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Cardus Hits His Critics For Six

WHEN Raymond Beatty was interviewed by "The Listener" three weeks ago, he spoke of the influence of Neville Cardus, the former music critic of the "Manchester Guardian" and a famous cricket writer, in raising the standard of music in Australia. Mr. Beatty said that Cardus had inevitably made a lot of enemies. A recent issue of the "ABC Weekly" contained an article by Mr. Cardus, who regularly writes on music for that paper, which was headed "Cardus Hits His Critics for Six." We reproduce it here for our own readers.

* * *

IT is my opinion, from long observation, that the average reader of newspapers and periodicals is entirely unable to give a fair account of anything he has read half-an-hour afterwards.

The general public seems incapable of forming either general ideas or attending to particular facts in a context.

If I were to write that there is a certain tune in *Parsifal* that sounds to me vulgar and banal, some correspondent as sure as death would rush into print to let the world know that I had appointed myself as Lord High Executioner of "the works of men of far greater talent than myself."

These, indeed, are words which already have stamped from the annoyed throat of a correspondent to these columns.



NEVILLE CARDUS
Enjoys spoiling breakfasts

For my part, I would never dream of belittling the composer of *Parsifal* by calling him a man of "talent."

A few weeks ago I suggested that many of the orchestral programmes presented in Australia are "hackneyed," and that we hear too much tonic-and-dominant music.

As a consequence of this mild statement I am supposed by quite a large number of folk, who apparently get through their reading in as much haste as they get out of the way of a Sydney taxi, to regard Haydn and Mozart as composers who wrote hackneyed music. If I describe the playing of the Sydney Orchestra as indifferent on one occasion and excellent on another, the blame is remembered and the praise forgotten. I do not object to these inevitable loosenesses of intellect.

Sadistic Pleasure

A critic enjoys himself most when he is spoiling people's breakfasts. It is a thought that never fails to stimulate the critic. Any morning he can picture the scene: a tenor, vocalist or a pianist leaps out of bed, full of the joy of life. Then he reads the notice of his concert last night, and at once he or she says, "No dear; no breakfast, just a cup of coffee; couldn't face an egg to-day."

It is a special and most sadistic pleasure to write sentences with double meanings to add to the performer's miseries; at a first reading it sounds splendid: Mr. Blank sang *Vesti la giubba* with a tear in his voice." And then it doesn't sound so splendid after all.

The other week a correspondent to the *ABC Weekly* wrote that the non-appearance of the works of Bruckner and Mahler in Australia "constitutes a serious obstacle to the completion of Mr. Cardus' musical education." If I could offer a gold award for contributions to a sort of humorous Cardusiana, this remark would win easily.

Probably my brain has been affected by the Australian heat, but I am under the impression that for years I have been making claims for Bruckner and Mahler not only in Australia, but in England, much to the natural impatience of many musicians who agree with Frank

Howes and the majority of English writers on music that the Bruckner symphonies are "over-long and over-ripe," and that Mahler wrote "a good deal of quasi-philosophical bombast of the Teutonic kind." (Mahler, of course, was not Teutonic in any way and his complex nature and sensibility prevented him from ever achieving anything so positive as the bombastic sort of utterance.)

"Without Loving Less"

The first principle of a good critic is to understand a fault and to see it in its necessary relationship to a quality, to point out flaws without loving less the possessor of them.

Yet I hereby declare and put it to the test; if I write down these following lines, in cold and mischievous intent, they will be at once distorted by thousands of readers: "In the A flat symphony of Elgar there is more than a trace of symphonic technique derived from a 19th century German musical culture."

It is a hundred to one that as a result of this statement I shall shortly be convicted for denying that Elgar is in spirit and essence an English composer of the Edwardian high noon.

The general reader, in short, attends to the critic with much the same mind that he attends to the politicians and leader writers.

That is to say, he remembers little and forgets nearly everything. "What did Mr. Gladstone say in 1885?" The question, of course, implies that Mr. Gladstone must on no account ever change his mind.

If Sir Ernest MacMillan conducts, as I think, indifferently on one evening, and then, an evening or two later, he conducts well, I am supposed to possess a "loose screw" in my critical apparatus if I take notice of the change. "Do I contradict myself?" asked Walt Whitman. "Very well, then; I contradict myself."

Poplars

*SPIRES of the poplars, flickering like
candle-flames, in a line
Following contour and curve of hollow
and incline;
Tapers on the altar of the clay-sashed,
green-grey hillside;
The Land holding solemn requiem-mass
for those who died;
The bush-tellers, the bridge-builders, the
road-makers, the drovers,
The fencers, the swaggers, the nameless,
homeless rovers
Who worked here in the wilderness-
wastes and tamed
Torrent and forest and hill, they who
died unnamed
That the folk in the flower-girt farm-
house might come
Finding the wilds made docile, not over-
troublesome,
Responsive as a well-broken colt to their
will,
Planting these poplars by the road on
the hill,
Unseeing this end, erecting an enduring
shrine
Memorialising these dead.
Golden poplars shiver
Flickering candles by the road above
the river.*

—R.S.R.F. (Gisborne).

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