

After Midnight Thoughts on Leopold Godowsky, etc.By Paul Howard.To The Members of The International Godowsky Society.ERRATA

On Pages 70-71 of Instalment 7, Kempis was mis-spelt, and on page 70, 13 lines from the bottom should read 1st. Ancient Dance.

In Instalment 5 I know November was substituted for October, but that would have been obvious to you.

Literals, etc., are the devil! - is there anyone living who can dodge them?

In the last resort, the typiste will trick you after the last proof, but this appealing, blonde and beautiful, disarms rebuke.

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Instalment 8.

The Java Suite.

Suite for the Left Hand Alone.

Letter to Gray-Fisk - "Is Godowsky Box Office?"

JAVA SUITE (Four Books) - by Leopold Godowsky.

Says the great Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji in "The New English Weekly", 20/6/40.
(see full article included with Instalment 2).

"...The great Java Suite. In this, his rich imagination, his flexible, finely variegated and warmly coloured harmonic utterance, and his magnificent piano-writing reach their highest pitch. This set of pieces I have no hesitation in declaring to be among the masterpieces of modern piano music. Each is prefaced by a clever little word-picture of the place or event that inspired it, indicating a personality of rare percipience and high sensitivity..."

HERE ARE EXTRACTS FROM SOME OF MY LETTERS.

"The Gardens of Buitenzorg" - from the Java Suite.

"...Also after four years' continual work played "The Gardens of Buitenzorg", one of the Java Suite, all PP and PPP, just like a string quartet with the violin often going into the blue. Weaving all these voices beautifully against each other is a task. Colour, colour, colour, that is Godowsky, the greatest colourist who has lived, but also the greatest master of line, for every particle is line. No colour without line. Not one superfluous note, no refuge for the slack player, no smother of spume to hide the loss of something to say.

From Bach to Godowsky is one step, but Godowsky has the incomparable benefit of retrospect, and to today's piano. How the devil the interval got filled up with so many monotonous atrocities culminating in the Liszt Rhapsodies and rushings scale passages of the Thalbergs, etc., that means nothing, it is difficult to understand. I often think it a pity Chopin finished his A Minor study and the G Minor Ballade with those scales which mean nothing and contribute nothing to the aesthetic content of the works. Schumann and Brahms avoided it but often got muddy and lacked the polyphony of the Master..."

Paul Howard.

(From a Letter to Gordon Short, 15/7/38).

oOo

"A Court Pageant in Solo" - from the Java Suite.

"...On further working of "A Court Pageant in Solo" I feel that it would be a magnificent work for -----to do, its rhythmic devices are surpassingly enchanting, alluring, the player is bound to be swayed by them into a frenzy of excitement and enthusiasm, the rhythms piling one upon another. But the player must be capable of conceiving surpassing grandeur and magnificence of motion, of pageant redolent of the East, the swaying majesty of elephants bedecked with gorgeous hangings of flaming colours. How is a girl of limited vision and experience to achieve this? Could it arise from

within her? I think she would have to study the drawings of Gilbert James' illustrations contained in the deluxe edition of the Rubaiyat. Not merely a passing glance at these revelations of majesty, but the possession of them for frequent notice and thought. I refer to the one respecting "Think in this battered Caravanserai..." "How Sultan after Sultan with his pomp abode his little hour and went his way." and the other, "How sweet is mortal Sovranty". A Court Pageant in Solo adequately conveyed would arouse the audience; they would never restrain themselves till the cataclysmic close, they would rise to it in a frenzy, even Londoners.

And what a magnificent opportunity with the whole world's attention focussed upon the East - it is the moment when the Pianist could be right in the spotlight. For years past various works from the Java Suite have taken pride of place in America in the programmes of the best pianists.

These nights, whether dark or moonlight, have skies split with quaking shafts of searchlights drawing fantastic geometrical patterns from horizon to horizon. With you, of course, that has become commonplace, plus the visitors.

How go Moura's Rach. Preludes? Can you get American records through? If you could put Saperton's Java works before her, she would respond..."

(From a Letter to Gray-Fisk, 26 October, 1942).

oOo

"The Ruined Water Castle of Djokja" - from the Java Suite.

"...The Ruined Water Castle of Djokja" from the Java Suite, a dozen pages or so of murmuring loveliness, but so terrifically complex that it is like a carnival of the constellations; one has to be as alert as pussy over a mouse-hole..."

(From Letter to John Stokes, 22/5/42)

oOo

..."And after two years of unremitting, concentrated, intense and fanatical study at "The Ruined Water Castle of Djokja", topped off by playing nothing else morning, noon and night for the last two months in a frenzy of determination to overcome its powers of embarrassment (that's mine, copyright), I have at last got it off paper

(Later, - And the game I've got to keep it off paper!)

This work, tell Archie, through all of its dozen pages^r so, is Pianissimo and full of polyrhythmic and polyphonic devices of most complicated, illusive, murmuring loveliness: it is like the whispering of mucia of the spheres heard through a chink in the floor of heaven. The listener following copy dem^{ix}nds it over and over again, but I assure you the listener has to be as clever as the player. But the listener who cannot read copy, can just blissfully think that a chorus of beautiful angels, coy angels, mincing angels, Papa and Mama angels, and little baby toddler angels, are all

around him, brushing him up, feeding him with nectar, giving him a hair-do and a shave, putting a halo on him, and promising him the Joys of Eternal Life. The ineffable never penetrated so far the realms of ineffableness before, not in any art, although I can think of Corot landscape akin..."

(From a Letter to Carl Sauer, 15/1/43).

oOo

The limitations of my rainbow have prevented me from completing many of this Suite yet, though I have done much work of ^{the} Streets of Old Batavia and Bromo Volcano - both magnificent concert works. Shura, that is, Professor Alexander Hmelnitshy, formerly of Moscow and Java, (he brought me a bottle of dinkum Vodka) has done the Streets of Old Batavia, streets he knows and loves so well. As Shura plays it he smiles lovingly at you as he turns some pet phrase or nuance. Shura plays exquisitely: he has "it".

oOo

SUITE FOR THE LEFT HAND ALONE - 8 MOVEMENTS. by Leopold Godowsky.

"I consider my Passacaglia and my Suite, the latter for Left Hand Alone, to be my most mature compositions""

(In Letter to Paul Howard, 4/10/32.)

"Here is God's plenty." - (John Dryden).

"In the end, it is not the wizardry, the unbelievableableness' of this mighty Suite that will capture you, but its living breathing beauty, a perfect inspiration from a great heart."

Edward F. McMahon.

EXTRACTS FROM MY LETTERS.

Letter to Dr. Cooke, quoted in Musical Courier, N.Y. 2/1/37.

"In his Suite for the Left Hand, he stands completely alone. A major work in eight parts, a glorious concert number, a main backbone to any program distinguishing any artist who plays it adequately as a real two-fisted he-man, (L.D. Austin said that betrayed my Irish ingredient), a ^{genus} previously all too rare, even among the elite."

Don't take any notice of Austin though, he has turned atheist since, and in addition to saying that polyphony is only the evidence of a freak mind, (shades of Bach, the Flemings, and Palestrina), he

says that Godowsky never wrote a measure of music worth a tin of fish. Perhaps some pianist who cannot play Godowsky "Panned" him that. I must quote some correspondence on that later. Of course I killed him.

oOo

From a Letter to ^LLeonard Liebling, 6/3/33, and quoted in "Variations",
Musical Courier, 8/4/33.

"...What a wonderful master of the Minuet Godowsky is. There is the exquisite early one, about Opus 15, the towering one in the Walzermasken that always thrills, now this so beautiful and haunting one in the Suite for the Left Hand. It follows you down the street, crawls around your neck, and up under your hat, and makes you want to turn and smile lovingly at the people coming along behind. You want to get in a quiet corner behind the door and murmur it most delicately and then go to the window to hear soft strings waft it through misty gardens. Withal it is an aristocrat of thought and material and will never sate.

Godowsky's compositions for the left hand are the first important ones in history and a great gap was waiting for them. Time at last produced the man, the second ^dgreat contrapuntal genius. Always has the left been but the spouse of the right hand, but these works allow the left to develop to an equality, making a more perfect partnership, and will give the pianist the mastery of the string quartet plus the piano's peculiar qualities. Every pianist should learn this Suite.

The left, to obtain the power of enunciation, has not to speak outwards to the fourth and fifth fingers, as does the right, but with first and second towards the tree-top, whereas previously the left, as a general thing, played mostly to the fourth and fifth fingers, the equivalent of the big strings of the orchestra. Now the left has become a mercurial songster as free and articulate as the right, far more so in fact."

oOo

From a Letter to Louis Austin Concerning a visit of Eileen Joyce, 24/10/36.

"The first thing I played to her was the Sarabande from the Master's Suite for the Left Hand Alone. It brought an immediate emotional capitulation. That Sarabande is of such architectural magnificence, stately grandeur, and benevolent benediction, it would move any living creature. The other Movements are equally wonderful..."

Eileen promised to study Godowsky ^wsorks, but I haven't heard of her playing any in recital yet.

oOo

From a Letter to Colin Horsley, 12/4/38.

“You speak of playing some Godowsky arrangements. Original compositions should be preferred. Godowsky original compositions transcend all pianoforte compositions of the century. If now you start some of the works you will have them for repertoire at the time when they will do so much for you. The respected virtuoso of tomorrow will be an entirely different person from the virtuoso of today and yesterday. Unfortunately the poor young prodigy is too often fed on the banal works that have been worn to rags by the globe-trotting fraternity. When they go a step forward they take the least important ones available and play things which tickle the ear for the moment.

Some Chopin/Godowsky by all means sometimes, but far better now to get “The Suite for the Left Hand Alone” and find your left side, which the general mass of compositions does not enable you to do. That will vitalize all your other playing and put you on a different footing in a decade’s time. I do not mean devote more time to the works than you can spare, but do something at it every day.

Doing much every day it took me about three years to memorize the Suite, and now I am engaged on the task of trying to get the curvature of the whole 8 Movements as a unit. Skolovdky played it in New York last year - the Master wrote me a detailed critique of the performance. If, in the course of a year or so, you have added one of the Movements to your repertoire and have gained some acquaintance with the others you will have done well and have reaped great profit...

...Godowsky’s Left Hand compositions are complete, rich, unfettered inspirations, while you will find all other attempts have been thin and feeble. A study of this Suite will give you a capacity for playing four part music, with one hand, articulating the voices against each other in a way that is amazing, almost unbelievable.

I must try and find an article by ^Ggodowsky, “Why I Write for the Left Hand Alone”, and send it to you.”

Horsley didn’t reply to that not to another I wrote him some months back. Possibly these young people are carried helplessly on the tide of hackneyed repertoire of the perambulating bagmen of the concert platform who travel in Tchaikovsky (No. 1, of course) as Sorabji so beautifully puts it.

oOo

From a Letter to Gordon Short, 15/7/38

“I played the Suite for the Left Hand Alone straight through 8 Movements, to a visitor for the first time on Sunday last. Three quarters of an hour strenuous play for the left hand is severe, and by the last Gigue at break-neck speed, four voices all the time to be articulated, and crossing themes and moods, and nuances within nuances with one hand.

I have for some time been able to play all the Movements without copy and and three or four at a time, all out, but to do the eight straight off is a game for a giant.”

oOo

And now here is part of Godowsky’s article:-

Reprint from "Quarterly Review", New York.

PIANO MUSIC FOR THE LEFT HAND.

By Leopold Godowsky.

Frequently I have been asked the reasons for my writing for the left hand alone. Many seem to think it unwarrantable to narrow the piano, with its range comparable only to that of the orchestra and the organ, to the limitation of one hand. They contend that, from the mechanical standpoint, the left hand is inferior to the right, and, from the artistic view point, the limitations imposed by the use of only one hand seem calculated for the display of virtuosity. My answer, based on my own experience of many years, is that, from the physical aspect, the left hand is more adaptable to cultivation than the right. There are a number of reasons for this statement. I shall mention but a few to support my theory, if the left hand of every string player is not sufficient proof.

We all know that modern teaching of piano mechanics is based on weight playing and relaxation. We are also aware that the majority of persons use the right hand for common manual purposes almost to the exclusion of the left.

The result is that the right hand is constantly in a state of tension, while the left hand, owing to its freedom from cramped muscles, is in better condition for the cultivation of the desired relaxation essential to a superior pianistic equipment. (1).

Another advantage of the left hand is its more favoured position in relation to the keyboard. It has the stronger fingers for the stronger parts: the thumb, index and middle fingers share the upper notes of all "double stops" and chords. Almost equally important is the fact that crescendi, usually associated with ascending passages, are similarly favoured.

One of the principal reasons why the left hand is inferior to the right in mechanical and technical equipment is that there is a lack of appropriate material for it in the several branches of the piano repertoire, whether classical, (2), romantic, or modern.

But the left hand is greatly favoured by the command it has over the superior register of the modern piano. To support this statement, I need only mention the splendid sonority, mellowness, and tonal sensitiveness of the lower half of the keyboard as compared with the this brittle and tinkly sound of the upper register, a characteristic which becomes more and more accentuated as the right hand ascends the keyboard. Because of the fulness of the lower register the left hand is easily capable of producing a tone of a more sonorous, less percussive quality, thus attaining quantity and quality with minimum effort.

When one plays with the left hand alone, the damper-pedal becomes so important in its function that it almost replaces the other hand. It sustains bass-notes, chords, and voices which the hand must abandon in order to strike other parts of the keyboard. (3).

As Bach wrote his unaccompanied Sonatas and Suites for the violin and violoncello to express the intrinsic musical characteristics of these instruments individually, so I wished to give undivided

musical utterance to the left hand. (4). The concentration of my entire resourcefulness, keyboard knowledge, and musical experience on the left hand alone led me to combinations I should never have written if I had used both hands. On the occasion of the publication of my *Miniatures*, I wrote the publisher a letter which was reproduced in the preface. A portion of this letter is equally applicable to the left hand compositions.

“(Working within self-imposed limitations convinced me that economy of means leads to a superior form of concentration and the resulting concentrated effort produces the quintessence of human endeavour, materially and spiritually. The resourcefulness needed in dealing frugally with the means at our command often opens up unexplored and unsuspected regions of the imagination. I have been amazed at the possibilities created by the adopted restrictions.)”

In conclusion I wish to state that, if the left hand alone is given as much attention as the right, the results will be at least equally good, and in my estimation, considerably more gratifying.

To composers writing for the piano I would quote the following from one of my prefaces to the Studies on the Chopin Etudes for the left hand.

“If it is possible to assign to the left hand alone the work done usually by both hands simultaneously, what vistas are open to future composers, were this attainment extended to both hands...”

1. At the age of twenty I had to prepare a number of different programmes within a limited time. For months I worked about twelve hours daily. Having practised all day, I noticed, on resuming my work at the piano in the evening after dinner, that with less effort my playing sounded better. For weeks I was puzzled. Suddenly the realization came to me that, feeling too fatigued to tax my muscles, I relaxed them. The enforced relaxation caused me to give the full weight of my arm to each key, the keyboard supporting the weight of my arm just as an armchair supports the weight of the body. Thus it was that I discovered the principles of weight-playing as opposed to those of percussion and pressure.

2. The contrapuntal writers, headed by Johann Sebastian Bach, contributed much to the development of polyphonic music from the manual as well as from the intellectual standpoint. But they were greatly hampered by the limitations of keyboard range and tonal sonority, and by the lack of tone-sustaining qualities of their time: The ineffectiveness of the damper pedal prevented the contrapuntal voices from spreading beyond the immediate reach of the hands.

3. If more detailed information regarding the science and art of pedaling is desired, I advise the reading of my remarks concerning them in my Studies on Chopin Etudes, Nos. 1 and 45.

4. In seeking to do so, I have tried not to forget that the ethical, aesthetic and musical value of a work depends upon the triumverates: Inspiration, Purpose, and Technique. The depth and intensity of the artist's emotional reactions, the loftiness of his ideals, and the logic and originality displayed in the development of the musical material which he has selected, determines his artistic

status. (A composer may have fertile thematic ideas without the ability to use them. For he may lack the constructive logic of the architect or the technique of the experienced author unfolding the plot of a novel.) The inspiration part of a composer's work is the life-bringing essence of any musical creation, just as the degree of originality determines our interest in the art-work. What we hear in a true work of art is the quintessence of the composer's experience and comprehension of life.

The medium - whether it be an orchestra, a Pianist's pair of hands, or only his left one - is merely the means for conveying the composer's message.

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IS GODOWSKY BOX OFFICE/

Box 919 G.P.O. Adelaide, S.A.
13th December, 1944.

Very Dear Friend Gray-Fisk,

You say do I ever think Godowsky will ever be Box Office, and I have given that the deepest thought, under favourable conditions, because I have been for months in the throes of rehearsing vast Godowsky repertoire ready to play to visitors I expect to stay in the house a couple of weeks at Christmas, to wit, Professor Alexander Hmlitsky whom I call Shura, Leonard Harrop, Flight Commander, formerly lecturer in Spanish at the Perth University, and others.

The Answer is emphatically Yes.

I don't know that the Sonata can be used complete with the immortal 5th. Movement for the hoipoloi, but the first three Movements wykd have terrific effect. The 4th and 5th. could be added to a very good audience.

In fact if omitting the 5th., the 4th. Movement could be played before the 3rd. and be an excellent foil between the highly symphonic 2nd. and the sky-rocketing 3rd.

5th. Movement of the Sonata can be played by itself, its incomparable five sections all PPP, the Retrospect, the Lamentation, Fugue, Dies Irae, and the sublime, yes, that is the only word, sublime, closure, can be used as an opening number for a programme or a centre number.

The only reason I fear the whole Sonata for a common recital audience is that the recitalists have ruined their audiences with programmes consisting of a succession of worn-out tit-bits. On this argument I will enclose my letter to Harold Bauer who wrote me that "either through his fault or misfortune he has never acquired the necessary technique to play Godowsky."

Of course Godowsky being Box Office depends upon the recitalists acquiring a higher technique, not an increase of the mad scale and arpeggio racings and bangings and vulgar flying hands, but a

higher technique of producing still great effects, deeper and fuller in the work of Godowsky, by greater independence of finger and better and clearer dynamic part playing which all depends on clearer thinking.

Of course you means is the Godowsky music sensational enough.

It is.

The 24 Walzermasken can be used as one whole programme, takes about two hours to play, or they may be used in groups, or single works from here and there.

Each one is beautiful, interesting, arresting, intelligent - I mean all that to the man in the street.

Many of the Walzermasken are most terrifically sensational, breathtaking; for instance, the Liszt Silhouette, and the Strauss Portrait - Godowsky's own subject themes, not theirs.

Please read here my After Midnight Thoughts on those two in Instalment 6.

Many of the Java Suite are captivating, others are sensational, carrying everything before them, so rhythmically, insistently intriguing, that the listener will be breathless. The achievement of relaxation that I have not yet seen in any pianist is needed, because without relaxation from toe to scalp the works could never be delivered.

The Poems, the Waltz-Poems, the Capriccio (Patetico), and so many other works of exquisite delicate tracery are useful for inner brackets among the bigger ones. There are his six transcendentalizations of the Bach violin unaccompanied Sonatas (Suites), greater, fuller, more resonant, than any of the big Bach works as arranged by Tausig and d'Albert and others.

And that is without touching on his Strauss Metamorphosian, Wein, Weib und Gesang etc., five of them, and the Gypsy Baron, about 27 pages of terrifying bravura for the left hand alone.

Look at the sensational effect of anyone playing the Suite for the Left Hand Alone, so full and orchestral. The Scriabin trifles for the left hand are the merest junk, and Saint-Saens Suite for the Left Hand Alone looks and sounds by comparison like some Czerny exercises. There is the Master's Prelude and Fugue for the Left Hand Alone, a rip roaring opening number and would get any audience on its toes.

~~I have only touched upon the subject and could go on with pages of this, for his works are legion, and in them he has been all things to all men.~~

Godowsky is not only Box Office, but he is outstanding, incomparable Box Office, and for the artist, ah! there is the rub, the artist - the real thing - with the brains, the heart, the stamina, the confidence, the strength of purpose, and the indomitable will to command the mastery of these

super works. Godwosky means transcendent truiumph, and the great little man's Godlike charitableness will lift the artist to the highest pedestal yet achieved on the concert platform, just as the Master's own appearance in Berlin caused the sensation of the century.

Haste the day when we shall be able to sit in reverence to a pianoforte recital of dignity, majesty, charm and excitement...

Well, that answers one line of your letter: I know there is a lot more and I will get to it anon.

Affectionately,

(Sgd). Paul Howard.