

FULLNESS OF HARMONY

What new acquisition of the Berghof was it, then, that rescued our friend of many years from his mania for solitaire and led him into the arms of another, nobler, if ultimately no less strange passion? We are about to introduce it, since we ourselves are much taken by that mysterious object's secret charms and are honestly eager to share them.

In its never-resting concern for its guests, a thoughtful management had decided to add another amusing gadget to the collection in the main social room – purchased at a price we do not care to estimate, but that must have been considerable, a handsome disbursement on the part of the administration of this highly recommended institution. An ingenious toy, then, on the line of the stereoscopic viewer, the tubelike kaleidoscope, and the cinematographic drum? Yes indeed – and then again, not at all like them. First, it was not an optical contrivance that the guests

found one evening in the music room – some of them greeting it by clapping their hands over their heads, others by folding them reverently with heads bowed – it was an acoustic instrument; and second, there was no comparison to those little mechanisms in value, status, and rank. This was no childish, monotonous peep show, of which they were all tired and with which no one bothered after his first three weeks here. It was an overflowing cornucopia of artistic pleasure, of delights for the soul from merry to somber. It was a musical apparatus. It was a gramophone.

We are seriously concerned that the term may be misunderstood, be associated with undignified and outdated notions, with an obsolete model that in no way does justice to the reality we envision here, the product of untiring advances in musical technology, developed to elegant perfection. My dear friends, this was no wretched crank-box, the old-fashioned sort with a turntable and stylus on top, plus a misshapen, trumpetlike brass appendage, the sort of thing you might have found at one time set up on a tavern counter to fill unsophisticated ears with nasal braying. This small cabinet, a little deeper than it was wide, was stained a dull black, had a silky cord that led to an electrical wall outlet, and stood on its special table in simple dignity – and bore no resemblance whatever to such crude, antediluvian machines. When you lifted the gracefully beveled lid, a well-secured brass rod raised automatically to hold it in place at a protective angle, and inside you saw, set slightly lower, the turntable with its green cloth cover and nickel rim, plus the nickel spindle that fitted into the hole of the ebonite disks. At the front on the right was a device like the dial on a clock for regulating the turntable's tempo, to its left, the lever that started and stopped it; at the rear on the left, however, was the sinuous, club-shaped nickel tube that had pliant, movable joints and ended in a flat, round sound-box equipped with a screw into which the needle was inserted. When you opened the double doors at the front, you saw a diagonal pattern of wooden louvers stained black – nothing more.

"The newest model," said the director, who now entered the room. "The latest achievement, children, top-notch, A-1, nothing better in the warehouse." He said this last with an impossible, comic twist, the way some poorly educated salesman might have

praised the item. "This is no apparatus, no machine," he went on, extracting a needle from one of the colorful tin boxes set out on the table and screwing it into place, "this is an instrument, this is a Stradivarius, a Guarneri – you'll hear resonances and vibrations of vintage *raffinemang*. It's a Polyhymnia, as we are informed here inside the lid. German-made, you see – we make far and away the best. Music most faithful, in its modern, mechanical form. The German soul, up-to-date. There's the library," he said and pointed toward a cupboard with rows of broad-backed albums. "I hereby entrust its magic to the public, to be enjoyed at leisure, though I likewise commend it to your tender care. Shall we give a disk a try, let her rip and roar?"

The patients implored him to do so, and Behrens pulled out one of the mute books laden with hidden magic, turned the heavy pages, the colorful titles visible through circular openings, extracted a disk from one of the pockets, and put it on. He flipped the switch that sent current to the turntable, waited two seconds until it had reached top speed, and carefully set the fine steel point down on the rim of the disk. A soft sound, like someone whetting a stone, was heard. He lowered the lid, and in the same moment from between the louvers at the open double doors – no, from the whole chest itself – a bustling, merry instrumental din burst forth, an insistent noisy melody, the first bars of a toe-tapping Offenbach overture.

They listened, mouths open and smiling. They could not believe their ears – how pure and natural the trills of the woodwinds sounded. A violin, in solo, offered a fanciful prelude. They could hear the bowing, the tremolo in the fingers as they slid sweetly from one position to the next and found their melody, a waltz, "*Ach, ich habe sie verloren*." The harmonies of the orchestra picked up the easy strains and bore them on – and it was simply ravishing the way the whole ensemble repeated it now in a sweeping tutti. Naturally it was not the same as if a real orchestra were giving a concert in the room. The body of sound, though not in any way distorted, had suffered a diminution in perspective; it was, if one may use a visual comparison for an audible phenomenon, as if one were gazing at a painting through the wrong end of opera glasses, so that it looked distant and

small, but without forfeiting any definition of line or brilliance of color. The piece was clever, tight, tingly, and was reproduced here in all its witty, giddy invention. It came to a perfectly rollicking close, a droll galop that after a brief hesitation became a shameless cancan, evoking visions of top hats flung into the air, of flying skirts and bouncing knees, and its comic, triumphant ending seemed to have no end. Then the turntable stopped all on its own. It was over. Heartfelt applause.

They called for more and got it: a human voice came from the cabinet, a male voice, both gentle and forceful, accompanied by an orchestra, a celebrated Italian baritone – and now there could be no talk of any diminution or distancing. The splendid vocal organ swelled to its full natural range and power, and indeed if you walked into an adjoining room, leaving the doors open but staying out of the line of sight, it was exactly as if the artist were physically present, as if he were standing there in the salon singing, music in hand. He sang a showpiece aria in his own language – *eh, il barbiere. Di qualità, di qualità! Figaro qua, Figaro là, Figaro, Figaro, Figaro!* The audience almost died laughing at his *parlando falsetto*, at the contrast between this bear of a voice and his talent for tongue twisters. Ears more expert could follow and admire the art of his phrasing and his breathing technique. A master of the irresistible effect, a virtuoso in his native *aria da capo*, he held the penultimate note before the resolution – moving downstage now, or so it seemed, one hand thrust into the air – held it so long that they broke into polite bravos before he had finished. It was exquisite.

And there was more. A French horn executed lovely, discreet variations on a folk song. With the most charming, cool precision in her staccato, a soprano warbled and trilled an aria from *La Traviata*. The ghost of a world-famous violinist played as if behind veils, accompanied by a piano with the arid sound of a spinet – a romance by Rubinstein. From the gently simmering chest of wonders came the peal of bells, the glissando of harps, the blare of trumpets, the roll of drums. Finally, some dance records were put on. There were even copies of the latest imports – tangos, born in the dives of a port city and destined to turn the waltz into a dance for grandpas. Two couples who had