



MUSIC CHRONICLE

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MUSIC CHRONICLE

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With the sole exception of Sir Thomas Beecham's visit of last term, nothing more than usually stirring appears to have occurred; but the general level of performances has been so high that there is no good ground for complaint. In this connection I should like to put it on record that both the Music Club and Balliol have behaved with integrity and faithfulness to their ideals, and if, in their anxiety to avoid any hint of sensationalism, they may have allowed themselves to be drawn too far in the opposite direction of sober but somewhat flat and graminivorous good taste, yet the programmes were on the whole so agreeable that a considerable balance of pleasure was secured; there are occasions when a desire for Stravinsky or Bartók is met with Fauré and Dohnanyi, but such disappointments are obviously not serious. Both societies may be congratulated for continuing along their chosen paths.

As for more public events, the memory of Mr Hayes singing in summer rises dimly to the memory. So far as I can recollect he sang with great feeling and little taste, and so on the one hand dramatised and vulgarised the most lyrical Schubert, not, unfortunately, altogether beyond the limits of recognition, but was, on the other hand, most effective in *Danse Macabre*, whose violent, crude paints were reproduced with huge vehemence and proper dramatic power. As for his native spirituals, Mr Hayes sang them, it seemed to me, exactly as they are meant to be sung; my personal dislike of them is so great, however, that I am plainly not competent to say more about them.

Mr Harold Samuel is happily a frequent visitor and plays always with intelligence and depth. These qualities have made him the most distinguished exponent of Bach's keyboard music in England, and it [62] seems a pity that he should, on his Oxford visits, so largely abandon him in favour of other composers, Brahms and Debussy for instance, to whom his talent is far less suited. It is so rare to hear Bach played at all adequately that one cannot afford to let the few who do him justice to wander off to other shrines, there to worship in mediocre ways. Mr Samuel's musical past is such that one is within one's rights in demanding the luxury of a complete Bach recital from him. *La Fille aux cheveux de lin* may safely be left to others.

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Mr Harold Bauer is a pianist of very different type: he is a romantic who in moments of genuine *Aufschwung* can be greatly moving. He gave a sensational performance of the *Sonata Appassionata*, violated rules, rode roughshod over the entire work, mowing down many delicate passages, and fused it into a most passionate and dramatic whole. This entailed distortion, and was on the whole not justifiable: it is one thing to play Liszt fiercely, and quite another to draw all that is thrilling, palpitating, breath-catching out of the *Appassionata* at the expense of depth. It is a passionate work, but the passion of Beethoven is not the passion of Berlioz; and it is idle to object that the alternative is the didactic dissection carried out by certain academic pianists, because one need only point to Mr Lamond, not to speak of Schnabel, to dismantle that thesis. After thus tampering with Beethoven, Mr Bauer gave a magnificent interpretation of Franck's Prelude, Chorale and Fugue. Those who, whether or not they recognise his genius, dislike Franck for the voluptuous mysticism, the organ loft and incense and decadent Madonna with whose spirit they find his works saturated, could not here complain of impurity in the conception of either the composer or the pianist. The whole, especially the [63] Fugue, was played with disciplined ardour and attention to the splendid architectonic quality, which revealed the genius of the work. It must have been so that Vincent D'Indy wished to hear it, any rate in middle life, before the austerities of his old age.

A Night in May, produced by the Oxford University Opera Club, was, on the whole, very delightful. The weakest point was the playing of the orchestra, which occasionally sank to desperate depths: but it was vigorously sung and acted; Korsakoff's music, though it nowhere rises to his highest level, was very agreeable, the *Spottlied* was excellently performed, and the whole was skilfully cut and abridged to reasonable length by Herr Strohbach and Mr Naylor. The production showed courage, enterprise and taste which do the Club great honour.

Sir Thomas Beecham's concert was an outstanding triumph. This, like all his programmes, possessed great breadth; the works played were assorted with an eye to bold contrasts. The *Hebrides* overture remains a lovely work, which, among reputable critics, Wagner alone despised, and the performance was almost faultless. The overture to *Prince Igor* was played with proper breadth and

ampleness, but, curiously, without the big swinging rhythm which Sir Thomas himself used previously to give it, and which seems essential to it. Delius was handled tenderly, and was very touching. A symphony by Boccherini was played, and was, of course, quite agreeable. Its chief value seems to consist in its faithfulness to its period: it is not Haydn and not Mozart, but springs from a small very pure and attractive source of inspiration; perhaps it was his visit to Rome, or, it may be, his recent association with that essentially eighteenth-century orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic, [64] that made Sir Thomas feel affection towards the light and charming art of this Italian composer.

The *Eroica* symphony was given an incomparable performance. It was one of the performances which permanently colour the listener's conception of the work, and so becomes an event of the greatest personal importance. The obvious comparison is naturally with Toscanini, who, more than any other conductor of our time, possesses the gift of giving performances which are unique and seem authoritative for all time. Furtwängler has in this manner recreated the Sixth Symphony for our generation, and some would say that Sir Thomas himself had done as much for certain works of Handel. The performance of which I am speaking belongs to the productions of this exceedingly small musical aristocracy. Sir Thomas has this much in common with Toscanini, that he too does not see music as a horizontally expanding line composed of discrete sections, each of which presents separate problems and embodies separate values, enhanced, no doubt, by what precedes and follows, but nevertheless with an individual character of its own which must be brought out to contrast with the rest and then abandoned for the next event, which in its turn is born, grows and dies; but discovers a point of rest at the centre, as it were, of the musical gravity of the work, and thence builds up an organic structure not longitudinally but in all the dimensions, up and down and about, so that the work grows not from point to point but emerges as the concrete actualisation of a preconceived ideal plan, the significance of whose structure becomes more and more evident and arresting as it expands and is filled with content flowing out of the central source of energy, the single impulse from which alone the parts are seen to derive their existence and their value.

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[65] And let me add this: synoptic survey is not enough; you can see a thing whole and remain outside it and be content to run through it steadily like a scale on a piano. What I am so awkwardly attempting to describe is the vision obtained by penetrating to that point within a work of art which is its point of balance, its root and its keystone, that point where alone what you identify with the composer's goal is borne upon you with new and irresistible conviction; what is eliminated is the sense of contingency, the view to which one is so often treated of a composition as a fascinating patchwork bound together by little more than mere temporal sequence; what is revealed to you, standing within, is the reason, the idea, the internal coherence of what is being expressed.

Music is ten times more *sui generis* than the other arts, and metaphors drawn from outside necessarily seem lame and insufficient. If, however, all these words even begin to suggest my meaning I am at last in a position to make my final point and ask whether it is not true that the difference between the second, what I may call the sculptural, and the first, or episodic, method is not also one of the obvious criteria of genius in an interpretative musician, and the exact measure of it, even if it is, in the ultimate analysis, seen not to be a definition of its essence.

I. B.

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