

Rodolphe Kreutzer, the Master Teacher

THE present-day fame of Rodolphe Kreutzer, violinist and composer, rests chiefly on the fact that he was the composer of the famous *Forty-two Etudes ou Caprices pour le Violon* (Forty-two Studies or Caprices for the Violin), a work which is indispensable in every scheme of violin instruction, and that Beethoven dedicated to him the immortal violin and piano sonata, Op. 47, now universally known as the *Kreutzer Sonata*.

Kreutzer was a prolific composer of operas, and of works for the violin, having left no less than 39 operas and ballets, 19 violin concertos, several violin duets, 15 string quartets, 15 trios, 2 symphonies concertantes for two violins, sonatas for violin and 'cello, airs with variations, and other miscellaneous works.

His operas, popular enough in their day, are now obsolete, and would sound antiquated and trivial to modern ears, and his violin concertos, and other compositions for the violin, while containing many fine passages, are rarely if ever heard in public at the present day, but are given over to the class room, still being used for teaching purposes to some extent.

Kreutzer would have no doubt been much surprised if he could have known during his lifetime that his most ambitious works would be forgotten, but that his *Forty-two Studies*, which he composed for the benefit of his pupils, would give him immortal fame in the art of violin playing. In this we have one more instance, added to many in the history of arts, of where works which an artist considered his masterpieces were forgotten, with the lapse of time, while a work or works, which he considered of slight importance, brought him undying fame.

Kreutzer was born of German parentage in 1766, in the French city of Versailles. Practically his entire life was spent in France, and the most of it in Paris. His talent developed in early boyhood. His father, a violinist in the Royal Band, gave him his first lessons, and he later studied with Anton Stamitz, an excellent violinist. Some time afterwards, in Paris, he gained much from hearing Viotti, and may have had personal instruction from him. Like so many eminent violinists, Kreutzer seems to have relied more on his own efforts, and natural genius for the instrument, than on instruction from teachers.

At the age of thirteen we find him performing a violin concerto in Paris at the Concerts Spirituels, with great applause. Some authorities state that this concerto was written by him, while others attribute it to his teacher. At the age of sixteen, through the influence of Marie Antoinette, he was appointed first violinist in the Royal Orchestra, the post having been left vacant by the death of his father. From this time on his career as a violinist and composer was of the greatest brilliance. He was appointed solo violinist of the Theatre Italien, and became a successful composer of opera.

During the stormy period of the French Revolution, Kreutzer seems to have worked serenely on, popular alike with royalists and revolutionists. The friend and protégé of Marie Antoinette under the old regime, we find him in 1802 the first violin in the orchestra of

the Consul Bonaparte; in 1806, solo violinist of the Emperor Napoleon; in 1815, after Napoleon's downfall, the director of the Royal Orchestra of Louis XVIII.

Kreutzer was a brilliant public violin soloist, and on his tour through Italy, Germany and the Netherlands he was everywhere hailed as one of the first violinists of his day. His educational work in Paris was of the greatest value to the development of the violin art. Musical historians class Kreutzer third in the order of development of the four great representative masters of the classical violin school of Paris, the others being Viotti, Rode and Baillot. In collaboration with Baillot, Kreutzer compiled the *Method de Violon*, an instruction book for the use of the students of the Conservatoire. As professor of the Conservatoire, Kreutzer formed several pupils who became eminent, among them being D'Artot, Rovelli, who became the teacher of Molique; Massert, afterwards the teacher of Wieniawski and Teresina Tua, and Lafont. His talent was given the widest recognition during his lifetime, and he received many distinguished honors. He was awarded the cross of the Legion of Honor, and was General Director of Music at the opera in Paris for a considerable time.

Kreutzer's solo violin playing was of the highest excellence. His intonation was perfect, his tone broad and noble, and his interpretations marked by the highest intelligence, and full of magnetism and temperament.

Kreutzer's career as a teacher and public performer were cut short by his breaking an arm in 1825, when he retired. Not long afterwards he went to Switzerland on account of poor health, and died in that country at Geneva in 1831. It is stated that a priest of that city refused him Christian burial because he had formerly been connected with the theatre in Paris.

The name of Kreutzer is best known to the general public through the *Kreutzer Sonata* having been dedicated to him by Beethoven, and from the fact that the *Kreutzer Sonata* was taken as a title for one of his most famous novels by the late Count Leo Tolstoi, the Russian author. Beethoven's dedication of the sonata reads, "to my friend Kreutzer," but musical history is not very clear as to how close a friendship existed between Beethoven and Kreutzer, and some authorities intimate that Kreutzer never even played the sonata which was dedicated to him, and had a slight opinion of Beethoven's style.

The Famous Etudes

The Kreutzer etudes, known to every teacher and student of the violin as "Kreutzer" are 42 in number, although only 40 are published in some incomplete editions. They form one of the most important educational works in existence for the violin. They are so thoroughly violinistic, and breathe in every phrase so perfectly the genius of the instrument, that they are absolutely necessary in developing a correct style. They are used by teachers of every school and nationality, and are considered to be a necessary part of the education of every violinist. A famous violinist has said: "Make Kreutzer your daily bread." Another has said: "If you can play Kreutzer in the

highest perfection you can play anything." The etudes devoted to the acquirement of the trill by Kreutzer have been surpassed for this purpose. In point of difficulty the Kreutzer etudes are usually considered as just below that of the Rode *Twenty-four Caprices*, for which work they serve as a preparation, just as Kayser's *Thirty-six Studies* are considered as a preparation for Kreutzer.

How to Study Kreutzer

Many different works have been written by violinists on how to study the etudes of Kreutzer, or amplifying the studies. One of the best known is that of one of Kreutzer's pupils, Massart, himself a famous violinist and teacher. Massart's work on the art of studying Kreutzer is not used as much as it should be by



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violin teachers and students, for it is a work of the highest value. It gives several hundred additional bowings to be applied to the bowing exercises in the etudes, additional ways of studying the trill exercises, directions for transposing some of the etudes, playing some of them in octaves, etc., etc., thus increasing the material in the etudes, and adding to their interest. Every violin student should possess this little work.

The etudes of Kreutzer, should be studied, reviewed and re-reviewed by every serious student of the violin, until they are thoroughly mastered, as their mastery gives the violinist a broad, firm foundation on which the great concertos and other works for the violin can be safely erected. Too many pupils hurry through Kreutzer, vainly imagining that they have mastered it, without really penetrating its depths.

How to Rosin the Violin Bow

MANY violin pupils either do not rosin their bow enough, or else do it in such a way that much rosin collects on the body of the violin under the strings. The first method produces squeakiness, and the second scratchiness—besides interfering with the vibrations of the instrument, and thus marring the tone. The bow should be thoroughly rosined with good rosin. Then loosen the hair and shake the bow, whipping it through the air several times. This forces the powdered rosin to go *between* the hairs instead of merely on the surface. When good rosin is used, this is all that is necessary; if cheaper material is used, it may be necessary to blow the waste matter from the hair after it is tightened.—M. T.