FOREWORD
by
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'To be a legend in one's lifetime . . .' The phrase has become a cliché, debased by the ease with which the media today can create legends for a public ever hungry for new idols to worship. Yet such legendary figures do exist and have existed, figures whose stature is more enduring than that of the television interviewer, the newspaper columnist or the pop star. The true creators, writers, painters, sculptors and composers are ultimately judged by the value posterity places upon their work; thus the Work is in the long run more important than its Maker. Tastes may change; the critical esteem in which a composer is held may decline over a couple of decades, as it has with Sibelius, or be enhanced as it has with Janaček. The music lives on, renewing its vitality through performance. But what of the performer? Is his contribution to music too evanescent to be preserved? Recordings today have reached a sufficient perfection for us to be able to convince ourselves that 'legendary' performances of our time can now be captured for generations to come, as though by some miracle we were able to hear the actual sound of Liszt or Chopin across the gulf of years. Already we may feel a sense of awe as we listen to records (or pianola rolls) of Busoni, Godowsky, Kreisler or Chaliapin. The machine conjures up the long-dead sounds, but though we may marvel at the performance itself or at the technology that makes its resurrection possible, it remains a performance of the dead, and as we listen, our room is filled with their spectral presence. Instinctively and unavoidably we measure them against the yardstick of our contemporary giants, and because the latter are still with us, because they will play or sing for us again
next week, next year, they have the power to put the ghosts in their place, to make them truly passé.

I only heard Casals once. Of course one says it was unforgettable, and so, in a way, it was. As long as I live I shall remember the sight of that homely almost dumpy little figure, more like a village organist than an internationally renowned soloist; as long as I live I shall remember the atmosphere he created around him, the uncanny hush as six thousand or more people in the Albert Hall seemed to hold their breath for the entire duration of the Bach sarabande he played as an encore. But can I truly say it was unforgettable? Do I remember every nuance, every bow-change, every accent? In all honesty I must say No. Say to me ‘Listen to the records then’, and I will reply that it is not enough. I could listen a thousand times and since each repetition would be identical so would the marvellous spontaneity of his interpretation seem to diminish. Gradually the machine would take over and that treasured visual memory of an actual occasion might even grow less vivid. Casals would cease to be the ‘legend in his lifetime’ and become a legend in his death, and the taint of death would lie upon him as he joined those other ghosts I have mentioned.

And so we come to the purpose of this book. Two years ago I spent a happy day in Geneva at the delightful home of David Blum. The conversation turned to Casals and such was David’s enthusiasm as he spoke of him that I half expected that never-forgotten figure to walk in from the garden, take out his cello and play for us. Casals was no longer in a box of discs or imprisoned between the plastic covers of a record-sleeve. He was there, alive again, speaking through another’s voice it’s true, but nearer to me than he had ever been in life. ‘Was there a place for a book about Casals,’ David asked me, ‘a book for musicians, detailed enough to go into the fundamental aspects of his art?’ My answer was an emphatic Yes, since here I felt was a man whose devotion to Casals was such as to ensure a fidelity to truth – musical truth. Not being a string-player myself I might easily
fall into the trap of saying that the book is not for me; to do so would be as foolish as it would have been to have turned Casals away from my door had he miraculously appeared there. In these pages there is something more important than memories of Casals, reminders of performances, annotations to recordings. Here is the means whereby that ‘legend in his lifetime’ may be kept alive so that every young musician may feel Casals in spirit standing by his side, exhorting, cajoling, teaching.

There have been other examples of such books; Johnson had his Boswell, Stravinsky his Robert Craft; yet there is a danger that if the disciple’s notebook is too readily in evidence, the master may become too self-consciously aware of posterity. David Blum had his notebook to hand but he never forced himself upon Casals as a chronicler; he never even planned to write a book at the time. He simply wanted to treasure for his own use everything that he could gather of Casals’ experience and wisdom. Only an intellectual miser would want to keep such riches to himself; it is our good fortune that this quiet observer has chosen to share this wealth with us so that we too may come under the spell of Pablo Casals and know him as a musician and teacher supreme.

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