

✓ ST. DAVID'S HALL, CARDIFF
(October 18th, 1984)

SEGOVIA

The appearance of Andres Segovia, at the age of 91, in St. David's Hall brought to mind some of the issues that go to making the musical experience such a complex social and personal as well as acoustic perception. I was reminded, for example, of the way in which so many of us

attempt to listen to the transcriptions of the legendary tenor Jean de Reszke captured on a precious Mapleson cylinder more than three quarters of a century ago. We listen through the roar and crackle and peer into the noisy acoustical mist in order to catch a glimpse of one of history's greatest singers and the experience requires that we project as much imagination into the experience as the actual sound of the voice brings to it.

So it is with a number of great musicians whom we flock to hear during the twilight of their careers. We attend in order to catch through the aging fingers a glimpse of the great men who perhaps changed the course of music making: men like Casals and Segovia. We listen, not only for their past greatness, but also for their inherent musicianship. We forgive them their human frailty as indeed we forgive the wrong notes of a Cortot or the sour tone of a Szigeti in order to share the insights of their interpretations.

Andres Segovia has never been one of your flamboyant extroverts, indeed these days he shuffles onto the stage, lowers himself awkwardly and gently on to his stool and starts to play as though to himself. His music making is introspective in manner, occasionally halting and insecure but also full of the beauty of tone that has made him a true master of the guitar.

A glimpse of this mastery was to be heard during the performance of Sor's *Theme and Variations in E minor* in which Segovia held the attention with musical grace and poised phrases. There were further delicacies to be heard in the playing of Haydn's *Allegretto-Andante-Minuetto* where the expressionless physical presence of the performer hid the love of the musical gesture: sometimes it was a portamento lovingly caressed, sometimes it was the graceful shaping of a larger span of music such as the seamless final *Minuetto*.

Despite the lapse (and as far as I could tell, the only lapse in the impressive memory of the nonagenarian) in the middle section of Villa-Lobos's *Prelude-Study-Prelude* the interpretation was made memorable by the playing of the opening *Prelude* which was dulcet in its chime-like delicacy.

When it was all over, the audience stood up and cheered, causing Segovia to hobble back painfully for two encores. They know and stand up for their great old men in Wales.

Finally, with a great effort, Segovia lifted his hand slowly and half waved to the audience before shuffling haltingly off the stage for the last time.

IFAN PAYNE.