MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN

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Associate in Music

The Metropolitan has two good reasons for being associated with music in the minds of its patrons and the public. It owns the largest collection of musical instruments in the world as the proud if, until lately, negligent possessor of the Crosby Brown collection, and for thirty consecutive years, under David Mannes’s kindly direction, it gave free concerts in the Main Hall before America’s largest indoor audiences. Besides, since the appointment of Dr. Winternitz as keeper of the Crosby Brown collection of musical instruments, there have been literally historic concerts given for Members of the Metropolitan in various parts of the Museum. Acoustics aside, and more often to the contrary, these concerts have been, judging by standards of performance, of interest, and of attendance, an unqualified success.

A museum is an almost ideal place for the hearing, and what is more important, the contemplation of music as a fine art. Music is mostly for remembrance, and nowhere is the past as present as in a museum. The present is for tomorrow.

The proper setting, then, for most music depends on its removability from the present. Some of it belongs at home along with good friends and good food—and good neighbors—but there is possibly no place like a museum for the enjoyment of a great part of our musical heritage. A museum has the acoustics for church music, of which there is so much that is not heard, and it has the banquet-hall setting as well for all the fine music of the days and knights of old. A museum can offer visual distraction too, consonant with the music itself—unless you are among those who claim we should have no interest other than in the pure sound of music and should contemplate with shaded eyes the intricacies of structural form and the back of each others’ necks. At least, as in one of our concert halls, you do not have to look at one tapestry all evening and every evening for the rest of your concert-going life! The Metropolitan has more than just one tapestry.

In place of programs filled with alluring advertisements of possibly better artists than the ones you are hearing, and better-rounded figures than the one you are wearing, we offer you illuminating program notes that will supply reading matter before and during the concert and after you are at home in bed. Hence the chances of boredom, even of sleep, for the elimination of which the chairs at the Metropolitan are specially designed, are greatly diminished and you will also get plenty of exercise walking through the Museum, which, at night, it can be added, is also a rather spooky experience. As for the music performed exclusively for Members of the Metropolitan, you most certainly will not have heard the greater part of it before, and you will possibly never have to hear any of
The illustrations on these two pages are from decorations inside the case of a psaltery in the Crosby Brown collection of musical instruments. Italian, xvIII century

it again. That is more than you can hope for in attending regular concerts, isn't it?

The Crosby Brown collection of musical instruments is, since the late holocaust in Europe, the world's foremost and largest collection of its kind. Many of the instruments do not sound at all any more, which from looking at them may be just as well, but many that can be played are the only ones that can re-create for us the music of the past as it really sounded to its first audience and to the ear of its composer. The influence of the inventors of musical instruments on musical composition has been enormous, and the Crosby Brown collection can give us pause to think of what impetus a new musical instrument or perhaps a new tuning system might give to composers in our time. The tempered system of tuning twelve equidistant notes in an octave, and the constant changes in the keyboard instruments for its use, provided the Western world with two hundred years of music restrained only by the possibilities of this system. Is there a Werkmeister in the house? It was he who invented the twelve-tone system at the time of Bach. It was “well tempered” then, but just listen to those same twelve tones under Schönberg! Who is well tempered now?

Museums may indeed become the last refuge of music as an art as opposed to music as an exhibition or a contest between the performer and the composer. Music as a spectator sport has a limited appeal. It is perhaps exciting to watch and hear a virtuoso running up and down an E string, but as an eminent violinist remarked,
"One gets a bigger thrill nowadays at the circus, where the wire is higher and the fall is not merely a matter of pitch!"

Music also belongs in a museum. Much of it does not lend itself to playing in concert halls or is forgotten and remains unheard—some of it, of course, deservedly so. But you cannot hang great music in a gallery—it must be heard and revived by at least occasional performance. And as a part of the general artistic expression of a given period, it should be "shown" along with the decoration and complete artistic décor of that period. Where else, then, but in a museum? The artists too might be grateful to find a haven away from the routine of their concert careers to perform such music before discriminating museum audiences.

Lastly, the museum needs the music for itself. It needs the warmth of great music and great stationary crowds who will stop, look, and listen, and while listening perhaps ponder for a moment on the importance of the arts and their relationship to each other—and to each one of us, yes, even in an atomic age.