

IN MEMORIAM

Gustave Reese (1899–1977)

MANY of us who remember Gus (how difficult it was for the erstwhile student to accept the professor's invitation to address him thus) remember him best as a teacher who was generous, reserved, indefatigable. In my day, courses in musicology met in the drab lecture-room of the New York Public Library, 42nd Street and 5th Avenue, the riches of the Music Division near at hand. Professor Reese's lectures were given in the evening, for two hours at first; gradually they were extended by omitting the mid-lecture break, which was hard on us smokers (Reese was not one to recognize the frailty of flesh), and then, when the sixteenth-century floodtide of music was reached, by pushing past the scheduled time for the ending of class.

The lectures I remember best consisted of readings from *Music in the Renaissance*, then a work-in-progress. A miscellany of as many copies of musical examples as Reese's library and that of the NYPL could provide, always stood ready, piled high on one of the library's book trucks; slips of paper marked the pages to be opened to, when the moment came for the twenty or so graduate students to huddle around the scores while the professor played a recording brought from home to illustrate a point. Of Renaissance music few records were available in the mid-40's, and we must have heard them all.

Classroom tempo was as brisk as a television newscast's; there was never time to linger, always more to cover than time allowed, extended though it was. The Renaissance lectures provided a tightly organized survey of all that was then known about the music of the period, which was a great deal even in those days before the edition explosion of the 50's and 60's. An illustration of his determination to make use of every available scrap is Reese's search for what he later described as 'buried treasure' in the contrafacta of Maldeghem's *Trésor Musical*; few if any modern editions of Renaissance music escaped his notice and, in the book, footnotes.

Those of us lucky enough to become what were then called 'Reese-researchers'—contributors, however modest, to the book-to-be—remember bringing our 'patches' of ten to twelve pages to the apartment at 50 Park Avenue (where most of the flat surfaces were occupied by parts of the manuscript). One sat next to the professor (who had begun the day

at Fischer's, done his stint at NYU, and was spending the time before, during, and after dinner checking student contributions) while he read through the material, slowly, patiently, revising all the while. I recall the substitution of short words for long wherever possible—e.g., 'trait' for 'characteristic,' which saved nine spaces—these spaces added to the others similarly saved made room for another footnote or a few lines of text within the limited number of pages the publisher allowed him. Sometimes all that remained unaltered on one of my pages was a sentence or two; these were scissored out of the manuscript, the salvaged bit stapled onto a page of the yellow, legal-sized pad on which the revised text was taking shape. (Legal training taught Reese never to copy anything unnecessarily.) These 'patch-sessions' gave the student apprentice an opportunity to watch a master editor at work.

Reese had a genius for editing, for evaluating, and for synthesizing the work of others. His books are grand mosaics of accumulated musicological knowledge, each a kind of state-of-the-subject report as of the date the books first appeared. Like its companion history of medieval music, *Music in the Renaissance* immediately became a standard work, the student's vade mecum. Together the two histories made Reese one of the best-known musicologists in the world.

His students saw a side of the man that readers of the books can hardly guess at: his love of nineteenth-century opera, exemplified by the delight Reese took in singing long passages from Wagner and in recalling the casts of performances he had attended at the Metropolitan from the time of his youth until the year of his death. Of his editorial work for Fischer's we heard nothing; that belonged to another world. So did his labors for the American Musicological Society, which in those days did not encourage student membership.

That Gustave Reese should die shortly after attending the meetings of the International Musicological Society at Berkeley is sad but fitting. If ever a man lived musical scholarship it was he. In the months preceding those meetings he was at work on the revision of *Music in the Middle Ages*. In the months following he would have been teaching again, despite the handicaps age and illness had brought. He will be sorely missed.

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