

Laureate Of International Musical Competition

By SUNA SURVEYOR

Olga Craen, leading Indian pianist, who won first place in an international competition in Paris, has been hailed by European Continental critics as "a great pianist and virtuoso," and "a genuine artiste who is unaffected and sincere, and so steeped in the traditions of her calling, that she raises it to the level of true art." She will once again give proof of her talent at a recital of pianoforte music at the C. J. Hall in Bombay, on November 8.

"It has often been said that Indians are lovers of Bach's music, because they feel in it the divine monotony of nature which they themselves would strive after in their art of sound and dance. At any rate, it is convincingly obvious that the Indian pianist, Olga Craen, possesses a deep sense of beauty in Bach's art, and that not only from convention, but from sincere devotion, she started her programme with his Prelude and Fugue, in resounding tones", so wrote a Dutch paper of The Hague, in Holland, about Olga Craen, the Indian girl from "down under", who has "made good" so brilliantly, whose unique career and meteoric rise to fame have left an indelible mark on the world of European music, not only in this country, but also abroad.

Hailing from a musical family, music being the heritage she received from her mother, Mrs. L. Athaide, a very gifted pianist, Olga commenced her instrument at an early age with the latter. She soon showed so much precocity, however, and started to "check" her mother so much, (as she puts it herself!) that the latter decided to place her under some professor or teacher who might take her musical education in hand properly. But there was the difficulty of finance. Music is the most expensive luxury in the world, and Mrs. Athaide could not afford high fees. But here was little Olga, certainly something of a child prodigy. The picture of a little girl, perched on a piano stool, legs dangling in the air, playing with all the confidence of a ripe musician, still lives as a vivid memory in the minds of many people.

EARLY PROMISE

Fortunately for the child Olga, Mrs. Athaide happened to meet Prof. Edward Behr one day at the Excelsior Cinema, and explained to him her predicament. This eminent musician readily agreed to teach the child free, and for 12 years the good professor gave Olga the priceless benefit of his great knowledge and musicianship entirely gratis. Olga remembers with gratitude the wonderful training she received at the hands of this master musician, who grounded her thoroughly in the art of pianoforte playing, paving the way for a brilliant pianistic career. With Prof. Behr, she soon became deeply versed in the works of the Old Masters, especially of Bach and Mozart. For, as she expressed it, "If you can play Bach and Mozart, you can play anything!"

At 16, Olga topped the list in the L. A. B. Examination, (Licentiate of the Associated Board of Music), but did not take advantage of a scholarship to proceed to England for higher studies, being too young, (in her mother's opinion), to go abroad. Two years later, however, Prof. Behr thought it was high time his talented protegee was enabled to prosecute her studies in England and he moved in the matter in an energetic way, arranging an audition for her, to which he invited Lady Tata, Lady Blackwell, and Mrs. Teasdale. The result of the audition was that Lady Tata being very much impressed by Olga's performance, agreed to finance her studies abroad.

RECITALS IN ENGLAND

At the Tobias Matthay School in England, to which Olga proceeded, she soon made her mark, bearing out the rich promises of her early talent and genius. During the course of her five years' stay in England, Olga Craen gave many recitals, including performances at the Queen's Hall Summer Festival Concerts, and a re-

ital at Wigmore Hall, at the age of 21. She likewise fulfilled several engagements for the B. B. C., passed the L. R. A. M. Examination, and obtained the Teacher's Diploma of the Tobias Matthay School, whose distinguished Founder thought very highly of his pupil from India. "Your performances at the Queen's Hall Summer Festival Concerts were outstanding", he told her. "You should have every facility to help you to become a concert artiste."

When Olga Craen returned to India in 1937, fresh from the honours

In 1946, Olga Craen embarked for Europe, accompanied by her husband, to participate in the International Competition Marguerite Long-Jacques Thibaud, at Paris, organised by the French Government, at which 140 entrants from all over the Continent and America took part. The contest was divided into two sections,—one for solo playing, and the other accompanied by an orchestra. The first section consisted of an exacting programme—and Etude by Liszt-Paganini, Harp Study and Fantasia by Chopin, the Prelude and Fugue



OLGA CRAEN, Indian Pianist, astounded leading European experts, including the Director of the Paris Conservatoire by her "brilliant technique." (Photo AVIE.)

of a glorious scholarship in England, and made her debut on the Bombay concert platform, her success was assured. She was acclaimed by press and public alike as one of the foremost pianists in the country. In 1938, Olga Craen made her debut with the Bombay Symphony Orchestra, playing Beethoven's "Emperor Concerto". In 1939, Olga married M. Jules Craen, the able conductor of the Bombay Symphony Orchestral Society, and the professional partnership which had started with her debut with the Orchestra, became a conjugal one also. Since then, Olga Craen has enjoyed enormous success, both with the Orchestra, and at her own recitals, when she has often played for charity.

"MODERNS" PIONEER

Olga Craen claims to have pioneered the interpretation of modern contemporary composers in India, by including them in the 2nd half of her programmes at her recitals, when she has popularised the music of Faure, Ravel, Debussy, Smetana, Turina, Bax, De Severac, and D'Indy, among other "moderns".

by Mendelssohn, and a number of the candidate's own choice; (Mme. Craen's was Faure's Valse-Caprice.) In this section, Olga Craen's outstanding execution easily won her first place among the representatives of different countries; the next day, however, she could not do full justice to a performance of the A Minor Concerto by Schumann with an orchestra, (without rehearsal, as required by the Competition rules), due to a sudden illness that overtook her. She managed to stand 4th in this section, however, and the jury awarded her a prize of 20,000 francs. The international jury included such eminent musicians as Jacques Ibert, Director of the French Academy in Rome, (as President), Weingartner Professor of Piano at the Conservatoire of Vienna, De Kreze, Director of the Budapest Conservatoire, Jongen, Director of Royal Conservatoire, Brussels, and the composers, Tchernine (Russian), Louis Aubert, and Busseu, (French), among others.

EUROPEANS ASTOUNDED

Like Vijaylakshmi Pandit, who at the same time was covering herself and the whole of Indian womanhood

with honour in the field of international politics, Olga Craen was trailing a path of glory in the field of international art, to the greater glory of India and Indians. It is a matter of great regret, therefore, (as it was of surprise to the organisers and competitors of the International Competition), that such an outstanding exponent of art should have received no help or encouragement from our Government to represent India at the contest, where every other candidate was present with the aid and financial support of his or her respective Government. That despite such difficulties, Olga Craen succeeded in enhancing the prestige of her country by becoming the Laureate of the International Competition, is a tribute to her powers and the dynamic force of her personality, which left Europeans thunderstruck, and astounded that such a musical phenomenon could come out of India.

As a Brussels paper wrote of Olga Craen: "It is not often that one has the opportunity of hearing a pianist with such a pleasing style as Olga Craen. The charm and accuracy with which she played an elaborate programme, left us astonished at her deep understanding of composers who, though familiar to us, are not so to the people of a country whose origins and traditions differ so greatly from ours. It would seem that just as the Japanese are devotees of Debussy, so do Indians appreciate Faure—perhaps even more than many French people."

Amongst the cities of Europe in which Olga Craen played were Paris, London, Amsterdam, The Hague, Brussels, Liege, and Lausanne. She was received everywhere with enthusiasm, whilst the press described her in glowing terms. The "inner urge", the "monumental and great vision" that inspire her, the "massive greatness" on which her playing is based, the "masterly control of her instrument", her "brilliant technique", her "impressive and entrancing performance", "the feat of strength" she displayed in her rendition of a Liszt Rhapsody—all these have come in for due recognition in a chorus of praise from the Continental critics.

It has been said that women are incapable of being good concert pianists, due to their lack of physical strength. Olga Craen verily gives the lie to this over-rated statement, by successfully scaling the manly heights of the concert pianist. She can indeed be classed as a giant among pianists, with masterful control over what G. B. S. once described as "that monster, the iron grand piano"

INDIAN DANCE AND MUSIC

Questioned as to her opinion on Indian music, Olga Craen chose to withhold it, since "she did not understand it." She thinks highly of Indian dancing, however, though in her opinion this beautiful and highly expressive art of our land is not accompanied, as a rule, by music of an equally lovely and expressive nature. The accompanying music ought, she says, to speak and express the poetry of graceful and exquisite movement, to inspire the dancers to ecstatic heights of terpsichorean art. For instance, in the case of the European ballet dance, the accompanying music conjures up the story of the dance vividly and graphically, so that one can see the dancers with one's eyes closed, so to speak. Indian dance music, on the other hand, does no more than monotonously beat out the time and rhythm. The Renaissance in Art taking place in India to-day should certainly inspire our composers to a better and more beautiful kind of music.

Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace

EARLY in August the Government of India announced their approval of the International Pact for the protection of cultural treasures, known as the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace. It is of great significance that India, within the very first year of her Independence should voice her adherence to this Treaty of Cultural Unity.

India's own great cultural heritage places her in a unique position. And her voice, like the mission of Gandhiji, must be the voice of Peace, the ideal of higher values and ever broadening horizons.

The real purpose of the Pact, as visualised by its creator, Professor Nicholas Roerich, was not only to preserve treasures of human genius for posterity, but also to create a common unifying bond by establishing the principle of inviolability of cultural values common to all humanity.

Professor Roerich always felt that this Pact should have an educational value by awakening in the younger generation from the earliest years, an understanding and respect for the great achievements of man's creative genius. He believed it would help to forge that great living bond, common to all, above any distinction of race, colour or creed to lead humanity towards that great goal—Peace—Peace based upon the realization and understanding of the higher values—above every strife and conflagration.

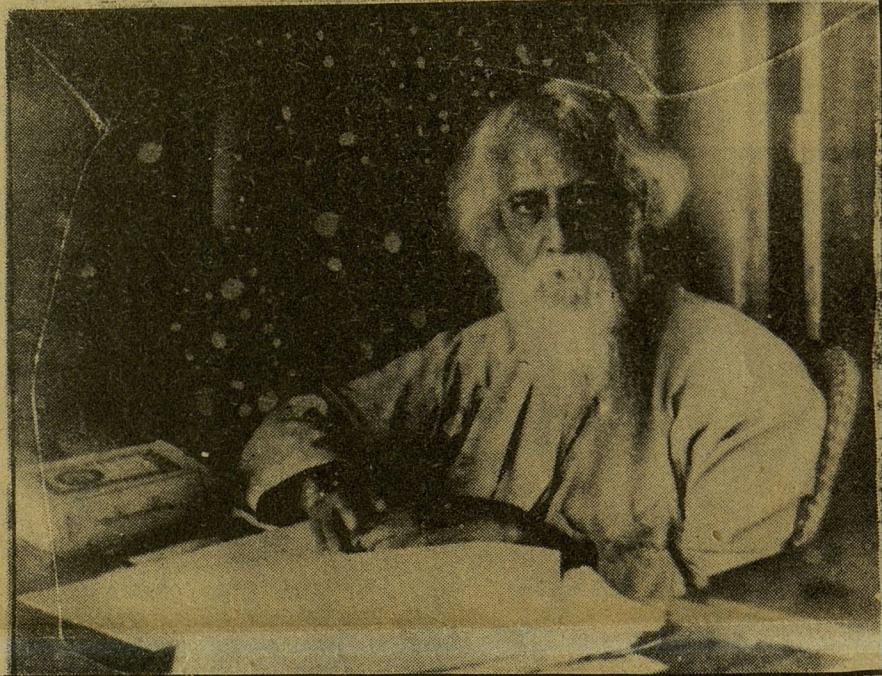
ORIGIN OF THE IDEA

The idea for a Pact of this nature was first conceived by Professor Roerich in 1904 and proposed first to the Society of Architects in Russia and later to the Russian State authorities in 1914. Though it was received with great interest, it was delayed on account of the war. It was only in 1929 that the idea was formally promulgated by Professor Roerich in America and the text of this treaty was published in the press. Simultaneously committees for the Pact and Banner of Peace were founded in Paris, New York and Brussels.

The principal articles of the Pact provide: "Educational, artistic and scientific institutions, artistic and scientific missions, the personnel, the property and collections of such institutions and missions shall be deemed neutral and as such shall be protected and respected by belligerents. Protection and respect shall be due to the aforesaid institutions and missions in all places, subject to the sovereignty of the high contracting parties, without any discrimination as to the state allegiance of any parti-

cular institution or mission. The institutions, collections, missions thus registered, may display a distinctive flag which will entitle them to special protection and respect on the part of the belligerents, or governments and peoples of all high contracting parties."

The symbol of this pact, the Banner of Peace, designed by Professor Roerich, consists of a red circle, within which are inscribed three spheres on a white field. One interpretation of this symbol is the past, present and future achievements of mankind within the circle of Eternity. This Banner as provided for in the articles



RABINDRANATH TAGORE, writing to Prof. Roerich: "...Your great humanitarian work for the welfare of the nations, of which your Peace Pact with a special banner for protection of cultural treasures is a singularly effective symbol."

of the Pact, is to be flown over protected sites, much in the manner of the Red Cross, a similarity which made some writers refer to it as the Red Cross of Culture.

The articles of the Treaty provided that the adherence to the pact could be by means of unilateral action through the proclamation of the executive, by bilateral action, through international agreements, and by multilateral action through the declaration of international conferences.

From its very inception the idea drew an enthusiastic response from the leaders of culture, heads of States,

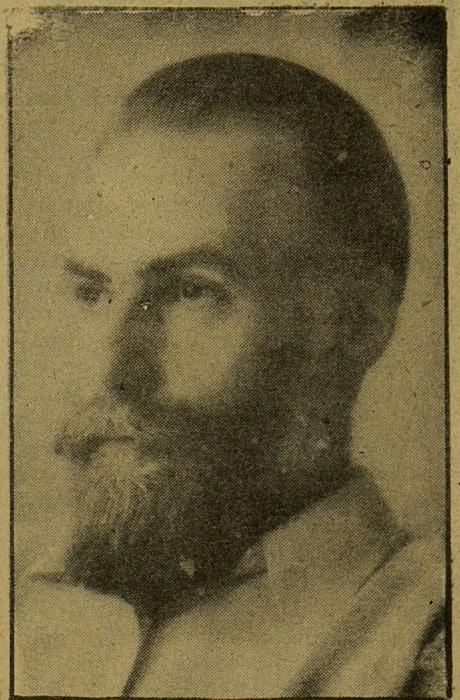
international organizations and cultural institutions. Three International conventions for the adoption of the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace were held at Bruges, Paris, and Washington. Representatives of 35 nations participated in the third international convention at Washington and unanimously adopted the resolution, approving the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace and urging its adoption by other nations of the world. The League of Nations, through its Museum Commission, voiced its adherence while thousands upon thousands of letters and resolutions proclaiming solidarity with the Pact were received by the respective committees for the Roerich Pact.

In 1935 on the 15th of April in the office of President Roosevelt in

the White House at Washington, the Pact was officially signed by the representatives of the United States of America and 20 Latin-American republics. At the close of this solemn occasion, President Roosevelt in an international broadcast delivered the following message:

"It is most appropriate that on this day designated as Pan-American Day by the chief executives of all the republics of the American continent the Government-members of the Pan-American Union should sign a treaty which moves a step forward in the preservation of the cultural achievements of nations of this hemisphere. In opening this Pact to the adherence of the nations of the world, we are endeavouring to make a universal application one of the principles vital to the preservation of modern civilisation. This treaty possesses a spiritual significance far deeper than the text of the instrument itself. Let us bring renewed allegiance to those high principles of international co-operation and helpfulness, which I feel assured will be a great contribution to civilisation by the Americas."

At the same juncture the Minister of Panama, Dr. Ricardo J. Alfaro, in the course of his address said: "The historic act which has just taken place is one that marks a signal victory in the perennial struggle of the better sentiments of man against the ravages of war. A great idealist and Apostle of Peace, Professor Nicholas Roerich, conceived the plan



SVETOSLAV ROERICH, son of Professor Nicholas Roerich author of the Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace.

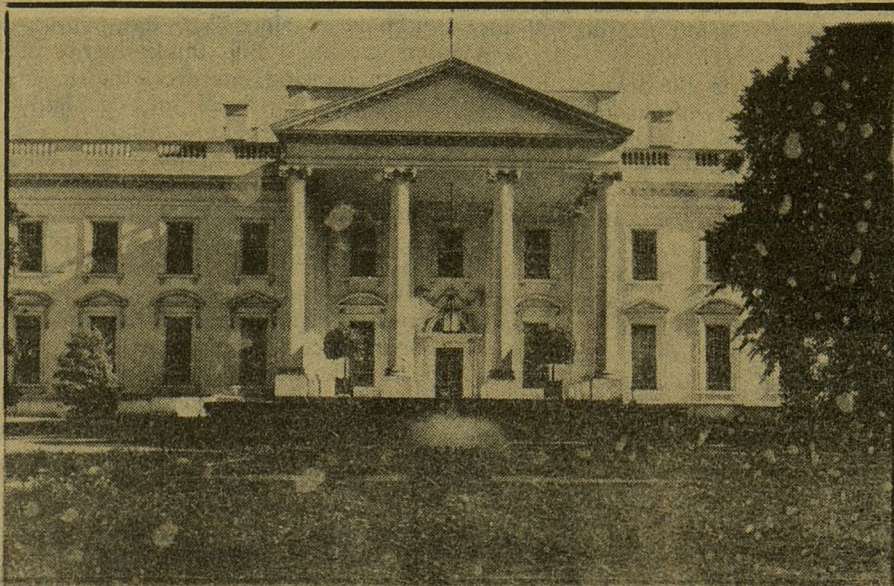
of an international convention for the neutralisation and protection of the cultural treasures of the world. And to-day the Republics of the Western hemisphere sought and attained the honour of carrying the lofty project to a successful conclusion... The deep significance of this occasion has been enhanced by the gracious hospitality which the President of the United States has shown the plenipotentiaries of the signatory nations by inviting them to perform the historic act in the White House."

Committees for the Roerich Pact have been established in many countries of Europe and America, as well as in India. Here in India from the very inception, keen interest has been evinced in this project by cultural leaders, institutions and organizations. The committee for the Roerich Pact in India includes the following names:—The Hon. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sir C. V. Raman, Dr. Amarnath Jha, Sir S. S. Bhatnagar, R. K. Shanmukham Chetty, Hon. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Sir Mirza Ismail, Dr. M. R. Jayakar, Sir B. Tekchand, Lady S. Hydari, Dr. Mata Prasad, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, N. R. Sircar, Hon. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, K. M. Munshi, G. Venkatachalam, S. Gujar and Svetoslav Roerich.

TAGORE'S SUPPORT

Rabindranath Tagore, writing to Professor Roerich, said:—"I have keenly followed your most remarkable achievements in the realm of arts and also your great humanitarian work for the welfare of the nation of which your peace pact with a special banner for protection of cultural treasures is a singularly effective symbol. I am very glad indeed that this pact has been accepted by the Museum Committee of the League of Nations and I feel sure that it will have far-reaching effects on the cultural harmony of Nations."

We are indebted to the enlightened and farseeing vision of our Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, for making the recognition of this endeavour by India possible within such a short period of time. Let us hope that India will now take in Asia the leadership of this movement for cultural Unity and that this Treaty for the protection of treasures of human genius becomes soon as universally accepted as the Red Cross.



THE ROERICH PACT was officially signed in the office of President Roosevelt in the White House at Washington, U. S. A. on 15th April, 1935.

Svetoslav Roerich