

¶Without musical education, you are uncultured.

## LISTEN AND LEARN

OUR ignorance of the music we really love, and of the instruments on which it is produced, is colossal. I mean by that no slight upon the music-loving public. Their ignorance is not their fault. They have listened to orchestral concerts with all sorts of pleasant curiosities buzzing through their brain.

If, at any great philharmonic concert, some impish devil should insist that the audience one by one step up and identify an oboe, a bassoon, a clarinet, and distinguish between a trumpet and a horn, and, worst of all, between a French horn and English horn—well, most of the audience would flunk the examination, and I don't except the distinguished patrons of music who are on the board of directors.

You will notice that I have been referring only to the appearance of the instruments. I've been avoiding altogether the sounds they make—and, after all, it is their sound which we value. Any one with a state for music can appreciate in a vague way the gorgeous variety of sound which only an orchestra can produce. In fact, we describe a complexity of beauty

by the word "orchestral." Yet few of us know which instrument produces which sound, and for that reason we do not hear all of the sounds. Among several noises, you hear only those to which your attention has been called. If you are walking in the woods and one of your companions says, "Is that a woodpecker?" you search around among the sounds, and pick out the woodpecker. You can do that because you have heard the woodpecker before. But, if some one says to you, "How lovely that clarinet is!" you can't pick out the clarinet because you and the clarinet have not yet been introduced.

Wouldn't you like to say to the conductor—"Please stop a minute and let me have a look at that clarinet! Will the clarinet player please go over his music alone, so that I can recognize it even when the whole orchestra is playing?" Ernest Schelling of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra does this for his children's concerts. He uses a magic lantern to throw on the screen excellent pictures of the various instruments. That is for the eye. He also lets us hear the sound of each instrument,

and he tells something of the purpose for which each is used. It's simple kind of aid, and it takes only a few minutes. There is plenty of time left for a beautiful program, in which you can identify the instruments which you have just heard separately, but simple as this aid is, there are few places in this world where it is provided.

You'll notice that though I have now been speaking of the sound of the instruments, I haven't yet said anything about the music. No matter how well each instrument sounds by itself, what we value in an orchestral concert is the total effect produced by the compositions we hear—the emotions roused by each piece and by the program as a whole.

For many music lovers, music is unfortunately a mystery. In one sense it ought always to remain a mystery; the utter beauty of it is at times beyond rational investigation. But there is a large intellectual element in all music, a structure which is easily understood, if some one takes the trouble to explain it.

In order to listen to music, you must accustom yourself to follow the themes. There is nothing hard about this. Any one with a decent ear, and even those whose ear otherwise needs training, can recognize a musical theme.

It's rather odd that we have to be urged to listen to the themes in an orchestral concert. I say it is odd, because one of our commonest habits is to identify in one song, or one piece, a theme we have heard in another. We usually recognize the resemblance when we are accusing the composer of a lack of originality. We say, "Why, that is a straight steal from such and such a piece." In all probability the resemblance is not very close, yet we can see it.

In some respects music is the most abstract of the arts. When the performance is over and the players put their instruments away, nothing is left but a memory. The masterpieces of Mozart and Beethoven cannot come to life unless we perform them. At each performance, the artists are trying to create an ideal Mozart or Beethoven who has not yet existed. Since music is so much a matter of the spirit, we sometimes think of it as a universal language, like mathematics, and we suppose it is the same in all countries, like the multiplication table.

This is true in only a moderate degree. Musicians everywhere understand their language without regard to nationality or race. When they compose, however, they unconsciously express the qualities of the life around them; all of its social, political, and religious habits will some-

how appear in their music. If you are interested in the spiritual career of mankind, nation by nation, you will wish to be able to recognize what is national in the literature and the painting of each country, and surely you will wish to recognize this note of nationality in music.-

Mozart, for instance, is an extremely universal composer, and we ought not to call him Austrian or Viennese. But I personally should say that he belongs to a particular time and a particular society, if not to a particular place. And I think his is the most beautiful expression which his time and his society received from any genius. His heart was in his music, he had no intention to composing any kind of historical portrait, yet when we hear his greatest work, we have no difficulty now in recalling the most polite society Europe ever knew, and the highest cultivation of grace of mind, as well as grace of body. Even sorrow can be graceful. It need not be awkward or vulgar. In Mozart's music, you touch the depths of life and death in a society of beauty.

But, of course, we can't all be musicians. Our hobby may be painting, or dancing, or even knitting. In that case we ought to have such an understanding of the other arts as can be acquired without practicing them.

Musical education, therefore, ought to fall into at least three stages. It ought to reach, of course, the highly talented who intend to be professional artists. It ought to reach the amateur who, according to the measure of his ability, will try to be an artist, but who will sing or play for fun. But a still larger class will be those men and women who, without taking an active part in music, love it, and can listen to it with intelligence. If they are practicing self-expression in some other art, just for that reason they know how important an intelligent audience is for the great composers and performers. Musical education ought to reach this large class, but until now it has not done so. This is no insult to music lovers the world over, but simply a sad fact.—*John Erskine, condensed from Listener's Digest.*