

Music and Musicians.

TALKS ON MUSIC.

By W. H. WEBBE.

(Specially Reported for the
"Graphic.")

The following is the conclusion of the lecture delivered by Mr W. H. Webbe at the School of Music Grafton Road, on Thursday, September 20th, about

Some Great Composers of Piano-forte Music and Their Works.

MENDELSSOHN.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy was born at Hamburg in 1809, and died at Leipzig, 1847.

His father, Abraham, was a wealthy banker in Hamburg, of Jewish parentage, but who, with his wife, joined the Lutheran Church. The name Bartholdy was his mother's, and was taken later in life as a condition to inherit some property. The grandfather of Mendelssohn was Moses Mendelssohn a distinguished Jewish philosopher. Both father and mother of young Felix were persons of superior intellectual abilities. They bore a high character, and devoted much attention to the education of their children. Young Mendelssohn received a first-class education, and in addition to the study of piano, organ, violin, and theory, he was taught Greek and drawing, and among other accomplishments it may be added that he was a good all-round athlete.

He commenced to compose at the age of 12, and he wrote many symphonies and numerous pieces for the piano in his youth.

Unlike the majority of the great masters, Mendelssohn was brought up in the lap of luxury. The home of his people was a delightful one, and the resort of numerous musicians.

His father arranged an extended tour for his son, and when he was about 20 years of age he visited England and Scotland, and produced some of his compositions there; he was heartily received by the public. The next year he made a long tour through Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and France. It was during this time that he wrote his celebrated "Concerto in G Minor," and the first book of the now world-wide known "Lied Ohne Worte." In 1835 he was appointed Capelmester to the King of Prussia, and also principal professor of a new academy of music in Berlin. In 1843 he assisted in founding the celebrated Leipzig Conservatorium. The other teachers were Schumann (piano), Becker (organ), David (violin).

In 1837 he was married to the daughter of a Lutheran clergyman, the union proving a very happy one. He was a hard worker; in fact, it was the strain of too much work upon his excitable nerve, that caused him to break down, and he died in 1847, at the early age of 38. Mendelssohn scholarships have been founded in London and Berlin, and a statue erected to the memory of this illustrious musician in Berlin in 1892.

Mendelssohn led an ideal life. He was surrounded by all that wealth, education and position could give him, he was honoured by musicians, and idolized by the people. He was probably the only one of the great masters who was so fortunate.

Not only was Mendelssohn a wonderful creative genius, but he understood the works of the classical masters, and it is to him we have to be thankful for reviving so many of Bach's works.

Mendelssohn's music is beautiful in melody and rich in harmony. Occasionally its melodiousness tends towards sentimentality in some of his smaller pieces. He was a prolific composer, his choral works including "St. Paul" and "Elijah." His pianoforte compositions include some fine concertos, fugues, and sonatas, numerous solos, one of which, the "Rondo Capriccioso," is universally known, and the ever popular "Songs Without Words." I would add that his violin concerto, Op. 64, is considered one of the finest ever written, and his Capriccio in B Minor, and Scherzo, are fine specimens of his characteristic pieces for piano solos. The overture to a

"Midsummer Night's Dream" is one of his most charming and original compositions, although written when he was but 17 years of age.

Mendelssohn was a musician of a high type, an able conductor, a fine pianist, a master organist, a man of culture and honour.

Regarding his pianoforte music, he was original in the domain of melody and harmony, unsurpassed for the grace, elegance, refinement, and finish of his compositions.

CHOPIN.

Frederic Chopin was born at Warsaw the same year as Mendelssohn (1809), and died two years later than Mendelssohn, at Paris (1849).

Chopin was of French and Polish origin, his father being a celebrated Polish patriot born in France, and his mother a Polish lady. His father settled in Warsaw as a professor, and it was near Warsaw that Chopin was born. Young Chopin was of a refined, sensitive nature, and was brought up from his childhood in the best society in Poland. In spite of his delicate constitution and nervous disposition, he generally enjoyed good health, until he contracted consumption in Paris when 30 years of age.

The boy's genius soon became manifest, both in the art of composing and improvising. He was passionately fond of Polish folk songs and national dances, and frequently clothed these strange melodies with their peculiar rhythms, with such original and characteristic harmonies as to give the complete composition a weird charm.

He first played in public when nine years old, when his rendition of a concerto by Gyrowetz met with hearty applause, but the manner in which he was received did not make him vain of his success, and it has been said that when his mother questioned him about the concert, he replied, "Oh, mamma, everybody was looking at my new collar."

At 18 years of age he was sent to Berlin, where he had the privilege of meeting Mendelssohn, Spontini and other of the great musicians of that place. Shortly afterwards he went to Vienna, where he met with much success. The encouragement he received from the best artists there stimulated him in his work. It was in 1830 that his great concerto in F Minor was finished and performed. It was this year he left Poland. After a few years travelling he settled down in Paris, where he lived for the rest of his life. Amongst his numerous friends in Paris were Liszt, Berlioz, Heine, Balzac, Ernst and Meyerbeer.

As a concert player Chopin was not a great success, his playing, which produced a soft and delicate tone, was more suitable for a drawingroom than a large hall.

Chopin was a prolific composer, his mazurkas, nocturnes, and polonaises being reckoned amongst the most favourite of pianoforte literature of the day.

Not only did Chopin excel as a composer, but also as a teacher. Wherever he went he was greatly sought after by those who were anxious to obtain lessons from him.

Chopin, during the last eleven years of his life, suffered exceedingly, and in spite of his delicate condition visited Scotland and England, and gave numerous concerts, and when he returned to Paris in 1849, it was but to die. At his funeral, in accordance with his wish, Mozart's Requiem was performed, and he was buried close to Cherubini and Bellini.

Dr. Rieman puts it that "Chopin was of a rare poetic nature, as Heine in words, so did he compose in full, free tones, untrammelled by tradition and recognised forms."

In Chopin's, like the works of all composers, there are certain degrees of excellence, some being of greater merit than others, but in nearly all of Chopin's compositions there is little which is not beautiful, poetic, and full of the inspiration of a high born genius. Pianists are indebted to this great master for some of the most original and exquisite pieces ever composed for their instrument.

SCHUMANN.

Robert Schumann was born at Zwickau, a mining village in Saxony,

in 1810, and died at Bonn, 1856.

He was the youngest of five children, and the only one of the family who attained distinction. His father was a bookseller and publisher, his mother was a doctor's daughter, and unfortunately for Robert, was somewhat narrow-minded and provincial in her education and ideas.

He took his earlier lessons on the piano from a teacher named Kuntzsch, with whom he made scant progress. Later on he went to Leipzig, and received instruction from the celebrated Wieck. The master being strict, and the pupil being self-willed and obstinate; as may be supposed, lessons did not at first always go along smoothly. Schumann was somewhat erratic in his musical studies.

In 1828, when 18 years of age, he was sent to Leipzig to study law. It is related of him that he meant to attend the lectures on jurisprudence, and that he made several attempts to do so, but never got beyond the door.

After being with Wieck some years Schumann married one of that gentleman's daughters, which was fortunate for him, as the marriage was a happy one, and his wife greatly assisted him in all his work. She became one of the most famous pianists of the day, and only recently (1896) she died, at the ripe age of 77 years. She was a frequent performer at the principal concerts on the Continent, and in London; as an interpreter of her husband's music she was unrivalled.

Schumann was very absent-minded, as will be perceived by the following anecdote:

We have elsewhere spoken of the growth and culmination of Robert Schumann's sad malady. The more serious phases of this affliction were preceded by an occasional absence of mind that sometimes produced ludicrous results.

A characteristic instance of his forgetfulness occurred when he was once conducting a rehearsal of Bach's "Passion Music." The choir had begun the great opening chorus and were singing bravely along, when it was noticed that his baton grew less and less decided and finally stopped altogether. He then laid down his baton, rapidly turned over fifty or sixty pages of the score before him, and became absorbed in reading a movement in the second part of the work. The chorus kept on singing and Schumann kept on reading, utterly oblivious of what was going on around him.

After a while he became conscious of the singing, and finding that what he heard did not agree in the least with what he was reading, he stopped the singers, and cried out to them: "Good heavens! ladies and gentlemen, what on earth are you singing there?"

Towards the end of his life he unfortunately showed symptoms of insanity, and in 1854, when but 44 years of age, while sitting with his physician and another friend, he suddenly, without any warning, left the room, and went to the bridge close by, and threw himself into the Rhine. He was rescued, but was found to be quite insane. He was removed to an asylum near Bonn, and died there a few months later, in July, 1856.

Schumann's compositions are mostly of a poetical and intellectual character, sometimes blending together movements of intense fiery passion, with those of the tenderest conception. Many of his smaller pieces are not only interesting but important, mainly as showing the bent of his mind toward connecting his music with more or less definitely conceived scenes. He was a clever critic, his literary works rank very high, and may be read with much profit.

Christine Nilsson and the Shah.

Mapelson, the great impresario, tells a good story of Christine Nilsson and the Shah of Persia on the occasion of the late monarch's first visit to London. Mr Mapelson says:—

Early in the month of July, it was intimated to me that His Majesty the Shah of Persia would honour the theatre with his presence. I thereupon set about organising a perform-

ance that would give satisfaction both to my principal artists and to the Lord Chamberlain, who had charge of the arrangements. Two days before the performance Mme. Nilsson suddenly expressed her willingness to commence the evening with the act of "La Traviata," she having ascertained from the Lord Chamberlain, or some other high personage (as I afterwards discovered), that His Majesty the Shah could only be present from half-past eight until half-past nine, being due at the grand ball given by the Goldsmiths in the City at about ten o'clock.

Mme. Nilsson had ordered, at considerable expense, one of the most sumptuous dresses I have ever seen, from Worth, in Paris, in order to portray "Violetta" in the most appropriate style. On the evening of the performance His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales arrived punctually at half-past eight to assist in receiving the Shah, who did not put in an appearance; and it was ten minutes to nine when Sir Michael Costa led off the opera. I shall never forget the look the fair Swede cast upon the empty royal box, and it was not until half-past nine, when the act of "La Favorita" had commenced, that His Majesty arrived. He was particularly pleased with the ballet I had introduced in the "Favorita." The Prince of Wales, with his usual consideration and foresight, suggested to me that it might smooth over the difficulty in which he saw clearly I should be placed on the morrow in connection with Mme. Nilsson, if she were presented to the Shah prior to his departure.

I thereupon crossed the stage and went to Mme. Nilsson's room, informing her of this. She at once objected, having already removed her magnificent "Traviata" toilette and attired herself for the character of "Mignon," which consists of a torn old dress almost in rags, with hair hanging dishevelled down the back, and naked feet. After explaining that it was a command with which she must comply, I persuaded her to put a bold face on the matter and follow me. I ac-

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The Children's Tea Table.

It is always a pleasure to a mother to make her children's tea-table inviting. Some do this by providing fancy cakes and pastries from the nearest pastry-cook, but the after-effects of such fare too often proclaim its unwholesomeness. Nothing is more welcome to the children than nice little scones and simple cakes freshly baked at home, and these can be made very quickly and easily with the help of the new Paisley Flour, made by Brown & Polson, of Corn Flour fame. No yeast or baking powder is required, as Paisley Flour does the work of raising, and at the same time improves the flavour and digestibility of whatever is baked with it.

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