

Ernst VonHeeringen

(- 24 Dec 1855)

The Evening Star, Dec. 22, 1855

Suicide

Much feeling was manifested by our musical community, upon the intelligence of the melancholy end of Ernest Von Heeringer, who shot himself at his lodgings at Mrs. Campbell's on 4 ½ street, on Monday afternoon. The ball entered just above the ear, cutting the temporal artery and causing instant death.

In a letter addressed to his attending physician, Dr. James, he says that had he been successful in introducing to the public his new system of musical notation, he should have been spared this end.

Dr. James attributes the act to a fit of derangement brought on by ill health and repeated disappointments. The deceased was rising fifty years of age; he was a man of rank in his native country (Prussia) being the younger son of noble family.

By his own request he was buried at night, according to the German custom, decently but without ceremony. He left a large number of valuable manuscripts upon music, which Dr. James designs publishing for the benefit of the widow and her child who reside in Fauquier county, Va. He left also a highly scientific manuscript work upon 'The Theory of Musical Harmony,' which from the expense attending its publication, will not probably be undertaken, unless gentlemen of wealth who feel sufficient interest in music should come forward. He requested that one copy of this work should be presented to the Congressional Library, and another to the library of the city councils.

The Evening Star, November 2, 1855

MUSICAL NOTATION

To the Editors of the National Intelligencer,

Gentlemen: Six years ago I chose the city of Washington as my permanent residence; but, unfortunately, the necessity of my presence in other cities, in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, as well as in Europe, to explain and defend my new system of musical notation, has until now prevented my remaining here. During those six years I have encountered my full share of the opposition which every reformer in science must inevitably experience, and I can even now claim to have achieved only a partial success any where. But I am not disheartened. I have essayed a great task, and I do not fear its difficulties. I must make the public acquainted with my system, and I must overcome their prejudices in favor of that with which they have long been familiar. To accomplish this double task in Washington I desire to address to the public several lectures on the subject of music; or it will be gratifying to me if I can have the privilege of confronting in argument a chosen disputant who favors the old system. I would then be willing to constitute a jury of our intelligent auditors to decide between the merits of the two systems. I am prepared to prove--

That the old notation is unphilosophical and unnecessarily complicated.

That the use of it involves a waste of time, labor, and money.

That thorough-bass and composition are learned with great difficulty by it, and may be learned with but little difficulty by the new system.

That in teaching the old system many unnecessary rules and facts are required to be taught, as for instance: 1, of natural sounds, and sharp and flat sounds; 2, of raising notes and sounds and lowering them; 3, of half tones, semi-tones, quarter-tones, etc.; 4, of half-notes, quarter-notes, etc.

That the intervals are placed on the diatonic major scale instead of the chromatic scale.

That 15 major and 15 minor scales are used, while only 12 of each exist in nature.

That 168 characters are used to represent 12 sounds being 14 for each sound, while only 12, or one for each sound are necessary.

That it uses 1,933 intervals from E to E, on paper, while only 12 really exist.

That it uses thorough-bass figures, which are unnecessary and troublesome.

That it uses Italian terms to represent the power of sound, which are neither understood nor regarded.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

E. VonHeeringen

Washington, October 25, 1855.

Library of Congress references:

LCCN: unk84-83138

Call No.: ML432.H44

Von Heeringen's celebrated instruction book for the piano forte, containing the principles of his newly invented notation, patented at Washington City, by the name of Chromatic, or Presidential system... Washington, publ. by the author, (1849) 118 p. fol.

LCCN: unk84-58630

Call No. ML432.H44 D3

[Heeringen, Ernest von, 1810-1855]

Declaration of musical independence. [n.p., n.d.] 1 l. illus. 44 cm.