

TO STUDY WITH A MASTER

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THE impressive scope of music education in America is something which Europeans do not grasp until they come here to live. I had known, by hearsay much about the performance activities of New York and other great cities, those centers where symphony orchestras appear to set the music standards. But like so many from overseas, I had no knowledge of the character of public reaction, the quality, taste, musical preparation, general background, even the vast size of the American audiences. What indeed were the conditioning factors that explain the urge to know, to listen, to absorb?

A striking difference between Europe and the United States, which becomes apparent upon the briefest residence here, is the almost total absence of "music-making in the home." At first glance this is hard to reconcile with the great mass interest. But there is of course a compensating element, which, new to me, is of enormous importance. That is the activity in the field of school music. The American figures on school orchestras, bands and choruses are stupendous. They illuminate the country's present musical culture and are also prophetically significant.

Nothing certainly could be further from the European tradition. In Europe, music education has always been highly individualized and is largely the preparation for a profession. In music-schools and conservatories, in music-academies and music high-schools it is chiefly the professional elements of music that have been taught. In elementary and secondary schools, music education consists solely of singing lessons. Only the centralized system of administration in Prussian Germany enabled Dr. Leo Kestenberg to make his unusual attempts to influence the general musical taste of youth by a carefully chosen program for song-books, and facilitated Fritz Jaede's attempt to revive the custom of community-singing and the use of that old instrument, the "recorder" for the layman. Certainly I do no injustice to music-educational trends in Europe by pointing out that these were exceptional activities; if there have been other efforts,

they remain unimportant because they were too new or their motivation and background were largely political.

As to the creative musician, the potential composer, he followed tradition, which was "to study with a master." This custom, nearly as old as Western music itself but neglected during the romantic period of the nineteenth century, was revived at the close of that century. Graduation from a particular school did not mean very much, but "pupil of" was important. The privilege of personal contact, of sharing the atmosphere of an outstanding and creative man was only for the few. Definite groups of young composers formed around men like César Franck, Ducas, Schönberg, Zemlinsky, Busoni, Vincent d'Indy, Albeniz, Schreker, Pfitzner, Szymanowski. Later on Kodaly, Berg, Webern, Hindemith, Jacques Ibert, Respighi, Casella, Bloch, Vaughan Williams, Frank Bridge, Ottmar Schöck and many others gathered groups of young composers about them. Famous scholars, non-composers, continued also to exert an influence, notably Straube in Leipzig and Boulanger in Paris; but, in contrast to the nineteenth century, the scholar-teachers of the contemporary European scene appear rather as exceptions.

From my own experience as a pupil of Schreker (a composer-teacher) I know what it means to learn under the guidance of a creative musician, to meet the stringent requirements of such a teacher, who took for granted the utmost skill in all disciplines of music, who gave us also the excitement of observing his own contacts with the public, the opera, the critics, who employed our help in studying and preparing the first performance of Schönberg's *Gurrelieder*, who gave us much freedom but even more responsibility, who introduced us technically, mentally, practically, to the music life of Vienna and later Berlin, who only lost interest after his pupil achieved his own success, his own firm foot-hold on the steps ad Parnassum. Like the pupils of Schönberg or Busoni, we came to feel that there was no yesterday, today or tomorrow in music; we viewed music as a living organism. Our fantasy had no limits. We watched our teachers at work, we admired their scores, their approach and their technic; as we grew more mature we allowed ourselves to be critical, to oppose, to stick to our convictions and prejudices, and we passed through the difficult experience of seeking, within ourselves, for our own expression, our own style.

I do not say this stimulation, achieved through direct contact with a creative musician, is unattainable in any other way. Wonderful scholars all over the world have striking records of successful teaching. There are also

composer-teachers who have no educational talent whatsoever. A composer's pupil, besides, faces the danger of being directed into a particular channel of writing from which there is no escape, if the direction and his teacher's "school" do not fit his nature and his talent. But one thing seems undeniably clear: the pupil in direct and harmonious contact with a composer feels and tastes music as something *alive*. The past leads into the future; form becomes a coordination of content. Small as the source may be, it releases a refreshing stream which flows inevitably to a greater one, to larger rivers, in the enduring rhythm of all music.

This ideal of "learning with the master," even a short time ago an adventurous, expensive, and complicated enterprise, today appears more attainable in America. The forces of history have created a new situation here, unique in all musical culture. The foremost creative spirits of music in the world today are gathered in this country, and nearly all of them are employed in the service of education.

The tradition of eminent composer-teachers is not new to America. In 1890, Edward MacDowell at Columbia and Horatio Parker at Yale taught music. Today, a large number of American composers of name and standing actively participate in music education. Amazingly enough, only a small percentage of composer-teachers have been associated with the purely professional schools. The large majority – though by no means all – do their teaching at universities and colleges, and there, it seems to me, is the completely new, the distinctly American challenge to social and artistic problems of our time. Here is a list of composers in leading colleges and universities (for which I am largely indebted to Mr. Douglas Moore); it makes no claim to documentary completeness, but it is I believe very significant: University of California, Albert Elkus, Ernest Bloch; Harvard, Edward Burlingame Hill, Walter Piston; University of Washington, Carl Paige Wood; University of Colorado, Mark Wessel; University of Kansas, Charles Sanford Skilton; University of Iowa, Phillip Greeley Clapp; Columbia, Douglas Moore, Daniel Gregory Mason; Princeton, Roger Sessions; Sarah Lawrence College, William Schuman; Bennington, Otto Luening, Robert McBride; Converse, Ernst Bacon; Yale, David Stanley Smith, Richard Donovan; New York University, Philip James, Marion Bauer; Teachers' College, Howard Murphy; Queens College, E. L. Stringham; Smith College, Werner Josten; University of Wisconsin, Carl Bricken; University of Rochester, Howard Hanson, Bernard Rogers; Western Reserve, Arthur Shepherd; St. John's College, Annapolis, Elliott Carter.

The professional schools have more recently begun to reflect this influence. Today Randall Thompson, Quincy Porter, Bernard Wagenaar, Frederick Jacobi, Samuel Barber, Vittorio Giannini, Paul Nordoff, Isidore Freed are connected with leading academies. In the New School for Social Research there is Henry Cowell, and at the Berkshire Festival courses, Aaron Copland.

The following composers from Europe are now also teaching in America: Arnold Schönberg at the U. C. L. A.; Arthur Bliss at the University of California, Ernst Toch at the University of Southern California; Nabokoff at Wells College; Ernst Krenek at Vassar College; Darius Milhaud at Mills College; Paul Hindemith at Yale; Bela Bartok at Columbia; Stravinsky at Harvard (1939-1940).

This is a roster impressive indeed for completeness and range of influence, for its picture of contemporary achievement and culture. It offers extraordinary hope for the musical future of the country.

My reflections on the American musical scene lead me to this general conclusion: Musical education here is a large and still growing influence on the social life of the country. Such an enormous music preparation and music activity will eventually stimulate the deeper creative forces of the nation. This slowly developing maturity coincides with a parallel development in arts and literature. The whole process is now being catalyzed by political and social developments.