

## Continuing the Veinus Notes

VICTOR BOOK OF CONCERTOS. By Abraham Veinus. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1948. 450 pp. \$3.95.

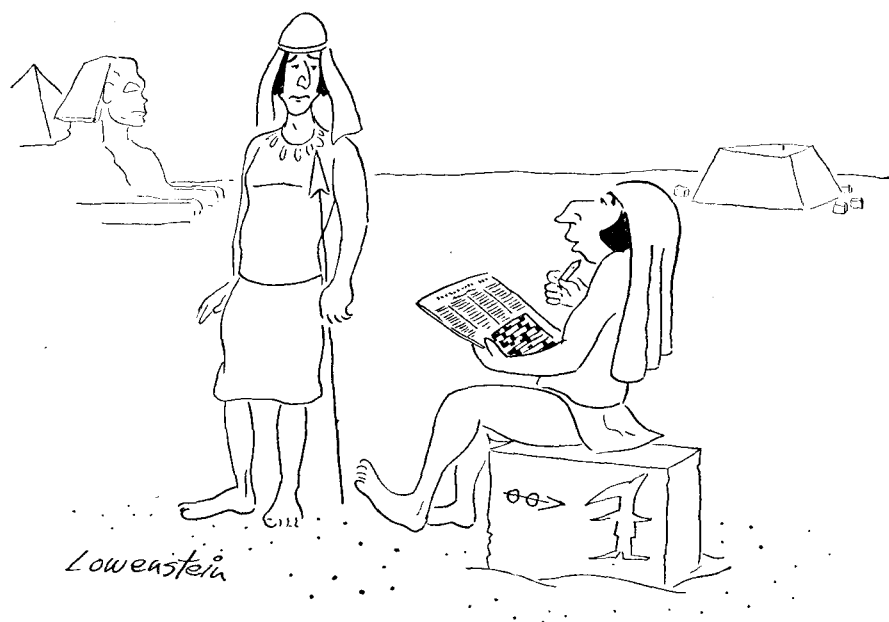
Reviewed by EDWARD TATNALL CANBY

THE title of this work and the fact that it is based exclusively on the recorded concertos available from one manufacturer may prove misleading. Mr. Veinus was a pioneer in the move towards more informative, more adult "program notes" in record albums in place of the preposterous fantasies which appeared when album notes were first used. His work for RCA Victor was done mostly during the period when album notes came in the form of paper folders, rather than album liners as now; his contributions were memorable for their unaccustomed length and thoroughness and for the copious use of thematic illustrations in the musical notation.

The present volume is in effect a continuation of the Veinus annotations, for the special medium of the concerto, plus additional material in the form of brief biographies, a short discussion of the concerto forms, and the inevitable and useful glossary and "discography," the latter of course ill-balanced in that it is arbitrarily confined to those concertos available on RCA Victor records. Aside from this difficulty (which excludes numerous works that without question should have and would have been included on any other basis) the book is in no sense meant as a trade or publicity

volume for Radio Corp. of America.

Granted, then, that this is a serious, scholarly, well-written account, and yet the Veinus treatment, in common with much fine writing about music in the literary tradition to which it belongs, is dangerously false to the more fundamental concepts of musical form as understood by musicians and composers. Granted too that musical analysis of just this sort has long been accepted as the standard for literary and cultural study of music, and that the writing itself has indeed been on a high plane. Nevertheless it is high time that the non-professional music listener should realize that the convention taken for granted in this school of writing—that the harmonic, tonal basis of musical form, the balance of key, the meaning of musical line are not fit subjects for the general reader—is a false and thoroughly misleading one. The characteristic method of primarily thematic analysis with virtually no mention at all of key relationship; the Darwinian emphasis on the evolution of one form into another, the insistence upon poetic and mood interpretations and upon style as a vital and perhaps fundamental element in analysis, all of this, however much respected, is from the composer's point of view an essentially amateur approach to the real problems in musical form. Moreover it is this writer's opinion that the avoidance of the supposedly "technical" side of music, far from simplifying music for the beginner, leads instead to eventual confusion and be-



"Who is an Egyptian queen, a famous beauty, and the mother-in-law of Tutankhamen?"

AUGUST 7, 1948

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wilderment—for no analysis of a musical work that does not take the actual pitch relationships directly into consideration can be more than superficial and in the end basically false.

Thus, though Mr. Veinus goes into extraordinarily precise detail, relatively speaking, in his many analyses and though he involves his readers in erudite discussion, yet at no point in some 400 pages does he explain adequately the fundamental tonic-dominant relationships of classical sonata form; nor does he mention perhaps the most important fact of all concerning the double exposition section in the concertos of Mozart and Beethoven, that *whereas the first exposition, minus the solo instrument, remains statically throughout in the same tonality, the second, with soloist added, moves dynamically on to a new key*. There can be nothing more fundamental to the meaning of that type of form than this, "technical" or not! (Similarly, the recapitulation combines the *tonality* of the first exposition with the instrumental duality of the second exposition.) In the same way the basic rondo-sonata of so many concerto last movements is dangerously misinterpreted if its fundamental key structure is ignored, as Mr. Veinus seems to ignore it.

A revealing instance, again, of the confused perspective of the literary tradition of musical analysis comes when Mr. Veinus quotes Stravinsky—the arch-professional musician, and no mean writer himself—on the Stravinsky Capriccio (1929). "The beautiful slow opening," says Veinus, "has a fine eighteenth-century flavor, and the entire work is governed by the kind of mannered precision and polish which characterize not Mozart and Bach but their minor contemporaries." A typical stylistic description. But "Stravinsky of course," continues Veinus, "is an iconoclast, who will not keep his sources of inspiration straight to please any critic. Contrariwise, he asserts that his creative thought was dominated by that Prince of Music, Carl Maria von Weber." Weber was an inveterate Romantic, as far removed from the eighteenth century in temperament as in time." But is it not clear that Veinus and Stravinsky are talking of utterly different aspects of music? Veinus, characteristically, assumes that Stravinsky is speaking of *outward style*—"Romantic." It is decidedly likely, however, that abstract style was the last thing Stravinsky had in mind; without much doubt he was concerned with more specific, more fundamental musical devices, of melody, of formal construction, of line, which are universal problems. For it is all too clear to

the man who actually makes music that style, while obviously an ingredient of any good music, is the *result*, the end-product of other forces; and when one actually grapples with music itself, those other forces are so immeasurably more important than any surface consideration that, in truth, style becomes by elimination a relatively insignificant factor!

It is hardly fair to condemn Mr. Veinus's work unilaterally for an approach that has long been considered wholly acceptable and respectable for the cultured non-musician. Yet his volume will nevertheless, by its very thoroughness and honesty, serve to point up the divergence between the composers' and the literary approach to musical analysis.

## 8 Papers at Harvard

MUSIC AND CRITICISM. Edited by Richard F. French. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1948. 181 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ALFRED FRANKENSTEIN

THIS volume contains the eight papers read in 1947 at the Harvard Symposium on Musical Criticism. Four of the essays—those by Olga Samaroff, Paul Henry Lang, Roger Sessions, and Virgil Thomson—deal with the theory and practice of musical criticism as seen from the vantage-points of the newspaper critic, composer, performer, popular educator, and musicologist. Two others—by E. M. Forster and Edgar Wind—are concerned with criticism in general as it appears to a novelist and an art historian. The remaining two papers—one by Otto Kinkeldey on the significance of disc recording, and one by Huntington Cairns on musical patronage—are somewhat peripheral to the issues for which the conference was called; they are of interest in this context because they deal with musical questions, but they do not touch on questions of musical criticism.

Mme. Samaroff's topic is "The Performer as Critic." Her paper is largely concerned with her experience as music critic of the *New York Evening Post*, which was unique in that she, an established concert artist, became for a time a newspaper reviewer; naturally, therefore, her prime emphasis is upon the critic's responsibility toward the executant. But Mme. Samaroff is also much interested in musical popularization, and she discusses the very important role which journalism can play in that effort.

Mr. Thomson, whose paper is called "The Art of Judging Music," provides a brilliant and most penetrating analysis of the successive psychological

steps whereby a musical judgment is arrived at. Mr. Sessions's article, "The Scope of Music Criticism," overlaps and underlines Mr. Thomson's to a certain degree. He, too, describes the processes of musical judgment, and in very similar terms; furthermore, he adduces excellent reasons why a music critic should be concerned, first and foremost, with the creative life of his own time.

Mr. Lang, on "The Equipment of the Musical Journalist," overlaps and underlines all three of the others, and lays about him beautifully in a magnificent attack on the fads and follies of the musical life in America.

Mr. Wind, in "The Critical Nature of a Work of Art," shows how a poem, a picture, or an opera can create an undying legend against which truth cannot prevail; and he proposes that the critic act as a kind of censor to keep the legends within reasonable bounds.

Mr. Forster, writing on "The Raison d'Etre of Criticism," decides that there really isn't any. He would like to establish a "spiritual parity" between criticism and the arts, but he is not able to do so. He fails to see that a work of art is, by definition, something for which there is no equivalent, spiritual or otherwise, and so his paper, delightful though it is as a literary exercise, is based upon faulty assumptions.

Mr. Cairns informs us that the era of great fortunes is over in America, and that the American composer cannot continue to look for patronage from such sources. He fails to tell us what American composer ever did benefit from wealthy patronage, and the comfort he holds out is chilly in the extreme. Essentially it is that a composer who does not make his living as such will never suffer from overwork. One wonders what Mozart or Bach would have said about that.

It is rather too bad that Mr. Cairns's appalling advice, "Never pursue composition as a trade," ends this generally stimulating and valuable book. One would rather it ended with some such exhortation as this of Mr. Lang's:

The abuses of managers, the concert racket, the shoddy programs, are all properly the critic's concern; he should fight them, and fight them eloquently and with authority; for if the will of the people makes a journalist rather than a critic out of him he should do what all good journalists are doing: speak, and if necessary fight, for the good of the commonwealth, which in this instance is a sound musical culture, within the reach of all.

Alfred Frankenstein, art and music editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, at present is doing research on a Guggenheim fellowship.