

A DISTINGUISHED LADY PIANIST

Shaw and Einstein are Her Intimate Friends

By
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RECURRING news of Harriet Cohen has filtered to South Africa, especially amongst music lovers. Harriet Cohen is to-day one of the leading women pianists not only in Great Britain, but in the world.

IT is not surprising to learn that Miss Cohen grew up in a musical environment. Her mother was a pianist of considerable note, a pupil of Tobias Matthay with whom the daughter began her early lessons, and her father's name has long been identified with musical editing in England. At the age of twelve Miss Cohen won the Ada Lewis Scholarship admitting her to the Royal Academy and the following year made her first public appearance in Queen's Hall. Although the success of this debut led many to expect the announcement of an extended tour by the remarkable child, her parents discouraged the idea and she pursued her studies, appearing only occasionally in public during the next two years.

Sir Henry Wood was one who took an early interest in the girl and presented her with his orchestra in Queen's Hall on numerous occasions. For the first of his Bach concerts, given in 1926, he selected her and the impression she created at that time automatically stamped her as particularly in the spirit of Bach, although paradoxically enough she is and has been for several years a forefront crusader in the performance of modern works, notably those of Arnold Bax. In fact it was Bax who announced when Miss Cohen was but fifteen: "This girl must play my works." And ever since, each of his appearing piano compositions has had its first hearing at her hands.



Harriet Cohen is known throughout the European Continent for her consummate artistry as an interpreter of the classics. This is enhanced by her keen absorption of intellectual currents. She is a protagonist of British music.

"What the modern English composers who write for the piano would do without Harriet Cohen is difficult to imagine," according to a recent London article. John Ireland, Eugene Goossens, Arthur Bliss, Frank Bridge have all dedicated music to her, and just lately Dr. Vaughan Williams turned his hand to a piano piece especially for her repertoire.

WHAT the continent knows of British piano music is largely due to her programmes. At the Salzburg International Festival of Contemporary Music held in 1924 she was the first English pianist invited to appear, and with the viola virtuoso, Lionel Terri's scored what was recorded as "altogether a great triumph for British music."

There seems to be no division of opinion about her musical individuality and the brilliant many-sided mind that lies back of it. Even a passing glance through critical reviews from Holland, Germany, France, Spain and Italy is able to convey the vivid impression that he has created in these countries. Practically every important symphonic organisation in Europe has supplied the background for her concerts and needless to say her outright recital appearances have been many. And side by side with her music runs a kinship with the other arts and an attraction for writers and painters. It is said that her home in London is a meeting place for all the shining names, literary and artistic, and that her library is stocked with autographed first editions of countless volumes any one of which would fill the average mortal with pride.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, and Professor Einstein are actually her cronies. Few people know that the great physicist is also an excellent violinist. His favourite composers are Bach and Mozart. When Harriet Cohen was last in the German capital, she spent a long and tranquil afternoon with the great scientist, playing works by these composers.

George Bernard Shaw may be frequently seen at the London recitals of Harriet Cohen. He regards her as the finest woman pianist living; indeed he once publicly declared: "There is only one Harriet." He has been urging her to become a conductor, convinced that she has superb qualifications. At the Shaw festival, at Malvern last year, Harriet and G. B. S. were seen walking arm-in-arm under the trees between the acts of his play Heartbreak House; they were discussing Shaw's love of and kinship to Mozart.

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