

FROM THE MAIL POUCH

The Question of Bruckner

To the Music Editor:

IN his recent criticism of the performance of Bruckner's Seventh symphony by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Bruno Walter, Mr. Downes quotes from a book of Alfred Einstein "that there are people in Germany who rate Bruckner as Beethoven's equal, or even his superior"; and Mr. Downes adds, "that is not the only example of bad taste afforded by Germany."

I cannot understand why the discussion of musical problems need be reduced to the level of nationalistic arguments. Music is the language not of individual nations but of one whole culture to which Europe and the Americas belong. Through its very nature music nullifies any nationalism. Music that is great to Germans is the same to Americans; and what appears to be of bad taste musically in America appears the same in Germany. Sometimes people of a nation have an easier first approach to music composed by one of their co-nationals. However, history has proved time and again that this initial difficulty is eventually overcome and that in music the question of nationality is of secondary importance as far as mutual understanding is concerned.

So why, instead of doing away with Bruckner by means of argu-

ments as "German" and "bad taste," should Mr. Downes not have gone deeper into matters? It would not have been difficult to establish the facts: that Bruckner is not the hobby of a few crazy people; that among leading German musicians there is much discussion of Bruckner's style but little of his rank; that the great conductors of Germany (that is, of former Germany, before the new Dark Ages) in their programs have been granting Bruckner a place equal to the other great symphonic composers; that outstanding musicologists have written comprehensive books on Bruckner, ranking him among the greatest composers of all times; that performances of Bruckner's symphonies all over Germany have been attracting crowds just as Beethoven programs have done.

The public, then, as well as the musical leaders of a nation whose musicality cannot well be doubted, recognize in Bruckner's symphonies one of the highest achievements in the history of music. Mr. Downes recognizes in them nothing but "tragic failure" and "débâcle." The reasons for this discrepancy become clear from the very arguments with which Mr. Downes supports that judgment. He expects Bruckner to do exactly what Beethoven had done.

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The New York Times

Published: November 23, 1941

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