

# Master Artists of the Piano

By JAMES HUNEKER

ARTISTIC pianoforte playing is no longer rare. The once jealously-guarded secrets of the masters have become the property of conservatories. Self-playing instruments perform technical miracles, and are valuable inasmuch as they interest a number of persons who would otherwise avoid music as an ineluctable mystery. Furthermore, the warring ease with which these machines despatch the most appalling difficulties has turned the current toward what is significant in a musical performance: touch, phrasing, interpretation. While a child's hand may set spinning the Don Juan Fantasia of Liszt, no mechanical appliance yet the Schumann Concerto as they should be played.

We mention purposely these cunning inventions because we do not think that they have harmed the public interest in pianoforte recitals; rather have they stimulated it. Never before has the standard of execution and interpretation been so high. The giant wave of virtuosity that broke over Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century has not yet receded. A new artist on the keyboard is eagerly heard, and discussed. If he be a Paderewski or a Joseffy, he is a centre of a huge admiration. The days of Liszt were renewed when Paderewski made his tours in America. Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that not until now has good playing been so little of a rarity.

But a hundred years ago matters were different. It was in 1839 that Franz Liszt gave the first genuine pianoforte recital, and possessing a striking profile, he boldly presented it to his audiences; before that pianists either faced or sat with their back to the public. Without any intention of making an historic record, it is nevertheless impossible to speak of modern pianoforte playing without mentioning Liszt, who, born in 1811, dying in 1886, years hence may still be an authority, so profound, so far-reaching were his innovations and discoveries. No matter what avenue of music the

genius, taking away all they needed, others glad to catch the very crumbs that fell. Liszt was a prodigious genius. His whole life was an outpouring. He was one of the most charitable men that ever lived. A hero of many cultures, he was not only the greatest pianist that has thus far appeared, but he invented the Symphonic Poem, a vital modification of the old symphony form, and left behind him a remarkable school of pianists who have, each in his own individual fashion, continued or expanded the Liszt's traditions.

Liszt was a pupil of Karl Czerny, whose finger exercise, still resounding in various homes and halls of learning. Czerny taught him finger mechanism. Muzio Clementi, who has been called "the father of pianoforte-playing," bequeathed a set of studies that showed Liszt the way; studies, the technical figures of which were appreciated by Beethoven to such an extent that when you have mastered Clementi, you can at least finger any sonata of Beethoven. Liszt has also studied to advantage the school of his predecessor at Weimar, J. N. Hummel, whose style was an amplification of Mozart's. Then he met Chopin, and that path-breaker in figuration, digitation, style, and interpretation, exerted, after Paganini, the most enduring influence on Liszt's future. Paganini's fantastic and extraordinary violin performances had fired musical and unmusical Europe; Liszt did not escape the general conflagration. A kindred temperament to Paganini's, on certain sides, he sought for the secret of the Italian's diabolic play. He discovered it, as by reason of his almost universal sympathies he discovered the secrets of other virtuosi and composers. Liszt's very power, muscular, compelling, set pianoforte manufacturers to experimenting. A new instrument was literally made for him, an instrument that could thunder like an orchestra, sing like a voice, or whisper like a harp. Liszt could proudly boast, "le piano—c'est moi!" With it he needed no orchestra, no singers, no scenery. It was his stage, and upon its wires he told the stories of the operas, sang the beautiful, and then novel, *Fieder* of Schubert and Schumann, revealed the mastery of Beethoven, the poetry of Chopin, and Bach's magical mathematics. He, too, set Europe ablaze; even Paganini was forgotten, and the gentlemanly Thalberg with his gentlemanly playing suddenly became insidiously true music-lovers. Liszt was called a charlatan, and doubtless partially deserved the appellation in the sense that he very often played for effect's sake, for the sake of dazzling the groundlings. His tone was massive, his touch colored by a thousand shades of feeling, his technique impeccable, his fire and fury bewildering; add to this a musicianship superior to any composer of the century, except Mendelssohn—Beethoven is, naturally, not included—and a gift of divination that was without parallel.

And if Liszt affected his contemporaries, he also trained his successors, Tausig, von Bulow, and Rubinstein—the latter was never an actual pupil, though he profited by Liszt's advice and regarded him as a model. Karl Tausig, the greatest virtuoso after Liszt and his equal at many points, died prematurely. Never had the world heard such controlled plastic, and objective interpretations. His iron will had drilled his Slavie temperament so that his playing was, as Joseffy says, "a series of perfectly painted pictures." His technique, according to those who heard him, was perfection. He was the one pianist sans peur et sans reproche. All schools were at his call. Chopin was revived when he played; and he was the first to hail the rising star of Brahms, not critically as did Schumann, but practically by putting his name on his recital programs. Mr. Albert Ross Parsons, the well-known New York pianist, critic, and pedagogue, once told the present writer that Tausig's playing evoked the image of some magnificent mountain. "And Joseffy?" was asked

—for Joseffy was Tausig's favourite pupil. "The lovely mist that enveloped the mountain at dusk," was Mr. Parsons' very happy answer. Since then Joseffy has condensed this mist into something more solid, though remaining quite as beautiful.

Rubinstein I heard play his series of historical recitals, seven in all; better still, I heard him perform the feat twice. I regret that it was not thrice. If ever there was a heaven-storming genius, it was Anton Rubinstein. Nicolas Rubinstein was a capital artist; but the fire that flickered and leaped in the playing of Anton was not in evidence in the work of his brother. You felt in listening to Anton that the piece he happened to be playing was heard by you for the first time—the creative element in his nature was so strong. It seemed no longer reproductive art. The same thing has been said of Liszt. Often arbitrary in his very subjective readings, Rubinstein never failed to interest. He had an overpowering sort of magnetism that crossed the stage and enveloped his audience with a gripping power. His touch, to quote again Joseffy, was like that of a French horn. It sang with a mellow thunder. An impressionist is the best sense of that misunderstood expression; he was the reverse of his rival and colleague, Hans von Bulow.

The brother-in-law, a la main gauche, of that brother of dragons, Richard Wagner, von Bulow was hardly appreciated during his first visit to America in 1876-77. Rubinstein had preceded him by three seasons, and we were loath to believe that the rather dry, angular touch and clear-cut phrasing of the little, irritable Hans were revelations from on high. Nevertheless, von Bulow, the mighty scholar, opened new views for us by his Beethoven and Bach playing. The analyst in him ruled. Not a colorist, but a master of black and white, he exposed the minutest meanings of the composer that he presented. He was first to introduce Tchaikovsky's brilliant and clangorous B-flat minor Concerto. Of his Chopin performances, I retain only the memory of the D-flat Nocturne. That was exquisite, and all the more surprising coming from a man of von Bulow's pedantic nature. His second visit to this country, some 15 years ago, was better appreciated, but I found his playing almost insupportable. He had withered in tone and style, a mummy of his former alert self.

The latter-day generation of virtuosi owe as much to Liszt as did the famous trinity, Tausig, Rubinstein, von Bulow. Many of them studied with the old wizard at Rome, Budapest, and Weimar; some with his pupils; all have absorbed his traditions. It would be as impossible to keep Liszt out of your playing—out of your fingers, forearms,iceps, and triiceps—as it would be to return to the naive manner of an Emmanuel Bach or a Scarlatti. Modern pianoforte-playing spells Liszt.

After von Bulow a much more naturally gifted pianist visited the United States, Rafael Joseffy. It was in 1879 that old Chickering Hall witnessed his triumph, a triumph many times repeated later in Steinway Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera House, and throughout America. At first Joseffy was called the "Patti of the Pianoforte," one of those facile, alliterative, meaningless titles he never merited. He had the coloratura, if you will, of a Patti, but he had something besides—brains and a poetic temperament. "Poetic" is a vague term that usually covers a weakness in technique. There are different sorts of poetry. There is the rich poetry of Paderewski, the antique grace and delicious poetry of de Pachman. The Joscelian poetry is something else. Its quality is more subtle, more recitativo than the poetry of the Polish or the Russian pianist. Such miraculous finish, such crystalline tone had never before been heard until Joseffy appeared. At first his playing was the purest pantheism—a transfigured materialism, tone, and technique raised to heights undreamed of. Years later a new Joseffy was born. Stern self-discipline, as was the case with Tausig, had won a victory over his temperament as well as his fingers. More restrained, less lush, his play is now ruled by the keenest of intellects, while the old silvery and sensuous charm has not vanished. Some refused to accept the change. They did not realize that for an artist to remain stationary is decadence. They longed for graceful trilling, for rose-coloured patterns, for swallow-

like flights across the keyboard, by a pair of the most beautiful piano hands since Tausig's. In a word, these people did not care for Brahms, and they did care very much for the Chopin Valse in double notes. But the automatic piano has outpointed every virtuoso except Rosenthal in the matter of mere technique. So we enjoy our Brahms from Joseffy, and when he plays Liszt or Chopin, which he does in an ideal style, far removed from the tumultuous thumpings of the average virtuoso, we turn out in numbers to enjoy and applaud him. His music has that indefinable quality



VLADIMIR DE PACHMAN.

which vibrates from a Stradivarius violin. His touch is like no other in the world, and his readings of the classics are marked by reverence and authority. In certain Chopin numbers, such as the Berceuse, the F minor Ballade, the Barcarolle, and the E minor Concerto, he has no peer. Equally lucid and lovely are his performances of the B-flat major Brahms Concerto and the A major Concerto of Liszt. Joseffy is unique.

There was an interregnum in the pianoforte arena for a few years. Joseffy was reported as having been discovered in the wilds above Tarrytown playing two-voiced inventions of Bach, and writing a new piano school. Arthur Friedheim appeared and dazzled us with the B minor Sonata of Liszt. It was a wonder-breeding, thrilling performance. Alfred Grunfeld, of Vienna, caracolled across the keys in an amiably dashing style. Rummel played earnestly. Ansgorge also played earnestly. Edmund Neupert delivered Grieg's Concerto as no one before or since has done. Pugno came from Paris, Rosenthal thundered; Sauer, Stavenhagen, Sloti, Sliwinski, Mark Hamblong, Burmeister, Hylstedt, Eadott Sherwood, Godowsky, Gabelowitsch, Vogrich, Sternberg, Jarvis, Milo, Richard Hoffmann, Bosevitz—to go back some years; Alexander Lambert, August Spanuth, Klahre Lamund, Doheanyi, Busoni, Baermann, Satul, Saens, Stojowski, Lhevinne, Rudolph Gauz, MacDowell, Otto Hegner, Josef Hofmann, Reisenauer none of these artists ever aroused such excitement as Paderewski, though a more captivating and brilliant Liszt player than Alfred Reisenauer has been seldom seen and heard.

It was about 1891 that I attended a rehearsal at Carnegie Hall in which participated Ignace Jan Paderewski, the C minor Concerto of Saint-Saens, an effective though musically empty work, was played. There is nothing in the composition that will test a good pianist; yet Paderewski made much of the music. His tone was noble, his technique adequate, his single-finger touch singing. Above all, there was a romantic temperament exposed; not morbid but robust. His strange appearance, the golden aureoled head, the shy attitude, were rather puzzling to public and critic at his debut. Not too much enthusiasm was exhibited during the concert or next morning in the newspapers. But the second performance settled the question. A great artist was revealed. His diffidence melted in the heat of frantic applause. He played the Schumann Concerto, the F minor Concerto of Chopin, many other concertos, all of Chopin's music, much of Schumann, Beethoven, and Liszt. His recitals, first given in the concert hall of Madison Square Garden, so expanded in



FRANZ LISZT.

student travels, he will be sure to encounter the figure of Liszt. Yet neither Liszt nor Chopin was without artistic ancestors. That they stemmed from the great central tree of European music; that they at first were swept down the main current, later controlled it, are facts that to-day are the commonplaces of the schools; though a few decades ago those who could see no salvation outside of German music-making, he it never so conventional, failed to recognize the real significance of either Liszt or Chopin. Both men gave Europe new forms, a new harmonic system, and in Liszt's case his originality was so marked that from Wagner to Tchaikovsky and the Russians, from Cornelius to Richard Strauss and the still newer men, all helped themselves at his royal banquet; some like Wagner, a great