



MUSIC CHRONICLE

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The Busch Quartet

Adolf Busch, Gosta Andreasson, violins; Karl Doktor, viola; Hermann Busch, cello

The first important event of last term was the performance given by the Busch Quartet, and although one could not reasonably expect that the same level would be achieved for a second time during the same season either in Oxford or anywhere else, it was never completely lost sight of, and the music which followed was notably good.

The Busch Quartet possesses qualities which remove it from the range of easy comparison: these qualities are different in kind from the accumulated musical virtues of others, and appear to spring not from artistic accomplishment, nor even from depth of understanding, but from the participation of these in a very definite morel attitude on the part of the musician, a striving after an end which, in an uneasy metaphor, is disinterested, and is immediately known to be totally different from the aim of, say, the Léner Quartet, which is plainly to delight, or of the Amar-Hindemith Quartet with its passion for precise rhythm and

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transparent clarity (and both these have reached a kind of perfection, too); it is akin to what one must believe to have been the purpose of the composers whose music they play, a purpose which, though it may, by those who attach a personal meaning to these terms, be called religious or spiritual in character, is genuinely expressible by none of these terms. Whether any art can rise beyond a certain point without this mental attitude is a question to itself and here unfortunately irrelevant. In this case, at any rate, it does exist and gives to all its products a peculiar nobility which characterises them all equally and makes their uniqueness plain for all to feel.

When these musicians played Beethoven's posthumous Quartet in B Flat, at once there was created a sense of the going on of an event of the vastest possible immediate importance for all concerned, audience and [50] players alike; but what is more astonishing, the same almost happened again when the *Death and the Maiden* quartet came close to assuming the huge dimensions of some universal emotional crisis; one could hardly help reflecting on the unbridgeable gulf between this and the almost erotic performance of it given by the Léners a year ago. Adolf Busch himself is very largely responsible for this, as anyone who heard him play in the Beethoven concerto can testify. Besides him we know of only Casals and Schnabel as worthy to rank beside him in this respect. Joachim is said to have possessed the quality, and Busch himself prophesies that Menuhin will have it also. It would be interesting if someone possessed of sufficient knowledge and insight would apply himself to tracing the history of the parallel streams of 'pure' and of 'brilliant' musical tradition in the nineteenth century, especially among violinists; and would show the continuity of the austere, absorbed, 'academic' style side by side with the art of the virtuosi, with their lighter genius, from Paganini to Sarasate and from him to our own day, to Elman and Huberman and Kreisler, with their hotter, easier, more democratic flow of perfectly genuine emotion.

As for the recital given by Mr Harold Samuel, it was less good than it might have been, owing to an error committed by the organisers. It appears that the Oxford branch of the League of Nations Union, in support of which the concert was arranged, was offered alternative programmes by Mr Samuel, one of which consisted entirely or largely of Bach, the other of more or less

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popular tit-bits ranging from Bach to Ravel. The person or persons with whom the decision rested, in the sincere belief that the greater the variety, the more tastes would be satisfied, chose the latter, with the consequence that we were deprived [51] of an opportunity of hearing an interpretation of a single composer by a musician who has largely devoted himself to the study of that composer alone, and whose success in rendering his work no one disputes. And it must be remembered that the composer in question is not Chopin nor even Brahms, but Bach. As it was, the spirit was too greatly moved by the tantalising excerpts from that composer with which the programme wickedly began to be able to rest with any comfort on the charming romantic fancies with which he entertained himself, not very skilfully, for they were radically unsuited to his talent. But Mr Samuel will surely come again, and then he will play more music.

It seems unnecessary to repeat what everyone has with self-evident truth always been saying of Elisabeth Schumann, that if the quality of her voice equalled her artistry she would be easily the greatest singer of lieder in our generation. As it is, she serves her composers very nobly, not only Mozart, Schubert, Brahms and Strauss, but Mahler, whose songs deserve wider recognition, and who can rarely have been sung in England with anything approaching Mme Schumann's excellence. And this is always such that any intended criticism must, in the end, turn into pure appreciation. We are content to suffer the common fate.

Sir Thomas Beecham's concert was very exhilarating, very provocative, but, in the end, completely victorious. He always creates a brilliant atmosphere of bizarre, unexpected possibilities which heightens the effect of Korsakov, or even of Mozart, but is sometimes disturbing in Beethoven and Brahms. However, he is admirably obsessed by the essential unity of whatever he may be conducting, his view of it is one and synoptic, and the parts, as they progressively emerge, are never allowed to deflect attention to their private excellences, but are articulated with constant reference [52] to their place in and relation to the whole, which develops in and through them. There is a continual emphasising and sometimes over-emphasising of the contributoriness of individually beautiful sections – with the result that the second movement of Beethoven's Fourth Symphony in B Flat, for instance, while it lost none of its tender, gentle vagueness, was not

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allowed, as it too often has been, to flow along in a casual, meandering manner, but was so informed with integral character that one could fancy that all its subsequent development, its entire future pattern, could be implicitly heard in embryo from the beginning. By these signs, if by no other, is genuine greatness in a musician made manifest.

Towards the end of term Guilhermina Suggia gave a recital, and played with uncommon fire and breadth. In her style of playing, in her choice of music, in her personal appearance she expressed a most magnificent tradition, that of the artist who, with great pride and not without an inner struggle, condescends to share his experience with others, to let them gape at his most intimate *Erlebnisse*. Actually Casals is, we believe, recognisedly a greater cellist. But neither he nor anyone else possesses her overweening pride in the aristocracy of her art, which makes her music, and her appearance while she plays it, blend into something very ardent and picturesque; Brahms profits hugely by all this, but Bach, whose fire is of a different kind, here grows perhaps too warm with southern passion.

Meanwhile our own ditties were not mute, though the oat grows sometimes a little attenuated. Balliol provided an excellent programme played by the London String Quartet, and the Musical Club invited the Kutcher Quartet, some of whom helped Mr Goossens to play the Mozart Oboe Quartet in F so [53] well that there is no more to be said. And Mr Petri caused real excitement with piano excerpts from *Petroushka*. The most interesting meeting in some ways was that at which the Griller Quartet gave a provoking, but highly suggestive, rendering of Beethoven's Quartet in F (op. 135), a work of which no more can be said than that its effect is wholly inexpressible in words of any kind, and that to play it demands very great artistic courage from the performers.

The Musical Club has on the whole provided more interesting nights than dull, and for this we take occasion to record our gratitude.

As for the Opera Club and Lortzing, we allowed ourselves to comment somewhat broadly on it in the last issue of this journal, and excited criticism which, to say the least, was very lively. Herr Strohbach is unquestionably a great producer; the Opera Club proved itself competent in all respects, and deserved for its own sake, of not for Lortzing's, wider support.

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What will be its next production? *Wozzeck*, we fully concede, is not to be thought of, nor indeed is *Cardillac*, nor even the most charming of all modern operas, Kodaly's *Háry János*. All these suggestions were thrown out only to indicate a general direction in which to move. For it is evident to anyone who saw its performance that the Opera Club can climb more perilous heights than those of light comedy, and to the former we beg that it may turn its ambitions. Then all the *Musikfreunde* in Oxford will once more be able to wish it success and help to promote it actively and without misgiving. May it remember this honourable means of exploiting all the potential enthusiasm for operatic music, which, we are certain, exists and deserves attention.

A.A.A.

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