

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

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MUSIC NOTES FOR ENGINEERS

By GEORGE S. BONN, '35

Germany, probably more than any other country, has its name associated with music and things musical. Whether the old German Beer Garden with its little German band had anything to do with this idea, I don't know, but much of the world's great music has been written by men who no doubt visited these delightful spots to obtain inspiration. One old German song, "Du Bist Verrückt, Mein Kind," is practically the same as the not so old "Why Did I Kiss That Girl?", which in turn approximates the older "Where Did You Get That Hat?" Now, all of these were born in the trumpet calls in Richard Wagner's "Die Meistersinger" and "Lohengrin." These are but two of the fourteen operas, or, more properly, music dramas, that Wagner wrote. He used for his themes the stories of the old German legends, which incidentally, have been recently revived for other reasons. He wove around them such vivid musical backgrounds that it is possible to hear almost any one of the fourteen without having the story enacted before you, and yet get the full meaning of the tale.

You have all heard the "Pilgrims' Chorus," the "March," and the "Song to the Evening Star" from Tannhauser; you know the "Wedding March" from Lohengrin (if you don't, you probably soon will); many of you have heard the "Ride of the Valkyries" or the "Fire Music" from "Die Walküre;" from "Die Meistersinger" you may know the "Prize Song" or the "March" or the "Prelude." But I believe that until you get up enough courage to see and hear one of Wagner's operas, you cannot fully appreciate the excerpts. "Parsifal," "Tristan und Isolde," and the four dramas of the "Ring of the Nibelung" are all quite long, but they embody some delightful stories and wonderful music. "Die Meistersinger," on the other hand, is not so long, and it is without doubt the world's greatest musical comedy. You can't help laughing, even in German.

The Three B's

Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms are generally considered to be the masters of pure music, just as Wagner excelled in music-drama. Johann Sebastian Bach was born at Eisenach in 1685; he died in 1750. Twenty years later in Bonn, Ludwig van Beethoven was born; he died in Vienna in 1827. Six years later Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg; he, too, died in Vienna, in 1897. Within this period of a little over two hundred years the greatest of great music was written; most of the other great composers lived in this same period, too, so it represents the productive age of music.

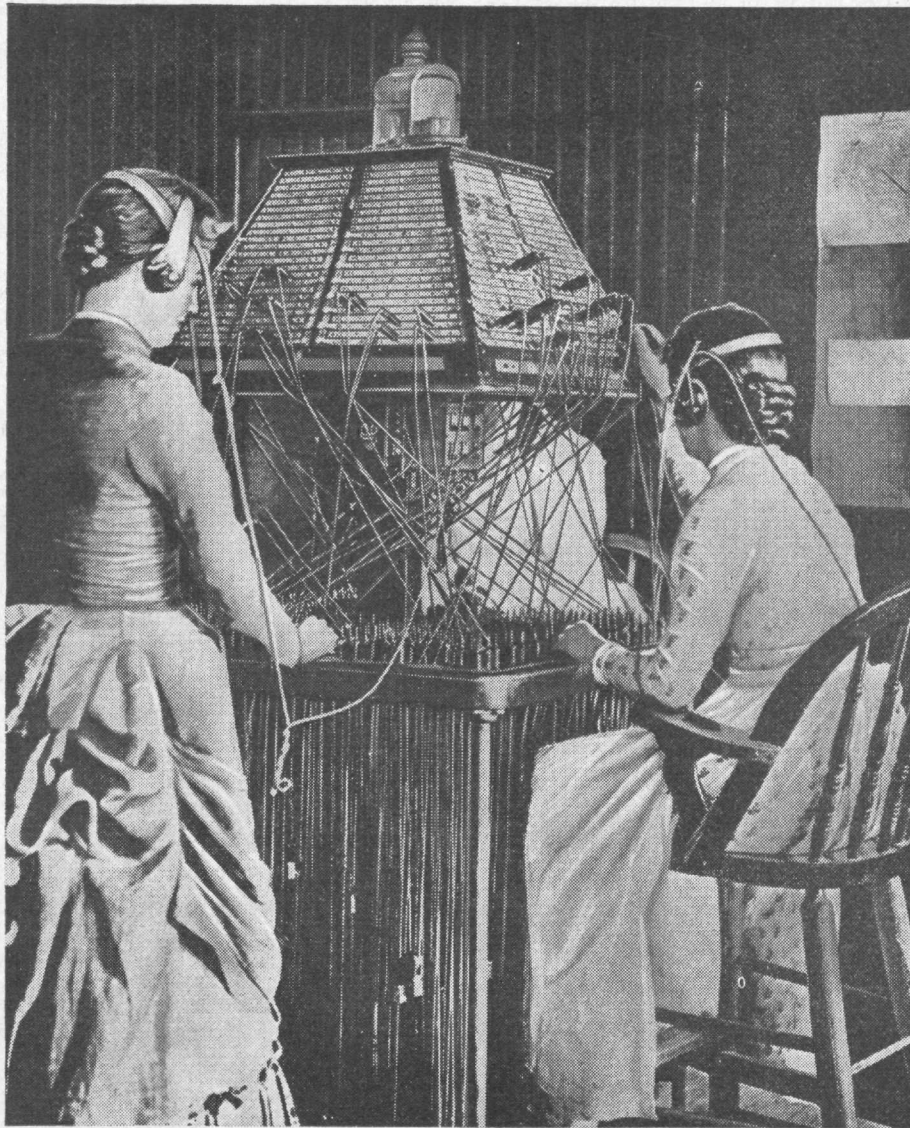
Bach was responsible for the "Well-tempered Clavichord" both in name and in fact; that is, he wrote a collection of preludes and fugues by that name, and he established the present tempered scale of the piano of today. He brought organ music to its peak. He wrote a great many religious works, cantatas, oratorios, masses, passions, and the like, besides a large number of suites and concertos for large and small orchestras. Through all his work, he has come to be known as the father of music as we know it today.

Probably the most familiar of Beethoven's works is the "Minuet in G," later known by the name "If You See That Girl of Mine, Send Her Home." Anybody who has studied piano, very early played this, I'm sure. Some of you no doubt know the "Moonlight Sonata," about which many fanciful stories have been written; the tales are charming, but they have nothing to do with this Sonata. Some of you undoubtedly are well familiar with the Fifth Symphony; those who are not, should by all means endeavor to hear it; it is about the best introduction to symphonies that I know of. Beethoven wrote nine of them: the Ninth is famous for its great choral finale; the Seventh, in somewhat dance form, is considered perhaps the best, musically; the Sixth is the "Pastoral;" the Fifth is the most popular; the greatest is the Third, or "Eroica." The Third will be played by the University Symphony Orchestra this spring; watch for the date; also watch the third movement, the Scherzo, and notice the similarity to "Come to the Fair." To be sure, Beethoven wrote many other things besides these, but he did more with the symphony than anyone else, and he did it more perfectly, with the possible exception of

Brahms

Brahms' "Lullaby" or "Wiegenlied" and his "Little Sandman" or "Sandmännchen" are undoubtedly his most familiar songs.

However, he, too, wrote symphonies, and it is said that when his first one was played, critics called it the "Tenth," signifying that it equaled the nine of Beethoven. Of the four that Brahms wrote, the Second is the most melodic, while the Fourth is the most austere. The Third is considered the finest of all his works, and perhaps the finest in all musical literature; that's why Brahms ranks so high in the minds of those who believe him the greatest of the Three B's. Hear one of the four and you will realize the greatness of the man.



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