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Introduction by IRVING LOWENS

Louis Lombard's "Our Conservatories" (1892)

This address was originally delivered to the officers of the New York State Music Teachers Association in Syracuse on June 27, 1892. It is here reprinted from the 1897 edition (called the third and published by F. Tennyson Neely, London and New York, under the title *The Art Melodious*) of Lombard's very popular book *Observations of a Musician* (originally published in Utica, New York, in 1893). Whatever the title, the work sold hundreds of thousands of copies and was translated into French, German, and Italian.

Louis Lombard, one of the most extraordinary figures in the musical life of both the United States and Switzerland, was born in Lyon, France, on December 15, 1861, and died in Genoa, Italy, on November 1, 1927. He began his musical study in 1870 at the conservatory in Marseilles and completed his work in violin, song, and harmony at the Paris Conservatoire. In 1876, after the death of his father, he was engaged for a tour of the United States and remained in this country, after several trips abroad, until 1900. He took up the study of languages (he was master of eight) and began to compose and conduct. His first works were published by C. Berdan in Detroit, Oliver Ditson in New York, Theodore Presser in Philadelphia, and E. D. Buckingham in Utica. He became an American citizen in 1886, settled in upper New York State, and in 1889 founded and directed the Utica Conservatory of Music (which is still in existence) on the model of the Paris Conservatoire.

In 1896 he temporarily abandoned music as a career and, having attended Columbia University Law School for a time, began to invest on Wall Street, acquiring a large fortune in a short space of time. In 1899 he married Alice Maud Allen, daughter of a wealthy railroad magnate. One year later he purchased, at a cost of \$2.5 million, the fabled Castello di Trevano in Lugano, Switzerland, built as a competitor to Bayreuth in 1871 by the Baron von Derwies, private secretary to the czar of Russia, and restored it to its former musical glory. He kept an orchestra in residence and invited the greatest names to perform at Trevano—among those who worked at the Castello were Gabriel Fauré, Ruggi-

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ero Leoncavallo, Jules Massenet, Camille Saint-Saëns, César Thomson, Albert Spalding, and Rudolf Ganz. He conducted not only his own ensemble but also orchestras in New York, Paris, Milan, Berlin, Budapest, Cairo, and elsewhere. Among his musical works was the grand opera *Errisiñola*, to a libretto by Luigi Illica.

While living in Switzerland Lombard composed extensively for orchestra, military band, string quartet, and piano and set up his own publishing house at Trevano. Although his financial fortunes took a turn for the worse with the advent of World War I, he continued living in Switzerland, where he served between 1916 and 1920 as American Vice-Consul, first at Zurich and later at Lugano.

After his death he was quickly forgotten, and the Castello di Trevano ultimately fell into the hands of the Swiss government. It was razed in 1961 to make way for a new school of architecture and fine art. As a thinker Lombard was much in advance of his time, as his essays dealing with the need for a national conservatory in America and government subsidy of music in the early 1890s clearly demonstrate. A full-length biography, partly subsidized by *Ricerche musicali nella Svizzera Italiana*, an association sponsored by Radio e televisione della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano, is in progress.

OUR CONSERVATORIES [1892]

by Louis Lombard

Conservatories were designed primarily to conserve musical art. They were originated by the church in order to improve its music while retaining its traditions. The first conservatory was that of Santa Maria Loreto, of Naples, founded in 1537. Among the renowned schools of music in existence may be mentioned the Conservatory of Paris, founded in 1784, and the conservatories of Vienna, Leipsic, and Brussels, established at a later date. These institutions are maintained by the government. Students are admitted after a competitive examination, provided they exhibit some aptitude. The principal objects of these schools are the preservation of the conventional forms and the diffusion of musical education, with the ultimate view of adding to the glory of the nation. Their method of training is rigid, and with a single purpose: thoroughness.

In the United States we also have institutions called conservatories. Few of these are entitled to this high-sounding name. Two or three of them, however, are conducted as nearly after the system of the best European models as the lack of subsidy permits. Through increased salaries, they are able to employ prominent teachers from European schools.

The well-known fact that Europe has educated all our good musicians, native or alien, proves beyond question the superiority of its system of education.

A reason frequently given for the lack of musical culture in America is that Americans possess less musical genius than Europeans. Were it not more logical to censure the methods used here? With the same thorough training, Americans may equal Europeans in music as they have done in other fields. Girls and boys that have a good ear, heart, and mind abound around us, and they also have artistic temperaments. The main reason for their seeming inferiority is that they have been denied the advantages which others have enjoyed for centuries. Why should a country so fruitful in almost all other desirable ways be so deficient musically?

No one caring for the moral and intellectual improvement of mankind can overlook the civilizing influence of musical culture; yet, while we ought to do much for musical education, we have done but little. It is true we spend annually vast sums of money in the importation of musical artists, but it is mainly on account of the momentary pleasure they give us, and not for the paramount good they might do as educators. We build costly music halls and pay exorbitant prices to hear a virtuoso, but we would not vote again for the legislator who would dare ask state or national aid for music schools. In the meanwhile, our children must depend for their musical education almost exclusively upon self-appointed "professors." Now, although we can have the self-made business man, we must not expect the phenomenon of the self-made musician. The art of music can neither be acquired intuitively nor by haphazard experience. Besides aptitude and study, good teachers with a sound educational system are needed to develop artists. If this be true, no other agency can disseminate musical knowledge more thoroughly and widely than the well organized conservatory. For these reasons I believe that such an institution is entitled to the support of our best citizens.

Through lack of endowment or of governmental subsidy, even the best American schools can not give free training to all the poor, though gifted, pupils who apply; but, with the class system, so successful in Europe and already here, the expenses for a thorough education in the necessary branches of the art have been considerably decreased. In fact, in the class, able professors can give instruction at prices lower than incapable instructors can afford to charge for worthless private lessons. There, students are able to discern mistakes made by others, which, if made by themselves, they might not see. The ambition to equal or to surpass others, spurs the student to greater effort. In the privacy of the teacher's studio, the pupil now and then displays apathy and slovenliness; before hypercritical classmates, he rarely does. The derision of an equal wounds more than the censure of a superior. Private instruction is one-sided. Contact with many minds is broadening. In the class the student hears, feels, sees, understands, and memorizes much that the teacher approves in others. Hearing many works differently interpreted, he acquaints himself with a large repertory, and he unconsciously becomes a critic. In a good school the individuality of the pupil need not be lost, as some persons would have us believe. With a good system, the Pestalozzian principles can be applied anywhere. The value of the

class system has been determined by experience long ago, and it has been recommended by Cherubini, Mendelssohn, Moscheles, David, Liszt, Vieuxtemps, Von Bulow, and many other distinguished instructors of music.

In the science and art of music the mastery of one single branch does not suffice. Not only should the musician play or sing correctly, but he ought to understand that which he does. He must not be a parrot, yet, thanks to much private instruction given in this country, most singers and players babble the letter while ignoring the spirit. The skillful hand should be wedded to the cultured mind. A specialist, however brilliant, is not of much value as an educator unless his pupils can get from other men the remainder of the knowledge necessary to complete their musical education. One man, however wise, can not give the student the full technical and theoretical training he needs. The best piano teacher can not take the place of the conservatory faculty. It would not be necessary to reiterate this self-evident proposition, were there not persons so absurd or designing as to deny its truth. It is alone the conservatory that can give the student his full equipment as a musician.

How can the pupil find a good instructor among the many self-styled masters? How can he measure the alleged superiority of a teacher, though he be high-priced and renowned? The best advertised man is often regarded as the ablest. Self-sufficiency, which thinking men regard as a sign of ignorance, blinds the public and judicious advertising often becomes the leading factor in the good reputation of a bad instructor. It is possible, of course, that a talented musician may have established a good name more by diplomacy than by his artistic merit, and it can not be denied that it is a desirable thing to have the talent of making one's talent known. Whatever be the case, the student will find it almost impossible to judge rightly of the ability of a teacher, however celebrated and expensive; on the other hand, he may feel quite at ease as to the value of professors in a good conservatory. The directors of a music school are entitled, at least, to the presumption that they know who are efficient teachers, and that they will select only such, if for no higher consideration than that good goods bring good prices.

How can a pupil outside of a conservatory receive the same quality and quantity of tuition for the same amount of money? Can the private teacher give training in solfeggio, harmony, theory, history, *ensemble*, counterpoint, orchestration, etc., in addition to piano and violin, or vocal and organ instruction? The foregoing theoretical branches are occasionally taught gratis in good American conservatories to the student who enters the vocal or instrumental classes. In addition, he has the opportunity of familiarizing himself with audiences. How often has the work of a talented man been marred by nervousness! The concerts that are also given free to the students enable them to acquire a taste for the best class of music, and to develop their critical faculties. Of course, pupils do not become judges of music simply by listening; thorough study alone can give the scales in which to weigh art-products. But, by hearing good music frequently, their enjoyment of the better art-forms is intensified and their enthusi-

asm in their chosen profession kept alive—a most powerful incentive to study.

Through the establishment of conservatories in America some artistic natures have found means for the development of their faculties—opportunities that would have been denied them without those institutions. We ought to have a free conservatory in each of our great cities.

One might go on forever to show the advantages of even a self-supporting conservatory, but perhaps enough has been said to demonstrate that it is safer to intrust the musical education of our children to the care of such institutions rather than to that of the private teacher, even supposing that he be competent. May the conservatory soon have an equal place beside the museum and the university which the genius of patriotism founds for the progress of our nation through the sciences and the arts.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Irving Lowens suggested the publication of this item in a letter to me of December 30, 1980. The letter begins:

I just got an idea for the journal that strikes me as very attractive. Furthermore, it would make your life easier. Why not include, in each issue, a notable article reprinted which is out of copyright? I'm sure that our very distinguished Editorial Advisory Board would be able to help materially—each member doubtless knows of a hidden treasure.

. . . [F]or a possible contribution, I enclose a piece by my fantastic discovery, Louis Lombard, penned in 1892. If I live long enough, I'll probably write a book about him. . . . What do you think?

Irv agreed to prepare an introduction and sent it along to me with a letter of October 9, 1981:

I'm back from Europe a week now, and I'm slugging away at the mountain of mail that has accumulated in my absence. This is about the Lombard piece.

In the time at my disposal, I found it virtually impossible to boil a biographical sketch of Lombard down to a single typewritten page, so I have supplied you with a page and a half. If that's too much, please cut as suits. I'm so close to the subject, after all the major discoveries I made in Lugano, that I'm incapable of condensing. If Pro Helvetia helps out, I'll be going back in February for four months or so of additional research. There's treasure there.

Irv's too early death on November 14, 1983, precluded further work on his Lombard book. The introduction printed here must suffice us for the present. Serving to remind us of Irv's wide-ranging interests and contagious enthusiasms, it is his last direct word to the society he formed and to the readers of the journal he helped establish and for which he served as book review editor. A.P.B.