

A WRITER ON MUSIC

By THE EDITOR

"*P*ENGUIN BOOKS" are read by a large number of people in this country. They cover every conceivable subject. "Pelican Books" are published by the same firm and a recent title on the book-stalls caught my eye and I purchased the book.

"You and Music" by Christian Darnton is meant to introduce the ordinary music lover to the significance of a wide range of music old and new outside the traditional repertory of standard classics. I quote from the Introduction.

I have no intention here of discussing the merits or otherwise of this book. The reader can decide that for himself. What I *am* concerned with is the only mention of the banjo, mandolin and guitar, which can be found on page 78.

The author of this book has been studying music from the age of four (he is now thirty-five years old) and in 1927 he gave a concert of chamber music at the Grottrian Hall, London. During 1928-1929 he lived in Berlin, and here he studied with Max Bunting. Returning to England he took an appointment for one term as second music-master at Stowe School, and for a short while after that he was Assistant Editor of *The Music Lover*.

We are told that Christian Darnton's compositions include concertos for piano, viol and harp, a considerable output of chamber music and some works for large orchestras, and that all of these works have been performed in various countries, such as Germany, South Africa, U.S.A., etc., as well as in England.

But all this is by the way and is

only given to show that, despite his musical training, Mr. Darnton's knowledge of the fretted instruments is so limited that he could, with advantage to himself, learn a little more of their histories and the use more famous composers than he have made of them in their works.

It is obvious that he has never heard of such players of the Spanish guitar as Andres Segovia, Miguel Llobet, Luise Walker, Maria Anido, Emilio Pujol, Regina Sainz de la Maza, etc., nor such famed players of the mandolin as Raffaele Calace, Silvio Ranieri, Bernado de Pace, Pasquale Vinaccia, Valentine Abt, etc.

But let me give you his paragraph.

"...without saying more of the Guitar, Mandolin, and Banjo than this: they are all descended from the mediæval Lutes, which formed a large family in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."

"The Guitar and Mandolin are used only in those countries where one may stand beneath a lady's window and serenade her without contracting pneumonia. And the Banjo is mercifully

relegated to what in my childhood were known as nigger minstrels—though whether any still exist I cannot say."

There is nothing funny about any of that. It is pathetic. What I object to is that the ordinary man-in-the-street (for whom, apparently, Mr. Darnton is writing) will read such absolute balderdash and take it for gospel!

Mr. Darnton is obviously unaware that the greatest composers of all time, including Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi, Berlioz, etc., have written music specially for the mandolin. Verdi introduces six mandolins and four guitars in the second act of his opera "Otello" and in the score of "Don Giovanni" Mozart writes the accompaniment to the famous serenade "Deh Vieni" for the mandolin. In Handel's oratorio "Alexander Balus," to the aria "Hark! Hark! He Strikes the Golden Lyre" the mighty Handel writes the accompaniment for *mandolin*, harp, violins, etc.

Perhaps Mr. Darnton is unaware that Segovia has played his guitar in Madrid, London, New York, Boston, Mexico, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Stockholm, Budapest, Vienna, Buenos Aires, Cuba, etc., etc. but *not* beneath the windows of amorously-inclined females!

And here are a few more details Mr. Darnton can add to his stock of things-I never-knew. Paganini was intimate and had performed in public with the leading guitar virtuosi and the guitar exercised an influence over his musical nature. During his whole career Paganini employed the guitar as his accompanying instrument with his pupils and musical friends and the majority of his compositions published during his lifetime include a part for the guitar. It has been said that Paganini preferred his guitar to the violin.

Another player of the guitar Mr. Darnton must be familiar with is Schubert. His instrument was preserved in the Schubert Museum in Vienna. Before the war an exhibit in the Museum of the Paris Opera was Gounod's guitar. There is no record to show that either of these illustrious musicians were in the habit of playing underneath a lady's window!

Boccherini was also a guitarist and composer for the guitar, although most musical directories fail to record this fact.

Berlioz was a master of the guitar and it has been said that this was the only instrument upon which he was really proficient. It is known that the guitar accompanied Berlioz on all his travels. Mr. Darnton must surely be aware that Berlioz is the author of the standard treatise on "Instrumentation and Orchestration." If Mr. Darnton cares to refer to this work he will find that Berlioz devotes five whole pages to the mandolin and guitar!

Manuel de Falla wrote a guitar solo to be played at the tomb of Debussy.

Sir Henry J. Wood has, on more than one occasion, included the banjo in orchestras under his baton and Paul Whiteman (writing for the "New York Herald" some time ago) said: "You can get more pizzicato effects with a single banjo than you can with a whole symphony lead of pizzicato violins and violas and you can play passages they would not dare attempt."

And as for the banjo being "relegated to nigger minstrels," surely Mr. Darnton cannot be unaware of the fact that the instrument of today is a totally different affair to the crude banjo of the black-faced minstrel and that this modern banjo was an integral part of the dance band from 1914 until a few years ago, when it was replaced by the guitar! Apart from the use of the banjo in the dance band, Mr. Darnton will be surprised to know that thousands of amateurs play the banjo, and that quite a number of professional musicians earn quite a comfortable living from playing the instrument.

But I think I have taken up enough valuable space to convince the reader that Mr. Darnton has a lot to learn.

I am posting a copy of this

"B.M.G." to Mr. Darnton and I would be pleased to give publicity to any reply he cares to make.

In the meantime, readers themselves are invited to comment on this matter and, perhaps, provide other examples of the fretted instruments being more worthy of notice than the meagre and wholly inaccurate few lines Mr. Darnton, in his ignorance, seems to think they merit.
