

ays He Has Amnesia

Godowsky Goes 4,000 Miles In Vain to Verify His Birth

By MARSHALL SPRAGUE.

Leopold Godowsky, Russian-born American composer and pianist who began giving concerts at the age of 9 and has continued doing so ever since, believes he is 64 years old. He believes it although his 4,000-mile quest for birth records, from New York to his native town, was unsuccessful.

"It's bad enough," he complained yesterday, "to go all that distance and then not be able to find your registration. It's worse when you can't even find the town."

The stubby, round-faced composer waved one of his short arms. "Was I born or wasn't I? According to citizens of Vilna, I couldn't have been because the town I thought I was born in doesn't exist. At least they told me that it either didn't exist or was in Lithuania, which means about the same thing to the citizens of Vilna. Furthermore, they wanted to know what I meant coming around asking for a birth certificate in time of war. Did you know there was a state of war between Poland and Lithuania? Let me tell you, if you want to learn about what's going on in Europe just pretend you're a Russian-born American trying to find your birth certificate."

It all began, Mr. Godowsky said, last February when a group of his friends got together and arranged a very special dinner and celebration for his alleged 65th birthday. "I didn't get wind of the scheme until a day or two before my birthday, February 13. My scouts found out all about it and informed me that the leitmotif of the celebration was that I was supposed to be 65 even, not 64 or 66. They got the date out of 'Who's Who' and in addition to not knowing there was a war going on between Lithuania and Poland, I'll bet you didn't know there was an error in 'Who's Who.'

"'Who's Who' says I was born in 1870 but when this birthday business came up I began figuring and I discovered I was born in 1871. Of course, it was too late to tell anybody, so I just went ahead and celebrated my 65th birthday a year ahead of time. But I decided it wouldn't do to be a year older than I am for the rest of my life and the only way I could establish my birthday was to go to my home town and get the records.

"I was born in Shoshli, a suburb of Vilna. I arrived in Vilna and told a taxi to take me to Shoshli. He had never heard of Shoshli. A dozen other people had never heard of Shoshli. Finally, I found an old, old resident. 'Oh, Shoshli,' he said, 'why, you can't go to Shoshli. It used to be a suburb of Vilna but now it's in Lithuania.' He implied that being in Lithuania was like being in Greenland or Alaska.

"I asked him why I couldn't go to

Shoshli. Then he told me about the war. It seems that nothing and nobody can pass the Polish-Lithuanian border. There is no mail, no customs, nothing. If you try to go to Lithuania from Poland, the Lithuanians chuck you out. If you go from Lithuania to Poland, the Poles bar your way. Lithuanian cows won't eat Polish grass, Lithuanian sparrows won't fly in Polish air. It's a very serious situation. The only way I could get my birth registration was to go to Riga and enter Lithuania from the Latvian side. If you were ever in Riga, you'll understand why I called off the quest."

Mr. Godowsky has come to Paris from Moscow and Leningrad, which he visited in connection with an offer to give master classes in both cities. "I guess I'd better not say much about Russia and Russian music. However, I did hear the Beethoven of the Bolsheviks, M. Shostakovitch, and I didn't like him. He's twenty-nine years old and he makes some very queer noises. I don't know what school he belongs to, but I do know that modern music sounds ancient compared to the Shostakovitch ultra-modernism which seems to me to have gone radically wrong."

Speaking of the remarks of his friend, Josef Hofmann, some time ago that the world could get along without new music for a long time to come, Mr. Godowsky said, "He's a Roosevelt man. He believes in plowing under musical production just like cotton and wheat." The musician has been staying at the Hotel Majestic and sails for New York today on the Cunard White Star liner Majestic.

Italy to Confiscate Chain Letter Funds

ROME, Sept. 3.—Premier Mussolini has found a drastic way of dealing with the chain letter nuisance. There will be no dime—or lira—switching among the Italians, for postoffice employees have been ordered to confiscate all postal orders sent in chain letters. The money is to be handed over to the Blackshirt militia, which is responsible for keeping order in the postoffices throughout the country.

This measure was adopted after the Fascist press had vainly exhorted the public to devote its leisure to better things.