

Excerpt from the Diary of Josef Filtsch*

(from the German)

. . . “Look how the child is smiling,” my wife said to me: Carl not yet 2 years old in his cradle. “Yes,” I said, “I have seen him smiling before, namely when the bell was rung.” Mühlbach has some good-sounding bells—but the ensemble of them all together is one of the best-sounding I have ever heard.

The bell may indeed be called, if not his first teacher, the first phenomenon to awaken in Carl the love of music.

“It is strange,” my wife continued, “this smile, but it is no less strange that this child never cries.” Also the excellent Doctor W., who had rescued my wife from mortal danger at childbirth and who paid us regular visits ever since, made a remark to this effect without our prompting him in any way. “The child is smiling again,” I said later when Carl’s brother Josef was

*Josef Filtsch (1782-1860), Superintendent of the Reformed Churches of Hungary, father of Carl. The diary was with Sir Francis Loring Gwynne-Evans of Wadhurst, UK, Josef Filtsch’s great-grandson, before 1994.

improvising on the piano in the next room. I can state that it was the bell—and his brother Josef—who were his first teachers. Carl usually came up to the piano when his brother was playing and took hold of one of his brother's or the piano's legs, listening intently. (It is a fact, moreover, that when the child began to stir uneasily in his cradle, he could be put to rest by playing a tune on the piano.)

Once, when Carl was about three, I heard the scale being played in the adjoining room. It was Carl, who was standing smilingly in front of the piano and playing one key after another with his forefinger, and as he had accidentally touched the “middle C” first, it sounded correct, if somewhat “staccato,” as it was played with the same finger. “Well done, dear boy,” I said to him, “but you haven't only one finger, why not use all all the fingers? What about doing it in this way?” Now I put my thumb on the “middle C” and called out three times: “C, C, C.” He laughed aloud—from this moment onwards he never forgot the “C.” “Now,” I continued, the forefinger is put down on the next key, but not without lifting the thumb up at the same time, otherwise it will sound ugly, —and then the middle finger in due course put down. The 4th finger is not yet allowed to come down on the key. —Like a pussycat who wants to catch a mouse, the thumb creeps onto “F” (this I also called out three times), and in this way we continue and now we also employ

our 4th finger, it may take a seat on the key, finally we end up with the little finger, which caused Carl some amusement. “May I do it now myself?” he said. He put his thumb on “C,” lifted it at the very moment he put his forefinger down, and then the middle finger. When he, laughing, let his thumb creep into the “mousehole,” I felt overwhelmed with joy and called my wife with these words: “My dear, here is another Sepi [Carl’s brother Josef]!” With my eldest son Joseph we had witnessed a similar happy development of his musical talent, albeit from his 6th year onwards, when I (in Szaszáros) started to teach him, after I had received some tuition from the organist of my parish.

This tuition had not had the desired effect—with three hours of daily practice—to make me an accomplished pianist, but I managed after all to learn how to teach, and above all through teaching our eldest son—Joseph—I, the father, became the music teacher of all our children. (Joseph, who learned from me, in his 9th year, at Klausenburg and Hermannstadt, and in his 14th year in Vienna, was called a “Wunderkind” or prodigy.)

Also my beloved son Eugen (the “middle” son), who wants to become a parson, had piano tuition from me and learned to master the keyboard at a comparatively early date, but he wrote to me once from Hermannstadt that he was afraid he would not be able to make the same progress as my Josef. —I

had a son, also called Carl, who died in his 7th year, who had shown great promise at the keyboard; my youngest son, born in Mühlbach, was again named Carl, explicitly, as though to “fill the gap” that the sad loss of our first Carl had caused . . .

Carl had started the scale (as we witnessed); he played it already the next day with the right hand separately without further help from me, then he turned to the left hand with gusto—its contrary motion especially gave him much pleasure.

. . . I have often thought about these words [of his nephew], especially at the time when after Carl’s concert in Vienna distinctions of all kinds were showered upon him, when his compositions together with his picture were printed, when the great Thalberg’s words about the “little great Carl Filtsch” were published, when afterwards he gave his charity concerts at home and the critics praised him to the skies—so that somebody said to me: “I can’t understand how you can bear such happiness!” (At the moment I am writing this, namely on the 18th of January, 1842, I receive a letter from Sep [Josef] to the effect that he was very graciously received by the king of France on the 30th of December!) —I have often thought that what we—in our inability to foresee the future—call “fortune” or “good luck,” could be a prelude to severe trials—and here we can only pray—may God protect us! May He keep us

from falling from such heights!