

## THE MELOGRAPHICON OR, HOW TO PRODUCE A MELODY

THE collector and the musician were seated discussing the arts, having as aid tobacco and a pale golden fluid of sustaining, soothing, or argumentative qualities, according to its use. The two armchairs were drawn up within range of that cheerful fire which always gave such a satisfactory welcome to the Collector's friends. The background was of books; chiefly in dull brown and otherwise shabby bindings. It softened into a warm shadow from the point of rosy glow which the blaze of the fire cast in one particular place. A piano was dimly visible in one corner of the room. The Musician petulantly reached for another cigarette from his friend's box, and continued the conversation.

'I tell you, my dear fellow, it is quite true. I am not exaggerating in the least; but there is no original music nowadays - not a scrap. You or I may not know its source, but a source it has had, and not with the present-day composer.'

'You are severe, my friend, and, I feel sure, unjust,' said the Collector in suave tones.

'The race of musicians is dead, sir; dead as any nail in any door.'

'Present company always excepted, of course,' interpolated the Collector, striking a match and applying the flame to his pipe.

'Oh, well, I'm no great shakes, I admit; but, dash it all, I do try to be original.'

'Professional Musician,' quoted the Collector from an imaginary dictionary. 'Professional Musician: one who never plays music for his own gratification, and regards the work of his contemporaries as beneath contempt.'

'Oh, you may laugh - you're not a professional, only a silly old picker-up of odds and ends, scarcely fit to grace the ash bin. I tell you I'm right - look here - '

The Musician rose and pounded a few bars on the piano.

'Hear that ? Well, that's from X's new piece that the press is going ecstatic over.'

'Well, what's the matter with it ? It's all right, isn't it ?'

'Course it's all right, if it hadn't been cribbed from Chopin. Hear this'(musical example from the dim corner where the piano is), 'don't you see ? - practically note for note.'

'I believe there are only seven notes, and a few half notes thrown in, that constitute the basis of all music; and it sometimes happens that composers use the whole seven in their compositions, consequently -'

'Oh! do dry up, please! The fact is indisputable that any amount of cribbing goes on.'

'Perhaps,' meekly remarked the Collector, 'the modern composer employs a "Melographicon."'

'A what ?'

'A Melographicon. I have one myself. It originally cost a guinea, and by its aid you, and with no musical knowledge, can come out as a full-blown musician, and make a princely fortune as a song composer. I am thinking of taking up the trade myself.'

'What on earth are you talking about ?'

'The Melographicon - I'll show you it; you had better see it before it graces the dust-bin.'

The Collector crossed to the bookshelves and returned with a volume in paper boards.

'The title is lengthy, so I'll abbreviate. "The Melographicon, a new musical work by which an interminable number of melodies may be produced ... for the voice and pianoforte, without the necessity of a scientific knowledge of the art. London: Clementi & Co., 26 Cheapside, price one guinea." - Date, I should say, about 1820. I will explain its use, if you'll come and sit down.'

The Musician complied, and fortified himself with a modicum of the golden fluid.

'You see,' said the Collector, 'each page is covered with a number of single bars of music, both bass and treble. These sets of bars are labelled A, B, C, &c., and each letter contains twelve examples, and each section of the book is adapted to different types of metre - iambic, dactylic, &c. The operation is simple in the extreme. You pick your song or poem, ascertain in which style of verse it is written, then turn to the appropriate section. You then get your little sister, or other unprejudiced person, to put her finger on any bar on the A page - there are twelve to choose from - and note the bar down upon music-paper. Then turn over leaf to the B page, and another bar is spotted at haphazard, and chalked down. And so you progress, and find you ultimately have got a real and regular melody. We guarantee success for, as the author (who modestly conceals his name - are we to assume it is the great Muzio Clementi himself ?) - tells us: - 'From such a stock of materials it will be readily perceived that an almost endless variety of melodies may be produced, but the author will not trouble his readers with a vain and useless calculation of their number. It is sufficient to observe that the major part of the bars are selected from the writings of first rate musicians, such as Haydn, Mozart, Weber, Rossini, &c., whenever the author could find them suited to his purpose.' 'There, my dear fellow, get an up-to-date Melographicon, and be happy.'

'Good gracious me !'

'Wait, my dear fellow, I have something else. Look at these cards - "Every one their own composer. Magic musical cards. By means of this newly invented musical card any one, even without musical knowledge, is able to compose an unlimited number of dance music." The grammar is, perhaps, a little shaky, but you can have it in French if you prefer it, for the directions are given in that language also. You place the cards in any sequence, and can rattle off as many polkas and waltzes as your hearers will stand, for the cards contain both these dance forms chopped into bars. The date of this ingenious device is about 1870. The ingenious gentleman who invented the Melographicon, and the one who produced the "Magic Musical Cards" are both wrong in claiming the idea as original, for in an advertisement on this musical work, in date about 1770" - here the Collector tugged forth a volume of music - "we find this: "The Musical Curiosity or Tabular System, whereby any person, without the least knowledge of music, may compose ten thousand different minuets in the most pleasing and correct manner, price 2s. 6d." 'Thus you see, - ' commented the Collector. But the Musician reached for his hat, and was gone before his friend could enter into further explanation.

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