



## A RISING AND BRILLIANT CONDUCTOR.

*Otto Klemperer*

By

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AN exile from Nazi Germany from which, upon Hitler's ascension to power, he was forced to escape because he is a Jew, Otto Klemperer went to America to become one of the vital forces in the musical life in that country. With one foot planted in New York, where his baton has opened the first half of the New York Philharmonic Symphony Society season, and with another foot in California, where he directs the concluding half of the concerts of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, he appears like some mighty Colossus, bestriding our symphony-season with his great musical stature.

To-day recognized as one of the foremost conductors of our time, Otto Klemperer has enjoyed a career rich with honour and achievement. He was born in Breslau, Germany, fifty years ago. He tells us that he turned to conducting as instinctively as some people turn to writing or painting. As a boy, his greatest pleasure was to sit in the uppermost balcony at a symphony concert, not merely to absorb the music with his ears, but also to feast his eyes upon the man who, with his baton, was directing this music. At home he would frequently, in play, sing portions of a Beethoven symphony, while with gesticulations and bodily motions he would attempt to ape the conductor he had just seen. Thus, when his obvious talents for music brought him to study the art from his earliest years, he felt strongly that some day he would become a conductor; and as a student at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfort, he directed all his effort toward those musical studies which would help him bring his great life's dream to realization which he finally succeeded in accomplishing.

WHEN Klemperer was twenty years old—his musical studies now having been completed—he met Gustav Mahler, the great Jewish composer and conductor, who was to help Klemperer attain his long-cherished dream. Klemperer confided to Mahler his ambition, and Mahler—who recognized a vital creative spark in the young man—gave Klemperer the encouragement he needed. For a short period the great composer took Klemperer under his wing and gave him private

instruction in the technique of directing an orchestra. One day, he permitted Klemperer to take over one of the rehearsals of the Vienna Philharmonic, of which Mahler was at that time the director. Klemperer was not more than ten minutes on the platform when Mahler came to him and said: "You are a born conductor. I have merely to see how you hold the stick, and how you can command your men, to realize that you will some day become as great as any of us, if not greater."

It was at Mahler's personal recommendation that Otto Klemperer was given his first important post as conductor of the German Opera in Prague in 1907. True, when he first poised his baton for the opening rehearsal he had not had much experience in conducting; but from the first moment he disclosed such authority and strength in directing the orchestra and singers, and he revealed such a keen insight into the music that, in spite of his immaturity, he shaped a performance of distinction. His reputation grew rapidly, and before long there were crowded houses whenever it was known that Otto Klemperer would direct.

Thus his career was launched successfully, and from that time on his prestige soared and expanded. From Prague he went to Hamburg, from Hamburg to Cologne, and from Cologne to Wiesbaden—and each position was a definite step higher. It was in Wiesbaden that Klemperer's reputation, finally, became so lustrous that his name became familiar throughout the entire music world. His performances of the operas of Mozart, Weber, Wagner, and particularly of the modernist composers of Germany, were so fresh and crisp and pungent that it was generally accepted that in him Germany possessed one of its most significant conductors.

HIS fame soon grew so great that it even spanned the Atlantic Ocean. In 1925 Klemperer was invited as a guest-conductor of the New York Symphony Society. Although he gave performances of an electric quality, he failed to receive the appreciation he so well deserved. As a matter of fact, it was not until 1933 that America fully accepted him as a great conductor. In that year he was deprived of his position at Wiesbaden by the Nazi government. Virtually forced to flee from his native country to save his life, he returned to America, and gave several performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. There could no

longer be a question in the minds of his American public as to his genius. The following year he was invited to give a series of concerts with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. These concerts were so eminently successful that, in 1935, Klemperer became one of the two principal conductors of this world-famous orchestra, the other conductor being Toscanini.

If you were to meet Klemperer personally, you would see a tall, somewhat ungainly man with abrupt mannerisms and impatient gestures. Although it is true that there is clumsiness in his movements, yet he makes a marked impression when you have been with him a little while, an impression that is not soon forgotten. In speaking with him, one is impressed by his flaming sincerity and idealism. He approaches the art of music as though it were a ritual in which he was the high priest and, therefore, he is perhaps one of the most artistically sincere musicians of our time. If you were ever to watch Klemperer conduct from close range, you would realize that he loses himself in his performance as much as a religious man does when he is at worship. His eyes are closed, and as his body quivers with each bar of music you begin to feel that he is no longer a conductor but a priest worshipping his religion—which is music.

The personality of Otto Klemperer is a strange blending of strength and delicacy. On the one hand, his pugnacious chin and assertive cheek-bones suggest the latent power in the man; on the other hand, his sad eyes and sensitive lips denote softness and delicacy. At rehearsals, Klemperer can, at turns, be tempestuous and tender. At certain moments he is an unleashed storm in the face of mistakes; at the next moment he will be almost childlike in quietly begging his men to understand his desires.

And as his personality, so his performances. His interpretations have the brawn and muscle of masculine strength. They are built on heroic outlines, and have a power uniquely their own. And yet, at other times—in a tender, slow movement of Mozart or Bach—Klemperer can be as soft as silk. This blending of strength and softness is a characteristic of most great art and of the artist who can so interpret it; and it is the most striking feature of Klemperer's genius.

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