

Publisher vs. Composer: Can They Agree?

By FELIX GREISSE

RELATIONS between composer and publisher pose a delicate problem. To explain this problem, we will have to examine the viewpoints of both sides.

For the composer, especially the younger one, the following situation usually exists. He has finished a composition. Still fresh in his mind are memories of the mental hardships he had to undergo, the struggles and doubts that possessed him while he was creating his work, and the final elation of achievement. He is convinced that he has accomplished something valuable that is bound to arouse deep interest; and he has a strong desire for his work to reach the widest circles. If he is vain, he will also crave fame. He decides to call on a publisher and offer him the composition. But before he does, he consciously or unconsciously—prepares himself for the visit. He knows by experience, or from the recounted experiences of others, that the publisher is a man of hard facts, who is filled with production and sales figures, but knows little or nothing about music. The publisher will talk in a language that is not that of the composer, and the conversation will revolve about matters foreign to a musician. Although the composer has undoubtedly done highly productive work, the publisher will not acknowledge this. He will have to fight the publisher. The composer deeply resents the injustice of circumstances that force him, who has something to give, into the position of a beggar. Even before he sees the publisher, he already considers him an enemy. He eventually meets him with a feeling of hostility, which he disguises with the self-degrading friendliness of a petitioner.

VIEWED from the other side, this picture changes considerably. The man who is expected to publish the composition is running an organization for which it is his responsibility to net a profit. He must worry about rent, taxes, payroll, and all the many other expenses of running a business. He knows precisely how much he would have to spend on the offered composition for editing, engraving, printing, promotion, and advertising. He is fully aware that he would have to sell 1,000 or more copies before he could amortize his expenses and begin to earn money. The publisher also realizes that he would be able to sell only 500 copies, if not fewer, during the first three years after publication, and that after this period interest might have waned to such an extent as to make this particular composition no longer saleable. Even if results were better than his expectations, the relationship between efforts spent and success achieved would still be discouraging from his point of view.

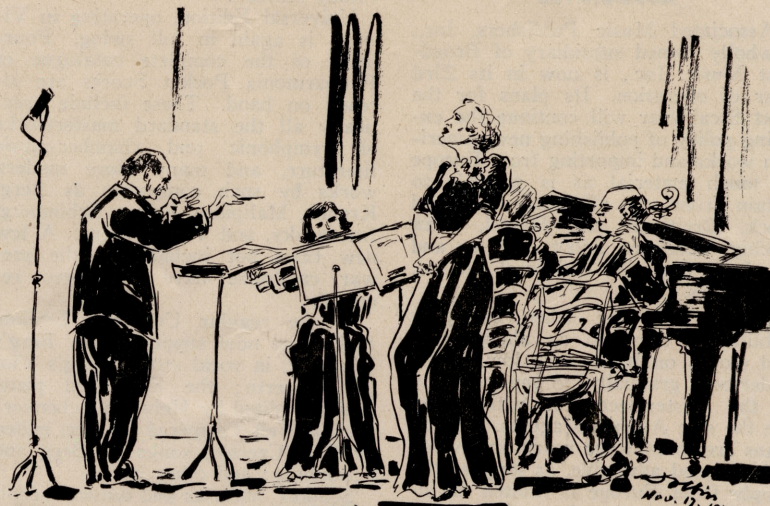
It is clear to the publisher that he will have to continue to rely for profits on his better-selling publications of lesser merit, on his classical and teaching editions, or on popular music. These have to make up for the loss he incurs in publishing a contemporary work of high standards but low marketability. If he does publish such a composition at all, he is usually motivated by other than business considerations. Gain of prestige, sympathy, or a certain feeling of obligation—these are the governing factors in his decision. Accordingly (and to his way of thinking quite naturally), he will feel that in publishing the work

he is being more generous than could have been reasonably expected. He will feel that the composer owes him gratitude, and he will be disappointed if the composer shows too little recognition of his debt.

In reality, quite so sharp a discrepancy of views may not always exist. Essentially, however, these opposing concepts are permanently at the basis of composer-publisher relations. The one is an artist, and the other is a businessman; each moves in a different world. They apply different standards to the things they have in common. Their ways of life diverge completely, and the problem of their relationship to each other is rooted far deeper than the mere protocol of polished good manners. Beethoven's rude outbursts against his publisher stemmed from his resentment against a man whom he wrongly suspected of making money at the composer's expense. Yet he was right when he accused him of ignorance, for the publisher knew nothing about the métier of the composer.

TO resolve this conflict, or even only mitigate it, is a difficult task. For the very nature of art resists commercialization. Only stereotyped music lends itself to mass production and brings appreciable profits. Such musical stereotypes evoke pleasure in wider audiences by means of well-known, repeatedly absorbed and digested patterns whose "beauty" consists in the delight brought about through recognition of the familiar. Here publishing—that is, making publicly known—is quite in keeping with the tastes of the majority of the prospective buyers; while in the light of present conditions, publishing a better (and more problematic) composition is practically senseless from the commercial point of view. The more difficulties a work of this kind sets against effortless perception, the fewer people—at least in the beginning—will be interested in it. Nevertheless, there remains the moral duty to make this music known. However, it is almost grotesque to assume that this should be the exclusive obligation of the publisher, whose professed and sole business it is to produce and sell music for profit. Nor is the small circle of those who will use such un-stereotyped music in any position to shoulder the entire expense of publication. Not unlike this small group of today, another minority in the past also valued its contemporary music highly. But this minority, represented by the nobility, was economically strong enough to pay for its refined pleasures. Selfish, as they no doubt were, in supplying means only to the end of their own enjoyment, they nevertheless fulfilled an important function. This class of patrons today belongs to history.

A REALLY culture-conscious democratic state has the answer to this question. Such a state could infinitely improve the present undignified situation by finding a solution on an impersonal, and thus ethically much higher, level. It would matter little to which field of music such aid was extended. Relief applied at one point would be of tremendous benefit to all. During the last war, the government of the United States undertook a preliminary step, which, if pursued intelligently, could be of telling consequence. Through the Office of War Information, it was made possible to distribute the scores of many compositions in other countries. The Government provided means for production and distribution. Even after the war, a skeleton of this office is continuing to operate on the same basis, and it can only be ardently



Drawing by B. F. Dolbin

SCHÖNBERG AS CONDUCTOR

Arnold Schönberg, whose 75th birthday was celebrated on Sept. 13, here shown conducting his *Pierrot Lunaire* at a New Friends of Music concert on Nov. 17, 1940. Erika Wagner-Steidry was soloist in the program, given in Town Hall

hoped that it will not be permitted to atrophy and die. It could serve as the nucleus of a new institution that could bring about a powerful modern revival of the benefits of aristocratic patronage.

State help would work a basic change in the relations between composer and publisher, for it would remove the causes of their mutual antagonism. An economically and artistically independent composer and a publisher who is not expected to be a patron could easily manage to get along. In the meantime, neither can do much to overcome the existing differences. On the surface, much can be improved by each party's making an effort to understand the other side. For the publisher this would mean to really know something about music, which is almost asking too much of him. Some houses have placed musical experts in responsible positions, a move that so far has always proved to be of advantage. But who would dare ask a composer to learn how to keep books?

Francisco Symphony participated in the performance.

The Koussevitzky Music Foundation has granted VIRGIL THOMSON, composer and music critic of the New York *Herald Tribune*, \$1,000 to write a new opera. Mr. Thomson's previous operas were *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *The Mother of Us All*. DIMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH's new *Song of Peace* was played for the first time at the Hermitage summer gardens recently.

JOHN JACOB NILES, American folklorist, has received the honorary degree of Doctor of Music from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, for his contributions to American folk music through his recitals, folk-song adaptations, and arrangements.

PETER MENNIN has been commissioned by the Dallas Symphony Society to compose a major orchestral work for next season. Mr. Mennin has written four symphonies, the most recent one, entitled *The Cycle*, with chorus. Walter Hendl, new conductor of the Dallas Symphony, will present Mr. Mennin's work.

George Hoyer conducted the Danish premieres of DON GILLIS' *Little Overture*, WILLIAM SCHUMAN'S *Third Symphony*, and SAMUEL BARBER'S *Capricorn Concerto* recently. HENRI SCHULTZE'S *Gamelan* was performed by the Charleston (W. Va.) Symphony recently. FREDERICK L. MARRIOTT played his new *Tryptique* for Organ and Strings at the Rockefeller Memorial Chapel of the University of Chicago on July 26. The Northern California Harpists' Association has awarded its 1949 prize to GRACE BECKER VAMOS for her *Legend of the Redwoods*.

British composers have been represented on many festival programs in recent weeks. GORDON JACOB'S *Symphonic Suite* was played by the Hallé Orchestra under John Barbirolli at the Cheltenham Festival. Mr. Jacob's *Fantasia on the Alleluia Hymn* was performed in Peterborough Cathedral. His *Suite in F* was played by the Goldsmith's College Orchestra in London. ERNEST J. MOERAN'S *Overture for a Masque* was heard at the Florence May Festival. ALAN BUSH'S *Nottingham Symphony* was played in Nottingham in June. HUMPHREY SEARLE'S *Fuga Giocosa* was broadcast from Brussels, and his *Ballade for Piano* was heard at Frankfurt, Germany. Mr. Searle's *Gold Coast Customs*, for speaker, chorus, and chamber orchestra, was given at the London Contemporary Music Centre.

Composers Corner

The newest composition of ARNOLD SCHÖNBERG, a *Fantasia for violin and piano*, was given its world premiere in Los Angeles on Sept. 13, at a concert in honor of the composer's 75th birthday. Adolph Koldofsky, violinist, to whom the work is dedicated, performed it. The birthday program also included Schönberg's *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*, in its original form for string quartet, piano and narrator; his *String Trio*; and several of his songs and piano pieces. The Schönberg concert was the last of three given by the Los Angeles chapter of the ISCM this summer. The others were devoted to music by ALBAN BERG, ANDRE CASANOVA, LUIGI DALLAPICCOLA, ERNST KRENEK, ARTUR SCHNABEL, ROGER SESSIONS and ERNST TOCH.

The first opera composed especially for television, LUKAS FOSS' *The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, based on Mark Twain's story, has been completed. Jean Karsavina wrote the libretto. Mr. Foss's opera was commissioned by Roger Englander, who plans to produce it this fall.

DARIUS MILHAUD'S *Sacred Service* had its premiere at Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco recently, with the composer conducting. Edgar Jones, baritone, the University of California Chorus and members of the San

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