselves forced to take courses of little practical value or interest because the instructor, often non-productive and uninspiring, has browbeaten the administration into making his course a "required" one so that he can control a captive audience. Pusillanimous nonentities wait until a distinguished colleague is on leave and then try to mutilate his course-offerings. Empire-building fanatics stuff their own exotic specialties into an already overcrowded curriculum so that students learn less and less about more and more, instead of broadening their horizons by voluntary reading. These same students have good cause to fear when the administration refuses to interfere.

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