

Integrity

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Integrity, a man's most important characteristic, is to be found in all of the great composers. These men were true to their ideals, and no one, no matter how important, could dissuade them from their ideals. Men like Bach, Haydn, Chopin, Grieg, and Liszt were true to their ideals; they sincerely believed in their work, and none of them ever composed for anyone else's fame. Although they were peaceful men, respectful of powerful and influential people, these men were never guilty of losing their integrity. Their music is persuasive, expressive of each man's greatness, and above all, rich in a type of individuality brought about by courage and a desire to please, but never tainted with the stain of falsity.

Not so long ago it was my extreme good fortune to become acquainted with several outstanding contemporary musicians. During this association, I was fortunate enough to hear them discuss the lives of many famous composers. The remarks which remain most vivid in my mind were about Beethoven and DeBussy, who, although exact opposites in their styles, had one significant characteristic in common, that of integrity.

Beethoven was, for the most part, a very congenial man, although at times he was known to display a vile temper. This was shown quite dramatically when an Austrian prince asked Beethoven to write a number of works that might be published by the prince's son, who was a student at the Leipzig Conservatory. Beethoven was so angry at this request that he vowed never to write again. Fortunately he did. Less than five hours later, legend has it, he stopped in at a blind peasant's cottage to play for him. When Beethoven went home that night he had played, for the first time, the beautiful "Moonlight Sonata."

DeBussy had an experience somewhat similar to that of Beethoven. Soon after DeBussy had published the delightful "Afternoon of a Faun," he received the Prix de Rome, which would enable him to study in Rome for three years and one year in any country of his choice. He was undecided as to whether or not he would go, for he felt that France offered all that he wished to learn.

Almost a month after he received the award, he was asked to a dinner which was given by a rich and influential lady of Paris. Imagine his discomfort when the lady virtually ordered him to authorize her son to take DeBussy's place at Rome. DeBussy was not a man of temper; and this incident, rather than arousing an outburst of words, served only to lower him into the depths of melancholia. During this depressing period, Claude DeBussy wrote one of the most beautiful compositions of any period of music history, his rapturous, dreamy "Claire de Lune." DeBussy later went to Rome; and, although he did not remain the entire four years, he showed everyone that his integrity was not a plaything for rich people to toy with.

These men are famous not only for their splendid creative ability, but also for upholding their ideals, purposes, and standards of ability, while opposing destructive intentions, ambitions, and low objectives. They were forced to struggle through many hardships to preserve their integrity; this fact alone is enough to make them famous forever.