

For this baffling task Denby has a remarkable equipment, not merely in his learning and sensitivity, but in an almost incredible power to concentrate on the physical impression before it fades. With the photographs as a guide, we begin to see how he puts that equipment to work. An inspired anatomist, he explores the potentials of the dancer's neck, arms, thorax, waist, pelvis, legs,

feet, hands and face, until at last no longer by science but by magic the body seems to detach itself from the flat half-tones and float through the air. Of course I should mention too the distinction of Denby's style, the care with which words are joined to gives us his own rich experience in this ephemeral world.

Minna Lederman

INTERPRETATIVE STYLE

FREDERICK Dorian's *History of Music in Performance* (W. W. Norton, 1942) offers to a musical public unacquainted with the fundamental traditions of interpretative styles a valuable insight into the general origins of these traditions. These sources have already been minutely studied by various musicologists, but Mr. Dorian, presenting them in a simpler over-all fashion, more readily assimilable, has made a worthy contribution. Musicologists, like other highly-specialized scholars, tend to operate in a sphere almost hermetically sealed to wider circles. There have been notable exceptions, but one wishes there were many more. Music, however ideal and complex, is an eminently practical art. Rarefied or matter-of-fact, abstruse or transparent, its products live ultimately only through the efforts of practicing musicians. If such musicians are notoriously unconcerned with matters of theoretical and historical import, all the less reason for scholars to retire into a self-inclosed sphere of specialized research; all the more reason to refine their research at times to that point of final simplicity where its fruits become readily accessible. Such directives to musicological research would surely not lower its own standards. "Popularizers" undertaken in the spirit of Mr. Dorian's work help to raise the general level of

musical culture.

It is refreshing to find that Mr. Dorian has given the central figures of our musical past a proportionate fullness of treatment. The almost fatal fascination that the "petits maîtres" of the dead past have for Messrs. the musicologists is notably absent. Interesting above all is the fact that the major creative figures emerge here as the major sources as well of interpretative styles. That is as it should be — in more senses than one. First of all, because such figures as Palestrina, the Bachs, father and son, Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, were in actuality the foremost interpretative artists of their day — a fact whose true significance is often slurred over. Secondly, because the composer must in the last analysis determine the stylistic values of the sounding media through which his compositions attain their authentic life. It is no accident that the main currents that shaped the art of composition formed at the same time the styles of instrumental expression. Neither is it only a happy coincidence that masters like Bach, Mozart or Chopin should excel in both the arts of creation and of execution. Their supreme command of both arts is no doubt an attribute of their genius. But that genius should kindle our insight into the perfect inter-dependence of the two arts.

There is not a self-contained art of performance on the one hand, and on the other a disembodied art of composition. The pronounced breach between executant and composer is only a characteristic symptom of our present-day musical culture, a symptom whose serious implications cannot be disregarded. The values of the sounding work are the real life of music. To fully incarnate this real life each art must fully saturate itself in the laws and conditions of the other. Unfortunately, the practical trends of our musical life have been to split off these arts into separately functioning entities, with the result that serious cultural deficiencies have become apparent in both branches. The executant, armed with a formidable mechanical baggage, approaches a work in the spirit of having to manipulate an inert matter. Feeling himself on insecure ground he wavers between two poles of thought. Shall he transmute this raw succession of notes into patterns his own fantasy suggests? Or shall he confine himself to transmitting with the utmost fidelity the literal designs of the score?

Mr. Dorian, in an effort to define the uncertain role of the interpreter today, engages in an elaborate discussion of the objective and subjective approaches to the written work. He succeeds in giving an admirable dialectic expression to the quandary in which the modern interpreter finds himself. But on the terrain of a quasi-philosophical discussion the question cannot finally resolve itself one way or the other. Attempting to disengage the subjective and objective ingredients of a worth-while performance is like trying to extract the yeast from a well-baked bread. So long as a deep-seated awareness of musical realities is lacking the quandary always confronts the performing musician – what to do with the notes? – and the

temptation immediately follows to take refuge in some thoroughly extra-musical formulation, literalness vs. non-literalness, subjectivity vs. objectivity.

Could the problem be enunciated more penetratingly than it has been by Philip Emmanuel Bach? "Interpretation is nothing else but the capacity to make musical thoughts clear – according to their true content and emotions – whether one plays or sings." It is regrettable that Mr. Dorian, with so many sympathetic insights into important questions, should have failed to make some such concept as Philip Emmanuel's the central core and thesis of his book. To frame so much of his material around the elusive concepts of subjectivity and objectivity is to involve himself helplessly in an endless turnabout of dichotomies. Better to let professional estheticians muddle over such formulations.

The old masters bothered very little about these problems. The very essence of their genius was to fully explore the inner and outer life of music, and so clarify for all of us its complete interdependence. The solution lies in that spirit, in the light of that fullness of experience. A real balance of culture is attained only when composers in some degree exercise a command over the outward projection of their ideas – and performers in their turn, discipline themselves continually in the fundamental realities of musical structure and expression. The stylistic minutiae of any particular musical epoch will always have to be the object of special study. But the important thing, and with it the only real assurance, is to understand that the realities around which the performer is to organize his entire musical apparatus are the realities around which the main outlines of our Western musical language have been organized.

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