

**HISTORY OF MUSIC,
IN THE FORM OF
LECTURES**

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History of music, in the form of lectures by Frédéric Louis Ritter

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FRÉDÉRIC LOUIS RITTER

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BY

FREDERIC LOUIS RITTER.

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INTRODUCTORY.



To the young artists of America, in whose hands rests the musical future of their country, I dedicate the following pages. Our artists are entering on a new phase of existence. Our profession is no longer here, as it too long has been, at once a refuge, an exhibition platform, and a gambling bourse for ambitious amateurs, half-educated artists, unprincipled speculators, and undisciplined critics. This state of things, that generation, is passing away: humbug and puffery have lost half their power; the once pardonable weakness, that formerly excused national artistic short-comings with the plea of youth, is becoming stale and meaningless. Our musical public is beginning to have an opinion of its own. It is time that the dawn of a school of American art should appear on the horizon. And to whom shall we look for the

hastening, the ripening, of this dawn, if not to our rising artists?

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But they must arm themselves with courage, fortitude, and, above all, with honest artistic principles. For if our artists are unconvinced of the nobleness of their mission, the sanctity of their profession, the great duties which they owe to it and to themselves, with what hope shall they, as a class, expect justice and recognition from the general public? Although this will eventually be their reward, it would be worse than folly for one, passing through the furnace himself, to blind the eyes of his young colleagues to the trials they will necessarily be exposed to before they reach their goal. I do not here allude to the so often injurious influences of social *bonnes fortunes*, the flattery of family connections, the intoxication of seeing their names continually and favorably advertised, — enervating influences to which so many promising native talents have succumbed, sinking into oblivion at precisely the period of life when the mind should have attained its most harmonious and healthy development; but rather to the difficulties that beset the public career of the truly earnest artist in America. This is not the place to enlarge on the latter: I shall find opportunity hereafter to treat fully of them.

But it is absolutely necessary that I should at least allude to the Achilles heel of our present musical situation, from a social point of view especially.

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While the state of musical culture to-day offers many elements which justify the hopes of all lovers of music; while everywhere we perceive much activity, united in many cases to promising talent, — yet music is, by many intelligent people, scarcely regarded as an art. Many persons, of tolerably liberal views, yet consider it merely as an accessory accomplishment, and would gladly banish it, if the prevailing superficial fashion (so much to be regretted) of knowing how to play, or how to sing, *a little*, were not too strong to be resisted. And many consider music as an unfit occupation for masculine minds.

None of the other arts is encumbered with so many prejudices as music. Though accessible to every human being, its right position in the family of arts is, in many cases, underrated; its philosophical and æsthetical meaning entirely overlooked, or not understood at all. About none of the other arts has so much nonsense been written, as about music. A person scarcely able to distinguish one tone or note from another, one air from another, will not hesitate to judge

of, and condemn, fine musical works in a most imperative manner; nay, I have seen criticisms, novels, and sketches, on musical subjects, written by persons who could not sing or play the simplest tune, and to whom theory was a *terra incognita*.

In our day, as in earlier times, we find mankind making music the vehicle of all that is good and bad. Now it is prescribed for medical purposes; then it has to serve as a means for educating our ill-tempered youth: now it has to inspire the timid soldier with patriotic fire; then it is invoked as a helpmeet by the frivolous, &c., &c. But, worse than all, here appears an esteemed author, who does not find any thing of the sort in music, and who declares that it expresses nothing at all: it is merely a combination of agreeable sounds, to please our sense of hearing, and to tickle our nerves more or less. "It does not refine," he says; "it does not elevate; it does not strengthen. It leaves the moral nature quite untouched. It has no moral, — nay, no intellectual influence."

While we possess many technical and æsthetical works on architecture, sculpture, painting, and poetry, within the comprehension of the general public, music has, as yet, to struggle, in order to find its due and true place. That which, in a great measure, accounts for this

state of things is the one-sided education of our musicians themselves; in general, at least. Their whole attention is directed, in most instances, towards the technical side of musical art. Their appreciation of the history, the philosophy, of their art, is a dark, indistinct understanding and presentiment; and many of the false theories about music are due, in a great extent, to their want of a more general knowledge and logical power. Thus, the æsthetical side of music is entirely in the hands of philosophers and speculative authors, who have, unfortunately, not the necessary technical musical education, and whose theories, therefore, are built on sand. Or else it rests in the hands of amateur authors, who write about the art as their fancies lead them. Of course there are, everywhere, honorable exceptions.

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Music is not an isolated art. It forms a most necessary link in the great family of arts. Its origin is to be looked for at the same source as that of the other arts. Its ideal functions are also the same.

Art, in general, is that magic instrumentality by means of which man's mind reveals to man's senses that great mystery, the *beautiful*. The eye sees it; the ear hears it; the mind conceives it; our whole being feels the breath of God: