



Arthur M. Abell, who will be 86 years old on April 6, was Berlin correspondent of the Courier from 1890 to 1918.

BERLIN'S GOLDEN AGE OF MUSIC

For twenty-two years (1892-1914) Berlin could boast of a wealth of musical activities such as have never been known anywhere else in the entire annals of music.

By ARTHUR M. ABELL

BRAHMS, Verdi, and Tchaikovsky were all still living and composing when I sailed for Europe in 1890. One of Brahms' greatest masterpieces, the Clarinet Quintet, had not yet been written. Verdi's last opera, *Falstaff*, was not performed until three years later, and Tchaikovsky's *chef d'oeuvre*, the "Pathétique," had not even been thought of by the composer. Richard Strauss and Puccini were then only on the threshold of their careers. Anton Rubinstein and Hans von Bülow were the great luminaries in the pianistic heavens. The names of Paderewski and Busoni were not yet world-famous. Joachim, Sarasate, and Wilhelm dominated the violin world.

Vienna and Leipzig were still Europe's greatest music centers, but after the dedication of Bechstein Hall in 1892 Berlin outdistanced them. For the next twenty-two years Berlin could boast of musical activities such as have never been known anywhere else in the entire annals of music. What Brahms called "der grosse Aufschwung" (the great soaring) started soon after that remarkable dedication.

After the opening of Bechstein Hall, other concert halls shot up like mushrooms in Berlin. I myself witnessed there the dedications of no less than eight of them—namely, the Beethoven, the Aeolian, the *Bluethner*, the Mozart, the Harmonium, the *Klindworth-Scharwenka*, and the two halls in the new Berlin Royal High School.

There was a steady crescendo of musical activities in Berlin, which culminated in the season 1910-11. By actual count, there were that winter 801 performances of grand opera in Berlin's four opera houses, which functioned every night for ten months in the year. These were the Royal Opera, the Comic Opera, the Kuerfuersten Opera (also called "Das Teater des Westens"), and the "Volks-Oper." There were also 297 performances of light opera.

New Yorkers who visited Berlin that season marvelled that a city of four million inhabitants could maintain four opera houses. Of course they had to be subsidized, Count von Huelsen, the general manager (Intendant) of the Royal Opera, informed me that Kaiser Wilhelm contributed annually no less than 2,100,000 marks (\$570,000) to the support of the Royal Opera.

There were also 1,096 concerts that same season. Of these, 176 were symphonic with seventeen different conductors, 102 were choral, and 123 chamber music *soirées*. As for recitals, 328 were given by singers, 241 by pianists, 64 by violinists, and 15 by cellists.

The quality of the offerings that season was quite as remarkable as the quantity. Among the pianists heard were Busoni, d'Albert, Correno, Anserge, Sauer, de Pachmann,

Schnabel, Rosenthal, Godowsky, and Scharwenka. The singers included Lilli Lehmann, Frieda Hempel, Ludwig Wuellner, Elena Gerhardt, Julia Culp, Marcella Sembrich, Geraldine Farrar, Johanna Gadschi, and Tilly Koenen. Among the numerous oratorio societies, the most important was the Philharmonic chorus of 400 mixed voices under the dynamic Siegfried Ochs. This was by far the greatest choir I ever heard. Bach's B Minor Mass sung by that organization was indeed something to be remembered.

Of course where there was so much wheat, there was bound to be considerable chaff. Many vocal and instrumental mediocrities tried their luck in Berlin, but the critics, by mutual agreement, ignored all offerings that were below a certain high standard. This prevented Berlin's concert hall from being monopolized by inferior artists. A Berlin success at that time meant world acclaim.

Among my most precious memories of the eight years, from 1892 to 1900, were the many gatherings of famous musicians at the home of Joseph Joachim. Thanks to a very warm letter of introduction which I had brought to the great violinist from Walter Damrosch, I was invited to all of these. Damrosch's father, Leopold, had been an intimate friend of Joachim before the former came to America. As Walter expressed it, "Joachim was the embodiment of father's ideal of a violinist and musician."

Joachim, knowing that his friends were eager to hear him play, never waited to be asked. Like Mischa Elman today, he would get out his violin and regale us for hours at a stretch. Joachim, like Brahms, had a photographic memory; he never forgot a piece of music he had once mastered. I recall on one occasion, Andras Moser, Joachim's biographer, asked him if he had in his fingers the Paganini Caprices that he used to play in his youth. Whereupon Joachim dashed off the first one in E Major, known as the Arpeggio Caprice, one of the most difficult of the twenty-four. I have never since heard any violinist produce such staccato effects as Joachim brought out while his bow swept over the four strings. When I first heard him in 1890, he still had a formidable technic and I have never since heard the Beethoven concerto or the Bach Chaconne played as he rendered them.

Many years later I said to Dr. Albert Einstein: "I know that you play the violin and that you have heard a great deal of music. What was the greatest musical impression you ever had in your life?" Without hesitation, he replied, "When in my youth I heard Joseph Joachim play the Bach Chaconne." I could say too that it was one of my greatest impressions, although I shall never forget the furore that Anton Rubinstein caused at the Leipzig Gewandhaus early in 1892. When he appeared on the stage the orchestra

greeted him with a flourish of trumpets and a beating of the kettle drums. The entire audience stood up, cheered, waved their handkerchiefs, and yelled, "Long live Anton Rubinstein!"

Josef Hofmann, as far as I know the only man living in America who was present at that concert, often said to me: "Rubinstein was my ideal. There has been no pianist since who could be compared with him." Abram Chasins once asked Josef Lhevinne: "Do you really think that Rubinstein played better than you do or than Artur Rubinstein or Horowitz do?" Whereupon Lhevinne replied, "All the pianists in the world today put together would not make one Anton Rubinstein."

It's difficult for the present generation of pianists to understand the grand manner in which he played. It is the same with contemporary violinists and Joachim. There are at least half a dozen living violinists who possess fully as great a technic as did Joseph Joachim in 1890, but not one of them has his profound musicianship, his fascinating delivery, his lofty conception of Bach and Beethoven, and his unique intellectual lift when playing. To compare the playing of Anton Rubinstein or Joseph Joachim with that of contemporary pianists or violinists would be very much like comparing contemporary composers with Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven.

It is a great pity that no photographs were taken of those wonderful groups at Joachim's home during the nineties. At the very first one after the dedication of Bechstein Hall in 1892, I heard Joachim and Brahms play five Hungarian Dances, and Rubinstein and Joachim play the Kreutzer Sonata. Many living pianists have a more accurate technic than did Anton Rubinstein. He sometimes hit wrong notes and he was aware of it. That evening after the Kreutzer Sonata, he said to Hans von Bülow, who had just given an impeccable performance of Schumann's Toccata: "Well Hans. I hit more wrong notes than usual tonight, whereas you didn't miss a single one." Whereupon von Bülow replied: "Yes, Anton, you did hit a few wrong notes, but believe me, I would give every one

of my right notes if I could just once strike a wrong note the way you do."

I am at present at work on a book which is to be entitled *Famous Composers Discuss Inspiration*. The subject matter is concerned with intimate talks with Brahms, Strauss, Puccini, Humperdinck, Bruch, and Grieg, concerning their intellectual, psychic, and spiritual processes while composing. These conversations occurred mostly in Berlin between the years 1894 and 1914.

The talk with Humperdinck was particularly revealing because he told me of conversations he had had with Richard Wagner in 1880 concerning the same subject. I was amazed at Wagner's revelations, which will be reproduced in full in my book. Humperdinck was Wagner's pupil and intimate friend, and what he said to me was quoted from an old diary. I was so impressed that I said to him:

"What an extraordinary revelation you have given me, Professor Humperdinck. It is the most remarkable description of inspiration actually taking form that I have ever heard. I would like to express my gratitude to you in a more substantial manner than in mere words of thanks. What do you say to a reception in your honor at my home."

I then asked him if he had any particular wishes regarding musicians he would like to meet at my home. He replied:

"Yes, I have, and my list will be an unusual one. First of all I should like to ask you to invite Ludwig Pietsch, the musical editor of the *Vossische Zeitung*. He is now over eighty years old, but he is still very active as a writer. I first met him in Cairo in 1870 at the world premiere of *Aida*. Pietsch wrote the best review of that great event I ever read. I have not seen him since, and it would please me immensely to greet him at your home.

"Another very rare musical personality whom I would like to request you to invite is Etelka Gerster. During the seventies she rivalled Adelina Patti. I heard them both in the *Barber of Seville* and *Lucia*. It would thrill me to make the acquaintance of Mme. Gerster. She was my idol as a coloratura singer, but I have never met her.



Reception given in 1906 by Arthur M. Abell in honor of the composer of Haensel und Gretel.

Front row: Emil von Reznicek, Arthur M. Abell, Conrad Ansoerge.

Second row: Mme. von Reznicek, Mme. Humperdinck, Antonia Mielke, Leopold Godowsky, Xaver Scharwenka, Giovanni Lamperti, Elsa von Geare.

Third row: Fritz Kreisler, Alberto Jonas, Mme. George Palmer,

Etelka Gerster, Mme. Sacerdoti, Ludwig Pietsch, Mme. Abell, Mme. Scharwenka, Mme. Ansoerge, Martin Krause, Otto Richter.

Top row: Harriet Kreisler, Theodore Spiering, Mme. Godowsky, Mme. Rider Possart, Marie Loeser, Mme. Lamperti, Mme. Richter, Boris Lutsky, M. Katzenellenbogen, Tessa Haring, G. Katzenellenbogen.

"Please invite also Lamperti. His pupil, Marcella Sembrich, next to Gerster and Patti, is my favorite songbird. Other artists whom I would like to greet at that reception are Xaver Scharwenka, Leopold Godowsky, Ferruccio Busoni, and Conrad Ansoerge [all four famous pianists]. Also Fritz Kreisler, who is my favorite violinist today. The magic of Kreisler's playing reminds me of Wieniawski. (*Der Zauber der von Kreisler's spiel ausgeht erinnert mich an Wieniawski.*)

"And finally, I request you to invite my young friend, Richard Strauss. When I heard his wonderful interpretation of *Haensel und Gretel* at Weimar in 1894, I felt that I was creating the opera again. I realize that it is a large order for me to expect you to get together so many world-renowned musicians at one time, but from the reports I have heard, I believe you are equal to it."

I sent out invitations for December 28, 1906. Every one Humperdinck had selected came to the reception, with the sole exception of Richard Strauss, who had to conduct at the Royal Opera that evening. Busoni was present, but a concert engagement compelled him to leave before the picture on page 7 was taken, which was long after midnight. Since this photograph was taken, nearly half a century ago, a few words of explanation concerning the more important persons seen in the group, some of whom were not requested by Humperdinck, will, no doubt, be of interest.

E. N. von Reznicek was the leading conductor of the Berlin Comic Opera and the composer of *Donna Dianna*, an opera that was very popular in Germany before the First World War. In fact, the overture is still played on radio programs, even in America.

Conrad Ansoerge was one of the last of the great Liszt pupils. He was with the master in Bayreuth during his last days and was present when he died July 31, 1886. Ansoerge made an American tour the season of 1887-8.

Giovanni Lamperti and his father, Francesco, were two of the greatest singing teachers of their epoch.

Mme. Bornemann, sitting beside Humperdinck, was a relative of Ole Bull, the renowned Norwegian violinist.

The third woman in the second row, Antonia Mielke, was for many years one of the leading dramatic sopranos

of the Vienna Imperial Opera. Walter Damrosch brought her to New York with Lilli Lehmann for his season of German Opera at the Metropolitan.

Leopold Godowsky, sitting next to her, was one of the greatest pianists of his generation. His Berlin debut in 1900 was a sensation. The critic of the *Tageblatt* wrote, "Godowsky has no left hand; he has two right hands."

Xaver Scharwenka, seen between Godowsky and Lamperti, conquered the pianistic world, as a youth of twenty, with his "Polish Dance." During the seventies, eighties, and nineties, it was played by every school girl all over the world. A great banquet was given in his honor at the Hotel Kaiserhof, on his sixtieth birthday, at which Humperdinck made a speech, telling among other things that more than three million copies of the "Polish Dance" had been sold.

Mme. Sacerdoti, the stately dark-haired woman, between Etelka Gerster and the aged Ludwig Pietsch, was the joint owner, together with S. Landecker, of Berlin's largest concert hall, the Philharmonie, in which the celebrated Philharmonic concerts, under the baton of the unrivalled Arthur Nikisch, were given.

Martin Krause, the bald gentleman at the extreme right, was the teacher of Claudio Arrau, the distinguished contemporary Chilean pianist, a prime favorite with New York audiences today.

Boris Lutsky, standing behind Ludwig Pietsch, was the first husband of Olga Samaroff.

Theodore Spiering, top row at the left, was a distinguished American violinist, who was living in Berlin at that time. He was concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra during the season of 1910 when Gustav Mahler was conductor, and after the latter's collapse, he led the orchestra for the remainder of the season.

The memory of those wonderful evenings at Joachim's home in the nineties convinced me that I should have photographs taken of the many groups that assembled at my home in later years, after it had become the meeting place for musical celebrities. This I did, and the Humperdinck group was one of many photographs which I had taken.

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