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DR. B.A. PEROTT AS A GUITAR TEACHER

Dear

We beg you to accept with our compliments the enclosed group photograph of Dr. Boris A. Perott with some of his pupils, including ourselves.

As Dr. Perott does not advertise himself, does not seek pupils and is quite indifferent to any kind of publicity, we thought that it would be of interest to you to know something about him as a guitar teacher and of his unique qualities as such.

It seems to us that everybody knows that Dr. Perott has never belonged to the so-called "amateur class of guitarists", and from the very beginning of his career was taught professionally the art of guitar playing under the most famous teachers of his time: F.I. Decker-Schenk and V.P. Lebedeff, whose biographies can be found in Philip Bone's book, "The Guitar and Mandolin". For a certain period of years he appeared before public as a professional guitarist, performing in Russia, Siberia, Finland and Germany. He was highly honoured to play before the Emperor of Russia as well as to Chaliapin and Paderewski at their request. It was only when he established himself solidly in the medical profession that the guitar took second place, keeping it in a privileged position in his spare time.

The guitar was taken by him most seriously, and fully counterbalanced the mental strain resulting from his work in the field of science, in the three branches of which he holds degrees of doctor. He will be always remembered for his founding of the Philharmonic Society of Guitarists which has done so much for the Guitar.

It is quite natural that when a pupil approaches for the first time a professional teacher, he expects him to advocate all sorts of strict rules and to demand the following of these instructions, in accordance with this or that school. We also expected this from such a learned teacher as Dr. Perott, anticipating that he would be extremely pedantic, teaching without discrimination, over-estimating the importance of trifling points, and unyieldingly adhering to a certain method, system and school.

To our joy we found it not to be quite so, but a human approach, explanation of every problem and demonstration of advantages of this or that technical intricacy. Possessing perfect knowledge and mastery of Russian, Italian and Spanish Schools, Dr. Perott knows all the advantages of the modern technique and therefore can demonstrate them by comparison with already obsolete or antiquated ones.

As he studied the piano in his early youth and the theory of music, including harmony, he is quite free from any prejudiced attitude towards any other instrument. The more so, as he played in his younger days also zither, mandolin, balalaika and ocarina: he also conducted several big balalaika orchestras.

After this short introduction we would like to tell our readers something about Dr. Perott's ideas regarding the guitar teaching.

THE GUITAR

1. He fully recognises the fact that to very many guitarists, like himself, the guitar appears to be the most pleasant and attractive of all instruments.

2. But ... while piano, violin, 'cello and harp have established themselves a long time ago as fully recognised first class instruments, taught at conservatoires, the guitar is only in the process of becoming one of their legitimate members.

3. The principle difficulties in achieving this noble aim are not due to the guitar as such, but mostly to the standard of playing and behaviour of guitarists themselves.

4. This will be clearly evident if we look deeply into the nature of general designation of those instruments: while every man who classifies himself as violinist, 'cellist, pianist or harperst conveys quite a definite idea as of one who has been properly taught to play, a guitarist, at the same time, is generally a very vague description of one who does something with the guitar. It does not give any idea of the standard of playing or education. Practically everyone who strumms a guitar may call himself a guitarist: it is not necessary for him to have had a teacher or a method of study.

5. It is quite safe to assume that these so called guitarists cannot be blamed for their attitude and behaviour: firstly the guitar is one of the most difficult instruments to learn to play moderately well, and secondly, even an accomplished classical guitar player cannot be quite sure of a livelihood as a soloist. But the guitar as a "personal pleasure-giver", or as an instrument for accompaniment, has an exceptional attraction: thus so many people are buying a guitar and do "their best" with it.

Dr. Perott has been associated with the guitar since 1890 and has had a sufficient number of pupils to form a small "army" - he analyses the question "What then is a guitarist?"

THE GUITARIST

1. If Dr. Perott takes into consideration the number of people who learnt to play the guitar he finds that maybe only a fraction of one per cent. of these became professionals. For the last quarter of a century out of a good many pupils of Dr. Perott only three became professional players: Alexis Chesnakoff, Julian Bream and Jewad Selim, who quite recently was nominated by the Ministry of Education as an official guitar teacher at the school of Art at Baghdad, IRAQ.

2. All others attained only a certain degree of proficiency that enabled them to satisfy their own interest and love of the guitar and also to perform before their intimate friends or among members of classical guitar societies.

All these facts cannot be denied and therefore a teacher must elaborate his own attitude in approaching this problem.

Dr. Perott's guiding principle of teaching therefore is as follows: IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW FAR ADVANCED HIS PUPIL IS, BUT AT ANY LEVEL HE MUST BE AS PERFECT AS POSSIBLE IN EXECUTING A PIECE OF MUSIC ALLOTTED TO HIM AND WITHIN HIS CAPABILITIES.

Dr. Perott considers every prospective guitarist as having his own distinctive individual traits and surrounded by his own favourable or unfavourable circumstances. Therefore, in order to predict all possible chances of ultimate success, these questions should be asked before starting lessons:

- a) Is he a true lover of the guitar, and if so, how much is he inspired by enthusiasm?
- b) What is his purpose or intention for taking lessons?
- c) How much time can he devote to practice every day?
- d) The teacher should also consider the pupil's age.
- e) Does he play any other musical instrument?
- f) What type of music does he like most?

After a few lessons it will be possible to "diagnose" the very true character of the person concerned, i.e. is he diligent, determined, persistent, musical: does he possess enough patience and does he over-estimate his own knowledge.

Thus the "diagnosis" becomes very well established and the proper "treatment" in a sense of appropriate tuition can be elaborated.

THE AGE is of a great importance, though sometimes deceptive. In the late twenties and early thirties, if one's fingers are supple, not spoiled by manual work, and especially if some other string instrument has been played, it is not too late to become a good guitarist.

ENDURANCE. The possibility of sustaining effort plays a very important part in successful progress. As a medical man Dr. Perott certainly is the best judge in this question. He always warns that forced playing with tired fingers is very dangerous, especially for very young and rather old people. Overstrained muscles, after a prolonged period, are liable to become feeble and even incapacitated for ever.

Finally Dr. Perott asserts that every pupil must be conscious of an existence of certain basic laws, which rule and govern our body:

LAW OF VIBRATION: In our case it proves that only when strings are struck in the right direction and by correct finger movement they can vibrate most strongly and musically. That is why Tarrega's method became so popular.

LAW OF GROWTH OF MUSCLES: Any methodical and repeated movements of muscles excite their growth in group form. Thus if, say, the "extensor" group is involved then this group becomes bigger and stronger than their antagonists "group of flexors", and so on. Muscles, or any group of them, without practice become degenerated and feeble. Tired muscles do not grow and do not sustain their strength, over-tired ones may lose their power temporarily or for ever. Therefore forced practice without intervals or rest, defeats its own purpose.

To be an efficient guitarist, it is absolutely necessary to develop and strengthen these groups of muscles through continuous exercising in accordance with rules accepted by the various recognised methods.

To attain efficiency it is very necessary to follow these two basic rules:-

(a) Always practice in FORTISSIMO to give right encouragement for the muscles to grow and strengthen themselves and also to get used to producing the loudest sound possible. The wider the range between fortissimo and pianissimo, the more variations in tone volume between these two extremes are possible and therefore the most delicate degrees of expression can be produced.

(b) One should never play with "forced speed". This will develop in time, gradually and AUTOMATICALLY (sub-consciously) If ONE finger is unable to keep pace with the others, the exercises should be played much slower to improve that weaker finger. After a certain time the weakest finger will become stronger and the speed can be increased.

Every pupil must be treated individually, remembering that IT IS A GUITAR FOR THE GUITARIST, NOT A GUITARIST FOR THE GUITAR.