ISAIAH BERLIN ONLINE

Isaiah Berlin on Music

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Isaiah Berlin on Music

Edited by Henry Hardy

Marie Berlin's student identity card for the Institute of the Riga section of the Imperial Russian Musical Society. The stamp reads УЧИЛИЩЕ ПРИ РИЖСКОМЪ ОТДѢЛЕНІИ ИМПЕРАТОРСКОГО РУССКОГО МУЗ. ОБЩ. *(Uchilishche pri Rizhskom" otdelenii imperatorskogo russkogo muz. obshch.).*

Editorial Note

> And as I went out of the room he said, three-quarters to himself probably, only one-quarter to me, 'I *do love* music', or 'I *do love* listening to music', and the fervour and the feeling – it was said in an undertone – were very touching.
>
> Patricia Utechin, 'Working for Isaiah' (1997), BI 87

Isaiah Berlin's writings on music have never been reprinted in collected form. Had this been done, they would have made a slim volume of over a hundred pages, as this PDF shows. They range from youthful reviews of concerts, gramophone records and books about music to later essays on operatic themes and tributes to musicians. They may not be extensive, but they are certainly significant in Berlin life, springing as they do from one of the deepest loves of his life, if not the deepest.

Berlin inherited his love of music, by nature and nurture, from his mother Marie, who as a young woman wished to become an opera singer. She was accepted as a pupil by Rimsky-Korsakov, but her old-fashioned father forbade her to study with him. This did not stop her from singing arias around the house, and these penetrated Berlin's bloodstream. His left arm, damaged by surgical forceps when he was born, prevented him from playing an instrument, but in other ways he was dedicated to music all his life, attending (by his own account) more concerts than anyone else who ever lived, including regular visits to the Salzburg Festival. He loved opera in particular, becoming a director of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, in 1954, and serving until 1987 with one intermission in 1965–74 during his presidency of Wolfson College.

Concerts were given in his honour in his lifetime, and when he died there was music at events at Hampstead Synagogue in London and the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford. His friend the pianist Alfred Brendel played Schubert on both occasions.

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Not included here are two less musical pieces on composers, 'The Naivety of Verdi' (to be found in *Against the Current*) and **'A Portrait of Beethoven'** (a review of Bishop Fan S. Noli, *Beethoven and the French Revolution*).

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Constituents first posted in the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library 2017–2025
First posted in Isaiah Berlin Online 21 April 2022
Revised 3 February 2025

Music Chronicle

Between 1930 and 1932 IB published five reviews of recent musical events in Oxford under the above series title in the *Oxford Outlook*, of which he edited nos 52–7 (May 1930 to February 1932, in vols 10–12, 1930–2), jointly with Arthur Calder-Marshall for no. 52, with Richard Goodman for nos 55–7. For the first three reviews he used the pseudonym 'Albert Alfred Apricott' ('A.A.A.' except in the first case); all but the last review appeared under his editorship.

In 1937–8 he published four further such reviews in the *Oxford Magazine* (OM), and in 1948 an appreciation of Herbert von Karajan at Salzburg: these related items are included in this section as appendices.

I

Oxford Outlook 10 no. 53 (November 1930), 616–27

'THIS FESTIVAL […] is an attempt to display as fully as could be the musical activity of Oxford in its many and varies forms.' The attempt was nothing if not praiseworthy, and a small group of individuals genuinely exerted themselves to make a success of it. But it was very moderate. Everything was smoothly and efficiently managed, and there were, it is true, isolated moments which seemed to justify all the labour and publicity which was spent on it. But there were other moments, moments which made one wonder whether it was necessary to hold a festival, whether there were not aspects of artistic life in the city which it were better not to show to the world, even though to condemn them outright would perhaps be unfair and ungenerous.

There are several causes, of which it is useless to enumerate the unremovable, why the success of the Festival, and of our local music generally, is never more than mediocre. But the reason which touches us most deeply, because the responsibility is not difficult to fix, is the obvious stolidity and unresponsiveness of the musical masses; either the lack of musical education, or of enthusiasm, or of knowledge of what is happening in the outer musical world – or some or all of these – contribute to make every composition and performance for which Oxford is

responsible tepid and provincial. One is even allowed to complain when this happens at Birmingham or Liverpool; but what is one to say about cultured apathy in Oxford? Wild extravagance is better, is more civilised, than this torpor. For it is quite clear, and everyone in theory agrees, that the arts must either live intensely or quickly commit suicide; but to drag on a minor existence is worse **[617]** than extinction, is to become a travesty. This indictment is vague, and certainly exaggerated. It is the former because here to specify is invidious, and the latter in order to draw attention to itself; it is exaggerated, but surely in the right direction. It may be understood by those at whom it is directed, or it may not. In either case no more can be done.

To come to detail. The orchestral beginning of the Festival was marked by a concert conducted by Mr Guy Warrack, whose musicians played harshly and not in concord with each other; they became increasingly undisciplined, and Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony sounded loose, loud, and terrible; it was never a great work, though it almost passed off as one under Nikisch, who was strangely fond of what he called its Eurasianism; but on 5 May it was grandly maltreated.

On the other hand, 'Solomon' was wholly delightful. Perhaps the English tradition of Handel worship is still alive in the hearts of the Oxford Bach Choir, of Miss Isobel Baillie, Miss Mabel Ritchie and Miss Margaret Balfour (soloists). Of Messrs Dykes Bower and Christopher Cowan (continuo and organ) and of Dr W. H. Harris, who conducted. For they all applied themselves to their tasks with an ardour which sometimes rose to enthusiasm; but it is quite dead in Mr Steuart Wilson, who seemed to sing without pleasure, so that many of the peculiar little tags and conceits of Handel and his contemporaries, which it is possible to think delightful and look on with genuine affection, in his rendering were made stiff and ridiculous; it is not difficult to do this, but requires great heartlessness in the doer. However, the performance treated as a whole was one of the best events of the Festival, and Dr Harris earns our gratitude and admiration.

The Bach Concert was more ambitious **[618]** and the performance correspondingly poorer. The Oxford Orchestral Society under Mr Reginald Jacques played competently, but the Oxford Harmonic Society sang with far more vigour than skill, and in the motet 'Come, Come, O Jesu, Come', became patchy and scrappy, and (the comparison is not gratuitous) resembled the LMS Clearing House Choir in one of its unbridled performances. Mr Tucker, pianist in the D Minor Concerto, played with excessive modesty and restraint for that full-blooded work, but with enviable skill, and not without feeling. Miss Silk has a thin silvery voice, justly famous for its purity and undoubted religious emotion; her understanding of her art far outruns the quality of her voice; but it has a frail nobility of its own, for all its pious mannerisms. It was not a very satisfactory concert, but it is essentially right that this homage should have been paid to Bach, however inadequate the means.

What are we to say of the concert which followed the next day, and which consisted of chamber music arranged by the Oxford University Musical Club and Union? The works performed were by Ernest Walker, by W. A. Pickard-Cambridge, by Arnold Bax, by J. A. Sykes, by Bernard Naylor, by Herbert Murrill and by W. A. Mozart. Of the Oxford composers Dr Ernest Walker was by far the most modern and sophisticated: his Violincello Sonata is an intricate, reflective, interesting work, in places even inspired, not by genius but by a quality difficult to describe, a kind of intelligent artistry, an acquired talent for making music, faintly academic perhaps, but never dull and never shallow.

We waited for what was to follow with considerable impatience. Was there or was there not talent or even genius among our contemporaries? It is peculiarly sad that the absence of it which this **[619]** concert demonstrated should have taken the form that it did. Neither Mr Sykes nor Mr Naylor showed any immaturity or any of the extravagances or other faults of youth. The work of both was perfectly grown, that of Mr Naylor even

senile. The Rhapsody for Flute and Pianoforte by Mr Sykes was agreeable, and had an honest, straightforward style. Mr Naylor's Rhapsody for Viola and Pianoforte is a wonderfully anaemic work, and seemed all the more so for continual self-conscious attempts to inject vigour into it by artificial means. It is very dull, but, again, it is not raw or callow. It is quite competent, even if loose, in form. But there is, so to speak, nothing positive in it, only a thin, greyish ghost of matter impotently diffused through it, incapable of rousing interest. Neither did it gain by following Bax's beautiful and brilliant 'Moy Mell'. Mr Murrill's songs are swift, funny, lively little things, which, even if slight in texture, ran gaily and sprightlily, to everyone's evident enjoyment. Once the lethargy was lifted, was audience was prepared to listen to the Mozart Clarinet Quintet in A Major, the most excellent performance of the entire Festival.

Then, on the next day, came the Mass in D. It is very difficult to pass fair criticism on the performance. It would be strange, and even miraculous, if a choir of amateurs were equal to the task; it is monstrously difficult to sing, and the choir did convey the greatness of it more faithfully than could be expected; while Sir Hugh Allen is surely the best choral conductor in the land. Our grievance is of a different kind altogether. It seemed to us that the work was radically misunderstood; it is obviously a proud and even violent work, petulant, not plaintive, at times almost angry and threatening; and this is indeed the mood which would expect from a man who was known **[620]** to treat his God with great intimacy, to speak plainly to Him and even upbraid Him stormily, whenever he was moved by the injustices of the world. But instead of being treated as a work of enormous, almost sacrilegious, audacity, it was sung as though it were a work of gentle Catholic humility, a tranquil mass by Palestrina, or a tender, plaintive supplication by Bach, or by Mozart. Even so, the 'Credo', which not only defies description, but which even memory cannot conjure up, which can only be heard and leave the mind unsettled and comfortless, and cure it only by being

heard again – this 'Credo' emerged triumphantly even though it was only half understood. After that one was anyhow in no mood for cavilling, though 'The Banks of Green Willow', which was then performed, tried all our patiences.

But the peculiar triumph of the Festival lay not in its orchestral nor in its choral works, but in its opera. If Dr Vaughan Williams in *Sir John in Love* does not rise to the heights of genius, he gets as near it as a man of talent can, for it is an excellent, almost flawless, work. The music seems to grow with and out of the words themselves, which seemed not set to it, but to have generated it, and to blend with it into a genuine, interpervasive whole. It is as if the composer had somehow succeeded in penetrating through the comedy to the springs and background of Shakespeare's inspiration, and assimilated himself to them with rare felicity, so that he stands to his material as Schumann stood to Heine's songs, or as Mendelssohn or Wolf sometimes stood to them; and this community of course makes the music now run gaily, and now move with dignity, with folk song and original invention so interwoven and integrated that the texture seems spontaneously created, homogeneous, somehow simultaneously both artificial and unartificial, and **[621]** uniquely fitting to its theme and words, far more so than anything in Wagner, but rather as in Rimsky-Korsakov, in *Le coq d'or* or in *Sadko*. The fun, as there, is at once rich and pointed, but it is peculiarly English, in excellently graceful and fresh fashion, filled with solid but winged substance. We do not know whether these dense clusters of epithets can convey any impression of the delights of this opera; it is a poor way of showing appreciation, but we can do no more. This triumphant end of the Festival obscured many weaknesses; later it only served to reveal them in greater detail.

After this we settled down to our normal, unexciting fare as provided by the Music Club. There were two evenings at least on which the quality of performance sank below the normal, and was frighteningly bad; but otherwise, though the programmes were more uneventful than usual, the performances were very

competent, especially that of the Brosa Quartet, and there was one strange night when the Marie Wilson Quartet made a fierce onslaught on some Brahms, and galloped through it with strange sound and fury, completely ignoring the composer's indications of slower tempi, which was very bewildering, and still seems unreasonable. But this was the only lapse from the humdrum. Meanwhile a nobler excitement was aroused by the visit of three virtuosi, all women, and all remarkable.

To praise Mme Landowska is almost effrontery; had there been no harpsichord it would have had to be invented for her to play on, because she plays for it rather than on it, and in doing so reveals what ought to be meant when 'fine art' is spoken of. Everyone knows that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries produced enchanting music, but not everyone knows **[622]** what is signified; when one remembers Mme Landowska and her Scarlatti or her Rameau, one can only wonder why most epithets here suddenly turn banal.

The same, but more curiously and interestingly, is shown by Mlle Jelly D'Aranyi. She is a distinguished and serious artist, but essentially a virtuoso, in so far as she loves the instrument more deeply than the composer, and looks at everything with its eyes; her hand must feel definite physical pleasure when it embarks on long adventures in the slender and intricate cadenzas and finally emerges on to the broad, smooth surface of the slow theme. The great composer-virtuosi of the eighteenth century had this same passionate love for their instrument, to the exclusion of almost everything else, and the same tendency to regard music as primarily a divine means of enhancing its glory and their pleasure. Like them, she is a willing slave to her instrument. Hence the singular sympathy with which she renders their masterpieces; Vitali's Ciaconna could not have been better played than it was by her one evening in Balliol, nor yet Stravinsky's suite on the themes of Pergolesi, nor de Falla, who among the moderns most closely approaches that attractive ideal, all played on that same evening.

But this attitude is sometimes fatal; the *Kreutzer Sonata* was, on another occasion, in the Town Hall, played by her with such fire and brilliance that its depth, its complexity, its shadows, the part played in it by uneasy thought was obliterated, and the whole was made altogether too physical and too obvious. Her performance of the Bach Concerto in E Minor, for example, was a delight to hear, because she took pleasure in revealing the splendour and boldness of the work, but the remote and translucent quality of its slow movement had vanished completely; **[623]** it still was slow and beautiful, but it had become rich and solid and lost portions of its essence in the transmutation. Everything Mlle D'Aranyi touches she turns into the purest gold (in Brahms she is magnificent), but there are nobler elements than gold, to which those alone whom their love of an instrument leaves free to look beyond it can ever attain. Which brings us to the difference between her and Myra Hess.

Miss Hess has achieved a kind of freedom; she can afford to forget her piano, and totally immerse herself in what she is playing; she never, under any circumstances, consciously interprets herself, only the composer. With a singular lack of egoism she succeeds in forgetting herself, and allowing us to forget her too, which Mlle D'Aranyi never does, and indeed cannot do; with the latter, one is continually made aware of difficulties triumphantly surmounted, of favourite patches in the texture of her music to which she eagerly hastens, and communicates to you the vast thrill which it gives her to linger over them with open, enthusiastic partiality. This is not mere technique, but genuine artistry, virtuosity of the best and highest order. But with the former, if difficulties are surmounted, they are not allowed to be felt as such, and there is no bias and no intrusion of her person; there is a real attempt to resurrect the original emotion of the composer with a faithfulness and a single purpose to interpret, which shuts out all other desires, so that while it is being fulfilled, she does not attempt to evaluate her own material, to treat some parts as better and others as worse,

but strives only to reveal the progress of a single experience, by somehow entering it and becoming herself the subject of it, with no thought of its objectness, of how it may look to those outside. The greatest, and in one **[624]** sense the only, real exponent of this way of playing is Artur Schnabel; there are many who realise that from him they heard Beethoven for the first time. No one at all can properly be compared to him; but if it were possible to do it for anyone, one would gladly do it for Miss Myra Hess.

We cannot end these already unwieldy notes without some reference to the Opera Club. It began in really noble fashion. The courage, imagination and musical intelligence which the choice of Monteverdi's *Poppaea* showed still fills us with admiration for the founders. But then inspiration seemed to leave it. One could not complain of the choice of *Der Freischütz*; one might be bored by it, and think that Weber had no more life in him, but it is the earliest romantic opera, and it is a classic, and it contains undoubted genius. The *Bartered Bride* which followed was in more dubious taste; Smetana had not a spark of genius, and the opera does not disprove this; but it was very agreeable to listen to, and possibly the origins of openly nationalistic music in Europe ought to be interesting; besides which the Opera Club, after living in the company of giants, might with some justification plead that it was weary, and wanted something light and comic as a relief. By this time *Poppaea* and the ideals which that seemed to point to had been well-nigh lost sight of. Still, the Opera Club had so far shown itself a friend to music, and one wondered what would come next.

The possibilities were wide and alluring. If the committee boggled at Handel, there was Cimarosa's wonderful *Secret Marriage* for their choosing, or the great operas of Gluck; there was Schumann's charming *Genoveva* or Hugo Wolf's *Der Corregidor*, which was admitted to be a work of genius and had rarely been performed; or if something gayer was demanded, there are the delightful fantastic operas of **[625]** Rimsky-Korsakov; or, as seemed likely, something modern would be chosen, since

everyone with any pretentions to taste was obviously eager to hear works about which Germany has been talking so long and so excitedly; there was Hindemith's *Cardillac*, or Berg's strange *Wozzek*, or Kodaly's excellently witty *Háry János*, the suite of which has often been heard in England. The Opera Club does not depend on the support of unlettered masses; it can afford to ignore stageability and to set up some sort of purely musical standard. We wondered, not with a certain amount of misgiving, what it would select, hoping that one of the above works would fire some influential imagination. Its choice was in due time announced; it fell on Albert Lortzing.

At least now one knows what that standard is, and what one may expect in the future. For if Lortzing, then why not Flotow and Nicolai and Suppé and Herold and Millöcker? There is no end to the number of ninth- and tenth- and eleventh-rate German composers of the last century whom a scrupulous historian would be obliged to enumerate. They are, it is true, mostly dead and done with in their own native land; it has fallen to the lot of the Oxford University Opera Club to bring them to life again. All the bottomless vulgarity of Meyerbeer is preferable, because he has some real vigour and power of invention, or there is Donizetti, whose *Don Pasquale* is delightful, or Auber, to whom Wagner conceded originality, or Offenbach, who is sometimes very funny. And these are dead enough. But Lortzing!

The best that his champion, Mr Naylor, who will soon conduct his opera, has to say for it is that it is a bracing musical comedy. It is not bracing, but it is a comedy, and of the quality of its music the less said the better; it is in point of wit inferior to Sullivan, **[626]** its nature is perhaps better explained if we think of the works of Sir Edward German. Those who like the music of *Tom Jones* will like this farce too. It is perhaps true that they constitute the majority of the patrons of opera, and Lortzing is quite innocuous and easy to understand; he is quite regularly played in Prussian opera houses, to relieve the overworked companies after the long strain of Mozart, or Verdi, or Wagner;

in England *Peter the Shipwright* was performed sometime in the middle of the last century, had its mild success, and was forgotten. It is all singularly watery, and far too characterless to be anything but genteel, though a great comic actor might cause amusement even there. It is completely antiquated, more so than Weber, because it was written for the taste of the day by a man of meagre talent, who created nothing of permanent value (and indeed never pretended that he did), and whose name and works survived largely through a sentimental affection in which he, the primitive of musical comedy, is held by the less critical among his countrywomen. There is really no point in spending so much time on Lortzing; optimists will say, quite rightly, that the music is merry enough, and will go down quite well, even though the plot, which, in the case of music such as this, does matter, is singularly clumsy. We emphasise that though we are forced to condemn, we still cannot understand how the Opera Club, which certainly used to possess self-respect, came to this decision. It can be only a momentary lapse; it may remember the truly noble manner in which its foundations were laid, and be saved yet. We pray it may be so, and that this incident will come to be regarded as a curious misunderstanding. For we can conceive of no reasonable explanation.

We should like to apologise for the desultoriness, **[627]** incompleteness and lack of continuity of this chronicle; but musical activity in our University occurs piecemeal, and no survey of it can help reflecting this; we have at least tried to concentrate on the more significant fragments.

ALBERT ALFRED APRICOTT

II

Oxford Outlook 11 no. 54 (March 1931), 49–53

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

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 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, easer, 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 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 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.

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.

III

Oxford Outlook 11 no. 55 (June 1931), 131–5

It is very pleasant to be able to give wholehearted praise, and, generally, pleasant to receive it; the former is the agreeable task which we find ourselves able to perform with regard to the Opera Club, whose choice of the opera to be produced next term is so

wise and discriminating and altogether happy that we can only offer its authors our unqualified admiration. The opera selected is *A Night in May* by Rimsky-Korsakov, a generous and delicate work, full of the folklore of pagan Russia, with which Christian elements are quaintly interspersed; it closely follows the story which it dramatises, one of a cycle of Ukrainian tales by Nicholas Gogol, which are collectively called *Evenings at a Farmhouse near the Dikanka*.

The story is one of the most beautiful and poetically conceived in the language, and gave the composer an opportunity for indulging his growing fondness of picturesque paganism, as well as of paying homage to his beloved Gogol. When the opera was produced in 1880, Mussorgsky thought little of it, and César Cui reviewed it very coldly. But it survived its detractors, was recognised for a work of fine art, was performed in Germany, and finally reached London in 1914, when Diaghilev produced it at Covent Garden, with considerable cuts, which were evidently necessary. This is no place in which to discuss the quality of Rimsky-Korsakov's music (more especially as an essay devoted to this composer (a review by a more competent hand than ours will probably appear in the next issue of this journal), but we cannot refrain from affirming our belief that he was a composer of magnificent genius, and wrote the most perfect operas of his time. We hope that all those who claim to be concerned for music will realise that this imposes on them the **[132]** duty of doing everything in their power to ensure the success of this excellent and original enterprise.

With these pleasant sentiments we may leave the Opera Club and turn to our recent past. The general background of last term's music was furnished by concerts in the Holywell Room and at Balliol, which preserved a level of solid goodness, or at least agreeableness. The high-water mark of the former was reached in the singing of Marietta and Martha Amstad and the playing of Alice Ehlers; the last, especially, played the harpsichord with wonderful skill and feeling; nothing like it had been heard

since the now distant visit of Mme. Landowska. The most notable event at Balliol was Medtner's recital; but of this hereafter.

A pleasant concert was given by the Oxford Symphony Orchestra under Sir Richard Terry, Sir Hugh Allen and Mr Crawford McNair. The proceedings had a delightful village concert atmosphere about them; enthusiasm and amateurishness both ran high, and emerged with particular force in the fine, loud performance of Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Claviers and Orchestra, which was played in a manner which would have stirred the morosest spirit to active sympathy. A more notable achievement was the noble performance of the St Matthew Passion by the Oxford Bach Choir under Dr Harris. It was greatly improved since last summer, and does genuine honour to Oxford and to its conductor. But we hasten to the more unusual events of the term. These are the concerts given by Mr Anthony Bernard, by Medtner, and by the New Music Oxford Choir.

Mr Bernard conducted the London Chamber Orchestra in a curious potpourri of eighteenth-century and contemporary music. Fauré's overture to *Masques et Bergamasques*, with which it opened, is a charming **[133]** piece of delicate, ephemeral music-making which is frequently played in France, where composers seem to have given themselves up to just such stylish trifling, with Vincent D'Indy as an almost solitary figure surviving from a nobler age. After this Bach's Fourth Brandenburg Concerto in G was played. It is, we maintain, fair to complain of Mr Bernard's performance that it was too faithful to the style of the eighteenth century; Mr Bernard conducted as one might conduct Rameau or Grétry, and within those limits conducted excellently; what we wish to urge is that since Bach has come to mean more to us than ever he meant to the men of his own day, he must be regarded in the light of the developments to which he led, of what took place long after his death, of all the implications of his music which our own age is so busy articulating. This, after all, is what interpreting means, to those, at any rate, who believe that works of art grow

and reveal themselves in time. But on a static conception – and it is perfectly tenable – Mr Bernard's interpretation was more than justified; the concerto was played with great tact and sensibility, and one could almost see a roll of music for a baton in the conductor's elegantly moving hand; only the effect was perhaps, at times, a trifle bloodless.

This, too, was the occasion on which Oxford was introduced to Respighi's *Trittico Batticelliano*, and gained little thereby. Respighi was, it is true, taught by Rimsky-Korsakov, but he evidently remained impervious to the master's delicacy of feeling; for he shows none. He was given the palette to hold, and has laid on the paints in dense and glaring layers; the result is a piece of copious and singularly ineffective rhetoric, which is undoubtedly alive, but with a clumsy and coarse exuberance of its own, which vainly seeks to claim kinship with the **[134]** most tender and sensitive among the great painters. Lambert's *Pomona*, which followed, was, at any rate, in better taste; it is agreeable, has wit, and is as unsubstantial as a piece of Poulenc. The programme ended with Peter Warlock and Josef Haydn. It was an interesting and stimulating concert.

The visit of Nicholas Medtner, who played his own works for the piano at Balliol, was an event of real importance. He is a composer who possesses authentic lyrical genius, who draws from the wells of Brahms and Grieg and Rubinstein, but never apes them, nor anyone else. Nothing so lovely and so full of individual character as his fairy tales has been written for the piano in this century, if we except Scriabin and the Spaniards. Medtner, with all his national qualities, is considerably more European and in line with the great tradition than de Falla, but they have in common an expressiveness, a power of immediate lyrical appeal, which makes them together the two purest, most romantic voices of our times.

The palm of originality goes to the New Music Oxford Choir, which, meeting at Lady Margaret Hall on a certain afternoon in March, ventured to give not only two performances of Krenek's

Die Fahreszeiten, which proved to be a mediocre work, delicate and imaginative in places, but hardly even doing justice to Hölderlin's noble words, but in addition – and this is what is so astonishingly bold – *Der Lindberghflug* by Kurt Weill. This cantata, written for broadcasting by a young German composer, tells the story of the heroic enterprise in dramatic dialogue between the actors and witnesses of the event, sung to music which is partly 'pure', as, for example, in the aria sung by Sleep, and partly frankly imitative, as when the Engine speaks. The young gentlemen and ladies of the chorus – or at least some among them – made **[135]** no attempt to conceal their amusement at the strange effects which Miss Francesca Allinson inspired them to produce, though the soloists – Lindbergh himself, baritone (representing in order the New York Wireless Station, Sleep, the American Newspapers, First Fisherman: a pronouncer on the unattainable) and bass (Second Fisherman: also a pronouncer on the unattainable) – sang their parts with wholly admirable gravity, and Mr Ian Glennie, who sang the hero's part, recited Lindbergh's thoughts (spoken passages with orchestra) with force and dignity, which, in view of the kind of words provided for him by their author, Bert Brecht, or perhaps by the translator, is a remarkable enough achievement. The effect of the work is that of a fantastic stunt, which leaves the hearer dubious and wondering whether a second hearing would convince him that here is something better than a mere provoking bizarrerie which sounds comic when earnestly intended, and whether Hindemithian tactics have not here been driven to a ludicrous *reductio ad absurdum*. He is left wondering these things, but if he is wise he will not decide until he has achieved closer acquaintance with the school and its methods.

Meanwhile we must pay a tribute of respect to Miss Allinson and her coadjutor for conceiving and bringing to fruition this bold experiment, which, whether it achieved success or not, revealed a musical aliveness and a fine independence of public opinion which, when genuine, is valuable in itself, even if it is

manifested in some extravaganza perpetrated solely *pour épater les bourgeois*.

A.A.A.

IV

Oxford Outlook 12 (1932), 61–5

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.

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 fierily, 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 Boccerini 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.

[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.

V

Oxford Outlook 12 (1932), 133–8

During the last few months we have been visited by more musicians of genius and of talent than at any time during the past four years: Artur Schnabel, Josef Szigeti and Béla Bartók; and the Busch Quartet gave single performances, while the Léner Quartet in five concerts played the sixteen string quartets of Beethoven; this within the same six weeks. When this astonishing period came to an end one found oneself slightly bewildered by the sheer intensity and variety of music and musicians compressed into so brief an interval; but it remains a most remarkable and admirable experience.

I have paid homage both to Schnabel and to the Busch Quartet in these pages before. I have expressed my admiration in every way I know; by now their genius and their virtue need no advertisement. Those who are fortunate enough to hear them will, if they have ears, remember their experience as long as they remember anything, without the help of the gramophone; for without any doubt these artists reached the highest level of executive genius in music attained in our time; their methods are, however, so different that it may be interesting to dwell on this for some instant.

The Busch Quartet is for our generation what the Joachim Quartet was for the nineteenth century. The same ideal of absolute artistic incorruptibility, of unhesitating surrender to the

composer, and finally of awareness of the value and dignity conferred by the work upon its executant, is the source of the peculiar greatness both of Joachim and Adolf Busch. What this meant in the case of actual performances by Joachim, I, who have not heard them, cannot know. What it means in the interpretation of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, anyone who heard the performance of it given by Adolf Busch will remember. The same **[134]** quality characterised the Oxford concert: it was almost the sole redeeming feature of the Reger Quartet (in E flat), a sincere and serious work, at times moving in virtue of these qualities alone, for it had no others. The Haydn Quartet (in F, op. 3) was lifted to its proper pinnacle of serene and placid beauty after its skilful and not wholly unattractive vulgarisation by the Léner Quartet. As for the Razumovsky Quartet in E minor (op. 59), it was played with breadth, freedom and nobility, which Léner is constitutionally not capable of achieving, for all his undoubted technical brilliance and genuine pursuit of the immediately ravishing in music.

The greatest asset of the Léner Quartet is the flawless discipline of its ensemble, which makes up (though the phrase is not a happy one) in technical efficiency what it loses in individuality. This mechanical simile is not arbitrary – its fitness is plain to anyone who compares them (and in view of their claims the comparison is not unfair) to the Busch, for apart from the vast intellectual and emotional distance which separates them, they are divided by something even more personal. One receives the immediate impression of the Busch Quartet as consisting of four free and distinct individuals, each with his own peculiar artistic attitude, which is distinguishable even while it contributes itself to the whole, each aware of the equal and independent rank of his instrument, which is allowed to rise to its full stature among the others; in the other case everything is surrendered to purchase symmetry and smoothness; the individual differences are not reconciled but eliminated, and the residue acquires an inevitable tinge of something passive and oppressed.

The only person who remains unbroken is Jeno Léner himself, who is too obviously responsible for **[135]** this system. He is a remarkably gifted musician who frequently – invariably to one's fresh surprise and consternation – sinks to sudden depths of slickly expressed sentimentality, in which the other players become involved. This would be quite unexceptionable if it occurred only in such items of the Léner repertoire as Tchaikovsky's *Andante cantabile*; but occurring when it does, on occasions which demand the greatest insight and sensitiveness, it leads to ruinous results. Occasions such as these marred what was undoubtedly a very notable achievement – a complete recital of the sixteen quartets.

It is not frequently that anyone obtains the chance of hearing the whole series, and I wish therefore to put on record gratitude for this opportunity. Considered as a single achievement, there is surely no music which can claim equal status with it, either as music or as a constituent element of European culture; and since this is the case, no ordinary standards suffice in criticising a performance of it. Judged by the extraordinary standard implicit in the music itself, the Léner Quartet did not succeed, but it was not an ignoble failure. The six quartets op. 18 were played more than adequately. They are of very varying merit, and no generalisation can be concrete enough to have value. On the whole, the cool, fresh, early-morning romanticism of these quartets, especially of the enchanting Quartets in F and in C minor, was successfully conveyed.

Even these works, written when the composer was comparatively young, and more symbolic of the transition from one mind and century to another than any other contemporary art, at times rise to heights of which not a glimpse was hinted at by the players; but since these moments are comparatively rare, this does not weigh decisively against the superb skill which the Léner display on what may be called the purely empirical level. **[136]** The magnificent Razumovsky Quartets, the finest flowering of European romanticism, were played uneventfully, without

originality or fire, without any genuine lyrical impulse, with energy in place of intense emotion, with smooth and seamless sinuousness for tender feeling, which almost brought about a successful illusion. The real collapse occurred where it might have been expected, over the posthumous quartets.

The Harp Quartet (op. 74) is evidently the outermost limit of this quartet's normal horizon: beyond that, complete uncertainty prevails. The strange and haunting quartet op. 95 was played by them with complete assurance and even blitheness: they found not a hint of mystery in it; all was clear as day. With the exception of the Grosse Fuge, which depends so much on technical accomplishment that it attracted and brought out the most finished playing of which the quartet is capable – which is saying a very great deal – the posthumous quartets were treated almost as though they had been written by a Saint-Saëns. The slow movements were played with much beauty of tone, which was, however, enormously outbalanced by a mixture of complacency and tawdry feeling more irritating than can be described. The first movement of the C Sharp Minor Quartet, the movement marked *Andante moderato e lusinghiero*, and the playing of the second and third movements of the A Minor Quartet, for instance, or the cavatina of the Quartet in B Flat Minor, were, to those who knew them, movements of sheer suffering. The swifter tempi were disfigured by exaggerated buoyancy, with which this quartet sometimes arms itself to withstand the frequent charge of effeminacy; the effect of this was a kind of forced liveliness, on the horror of which there is no need to dwell.

[137] And yet, after all deductions have been made, the performance of these works, which collectively mark the highest level to which chamber music, and indeed the romantic movement as a whole, has attained, the highest, one would like to add, to which it is conceivable that any movement or any individual could ever have attained, represents a public service on the part of the Léner Quartet more valuable than any other they could have performed: for their shortcomings they ought

perhaps, at this stage of their career, no longer be held responsible.

I have been excessively long-winded about this matter, with the result that the initial reason for this disquisition – the discussion of the differences between Busch and Schnabel – was allowed to disappear altogether. It is too late to reopen the question: the thesis I intended to embroider consisted in the affirmation that whereas, in the case of Busch, as in the parallel case of Toscanini, the music is, as it were, allowed to play itself, there is no sense of deliberate choice between alternatives, of doctrine pressed home against encircling and eliminated possibilities, in the case of Schnabel the opposite occurs, the actuality which he develops moves forward in conscious opposition to the unrealised potentialities. In the first case there is no sense of conflict; the musical process of one of harmonious, natural, unquestioning self-revelation. What one admires is the nobility, the divine ingenuousness of treatment. With Schnabel, conflict arises at every stage. What one admires is the genius disclosed in each decision, each selected and asseverated element. The intellectual strain is much greater, the tension much severer, problems are presented and some are resolved, some not, but the urgency of all of them gives the whole process an aspect at once more tragic and more personal. This applies, of **[138]** course, primarily to Beethoven (it is absolutely true of the Diabelli variations, which Schnabel played here) and to a lesser extent to Schubert. To Mozart it does not apply at all. But I cannot enlarge upon this here.

The Bartók–Szigeti recital was extremely interesting. Bartók is one of the few genuinely original, genuinely creative composers alive in the present day. This recital was not representative enough to enable his audience to gauge his power. Such of his music as was played has a strong, tart, semi-barbaric character, gusts of violent feeling interspersed with patches of fierce, astringent wit. The piano is revealed as an instrument of percussion capable of yielding harsh and passionate discords the

like of which have not been heard in Europe since the Mongol invasions. As for Josef Szigeti, tribute is due to his superb talent: if Busch continues the tradition of Joachim, Szigeti is within that other great tradition of the violin, the Paganini–Veniavsky–Sarasate tradition of the virtuosi of genius, of which Huberman is the greatest living representative. Szigeti played one of the Bach unaccompanied sonatas with the most ardent feeling, combined with remarkable attention to the lucid formal structure of the work, a taut and passionate discipline which never grew turbid and never grew cold, but held a proud and perilous course between the extremes into which violinists who play Bach continually fall. Of all violinists who recently played Bach in England, only Huberman and Szigeti rose beyond the temptation either to gush or to flirt and sparkle. It is doubtful how far this is generally recognised.

It was a most interesting, most engrossing term.

I.B.

APPENDICES

Concert Reviews in the *Oxford Magazine*

The Mass in D

6 May 1937: OM 55 (1936–7), 558–9

The Bach Choir gave two performances of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, on Thursday evening preceded by Handel's setting of the Psalm *Nisi Dominus*, and on Sunday afternoon by Purcell's anthem *My Heart is Inditing*. The audience in the Town Hall (at the performance attended by your representative) seemed exceptionally large, and showed unmistakably its appreciation of Dr Armstrong's considerable gifts as a choral conductor.

Given a choir and an orchestra composed almost entirely of amateurs, Dr Armstrong took what seems the obviously right course of concetrating boldly on the dramatic as opposed to the lyrical or devotional quality of this immense composition, and secured a remarkably vigorous, coherent, expressive execution of it, at the expense, inevitable under the circumstances, of smoothness and precision in the phrasing of individual sections, and sometimes attended by exaggerated changes of tempo. The voices, notably the basses, performed **[559]** their task with great competence and (particularly in the *Gloria*) an exuberant volume of sound, the greatest that can ever have been heard in that confined space. Perhaps it was largely due to this that the orchestra was apt at times, particularly when deserted by the choir, to sound so thin and forlorn. Of the soloists, Miss Mary Hamlin sang with purity and exceptional sense of melodic line.

It is just to say that more than any of the composers who have written for the voice, Beethoven, despite his own explicit assertion to the contrary, seems to conceive the musical texture in

general, instrumental, rather than specifically vocal, terms, which in itself makes it singularly difficult to sing for any save exceptionally skilled and flexible choirs. The Bach Choir's strength lies at present not in the ability to perform delicate nuances or elaborate transitional passages, but in the simplicity and directness of its singing and the great force of its climaxes. For this last in particular Dr Armstrong is directly responsible. To him, the choir and the Orchestral Society our gratitude is due for a convincing performance of this very great romantic work.

I.B.

Boyd Neel String Orchestra

13 May 1937: OM 55 (1936–7), 588–9

A concert was given by this orchestra last Thursday afternoon, more notable for the interest of its programme than for the brilliance with which it was executed. The orchestra is well trained; the tone of the individual instruments was thin, but absolutely true; the phrasing was precise, the ensemble more than adequate; but they were conducted stolidly and without imagination in a manner which grew oppressively leaden, particularly when music was played which requires the conductor to exhibit sensibility and a sense of style, not general soundness based on devotion to the textbooks. On the other hand, the programme was remarkable varied and well chosen, and works were given which rarely appear in ordinary concert programmes.

The two best performances were those of the Overture to *Fazamondo* by Handel, a massive, stately work of great vitality, which, when performed faithfully, plays itself; and the Concerto in E Minor by Avison, an exceptionally pretty suite written in the middle of the eighteenth century and arranged by Peter Warlock, which was played with unexpected elegance and charm. Mozart's Divertimento in D (K 136) was given an adequate but pedestrian performance, and, in the Andante, moved at a dull and steady

pace for which the score is not responsible. After this the orchestra, greatly daring, played an orchestral version of the Grosse Fugue. This is not the place to discuss the merits of the orchestration, nor whether such treatment is even justified; it is sufficient to note that this performance was not a success. This work, being, as everyone knows, at a considerable distance from even the remotest points reached in the other posthumous quartets, must be played either with abnormal intensity and singleness of feeling or not at all. The performance given broke it into separate sections, each of which was conscientiously and carefully **[589]** played, and sounded quite clear and quite meaningless.

The new Concerto for Oboe and Strings by Rutland Boughton was then given its first performance. It is dedicated to his daughter, and the solo instrument was played by her with exceptional skill and sense of form, which was really appreciated by the audience. Of the work itself one can only say that it forms a moderately welcome addition to the literature of the oboe.

The *Adagio pour quatuor d'orchestre*, op. 3, by Lekeu, was genuinely interesting. It is a work of exquisite lyricism, and while obviously written under the direct influence of both Wagner and of Franck, completely avoids the vulgarities of either. It is small in scope and not elaborate; the quality of feeling is gentle, sincere and remarkably pure. The performance was, for once, subdued and satisfactory.

The last work to be played was the Concerto Grosso by Ernest Bloch. No one can fail to enjoy this well-conceived, energetic work. The tunes are full of life, the first three movements are carried forward by an irresistible force, the fugue is strenuous and exciting, but whatever may be the feelings of anyone who hears it for the first time, it is unlikely to be regarded for long as a masterpiece. It is to genuinely classical music, to use a metaphor once employed by the late Sir Henry Hadow, as good electroplate to silver. As such it has abiding value. Dr Sydney Watson's admirable piano obligato was too frequently drowned

by the orchestra, here grown enormously exuberant, which throughout played with more efficiency than elegance.

I.B.

Toscanini

10 June 1937: OM 55 (1936–7), 719–20

On Tuesday last a concert was given to the University by Arturo Toscanini for the benefit of the Oxford University Appeal Fund. At his request the BBC placed its orchestra at his disposal; it played before what was probably the greatest audience ever assembled in Oxford for such a purpose, which represented but a section of those who would have come if greater accommodation had been possible. This magnificent gesture on the part of the greatest of living conductors is likely to be remembered as the most notable artistic event in the history of the University in this part of the century; perhaps the greatest musical honour conferred upon it since the visit of Josef Haydn a century and a half ago, commemorated by the title of a celebrated symphony. It was a personal experience of the first magnitude for everyone present: those who had never heard him before may well have found that for them it shifted the boundaries of artistic possibility, and in this respect fundamentally altered the nature of their musical experience.

The programme consisted of the overture to *L'Italiana in Algeri* by Rossini, the 6th Symphony in F by Beethoven, and the 1st Symphony in C minor by Brahms.

The BBC Orchestra is an excellently trained, solid, highly efficient body of players, and when conducted by so highly competent and cultivated a musician as Sir Adrian Boult, gives performances which are good but not phenomenal. On this occasion it completely surpassed itself: the strings and the oboes, in particular, played in a manner which can only be described as marvellous. If, in the Rossini overture, it lacked the dazzling

quality which belongs to the New York Philharmonic Orchestra alone, it developed astonishing depth and freshness of tone, endless flexibility, and above all a wonderful singing quality which, as has long been known, Toscanini alone is capable of creating, hardly credible to those who believed that they knew the limits of these players' capacity.

No attempt will be made to describe the actual performance; but it is historically interesting to note that the Pastoral Symphony was conceived as a single unbroken lyrical sequence; the comic and dramatic incidents were never allowed to assert themselves as separate, slightly pedestrian episodes, in strong contrast to the flowing melodies by which, like islands, they are surrounded, but were absorbed in the whole, which grew not in successive stages, but organically, from a single central point, like the purest and most intensely felt nature-poetry.

Further, the C minor Symphony was, in a sense, almost too luminously played. The rich obscurity of the beginning, for example, cannot afford to be **[720]** treated with the uncompromis-ing, rigorous attention to detail which reveals every strand in its texture. On the other hand (in the last movement in particular), it appeared to contain moments which properly do not belong to it at all, which a sober study of the score would show to be impossible, which were due to a peculiar transformation which, without altering, enormously intensifed its common properties, and raised them to an unaccustomed height.

Oxford Subscription Concert

3 March 1938: OM 56 (1937–8), 470–1

The sixth concert in this series was given by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Felix Weingartner in the New Theatre on 23 February. Dr Weingartner is the most distinguished living exponent of what may be called the German academic tradition, of the lucid, precise, undeviatingly literal

method of interpretation, equally opposed to the luxuriant romanticism of Bruno Walter, the sensationalism of Furtwängler, or the sharp and glittering masterpieces of Sir Thomas Beecham.

Four major works were given, and, in a sense, were played almost faultlessly. The *Freischütz* Overture with which the concert began was interpreted as a succession of sharply distinguished episodes: nothing in the original was omitted, nothing added, but purely poetical music was turned into stately prose, and the superb eloquence of the concluding section was made to sound insufficiently emphatic, without the splendour which properly belongs to it.

The Symphony in G (op. 100) by Haydn, which followed, was given an authoritative reading: with purity, discipline and rigorous attention to detail, but moments of sheer pedestrianism occurred in this unexceptionable but hardly inspired performance.

This heroic self-restraint reached its apogee in the G minor Symphony by Mozart. Anyone accustomed to unduly self-indulgent or over-dynamic conductors could only welcome this spare, sober, scrupulous interpretation; on the other hand, it is not necessary to compare it with Toscanini's version of it last summer to demonstrate that even the most luminous playing will not rescue even this marvellous work from something perilously near monotony when its brilliance and its brio are allowed to vanish, and a thin sheet of glass seems to divide it from the hearers.

The concert ended with the Symphony in F (no. 3) by Brahms. **[471]** This was magnificently executed. Dr Weingartner's right to be regarded as the greatest living conductor of Brahms was well supported by this performance: his firmness, his exceptional sense of form, of balance both between groups of instruments and between the central and peripheral elements of the musical pattern, his temperamental sympathy with the peculiarities of Brahms's thought and language resulted in an exceptionally coherent and musical performance of this dignified and noble work. The great and deserved ovation which Dr Weingartner

received after it left no doubt as to the feeling of his audience upon this point.

I.B.

Karajan: A Study

The Observer, 19 September 1948, 2

THE MOST arresting and influential of the new personalities in Salzburg this year was without doubt the conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Herbert von Karajan. Greatly praised and hotly attacked, he has been hailed as a new Toscanini, as the greatest hope of Austrian art, and assailed as an irresistibly clever manipulator without heart or scruple, a cold, self-infatuated monomaniac guilty of arresting the vital flow of music with unexpectedly inserted dams calculated to force a vulgar but spectacular artificial tension.

At any rate, no critic has failed to react violently one way or the other, which in itself is a sign of a powerful and disturbing new personality at work. And, indeed, there is something here to discuss: for Herr Karajan is clearly a man of prodigious gifts and may well cause a great stir in the musical world. An Austrian, he does not belong to the Viennese tradition, and is equally remote from the classical purity, the luminous refinement of Schalk, and from the tender lyrical melancholy, the poetry and the elegiac sweetness of Walter.

Herbert von Karajan is a child of our own time, a deliberate and ruthless planner with a very uncommon power of concentration, organisation and execution. He is in iron control of himself and his orchestra; imposes his personality on the players and the audience and in some degree hypnotises both. Since the Vienna Philharmonic is today the equal of any body of players in the world, it responds to Karajan's smooth, sharp, microscopically minute demands with astonishing precision and beauty.

Karajan seems to conceive music as a series of self-contained episodes, and these he articulates one by one with a clarity of detail and a strictly calculated imperious organisation of tempi and dynamics which move with the remorseless accuracy of a dive-bomber intent upon its prey. His interpretations must inevitably shock and repel those who take for granted more traditional methods, but even those who feel lack of sympathy or even indignation – as, for example, with his treatment of the slow movement of Beethoven's C minor symphony as if it had been written by Mahler, or of its opening movement as if the composer were Berlioz – cannot deny that a very formidable new figure has appeared in the world of musical performance.

If Herr Karajan's style is at times over-rhetorical, it also rises to a vast and magnificent eloquence unattainable to the orthodox interpreters. His truest triumph was his performance of the Brahms Requiem: this is a work of considerable *longueurs*, which

needs a powerful hand if it is to be kept from sagging; Toscanini, for example, tends to desiccate it altogether. Under Karajan the Viennese played and sang with such noble dignity and Mme Schwarzkopf sang with such purity and sweetness as to transfigure the work and give it, for the moment, new dimensions. After this triumph the great ovations accorded to this conductor in Vienna and Salzburg seem justified. And yet he does not always remain upon his pedestal: his penchant for deliquescence, for the *pourriture ignoble* of bad Strauss, is very strong; sometimes he seems to address the music, as someone once said of Kerensky's speeches, not to the head nor to the heart but to the nerves. But be it addressed to what it may, the skill, audacity, willpower and originality of Herr Karajan are most exceptional and make him the most interesting among the younger conductors of our time.

Five Musical Books

Music in Decline

Review of Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (London, 1934: Faber), *Spectator*, 11 May 1934, 745–6

Mr Lambert's approach to his subject is wholly admirable: it is not technical, but humane; his prose is vigorous, intelligent and gay, and pours itself out in loosely constructed sections like the conversation of an exuberant and many-sided artist who talks with eloquence about his art. The result is an extremely able and entertaining book which is very nearly, but not quite, everything that is at present needed. The average spectator of contemporary music, brought up among the ordered contrasts of the Victorian

scene, is lost in the war of styles and tendencies both preached and practised by small, but intensely self-conscious and jealous, coteries. To such Mr Lambert's aid is most valuable: like all good artists who criticise their art, he has more to say, and says it more eloquently and more boldly, than many a cautious and learned author of a formal treatise.

The greater part of the book consists of an onslaught upon the dominant schools. He is at his most violent and destructive when he attacks the group of Parisian *pasticheurs* gathered round the leading figure of Stravinsky: his tone grows almost personal, as of one who but lately was himself half a follower, **[746]** but soon definitely revolted against the slick and lifeless formulae, the recipes for synthetic melody, which he found in place of any genuine will to create. He is perhaps particularly vehement because for him this represents a *corruptio optimi*, the betrayal of the nationalist movement in Russian music which was begun by the genius of Glinka, and reached its apex in the great masterpieces of Mussorgsky and Borodin: it is quite plain that it is to the Russians that Mr Lambert has really lost his heart, far more than even to Debussy, whose crucial importance he fully recognises and on whom, indeed, he is very interesting; and this allegiance colours everything he writes.

Russomania is unquestionably the most attractive form of musical extremism, and Mr Lambert, in spite of many enthusiastic asides on Chabrier and Satie, betrays all the symptoms: his homage to Balakirev, his more than tolerant acceptance of Tchaikovsky ('whatever his limitations as a symphonist he is undoubtedly one of the world's greatest melodists'),[1] the peculiar violence of his indignation with Diaghilev and Stravinsky for prostituting their own heritage, as later also that of other cultures, in turning out exotic *bibelots* to tickle jaded Western palates; all this points to the nature of the author's delightful infatuation. He occasionally betrays the vices of his excellences, as when in his anxiety to expose Stravinsky's

[1] 70.

decadence he systematically underestimates his originality, not only as an orchestrator or as a parodist (surprisingly enough, Mr Lambert appears to mistake parody for serious, if meretricious, writings) but as a creative artist. Perhaps he assumes that his readers will take that for granted. Perhaps they will.

Since it is part of Mr Lambert's express intention to survey music against the background of the other arts, his many analogies of music with literature and painting are both relevant and suggestive, even when overdrawn through his excessive love of a completely symmetrical parallelism. To take an instance: there is a great deal that is common to Schoenberg and James Joyce; their development from the shallow *fin de siècle* sentimentality of their beginnings to the culminating points reached in *Ulysses* and *Pierrot lunaire* is oddly similar; but here the parallelism ceases. The 'neurasthenic horror',[2] the inverted, twisted, masochistic romanticism of Schoenberg has no counterpart in Joyce's *Work in Progress*,[3] which is a detached and frigid experiment with words conducted in broad daylight, and is at the opposite pole emotionally to the slow and stifling nightmare which is the felt background of everything that Schoenberg writes. This is, however, a fruitful exaggeration and in the right direction: so little that is at all intelligent is written about the atonalists that when something is, it seems perverse to carp at detail; Mr Lambert is exceedingly convincing when he describes the emotional cul-de-sac at which the atonalists have arrived, but he fails to indicate what in his view is the right road to pursue. The weariness with diatonality which led to all the various secessions, to quartertones in Prague, polytonality in Paris and atonality in Vienna, is itself an established fact which cannot be doubted or abolished. And Mr Lambert refuses seriously to explore the value of the roads taken by, for example, Alban Berg or Bartok, though he frequently mentions both, and with respect.

[2] 214.

[3] [The working title of *Finnegans Wake*.]

Rejecting the sincere and sterile, Mr Lambert receives with acclamation anything which seems to him to be eloquent and imaginative, from the hot jazz of Duke Ellington and the oddly moving underworld studies of Kurt Weill to the splendidly isolated figure of Sibelius. To the last he sings his final paean, and looks upon him as the dominant genius of our generation. If this is no passing admiration, nor merely desperate flight from the dismal chaos of secessionists and post-secessionists to some lofty figure, withdrawn and lonely, *au-dessus de la mêlée,* we can only record our disagreement. Sibelius is a dignified and sincere artist, who sometimes achieves noble expression, but so are Delius and Bruckner. If he is their superior, he is so in degree, not kind. In literature his counterpart is, let us say, Thomas Mann; he represents that reputable second-rateness which corresponds among the musical public to the middlebrow characteristics whose disappearance is lamented by Mr Lambert. Even so, he is incomparably more distinguished than either the *Gebrauchsmusiker* of the type of Hindemith, who is rightly regarded as no more than an exceptionally gifted journalist, or, worst of all, the mild and arty earnestness of the 'folksong' group of British composers, who contrive to be at once more boring and more embarrassing than one would have thought it possible for any music to be.

All these are mown down without pity by Mr Lambert, whose melancholy thesis may thus be regarded as at least half proved; that music has reached an impasse is true, but Sibelius provides no solution.

Whatever doubts may be felt about the author's judgement, there is no doubt that the book is very good. In case surprise is felt at the apparent discrepancy between the title and subtitle, the answer is in the epigraph, which runs thus:

> *All:* The music, ho!
> *Enter Mardian the Eunuch*
> *Cleopatra:* Let it alone; let's to billiards.
>
> William Shakespeare

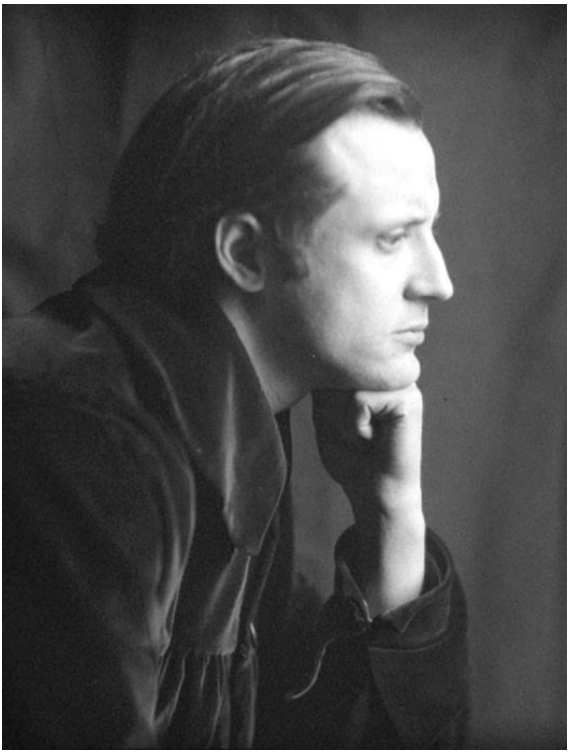
And it is upon this highly entertaining level that Mr Lambert holds his long and brilliant discourse.

There is some reckless treatment of foreign names, such as Dargomizhky (for Dargomyzhsky), *Die Unauförliche*, Al Johnson and the inevitable Greig.[4]

[4] [*Das Unaufhörliche* is a work by Hindemith; Al Jolson and Edvard Grieg perhaps need no gloss.]

Musiciens d'autrefois

Review of Bernard van Dieren, *Down Among the Dead Men. and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1935: Oxford University Press), *Spectator*, 1 November 1935, 732; letters, 22 November 1935, 874, 29 November 1935, 906



This is a very unequal book: unequal not only from essay to essay but from page to page, from sentence to sentence. It takes the form of a long and exasperated commentary on the recent state of music, musical criticism and musicology generally, mostly muttering fiercely to itself, but now and then enlivened by terrific broadsides to the address of musicians or critics held to be chiefly responsible for the decay of artistic standards. The criticisms arc

often original and just, many comments – those, for instance, on Berlioz as a melodist or on Meyerbeer as an innovator – are both brilliant and illuminating, and the general outlook is that of a discerning, independent, abnormally sensitive artist of absolute integrity; but the book is in places quite unreadable. Mr van Dieren, reporting on a world whose inhabitants seem to him to be for the most part ignorant, vulgar, stupid or blind, has allowed his indignation entirely to destroy his sense of prose style: the pages of this book are crammed and choked with endless epigrams, conceits and verbal jokes, which flow from his pen with the impartial prodigality of Nature; two or three are successful, the rest are acutely embarrassing. The facts being what they are, it is only fair to warn the reader of what to expect: words like 'Mendelssohnnies', 'Schumannikins', 'Stravinskyttens' will set the most insensitive teeth on edge. And yet, in spite of this, the book is interesting and even distinguished.

The weakest essay is that on wit in music, which, when it is not ruined by the author's own variety of it, proclaims defiantly many a well-worn truth. The most useful are the pages in which he defends the memory of the insulted or the forgotten – Piccinni, Meyerbeer, Donizetti, Offenbach, Alkan. Soon someone will rediscover Dittersdorf or Salieri, and doubtless we shall be none the poorer for it. Mr van Dieren dislikes irreverence and regards tradition, particularly that of the Roman Church, as giving background and discipline to composers who might lose themselves in the void; but an artificially adopted framework will kill at least as much as it preserves: how much life is there today in d'Indy's works, in the *Psalmus Hungaricus*, even in the *Symphonie des Psaumes*? The desire to return to Bach or Palestrina is a certain sign of artistic bankruptcy; where so little creative power is wedded to so much self-consciousness the result is bound to be pathetic caricature.

The problem of the conflict of tradition and individuality haunts Mr van Dieren and finds striking expression in what is the longest and by far the most interesting essay in the book, a study

of Ferruccio Busoni. He knew Busoni intimately and venerates his memory; but he allows one to see what the devotion of Professor Dent unconsciously covered over; that he was, and remained until the end, a tragic figure, unable either to emancipate himself from the tradition in which he grew up, or to come to any kind of terms with it.

He came to Berlin, that city with no tradition, in order to escape the despotic Italian education of his youth; he remained there in spite of constant persecution at the hands of a generation held spellbound by Wagner, by Strauss, attracted even by Puccini, but the experiment failed and brought added suffering with it; he was too complex, too divided, too self-torturing to secure calm by having easy recourse to this or that remedy; his personality contained something not merely passionate and turbulent, but an indefinable, violent, demonic element which frustrated his tremendous lifelong effort to achieve a lasting synthesis. He was, us we know, at a certain period of his life utterly preoccupied with Bach; but his favourite scores, Mr van Dieren says, were *The Magic Flute* and *Parsifal*. This is so startling and so revealing that those who understand anything need be told no more.

Having written with fascinating insight about the nature of Busoni's inner conflict with established values, Mr van Dieren finds it necessary to defend him against the charge of tampering with the classics in his interpretations. He declares that Busoni did no more than 'restore' the old masters, removing from their surface the dust and faded patina of the years, which only dons and sentimentalists fear to touch. This is an astonishing line of defence. Those who have heard him play will remember him not as a cautious and scrupulous 'restorer' of Bach or Beethoven, but as a man of magical power who flooded the senses with a vast opulence of colours whose like no words can possibly convey. His genius was so overpowering that everything he did was at the time completely convincing: not because the composer's intention for the first time stood clearly revealed – the liberties which he took . were too violent to allow any such illusion – but because the overwhelming intensity of his personality swept away

all other standards of reference, and left his audience no choice but unconditional surrender. Mr van Dieren's theory is diametrically opposed to this: those who are interested must examine. it in the light of their own or others' memories. They will find his book in places wildly trying, but with enough discernment, learning and passion for something better than a second *M. Croche.*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir, – Under the heading 'Musiciens d'autrefois' Mr I. Berlin informs his readers that my book – *Down among the Dead Men* – is 'in places quite unreadable', that my uncontrolled passions have entirely destroyed my sense of prose style, and that in fairness readers must be warned that the things I say 'will set the most insensitive teeth on edge'.

I cannot help thinking that Mr Berlin found it all so unreadable that he must have abandoned the effort half way, otherwise how can I account for some definite statements that are quite simply contrary to fact? His readers are bound to think that I advise composers to go back to Bach, or Palestrina, or anybody, but in several places in my book I have made clear how hopeless any such efforts seem to me: cf. p. 70, where the danger and futility of 'going back' is being discussed. The same idea returns clearly enough in the final essay, in fact so often that I could hardly undertake to quote all the relevant passages. I might, however, mention the last paragraph of p. 244, beginning 'a steadying spiritual orientation raises men of modest talent to a high plane of aspiration' etc., and the last 35 lines of p. 252, beginning 'many indeed give it up in despair, "go back" somewhere' etc. Further, p. 258, where I ask 'is it more pernicious to repeat recent experiments or imitate the idiomatic mannerisms of established masters?' This is the second paragraph of the section headed 8. I cannot resist quoting the next paragraph: 'where I recommended the example of polyphonists who wrote for the Catholic ritual I did not mean that one should

copy them. The practical reasons that determined them do not always hold good for us. There is no wisdom in uncritical acceptance of another man's stylistic principles. But we may with profit remember them.'

Finally, I might refer to the passage concluding section 4, on p. 218, with its reference to 'slightly cracked enthusiasts who play "with the bow of Tartini", or the lame idealist, who writes exactly like Palestrina, and yet again, not quite'.

Further it may amaze Mr Berlin's readers as much as it amazed him to hear that Busoni loved the scores of *The Magic Flute* and of *Parsifal*, but it should be made clear that they were not 'his favourite scores' in the sense that he preferred the *Parsifal* music to the music of Bach. Why his veneration of Mozart should be incompatible with his preoccupation with Bach I simply fail to understand. That I should have said that Busoni needs defence against the charge of 'tampering with the classics' in his interpretations could not be maintained by anyone who reads the relevant passages. And where I spoke of Busoni's courage in disregarding traditions of interpretation that for so many constitute an attractive patina, I certainly could not have suggested that he 'restored' the works by insisting on the original text in the conviction that this meant purity. The praise of Busoni's methods which Mr Berlin presents by way of contrast to my perverse assertions happens to be almost literally that which may be found in my own words.

I say that having discarded the interpretative traditions he reconstructed the works in pristine freshness (p. 87), that he let us see them in a bright range of colours (p. 88), and that traditionalists were aghast at his ruthless exposition, and his uncompromising truth and intensity. Surely this is very different from what my readers would expect from Mr Berlin's criticisms, and particularly from his astonishing inference that I regard Busoni as 'a cautious and scrupulous restorer'

Yours faithfully,

Bernard Van Dieren

68 Clifton Hill, St John's Wood, NW 8

Sir, – I respect Mr Van Dieren as a genuine composer, and, since reading his book, as a critic of great originality, and should be seriously dismayed if I thought that I had misrepresented him in any way. But I fail to see in what respect I can have done so. To take the points in order:

(1) Mr Van Dieren again and again pays homage to the Church for the salutary and fruitful influence which it exercised on composers, and compares its discipline favourably with the chaos prevailing in our own day. To this I object that if the antithesis is to be real the contrast must be made with works of modern piety, which, I suggested in my review, are jejune to a degree. I went on to say that self-conscious adherence to a tradition was a sign of artistic bankruptcy, and leads to artificiality and caricature. I did not say, nor did I imply, that Mr Van Dieren took it into his head to recommend as a remedy deliberate academicism or archaism, a programme which no sane person ever openly advanced, nor one which needs the multitude of passages quoted by Mr Van Dieren for its refutation.

(2) Busoni. To take the trivial point first: Mr Van Dieren says that *Parsifal* and *The Magic Flute* were among Busoni's 'beloved scores'. The juxtaposition seemed to me startling and revealing, particularly in the case of one so passionately devoted to Bach, and I said so. The obvious paradox is the combination of Bach and *Parsifal*, not of Mozart and Bach. I cannot but think it perverse of Mr Van Dieren to take it in the latter sense. As for the word 'favourite' used by me, if relief would be afforded Mr Van Dieren by the substitution for it of his term 'beloved', I would gladly offer the exchange, especially if he is right in holding that it is more foolproof and would not mislead people into supposing that Busoni preferred Wagner to Bach.

(3) On the question of Busoni's interpretation I cannot compromise. Mr Van Dieren convicts himself out of his own mouth: he says above that Busoni 'reconstructed the classics in pristine freshness' and on pp. 82 and 88 of his book that 'when

the colour of an old canvas is freed from this disguise [traditional interpretation] it does not at once please the eye' and compares the classics in Busoni's interpretation to 'the National Gallery El Greco revealed after a healthy course of cleaning. Busoni's renderings were so many successful restorations.' They were fresh and they were successful; so much I say myself. What I deny most strenuously is that the freshness was 'pristine' or the success one of 'restoration'. Mr Van Dieren's view is quite clearly and unequivocally expressed, and in my review I gave reason for thinking it entirely incorrect. Mr Van Dieren speaks of 'ruthless' renderings. In my review I said that so far from restoring ruthlessly or otherwise, Busoni recklessly transformed and altered whatever he played, but was so overwhelmingly eloquent that one was temporarily robbed of all one's critical faculties. I cannot see a single point of real agreement between Mr Van Dieren and myself; because we both agree that Busoni's colours were bright and his playing intense – qualities which could not fail to strike anyone who was not deaf – it does not begin to follow that my main contention is, as Mr Van Dieren mildly alleges, a paraphrase of words of his own.

(4) As for Mr Van Dieren's general style, it is a reviewer's duty to warn his public, and in my first paragraph I quoted lurid instances of what I meant. I should like it to be put on record that that I was not deterred by this from reading the book to the end, and strongly recommend others to follow my example. I do not attempt to deny that there are some difficult moments in store for them, but if they persevere, they will be handsomely rewarded.

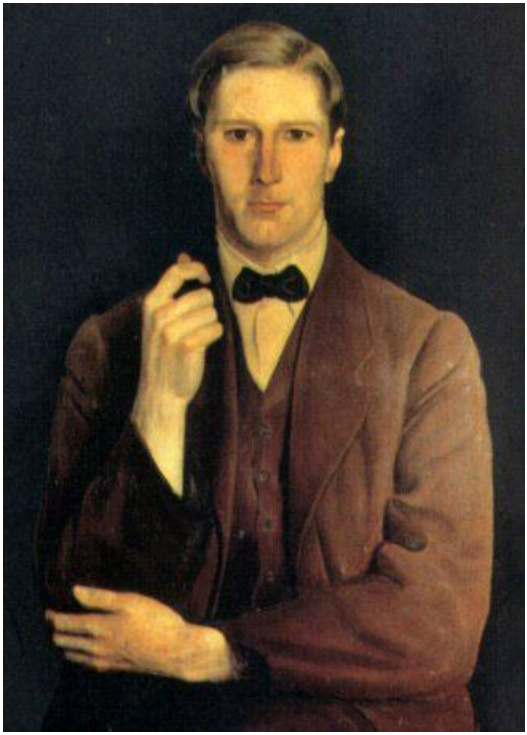
I am, Sir, etc.,

I Berlin

All Souls College, Oxford

The Future of Music

Review of Cecil Gray, *Predicaments, or Music and the Future*, *Spectator*, 21 August 1936, 317–18



This is the final volume of a critical trilogy planned by its author many years ago, and like its predecessors, *A Survey of Contemporary Music* and *The History of Music*, it is an exceptionally good book. To begin with, it is unusually well written: further, since Mr Gray's passion for the truth is greater than either his hatred of falsehood or his desire to score points against its advocates, he polemises without venom and without lingering too long over his victories; above all, he understands and does not, even unconsciously, distort the arguments of his opponents, and is far more anxious

to discover a fruitful method of enquiry into the future of European music than to insist on the adequacy of the hypothesis which, not over-confidently, he offers as a prophecy. Further, the author is a learned and cultivated man, and the subject is therefore allowed to appear in its natural proportions against the rich and spacious historical background in which it is placed.

But great though these virtues are, the chief merit of the book lies not in them but in a rarer and more important characteristic, which few contemporary English writers possess. Mr Gray is interesting because he is genuinely and quite openly interested in ideas, in ideas as such, for their own sakes. Unlike so many critics of our day, he is not frightened of intellectual speculation. Whereas they, even the most sensitive and intelligent amongst them, because they profoundly distrust and disparage all forms of cleverness, end by mocking at the cultures of others while concealing their own, and therefore refuse to give more than careful and exact accounts of the state of their subject in the present and the past, scrupulous geographical description of the country under survey, Mr Gray bravely believes that if one has knowledge, patience and imagination, one may be able to discover certain uniformities in the history of the arts, with the help of which it will be possible to classify the phenomena according to those obvious relations which connect them in their time sequence into ordered, repetitive patterns.

The theory of cycles in history is, of course, familiar enough, and has been supported by many celebrated metaphysicians; in so far as it presupposes the possibility of reconstructing even the broad outlines of history a priori, it rests on a fundamental fallacy which has been conclusively refuted over and over again. But even if to assert that events necessarily move in circles is nonsensical, it does not follow **[318]** that uniformities cannot be established at all, inductively, by guesswork and observation, as in the natural sciences, which would necessarily involve a certain repetitiveness. It may the case that history obeys no fixed laws, and the attempt to look for them may therefore be pointless; but it is at least interesting to note that the acutest and most

illuminating observations about the history of civilisation are to be found in the works of those metaphysical historians the best of whose speculation has long ceased to influence mankind.

This is certainly not an accident. Unless, for whatever reason, some phenomena recur, some laws are assumed to account for them, some structural principle is presupposed, the historian of art will be compelled to divide his time between statistics and photography. At best he will be praised for picturesque and entertaining reportage; at the very best he may rise to the rank of an accurate and sensitive impressionist painter of the times. But if the word 'significant' itself signifies anything at all, if more can be said of a given work of art than that the writer feels this or that towards it, if to speak of setting events in their true historical perspective is not to use an entirely meaningless expression, then Mr Gray is right, and the descriptive school wrong in theory and unnecessarily self-denying in practice.

Mr Gray, in our opinion rightly, follows the late Mr Van Dieren in his denial of teleology in the history of art. The existence of a definite direction does not entail the notion of progress, with its implication that what is later in development is *eo ipso* more valuable: a belief which led critics in the last century into great absurdity, into grading Palestrina or Mozart or Berlioz by their relative musical distance from Wagner or from Liszt. Van Dieren's influence is evident too in Mr Gray's immense admiration for Busoni. No one would today deny that he was a musician of superlative genius. If Mr Gray is right, it is only popular ignorance which denies him equal fame as a composer and a thinker.

We have left ourselves no space for detailed comment on the separate issues discussed in this fertile composition. There is, for instance, a stimulating essay on the artistic supremacy of races; an excellent deflationary chapter in which the nationalist theories of Dr Vaughan Williams are assailed and successfully destroyed; an acute and sympathetic analysis of atonalism; and finally a vehement attack on Stravinsky and neoclassicism. The last, in our

view, seriously underestimates the talent and historical importance of that remarkable personality: even if Mr Gray's charges were valid; even if Stravinsky's *obiter dicta* about his own ideals and those of other composers are shallow, absurd, inconsistent, of no account; even if Cocteau is indeed his evil genius, and in spite of Mr Gray's indictment the debacle seems moral rather than aesthetic, Stravinsky's service to European music remains unique. If Mr Gray would think but once again of the state of music in Western Europe during the *Epigonenzeit* which followed upon Wagner's death, of the falsity, the vulgarity, the stifling airlessness of the romantic decadence, when Saint-Saëns was austere and Mahler a purist compared to Strauss and Puccini, while Busoni or Sibelius were too distant and too aloof to bring relief, and Debussy was too French, too self-contained, in a sense too completely insulated to affect the issue, he must surely recognise that Stravinsky cut a window into the outside world, and thereby performed an immense act of liberation. It is difficult to believe that his genius has since left him, that his task was purely historical, that his present Alexandrinism is, as Mr Gray believes, all that he is now capable of; but even if this is so, if he is now that most tragic figure, a radical turned reactionary, his revolutionary past should not be wholly forgotten.

However this may be, Mr Gray is too good a critic to stand or fall by the value of his isolated judgements. Very few modern books of musical criticism attain to the standard which he has set himself and achieved. It is to be hoped that he will continue to add to their number.

Laws of Musical Sound

Review of Sir James Jeans, *Science and Music* (Cambridge, 1937: Cambridge University Press), *London Mercury* 37 no. 219 (January 1938), 356

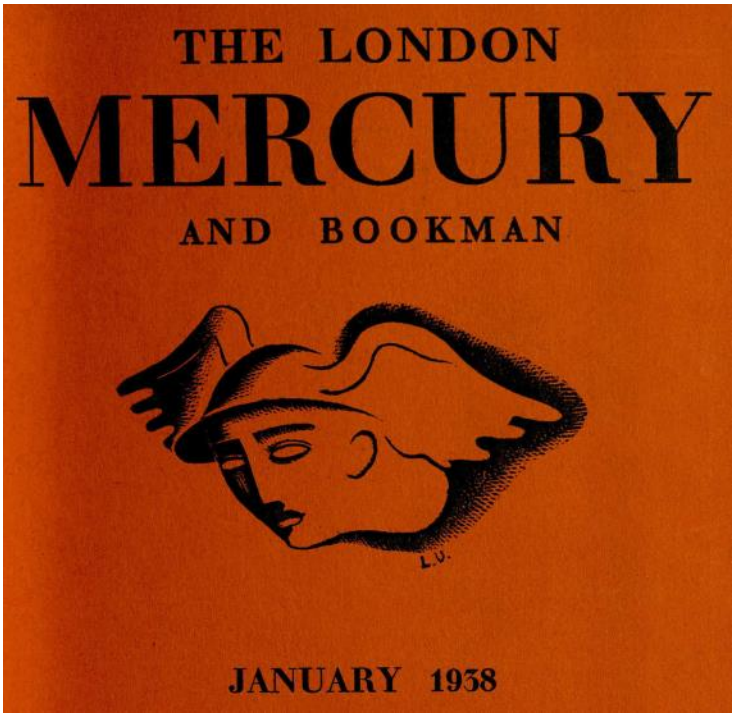
Science and Music is a title which suggests a large and interesting range of possible subjects, some of which are most unaccountably neglected alike by the historians of music and of science; and this although the relevant material is neither scarce nor inaccessible, but lies near the surface, most invitingly scattered in random profusion, full of rich promise if only some specialist cared to make use of it. Thus, for example, it has been recognised for almost a century now – since Marx's day it has been regarded as a familiar platitude – that the development of scientific technique, while it leaves no province of human activity entirely unaffected, has a particularly marked and immediate influence on the development of the arts.

An interesting book, also, could be written under the above title on the influence of the rise of the sciences in the late seventeenth century and the eighteenth on specific composers or styles; or again on the question whether musical evolution obeys any discoverable laws – whether the variations in musical styles and in the attitudes towards them of the general public and of the cognoscenti can be accounted for by any scientifically verifiable hypotheses. Is it premature to suggest that such enquiries ought to be recognised as legitimate subjects of academic research?

Meanwhile Sir James Jeans has set himself a task less ambitious than these, and has accomplished it with notable success. He deals with the physical conditions under which the sounds made by musical instruments occur and the causal relation between these and the principle scales in use among Western peoples in the past and present. The two most interesting chapters are devoted to the examination of the evolution and application of the concepts of equal temperament and of its rivals; and to the peculiarly symmetrical relations which hold between combinations of sounds which strike harmoniously upon the Western ear as opposed to those which sound harsh or discordant.

This book, without being or claiming to be original, is a model of brevity and lucid exposition: the views of Fourier and of Euler, of Weber and of the greatest master of the subject, Helmholtz, are stated with exceptional clarity in language of unclouded simplicity. Sir James has much to answer for. With that other femme fatale of popular metaphysics, Sir Arthur Eddington, he tended to employ an attractive prose style and a truly remarkable gift for picturesque analogies to lure many an unsuspecting member of the general public, and on occasion even a professional philosopher or two who certainly ought to have known better, across the frontier of rationality into the arms of the professional theologians, some of whom have, with excellent reason, looked more than askance at converts brought by these highly questionable methods.

The suspicious need have no fears, however. This latest book by the author is entirely innocent of any such procedure: it is confined severely to the exposition of known or conjectured scientific facts and hypotheses; no attempt is made to make metaphysical capital out of the unexpected symmetries found in the province of sound. One or two dubious statements about the empirical consequences of the 'unalterable properties of numbers' (p. 189) or of the practical effects of purely arithmetical considerations (pp. 187–8) are all that remain to remind the reader of the peculiar Cartesian views concerning the nature of the external world expressed in two of the author's previous works: the rest is blamelessly objective and austere, and will doubtless for many years remain the best and most readable popular treatment of an important subject.



The Development of Modern Music

Review of Gerald Abraham, *A Hundred Years of Music*
(London, [1938]: Duckworth), *Spectator*, 23 September 1938, 489–90

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the development of European music altered in character, and what had until that time been a single, broad, on the whole homogeneous river disintegrated into a multitude of separate streams and streamlets, whose currents only occasionally met, forming new and peculiar combinations. The sense of themselves as set in a particular historical context, the new awareness of standing in a line of traditional development, of the moral and aesthetic issues which this brought up, of the necessity of taking sides, of declaring oneself for or against this or that school or tendency or outlook, the desire to explain and defend their activity, to justify their

artistic convictions to themselves and others, above all the overwhelming passion to testify to some personal or national or religious ideal by every word and deed, increased the already acute self-consciousness of artists, and by putting a premium on novelty and expressiveness made their pursuit of them more deliberate, connected them with the need for a new idiom in which to express the uniquely original vision of the individual.

To give a comprehensive survey of this rich and scattered variety of styles and movements is the task which Mr Abraham has set himself, and accomplished with superb skill and effect. The most arresting and valuable quality of his book is the method employed in it in order to secure a unification and a genuinely objective view of the subject matter.

The history of musical development from country to country and from individual to individual is traced in terms of the development of the technical resources, of deviations and innovations from accepted methods, the *idées recues* of every age and tradition as they are transmitted in time and space in the course of the last hundred years. This method has the immense advantage of presenting the entire scene not in some artificially established relation to the particular musical ideal openly or implicitly professed by the author, but as a network of those indisputably real historical influences which connect the harmonic or melodic devices, or the quality of mannerism of his orchestral scoring, with the technical methods in use among his contemporaries or predecessors.

The rigorous and systematic manner in which, without copious musical quotation, but with constant exact references to accessible scores, this treatment is applied, for example, to Wagner and Liszt, is a triumphant vindication of its superiority to all forms of subjective commentary. By excluding all but the barest minimum of personal aesthetic judgement it succeeds in throwing far more light on the artistic outlook and method of varied composers, of the precise quality of their originality, of their relative historical importance, their relation to their or to

others' art, than a description of the personal experience of the critic, however sensitive, sympathetic, accurate, expressive, could conceivably do.

Mr Abraham provides that indispensable substratum of exact historical research which while not itself a substitute for criticism is that on which all criticism must be based, without which it becomes either simple to the point of naivety, **[490]** or else conversational and shallow. It should be added that it covers an enormous field, illuminating its obscure corners with its even and sober light, and while one may disagree with specific judgements – as when the author minimises the originality of pre-war Stravinsky or declares that there is no trace of banality in *Madame Butterfly* – they are never asserted without evidence, and in any case leave the major virtues of this excellent work untouched. As an example of scrupulous, informative, luminous writing it could with profit be adopted as a model by critics in other fields.

Gramophone Notes

Record Reviews from the Oxford Magazine

From 1936 to 1940, as a Fellow of All Souls until 1938, and then as a Fellow of New College, Isaiah Berlin reviewed new record releases for the *Oxford Magazine* (OM). These pieces form a substantial part of his writings on music – writings which may not be extensive, but are certainly significant, springing as they do from one of the deepest loves of his life, if not the deepest.

Berlin's 1952 tribute to Dinu Lipatti appears as an appendix.

All footnotes are editorial.

13 February 1936: OM 54 (1935–6), 370

It is by now a well-established fact that Artur Schnabel is much the most original figure among the pianists of our day. The records made of his performances of Beethoven's sonatas and concerti are probably the greatest single contribution which the gramophone companies have made to the musical culture of our times. The effect of this is such that one's whole attitude to Beethoven's compositions is to some extent materially altered. It has become impossible to avoid considering all future performances, and the nature of the works themselves, in the light of these magisterial interpretations: like some great critical commentary on a classic, they permanently deflect the course not only of scholarship, but of the history of taste; they affect, even if they do not always widen, the range of possible feeling towards the work in question.

Schnabel has, to a certain extent, done this for Beethoven: and is identified with him in the public mind. It is therefore with very uncertain feelings that one approaches the new records of Brahms's Second Pianoforte Concerto in B flat major (DB 2696–701), recently issued by HMV, played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Adrian Boult, with Schnabel as soloist. It is a vast, rich, highly romantic work, infinitely remote, in spite of its legitimate descent, from the Beethoven concerto for which Schnabel's cast of mind seems so singularly suited. A total change of technique is required, and this we do not wholly find. True, the style is different, more sensuous, more flowing, freer for the most part from the 'impure' humanist approach, highly charged with all kinds of extra-musical associations which some works by

Beethoven definitely seem to demand. But it is still too impeccably classical, too luminous, too precise, too hard for the purely Victorian, slightly elderly Romanticism of this great work. It is a most notable performance, and the records, except in one or two places where the orchestra seem too near the recording instrument, very faithful. The concerto is not organic, but episodic in structure, and is conducted so, even too much so; passages of outstanding beauty seem to be picked out by the conductor (never the pianist) for special attention, and the effect loses in unity what it gains in brilliance. But the work is likely to suffer from such treatment less than almost any other: the orchestra plays very competently, and never even threatens to drown the pianist where it could so easily do so. The total effect is very satisfying: yet it would be more than that if the pianist were not Schnabel, but, say, Gieseking. But one cannot expect everything.

Meanwhile, Decca have not been mute, and like the Everyman editors of musical classics that they are, have produced a number of admirably cheap and reputable recordings. The Verdi Quartet in E minor (DE 7043–6, 10/-)[5] – a curious work, less like a quartet than like four loosely connected intermezzi – is quite agreeably played, especially in the third, highly operatic, movement, and in the fugal finale, by the Prisca Quartet. It has the lyrical and dramatic qualities of the later operas: and indeed resembles nothing so much as a landscape by a portrait painter, curious and attractive in virtue of its very incongruities.

The Boyd Neel String Orchestra gives an admirably lucid and well-balanced performance of the divertimenti in F and D (K136 and K138) by Mozart (K 787–9).[6] The bass is sometimes unduly heavy, and there is a certain lacklustre quality about these records. But they are bound to give pleasure, and are definitely worth acquiring. The same may be said of a far more remarkable performance: that of a Handel *arietta* transcribed by Sir Hamilton Harty and conducted by him with the London Symphony Orchestra (K796). It is entirely transformed by this process and

[5] Ten shillings (half of one pound sterling; modern 50p).

[6] Confusingly, 'K' is used both for the Köchel numbering of Mozart's works and as a prefix in the numbering of one of Decca's 78-rpm record series. Here a space is inserted after the 'K' only in the latter case.

turns into a slow, opulent piece of the late nineteenth century, vaguely in the style of Berlioz or Mussorgsky, or perhaps Elgar; it is enormously effective as thus played, and very beautiful in a totally un-Handelian sort of way. The passacaglia by the same composer on the other side of the same record, and the *Introduction, Rigaudon and Polonaise* (K 795), are more conventionally arranged and, apart from certain roughnesses, sound well enough. The Decca Co. displays a great deal of musical taste combined with consideration for the listener's pocket in the selection and pricing of their classical records, of which more will be said hereafter.

Unattributed but certainly by IB

5 March 1936: OM 54 (1935–6), 463–4

The name of Sibelius has come to feature so regularly in the concert programmes of this country that the Gramophone Co. cannot have felt that they were indulging in a particularly adventurous enterprise, when they recently issued the D major Symphony (no. 2, op. 43). Besides the *Voces intimae* quartet and some of the tone-poems, all the symphonies except the Fourth had previously been published by HMV's own Sibelius Society or by Columbia. On the other hand, English conductors have not yet made themselves or their audiences sufficiently familiar with the works for their performances to carry an air of authority, or even, in some cases, of comprehension; and because the Columbia recording of the Second Symphony was conducted by Dr Kajanus, we had tended to regard it as the definitive edition. This therefore gives added interest to the new performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Koussevitsky (DB 1599–2603 and DBS 2604), and if comment mainly takes the line of comparison between the two versions, the circumstances justify it.

The chief importance of this symphony must be admitted to lie in its break with the tradition of symphonic form to which the First Symphony belonged, and in its method of synthesising phrases into themes instead of starting with full-blown subjects and extracting the development from them. That being so, it may seem carping to accuse Koussevitsky of too heavily underlining the fragmentary character of the introduction to the first movement, but that, unfortunately, is the impression it leaves with the hearer;

by taking the movement at a far slower tempo that Kajanus's, and by stressing the pauses between the admittedly isolated passages, he gives the music a ponderous deliberateness which is less suited to the form than the organic nisus of Kajanus. But his method's advantages appear in the second movement, where Kajanus's fidelity to Sibelius's instructions (*non troppo lento*) led his orchestra into an indeterminacy which Koussevitsky's precision triumphantly avoids.

With the final movement, Koussevitsky magnificently justifies the new publication of the symphony, for where the Kajanus version is slightly abridged and follows symphonic tradition in treating the movement as no more than equal in importance with the first. Koussevitsky climbs steadily, unhesitatingly up to a colossal finale, which he makes (and surely he is right here) the climax of the whole work, towards which everything before is directed. His conception of this symphony as an organic, and not simply a systematic, unity marks this album as a valuable contribution to the library of gramophone music, and a word of gratitude should perhaps be offered to Boston for providing him with a large and highly disciplined orchestra, capable of sustaining such an enterprise. The symphony's violent changes from *fortes* to *pianissimos* must have given the sound engineers some trouble, but the control of volume only becomes excessively noticeable on two occasions – in each case it is the timpanist who suffers, for his three bars' solo in the first movement are almost inaudible; and again, of the important five beats introducing the trio in the third movement only three can be distinctly heard – and in all other respects the recording maintains the high standard we have come to expect from HMV.

The Decca Co. display commendable taste in publishing two celebrated songs by Hugo Wolf, *The Drummer* and *Biterolf*, sung by Heinrich Schlusnus and accompanied by Franz Rupp (DE 7032). Neither work stands in any need of praise in this column: Schlusnus underlines every possible detail and nuance, and sings with striking expressiveness and force. This massive approach tends to murder certain songs by making everything over-explicit, and even blatant: here it comes off completely, in this case particularly in *Biterolf*, which is a work of great dramatic genius.

At a slightly lower level, but very agreeable and competent, is the version of two arias from *La forza del destino*, sung in German by Felicie Hüni-Mihacsek (CA 8211), here called 'Frieden, Ruhe' and 'Noch hegt mich'. There is a great deal of excellent music in that enormous, scattered, sprawling work of Verdi's middle period, and these arias, sunk in that great ocean, are liable to be overlooked. Similar neglect threatens – or perhaps, since the recent boom in the works of that composer, no longer threatens – the magnificent 'Marche troyenne' by Berlioz, very sympathetically played by the London Symphony Orchestra under Hamilton Harty (one side of K 793, the other being occupied by the end of the *King Lear* overture by Berlioz, a work of considerable historical interest, which on this record no fibre needle, at any rate, can make sound even remotely like music). This, like the rest of his Trojan music, is only now beginning to meet with that universal recognition which the prodigious genius of its composer deserves.

We end quietly with a recognised classic, the seven movements of the French Suite no. 5 in G major by J. S. Bach, played by Wilhelm Kempff with scrupulous and luminous accuracy, and therefore a great pleasure to listen to. So far as originality of choice is concerned, Decca seems to be bolder and more progressive than the two older and technically superior companies.

18 June 1936: OM 54 (1935–6), 717

A discriminating musical critic remarked recently that no more cultivated, eclectic and musically alert audience was today anywhere to be found than that which at present exists in this country. The truth of this statement, which is gradually obtaining a slightly incredulous but nevertheless quite definite recognition even in Vienna, which alone could perhaps afford to challenge its accuracy, makes it all the more astonishing that our leading gramophone companies continue to all appearance unconscious of the change times in which they live. Decca is an honourable exception to this rule, but one company cannot be expected to make a summer, and meanwhile the demand both for the new and for the forgotten old continues. It is this last that the EMG Co. has now set itself to meet with its 'Treasury of Music' issues. This enlightened concern, with its admirable instruments and equally admirable catalogues, has perhaps contributed more than any

private enterprise towards the rise in technical standards and improvement of taste among listeners to gramophones; this is, however, the first occasion, so far as we know, and which it has ventured to issue its own records.

The following have so far appeared: Trio Sonata in G major for flute, violin and basso continuo by J. S. Bach; Sonata in D minor for two violins, viola da gamba and harpsichord by the same composer; for the same group of instruments two *sonate da camera* – in G minor by Vivaldi (written in 1709), and in B flat by Corelli; a quartet in B minor by G. P. Telemann; two intermezzi – for this is what in effect they are – by Mozart, in F and in C, for two violins, cello and organ; an unfinished Trio in B Flat by Schubert; and, finally, for voices, two arias for tenor, entitled 'Was Quälet' and 'Trocknet euch', from a work called *Harmonische Freude* by P. H. Erlebach, a virtually unknown composer some ten or fifteen years younger than Alessandro Scarlatti, and three songs, 'Heiss mich nicht reden', 'Er ist gekommen' and 'Jeden Morgen', by Robert Schumann.

All these works are interesting, and all are executed with scrupulous attention to artistic and historical detail; the two Italian quartets and the quartet and trio by Bach are characteristic and beautiful works by these great masters, and need no commentary here; some of the others are more remarkable.

The quartet by Telemann is easy, gay and charming. Romain Rolland, in a typically brilliant and exaggerated essay, once proclaimed that this composer was far more gifted than his greatest contemporary, Bach. Others prefer to remember him as the author of the celebrated remark that a genuine musician should be capable of setting a poster to music. He was prodigiously fertile even for that prolific age, and appears to be the father both of the theory and of the practice of *Gebrauchsmusik*, the prototype of Boccherini, Schubert and Hindemith, the creator of an episodic, loose-woven, almost journalistic style in music. The resurrection of this pleasant figure is therefore a very timely and proper act of homage to the true ancestor of some of the most characteristic composers of the present day.

As for two *bibelots* by Mozart, that in F is graceful and pretty, but that in C is enchanting: sudden interventions on the part of the organ lightly and viciously punctuate and imitate the vigorous and

beautiful design traced by the strings; the sonority is sometimes that of an idealised, more melodious barrel organ; the total effect creates the illusion of that imaginary eighteenth century in which it would have been delightful to spend one's life.

The arias by Erlebach also merit attention. We regret that we are so ignorant of the life and works of this German composer: these pre-Handelian arias, with their obvious southern, perhaps Neapolitan, affinities, represent the end of the musical tradition of the Renaissance, and are pure, melodious and moving, in that old Italian style which now seems nostalgic and tinged with melancholy; they are exquisitely sung, and their rescue from oblivion is an excellent act on the part of the singer and the company.

As for the Romantic works, the Schubert trio is not profound, but, of course, infinitely agreeable, like all that composer's early chamber music: which indeed deserves greater prominence than it gets, being overshadowed by the great works of genius of his last years. Once again the devoted archaeology of the EMG Co. has revealed a masterpiece; a minor work, but still there are a masterpiece. The same cannot be said of the Schumann songs, which, charming though they are, and excellently sung by Yvon Le Marc'Hadour, do not deserve to appear in such company. But we do not wish to be thought to have uttered even the mildest criticism in the face of such taste and such generosity. It is to be hoped that the public response will be sufficient to make it possible to continue this enlightened policy.

19 November 1936: OM 55 (1936–7), 182

Once more it is proper to begin by expressing great admiration for the enterprise, taste and sense of artistic responsibility displayed by the Decca Co. in the their choice of works for publication. It alone among the gramophone companies fully realises the necessity of recording the works of contemporary masters, and it performs this public service with great efficiency and despatch. The records of symphonies by Vaughan Williams and William Walton are well known. We must now celebrate that of the B flat Quartet by Darius Milhaud, a slighter work by a composer of at least equal merit: his technical equipment is not inferior to that of Hindemith or Prokofiev, he does not speak without saying something new and interesting, he possesses a musical personality of great

distinction and charm, and this quartet is a luminous, expressive and beautiful work. It is excellently played by the Galimir Quartet, whose devoted and scrupulous attitude towards everything they have recorded is reminiscent of the Kolisch Quartet, upon which they obviously, and successfully, model themselves (DE 70545).

A less interesting record, because the music itself is trivial, is that which contains the Étude in E by Glazunov (mildly agreeable, but dull) and *Sarcasme* no. 5 by Prokofiev (charming and accomplished, but wholly unmemorable), played adequately by Alexander Borowsky (DE 7053). The same pianist also records Variations in B flat by Mozart, an exquisite opusculum well worth acquiring. So also is the *Serenata notturna* (the last side contains the *andante* from the Symphony in F by the same composer, competently played by the Boyd Neel String Orchestra; it is written in the familiar style of the divertimenti and occasional pieces and needs no comment (Decca CA 8237, K 813–14). From this it is but a natural step to the neoclassicism of *L'Oiseau de feu*, that early but still entrancing and almost flawless ballet by Stravinsky, a work of arresting genius which today only pedants and puritans would scorn. This is given a heavy but lucid and attentive performance by Oscar Fried, who follows the composer's instructions almost too mechanically, but thereby achieves his end, and in stressing the melodic line avoids making nonsense of the rhythm (CA 8235–6). Finally, there is a delightful record by Maria Gentile of 'Quando rapita in estasi' from *Lucia*, and 'So anch'io la virtù magica' from *Don Pasquale*, two more than agreeable arias by Donizetti, sung in a rich, resonant, uninhibited, full-throated Italian voice (DE 7052).

It is depressing to turn from all this to the HMV Co., whose only record to arrive for review is an album of the César Franck violin sonata, played by Yehudi and Hephzibah Menuhin (DB 2742–5). It was once suggested by, I believe, Mr [Ernest] Newman that a special licence should be required for performing works of this category. However magnificent such compositions may be, it is tiresome to have to listen to them yet once again only in order to award marks to the engineers and performers. It is in fact beautifully and brilliantly played on these records, particularly the last movement, which is performed with a depth of feeling which is entirely free from the effortless and mechanical facility which all

wunderkinder, particularly the generation of prodigies taught by the celebrated Auer, seem doomed to develop sooner or later in their career.

6 May 1937: OM 55 (1936–7), 568

There have been many signs during recent months of an increasing seriousness of attitude on the part of the principal recording companies in their choice of publications. Many causes have contributed to this, in particular the notable rise in the level of musical taste in this country, of which the limited Society publications are the clearest symptom. The effect of this minor musical renaissance upon the HMV Co. this year is shown by the impressive series of works by Bach, played by the augmented Busch Quartet, which form a small but standard edition of his main orchestral works. This is the first, and a highly successful, attempt to give a unified presentation in a single style of a number of interrelated compositions, executed with scrupulous purity, which completely supersedes the previous scattered recordings of individual works, some of which, it may be argued, possessed greater charm or brilliance. In the meantime, the Decca Co. have done something similar for Handel. These notable events plainly demand separate treatment, and will be discussed in a later article.

Meanwhile, the series of recordings of Beethoven quartets has been enriched by an almost flawless performance of the Quartet in E Minor (op. 59, no. 2) by the Budapest Quartet. I have never heard them in real life, but so far as one can judge from gramophone records they stand second to the Busch Quartet alone in the intelligence, skill and beauty of their playing. In this quartet they reach their highest level of both emotional and technical excellence in the long-drawn, extremely haunting scale passages in the second movement; but the whole immortal work is performed with vigour, sensitiveness and restraint, which becomes exaggerated neither into unnecessary austerity, nor into anything remotely resembling the Léner lusciousness of tone; and, above all, with wonderful lucidity.

After this it is a descent, though not a great one, to Menuhin's rendering of the Violin Concerto in G major by Mozart (HMV DB 2729–31), with the Paris Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Georges Enesco. Menuhin is no longer an infant prodigy, and

ought therefore to be judged by the standards of maturer players: the result is difficult to state. It is, of course, a very finished and agreeable performance. Technically it is admirable, and as accomplished as any which, for instance, Heifetz might have given. It is fresh, straightforward, resonant, and has none of the faults of the average violin virtuoso. One can confidently recommend these records. Yet more was expected of this player, particularly after the enthusiasm about him expressed by Adolf Busch. One expects, in fact, both nobility and depth, of the kind found in the playing of Busch himself, and which, one imagines, Joachim must have possessed to a great degree. These qualities, which the slow movement particularly demands, do not appear here, and this cannot be the fault of the records. It is, of course, pleasant to note that Menuhin has escaped the fate of those wunderkinder who in later life tend to become rather vulgar. But the exceptional moral qualities which some critics claimed to have discovered in him are not yet conspicuous; all that is manifested in these records is simplicity, sincerity and abundant technical skill. Which, some will say, is more than enough.

Decca have published a very competent performance of the beautiful Symphony in G Minor (no. 95) by Haydn, conducted by Hamilton Harty. Its outstanding characteristics are great gaiety and charm. The strings tend to be shrill occasionally, and the whole is slightly romanticised, particularly in the second movement. But the playing in general is very crisp and clear, and, for its price (K 798–799, 10/-), it is highly satisfactory. One cannot say as much for Decca CA 8096, which on one side contains several movements of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio espagnol*, and on the other the 'Triumphal March' from that composer's *The Golden Cockerel*. Both these works require exceptional resources, so far as both rhythmical accuracy and orchestral colour are concerned. The *Capriccio* is blurred, and sounds almost tawdry, the 'March', a spacious and magnificent composition, which occurs during a highly ceremonial episode full of splendour and bright colour, is here a mass of confused and unimpressive sound, through which the rhythm of the great march is heard struggling ineffectually to the surface. A far better record is CA 8261 of the same company, on one side of which (the other is the end of the A major cello sonata of Beethoven) the Prelude and Fugue in D major by J. S.

Bach are played by Messrs Kempff (pianoforte) and Grummer (cello) with scrupulous attention to the text. It is not a brilliant performance, but it is of the highest worth, and very attractive to listen to. The players treat each other with model respect and consideration.

16 June 1938: OM 56 (1937–8), 770–1

The A major piano sonata by Schubert has lately been recorded for HMV by Artur Schnabel, and is easily the most valuable addition to the literature of Viennese music for the gramophone made this year. It is the greatest of Schubert's piano compositions, and may, indeed, be regarded as the last work of genius written for that instrument before the end of what Alfred Einstein has called the age of innocence; before, that is to say, the appearance of Schumann, Chopin and Liszt, and the beginning of a period of specifically pianistic music both for the piano and for other instruments. It is a work of great emotional nobility and breadth, and possesses the combination of pure lyrical feeling with unique imaginative freedom and originality which belongs to certain among Schubert's later works and gives them a sublime quality not again found in music. All Schnabel's gifts and virtues are expended upon this performance; the reproduction is very good and the records are consequently outstanding even in the now considerable volume of his recorded performances.

The other notable set of records made by Schnabel is that of the F major concerto by Mozart (K 459, DB 3095–8). The London Symphony Orchestra under Malcolm Sargent is not ideally suited to the composer, least of all in this work, which demands exceptional lightness and flexibility, virtues for which, save occasionally under Beecham, they are not conspicuous. The soloist plays with devotion and feeling, and his customary astonishing clarity, but at times, notable in the first and third movements, with an insistent, over-emphatic application which exaggerates, by over-solidifying, the character of the music, and tends to occasional ponderousness. The recording is adequate.

The greatest single technical and artistic accomplishment of the season is the cello concerto by Dvorak, a work which, for all its merits, perhaps hardly deserves such apotheosis. The orchestra is conducted by Szell, and the soloist is Casals. No one who has ever

heard him can seriously doubt that Casals is the greatest instrumental player of our day; and, with the possible exception of the unaccompanied Bach suites (produced as vol. VI of the Bach Society),[7] this is the best recording which he has ever obtained. Of the music itself opinions may well differ: it is possible to think it too naive, too crudely coloured, and too broadly sentimental. The performance and recording are phenomenal: the orchestral playing is vivid and brilliantly diversified, that of the soloist of indescribable magnificence; the Prague conductor is recognised as the best interpreter of Czech music in the present day, and the sureness, precision and glitter of his phrasing attains to the level of Beecham himself. For those who like Dvorak, this rendering attains the unattainable.

Casals also plays in the [Beethoven] C major sonata for cello and pianoforte (op. 102 no. 1, DB 3065–6) with Horszowski. It is an excellent performance of a somewhat forbidding work, but infinitely below the level of the last. The pianist is rather too self-obliterating, plays competently and correctly, but rather dully. As a work it is interesting and historically important, occurring, when it does, during the obscurest moment of a transitional stage of the composer's final development; but intrinsically it is not greatly inspired.

Of works for the violin and orchestra, the best are two concerti in which Menuhin plays the solo part. The Mozart Concerto in G Major (K 216; DB 2729–31) is a very beautiful work. Menuhin gives a charming, fluent, technically flawless performance: his tone is marvellously pure, but sometimes slightly monotonous. A far more serious masterpiece is the famous Violin Concerto in A minor (DB 2911–12) by Bach, also recorded by Menuhin. This is a splendid performance. The first movement is played with an intensity and concentration worthy of Adolf Busch himself; the second with immense nobility and broad and beautiful phrasing; the third with spontaneity and fire. The proper balance between soloist and orchestra is scrupulously kept: it is the best performance of any one of the Bach violin concerti in existence.

The last album to be noticed is that of the A minor quartet (op. 132) by Beethoven, executed by the Busch Quartet. It is very

[7] The Bach Society Vol. VI includes only Suites nos 2 and 3.

difficult to assess the merits and demerits of this performance. The general character and artistic status of these performers is too well known to need description or commendation here. It is an austere, noble and moving performance. But the tone is sometimes – in the second movement particularly – too thin; the bold attack and spontaneity of the violins sometimes degenerates into harshness; and the Léner cello possessed a richer and more reliable sustained tone. The 'Dankgesang' and the last movement are played more slowly than is customary, with a corresponding increase in the prodigious intensity and self-absorption of which only these players seems capable, and which makes them incomparably the best living interpreters of Beethoven's chamber music. The faults are never artistic, but technical, and may be due to the recording, and are in any case too few to prevent this from remaining the definitive, standard rendering of the work for many years to come.

1 December 1938: OM 57 (1938–9), 243

The most notable records of the recent past are without doubt the two symphonies lately issued by HMV, in G major (op. 88) by Haydn, and in C major (no. 1) by Beethoven. Both are conducted by Toscanini and played by the BBC Orchestra. In the case of the second of these an even greater service has been performed than in that of the first. No one has ever been blind to the magnificence of the Haydn Symphony: together with the three other best-known symphonies in the same key (the Military, the Surprise, the Oxford), it has been adequately recorded before. Nevertheless, this version supersedes all others: it may be doubted whether Haydn, or indeed any Viennese composer, can have intended his work to be rendered with so much fierce concentration or clarity of detail, so much relentless accumulation of all resources in a rigorously determined direction, as Toscanini here provides. The slow movement is beautiful, but is perhaps, for Haydn, too serene: on the other hand, the *allegro con spirito* is thrilling beyond words – the tone of the strings, whipped on by some inhuman agency, is marvellously luminous and brilliant: a demonic Italian quality is infused into the work which may indeed be intrinsically foreign to it, but nevertheless makes this performance of it a work of genius.

Nor is the rendering of the Beethoven symphony inferior. This work long needed rescuing from a conception of it as an agreeable,

easy-going Haydnish work (as if these epithets begin to apply to Haydn's masterpieces), interesting largely because of its author's later development. This performance disposes of that legend once and for all. The last movement in particular is a triumph both of conducting and of playing. It is unlikely that records of similar musical importance will appear for many years.

The recording of Mozart's D minor concerto by Bruno Walter and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, in which the conductor is himself the soloist, is interesting but not exceptional. The most obvious comparison is with the records of this made not long ago by Edwin Fischer and the London Symphony Orchestra. The Walter records are always suave and often exquisite: in the second movement in particular, the urbane charm of the pianist is very captivating; but Fischer is so much technically his superior that in spite of the clearer orchestral texture of the Viennese musicians, the earlier version is to be preferred. A great musician is not necessarily a great pianist: and the result is therefore not professional enough. But this is a distinction which applies only in the uppermost regions of art: by all ordinary standards this is an excellent recording. Fischer is almost the last great representative of the German school of pianists before the age of the virtuosi: and his album of Schubert Impromptus (op. 90 and op. 148) is a most distinguished piece of work. He plays them with a freedom, delicacy, rare lyrical feeling, and beauty of intonation hardly rivalled by Rachmaninoff himself. The *allegretto* in A flat major and the *andante* in B flat major are particularly successful, being rendered in the authentic, *verträumt alla fantasia* manner which forms the greatest glory of piano works of their composer. A very valuable set.

The Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under Kubelik have recorded two pieces out of Smetana's cycle *Má vlast* (*My Country*), 'The Moldau' and 'From Bohemia's Woods and Fields'. The first is the well-known noble, generous, melodious tone poem which had considerable influence on the great Russian masters. This is a very sincere and moving performance of it, full of the instinctive musical feeling which Slav orchestras and musicians seem to secure with so little apparent conscious effort. A very different and yet not wholly dissimilar work is the Bruckner Quintet (the fifth instrument is a viola) in F played by the Prisca Quartet, and

recorded – their enterprise in the cause of modern music cannot be praised too highly – by the Decca Co. This music is the true successor not only to Schubert, but to the posthumous quartets of Beethoven – it is sacred rather than secular in character, and combines with intellectual naivety a depth of religious, but never mystical, musical feeling: a hearing of this work may make Bruckner's immense reputation in German countries intelligible to those to whom his symphonies seem merely tedious. The conception is orchestral, and strongly influenced by the earlier Wagner, but the imposition of the forms of chamber music necessarily reveals the method, the peculiar properties, the artistic and spiritual purpose of this composer on a smaller and therefore more easily intelligible scale than the great massifs of piled-up orchestral sound of which his larger works are compounded. It is played scrupulously and sympathetically, and may be warmly recommended to anyone puzzled by, but not wholly alien to, the music of this great German master.

9 May 1940: OM 58 (1939–40), 306–7

Haydn enjoys the most stable reputation in the history of music. At no period during the last century and a half has a serious attack been made upon him by the critics – neither during the '30s of the last century, when Mozart suffered neglect and disparagement, nor at the beginning of our own, when the opposition to the Viennese school was vigorously conducted in Paris and Rome. It is, therefore, surprising that until very recent times his works should have been recorded so sparingly in comparison with Beethoven and even Brahms. The balance is, however, in process of being redressed: the best quartets have been magnificently recorded by the Pro Arte Quartet, and the HMV and Columbia companies have provided performances under great conductors which set up a new standard.

The latest recordings of HMV include four symphonies, some done before, but never so well. Three of these are conducted by Walter: in G major (Military); no 100, with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (DB 3421–3); another in G major (Oxford); no 92, with the Orchestre de la Societé des Concerts du Conservatoire (DB 3559–61); and in D major, no. 86 (Paris no. 10), with the London Symphony Orchestra (DB 3647–9). Future historians of the art of conducting, in the course of their research into the present period – the end of the golden age of their subject, when the greatest masters of the art, Toscanini, Beecham, Walter, Klemperer, were still at the height of their powers – will doubtless look upon such records as these as their most valuable evidence. A study of Walter, indeed, would profit immeasurably by such a comparison of his method as is here afforded by performances of three works by the same composer, played in each case by different orchestras, equally great and celebrated, but heirs to wholly different traditions.

The best of these performances is that of the Military Symphony. It goes without saying that the Vienna Philharmonic play better than the only other available good performance, by the Berlin State Opera, under Knappertsbusch. But far more than this is true: the Adagio is marvellously clear, perfectly nuanced, and full of sustained lyrical feeling. The Allegretto is a masterpiece of well,

but not self-consciously, controlled rhythm. The Minuet and Presto are played with a combination of sweetness and energy which this orchestra alone has achieved. Indeed, if any criticism can be made, it is that sometimes the tone grows over-sweet, the attack is not robust enough and too Mozartian, and the strings are allowed (frequently in the first movement, in the opening bars of the second, and during the trio of the third) to linger too long over sostenuto passages.

The ensemble is beyond praise. That these faults (and they are almost virtues compared to the over-dynamism of the Italo-American school) are those of Walter himself is demonstrated by the very different performance of the D major (no. 86) symphony. Here the London Symphony Orchestra err, if anything, on the side of hearty matter-of-factness. The attack is very spirited and unanimous, but the excess of superfluous energy combined with lack of imagination, a metronomic beat and great technical proficiency, tends to produce a monotonous galloping motion which, particularly in the minuet, kills such melodic and harmonic subtleties as this work possesses. It is a broadly conceived, straightforward, faithful, full-throated performance, certainly the best version available, but not an *unicum* like the rendering noted above.

With the G major ('Oxford'), no. 92, we return to sweetness and light. The French orchestra play far better under Walter than on pervious records under native French conductors. The strings are still a little shrill, the turns of their phrases over-accented, but the woodwind is magnificent, far superior to that of the older version of Weisbach, which this alone would suffice to supersede. The Adagio drags a little and is allowed to seem heavier than it is. The elan of the Presto atones for everything: without sacrificing precision, beauty of tone, lucidity, a fiery pattern is developed which does justice to the rich life and noble eloquence with which Haydn touched all, or nearly all, that he wrote.

The last work by Haydn to be noticed is perhaps the most interesting – the Symphony (no. 80) in D minor, edited by Alfred Einstein (C3145–6), played by the Orchestra of the New Friends of Music, conducted by Fritz Stiedry. This rare and lately reconstructed work – Dr Einstein's name is sufficient guarantee of the scrupulousness of the restoration – is a masterpiece of the first

order. Anyone who still has an intellect to be stirred by music may be warmly advised to acquire this very inexpensive set: the music is bold, imaginative and unhackneyed to the last degree; neither the orchestra nor the recording are a match for those discussed above, but the playing is vigorous and coherent and the tone is consistently pure, nor is the effect so rough as American recordings are apt to have. The music – in particular the first two movements – shows the composer at the height of his mental and technical genius. A concert performance of it in this country is ardently to be desired.

APPENDIX

Lament for Lipatti

House and Garden 7 No 3 (March 1952), 91, 98

[*House and Garden* headnote:]

Isaiah Berlin, who includes a formidable knowledge of music among his many accomplishments, discusses some records made by Dinu Lipatti just before his tragic death in December 1950, as well as new records by other contemporary pianists.

I

Like human beings or political movements, every true art appears to go through a more or less predictable life span. It starts as a scarcely distinguishable part of some other activity, gradually acquires an independent technique, and with it an independent status and importance, steadily rises in its own eyes and in public esteem, lives through a 'golden age', then a 'silver age', and after that, in an atmosphere filled with the nostalgic memories of the old, who cannot forget some earlier and better time, struggles for life, declines, and finally fades into other arts and activities of which it imperceptibly becomes an intrinsic and scarcely remembered element.

This succession of phases is clearly applicable to the case of conducting, which, in the days when kapellmeisters stamped or beat time with their canes, and composers conducted their own works with a roll of music paper, would hardly be regarded as an

independent art. It grew to be so principally in Paris, in the 1830s, with the celebrated Habeneck, and its golden age was during the period that began with Mendelssohn and Berlioz; it came to a great height with Mahler and Nikisch, and yielded its greatest genius in Toscanini.

One may well ask whether even the romantic notion of a great conductor will convey more, towards the end, let us say, of the twenty-first century, than the concept of an improviser of genius conveys to the twentieth. Similarly with the art of the pianist: it reached a splendid peak in the mid nineteenth century, and even in our own time men of exceptional gifts have played to audiences sufficiently educated to understand and pay homage to their quality. Now they are fewer and further between compared with even twenty years ago, and it is therefore particularly melancholy to record that one of the greatest among them – upon whom the highest hopes were justly placed – is now in his grave.

This was a particularly tragic death, for the pianist in question, the Romanian Dinu Lipatti, died in his twenties of a painful disease, after revealing a quality to which there was no parallel among his contemporaries. Lipatti's master was also his compatriot, the composer, conductor and violinist Georges Enesco, whose magnificent musical gifts – in particular his inspired conducting – have not even now met with the recognition that they deserve. Happily he is still amongst us, although today he performs relatively rarely. Lipatti was the most gifted of his disciples, and his death in 1950 in Switzerland is the greatest loss to the musical world for many years.

Lipatti was mainly known as a player of romantic music – Chopin and Schumann, for example – but anyone who had the fortune to hear his performance of one of the Mozart concertos will never forget that sublime experience. Herr Karajan, who conducted, displayed a surprising degree of sympathy in restraining his natural penchant for dramatisation, and adapted himself fully to the exquisite lyricism of the pianist. This performance was recorded at the time, and re-broadcast a few days later by Radio Lausanne. There are disquieting rumours, which would be sad if true, that the recording has been destroyed.[8] But although we may

[8] It was not. On 3 August 1950 Lipatti played Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 21 in C, K 467, with Herbert von Karajan and the Orchestre du Festival de

never again hear the sublime performances of Mozart, yet the surviving recordings will give to those who never heard him some notion of Lipatti's remarkable gift.

That he was a great virtuoso, and could do almost anything he pleased, hardly needs mentioning. Without a very high degree of technical skill, great genius in a player cannot be realised. Lipatti's playing was luminously clear, delicate, pure, and tinged with a deep and piercing melancholy which may have been connected with the wasting disease that ultimately killed him. And this made his playing, whether he played lightly and gracefully, or with profound and concentrated *Innigkeit*, more beautiful and more moving than that of any other pianist now living.

This particular mood of sharp lyrical sadness, as opposed to the flow of German self-pity, is more frequently found in Eastern European musicians than in those of the West. He played very much as the Russian ballerina Ulanova dances today, with a melting poetry combined with a precise, classical, limpid sense of rhythm that preserves the inner structure of the work of art from degenerating into either sentimentality or rhetoric. The quality was sometimes of an unearthly brilliance, sometimes tranquil and seraphic; there was never the faintest intrusion of anything prosaic or alien to the soaring of the inspired, continuous line; the ground was never touched; the playing achieved a miraculous combination of lightness and solidity, and a kind of steady, uninterrupted incandescence that created the illusion of a bright and beautiful dream.

If the reader looks for adequate reason for such homage, he has but to listen on Columbia LX 8744–5.[9] It is a record equally marvellous in every movement, and the playing is unlike any other in our day. It is impossible to convey musical qualities in prose. It will perhaps be sufficient to say that if anyone seeks to understand what is meant by genius in a performer, not merely skill or depth of sentiment or beauty of tone conceived separately, he has but to compare this particular record with any other rendering of the same work.

Lucerne, in the Kunsthaus, Lucerne, and with his own cadenzas. The recording may be heard on YouTube. Lipatti died on 2 December of the same year.

[9] Bach, Partita no. 1 in B flat major.

Lipatti does not always continue on this astonishing level, and his playing, for example, of the Chopin waltzes (Columbia LX 1341–6) is not so continuously remarkable. He plays the D flat major [no. 13] and F major [no. 4] waltzes well, but without disclosing his peculiar talent: but the A flat major waltz no. 2 and E flat major waltz no. 1 are peerless. The G flat major [no. 11] and F minor [no. 12] waltzes are played with a combination of rhythmical precisions and a lyrical continuity disfigured by no inappropriate rubato, to which no player of Chopin since Pachmann can aspire. The beauty, nostalgia and melancholy of the C sharp minor mazurka [op. 50, no. 3] (Columbia LX 1346) has a poignant quality which the very sensitive may find almost too affecting. It is difficult after these records to turn to those admirable but somewhat less divinely gifted performers who form the excellent staple diet upon which we normally, and quite happily and properly, subsist.

II

Małcużyński plays Chopin's E minor mazurka [no. 27, op. 41 no. 2] (Columbia LX 1228) very well. Michaelangli plays the celebrated Busoni transcription of the Chaconne from J. S. Bach's Violin Sonata (or Partita) in D minor with a splendid dramatic

effectiveness and a virtuosity which often delights the ear; but after the B flat Partita by the same composer, played by Lipatti, mentioned above, Michaelangli's very virtues as a player of Bach – the bright, clear Carpaccio-like colours, the glossy sunlit surface, not to speak of the absence of the particular kind of lyricism or 'inwardness' not known to the Mediterranean – are too greatly a part of the ordinary universe. For this reason, the great C minor Sonata [no. 32], op. 111, by Beethoven, played most adequately but without inspiration, by Solomon (HMV C 4000–3) is, after Schnabel and even after Petri, uninteresting. Yet Solomon is a very good and very honourable musician, and plays more seriously, with a greater respect for the composer, than those frivolous performers who choose, despite a gift for playing picturesque music with fire and charm, to record such worthless Spanish trifles as those of Messrs Alfonso or Mompou (HMV C 3859); Gonzalo Soriano, who plays *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* or works by Granados or Albeniz beautifully, plays these trivial pieces as they doubtless deserve.

I should like to end this brief survey with homage to the noble and icily beautiful playing of Claudio Arrau. The Schumann Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 34 (DB 6373–6, Detroit Symphony Orchestra conducted by Krueger), is not ideally suited for the cool and fastidious temperament of this distinguished Chilean pianist, but any performance by him, even as indifferently recorded as this, serves to restore one's standards.

The news of Artur Schnabel's death came shortly after I had written this. The term 'genius' should be sparingly used: among musicians of our own time, no one – with the exception of Toscanini and Casals – deserves it better.

Don Giovanni in Aix-en-Provence

This talk was broadcast on the BBC Third Programme at 9.25 p.m. on 26 January 1950. It was first recorded on 30 August 1949, but the tape was accidentally destroyed, so IB had to re-record it in a mobile van in Oxford, on the day it was broadcast. The recording has not been preserved, but a transcript was made by the BBC.

Don Giovanni, *International Music Festival of Aix-en-Provence, 1949*
Photo: Henry Ely

THE MUSICAL FESTIVAL in Aix-en-Provence is not a vast, ambitious undertaking like the magnificent festivals of Salzburg or Edinburgh or Lucerne. During the performances which took place in Aix during the last two weeks in July, apart from Sr Segovia and M. Robert Casadesus, no celebrated virtuosi came to delight the public from distant corners of the earth. The orchestras were those of the Baden-Baden Radio and of the Paris Conservatoire. The conductor was Herr Hans Rosbaud, from Baden-Baden, a good, experienced, scrupulous, honourable, devoted musician, but not a man of towering genius.

Yet the occasion was not only attractive, but remarkable; more attractive and more remarkable in one respect, at least, than the great rival summer festivals of Europe – it was fresh and spontaneous, and endowed with a degree of natural charm which these more splendid enterprises seldom possess.

One was reminded most vividly of the Salzburg of more than twenty years ago, before wealth and fashion had yet fully arrived upon the scene. One must not be too critical of wealth and fashion in their relation to the arts, for splendour and luxury often excite and stimulate the artist to exceptional heights: they create a climate which favours the full flowering of the genius of singers and players, since artists of all men stand in the greatest need of perpetual praise and homage and rewards. And Salzburg in the middle 1930s, when Furtwängler vied with Walter, and Toscanini rose to a height far above either – a level not hitherto attained in the experience of any living human being – Salzburg, with its millionaires and titles and patronage, its extravagance and snobbery and unpredictable mingling of genuine elegance with staggering vulgarity – Salzburg was by no means the least worthy symbol of a world which is now dead. And so the role of wealth and fashion must not be too much decried; but they do tend to create an atmosphere in which everything is concentrated upon the production, by great virtuosi, of a few immortal masterpieces. This leads to the neglect of music which offers less opportunity for display, so that in the ruthless brilliance and glitter the nobler and calmer virtues are passed by, and the air, laden with so much social and artistic smartness, is not propitious to the spontaneous freshness, the sincere musical feeling with which the enterprise, as a rule, originally began.

It was so in Salzburg, and must be so whenever the occasion succeeds in attracting the attention of international society. But those who visited Salzburg in its beginnings in the 1920s will remember a very different situation: the unspoilt years when Mozart was faithfully served by such conductors as Schalk and Bruno Walter, and was surrounded by such sympathetic lesser divinities as Gluck and Cimarosa, Goldoni and Strauss, Rossini and Donizetti; they will remember the simplicity and innocence of those early days, before Wagner incongruously invaded the scene and destroyed Hugo von Hofmannsthal's classical–rococo ideal. The Festival in Aix is still in this valuable youthful phase; but if it

succeeds as it deserves, it will not, one fears, be permitted to continue in it long.

All the Aix performances were permeated by a quality of enthusiasm, sincerity and harmonious cooperation, the sense of a new beginning upon which much hope and devotion had been lavished. This could be felt most strongly in what was the centre of the entire Festival, the performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The performances were held under almost ideal conditions: in the open, on not too large a stage, set against the facade of the Archbishop's Palace, which forms one side of an elegant baroque square, so shaped that not a sound seemed lost.

The opera began late in the evening, at half-past nine, in the cool night which succeeds the hot Provençal July day under a dim and usually cloudless sky. The audience sat in a darkness set off only by the stage lights, in which the pure and graceful lines of the seventeenth-century Palace conveyed precisely that degree of feeling, upon the vague frontiers between formal classicism and early, not fully fledged, Romanticism which this opera, more than any other, seems to require.

Don Giovanni is, perhaps, not only the most profound, but musically and dramatically the most complex and unfathomable, of Mozart's operas. It seems compounded of a great number of diverse strands of feeling; and they compose a texture, at once more integrated and more tantalisingly elusive, less capable of clear analysis, less capable even of description, except in purely formal terms, than the relatively simpler succession of gay and melancholy episodes in Mozart's other operas.

The mood is almost always uncertain, uncertain and full of rich ambiguity. Apart from the conventional arias of Don Giovanni, or Don Ottavio or Zerlina, which, for all their beauty, could occur in some of Mozart's other works, the texture, in particular the orchestral texture, of this opera appears to move simultaneously at many levels of expression, to possess a kind of many-faceted surface, which, like passages in Shakespeare's lyrical comedies, seems at once immensely fertile and not defined, something which cannot be pinned down, however delicately this is performed, as an expression of this or that definite mood or quality of feeling or musical intention.

Nor is the plot as foolish and irrelevant as, for example, those of *The Magic Flute* or *Die Entführung*. For once the librettist, Da

Ponte, for all his patent plagiarism from others, seems to have tried to express something genuinely poetical. The opera is full of uncertainties and riddles. Is it serious or comical? Is it an *opera seria* or an *opera buffa*? Is it a tragedy, or a Romantic melodrama, or a heartless Italian comedy, or a legend and an allegory? Poets and scholars of many nationalities have argued about this mystery for nearly a century and a half, and brought a wealth of evidence, historical, literary, musicological, to bear upon the problem. But it has defied their efforts: the opera remains unclassified and unclassifiable, unique, outside the categories. Professor Alfred Einstein wisely remarks that it does not belong to the conventional genres: it stands alone, *sui generis*.

Within this larger question, there are specific mysteries, unsolved and surely insoluble. To take but a few: Is Donna Anna in love with Don Giovanni? We cannot be sure that she is not. She protests too much. And why does she put Don Ottavio off with such unplausible persistency? True, he is no doubt a good man, but a prig and a bore, and a sorry sort of suitor, and the librettist, who was very far from being a puritan, must certainly have conceived him so; but does Donna Anna think him as unattractive as every audience in the world must? And what does Don Giovanni represent? He is a profligate and a blasphemer, bold, insatiable and cynical. But this leaves something unanswered: is he an end or a beginning? Is he the final culmination of a period of fine aristocratic freedom, of style and gaiety and independence, the last embodiment of a violent Renaissance love of life untrammeled by the rules of the severer age which is approaching, and is he finally got down by the new morality of Donna Anna, the bourgeois daughter of a bourgeois Mayor, and of her dreary philistine suitor? Or is he a figure beckoning from a distant horizon? Does he foreshadow some bold and splendid freedom from the restraints of convention, to be realised only in some unimaginable future, not on this earth perhaps, but in some impossible artistic heaven? Does he stand for the fascinating, irresistible and dreadfully destructive life of art or of love in conflict with the forces of the real world? Or is he merely a glittering and heartless adventurer, a handsome, hollow, two-dimensional figure of comedy, made of pasteboard, with no inner life, and therefore in the end no match for the more solid, duller

but more profound figures whose lives he wrecks, but whose tragic three-dimensional reality ultimately sweeps him out of existence?

All this seems half conveyed and half evaded by that wonderful, unbroken flow of concerted music, of which the Emperor Joseph said, after *Don Giovanni* had failed in Vienna, that the opera was divine, but not meat for the teeth of his Viennese. Or are such sociological or aesthetic speculations altogether pointless, since Mozart almost certainly did not indulge in them in any conscious fashion?

And how is the opera to be produced? In a gloomy, sixteenth-century Spanish setting, suggested by the Spanish original, or in the *grand siècle* decor of Molière's play?

At Aix the problem was settled with boldness and imagination. The costumes and scenery, designed by the gifted M. Cassandre, were late rococo, and contemporary with the date of the first performance, and the work was carried out with corresponding verve and life and wit, with no memory of Spain in any century, but only, perhaps, as Professor Dent supposes, of some Venetian town of the eighteenth century, familiar to the librettist Da Ponte, or to his friend the latter-day Don Juan, the famous Italian philanderer Casanova, who by this time was an old man, living out his days as a librarian in a Bohemian castle. Was Da Ponte thinking of his old friend when he composed the character of Don Giovanni? Or perhaps of his own amorous adventures in Venice as an unfrocked priest? Curiously enough there is evidence that Casanova was in Prague at about this time, and that he even had a hand in the writing of the words of the opera.

And who was Mozart thinking of? Was there a concrete image of some real person in the centre of the timeless legendary figure of Don Giovanni, the hero and villain of a plot which so shocked Beethoven by its immorality? We shall never know; there is no one who can tell us, for Mozart and Da Ponte are in their graves.

As for the singers in Aix, they were drawn from the most diverse quarters, and it is to the very great honour of France that the quality of performance was thought more important than any concession to national feeling. The majority of singers came from Italy, from the Scala in Milan; but Donna Anna came from Hamburg; Donna Elvira was born in Belgium; Zerlina, who acted and sang almost as well as it is possible, came from Vienna; and as for Don Giovanni himself, he was a young Italian named Signor

Capecchi, and carried his part off in marvellous style. He began, so I was told, before the war as a promising pianist; his hands were damaged during the fighting in the Italian Resistance, and he then, very fortunately, discovered in himself a most agreeable dramatic baritone.

It was remarkable that the principal singers, only two or three of whom can ever have sung together before, should have achieved so great a degree of common musical understanding, and such harmony of total effect. Don Giovanni acted with a dash and a gaiety and a bravura which is but seldom seen on the greater, but duller, stages of New York or Vienna or, dare one say it, even of Glyndebourne. Leporello responded to him with the greatest life and gusto. It was not, of course, a performance comparable to the immortal evenings in pre-war Salzburg or Covent Garden many, many years ago; but it had something which more polished performances often fatally lack – the spring of life, the sense of unbroken dramatic tension.

The essence of *Don Giovanni* is continuous movement, an uninterrupted flow of music and action – this alone gives the intricate and perpetually oscillating succession of moods and flavours that degree of accumulating dramatic tension which bursts into its climax in the tremendous entrance of the statue. Unless this continuous pulsation is kept up, the ingredient parts of *Don Giovanni* tend constantly to die off, and need perpetually to be artificially revived. Doubtless all great music requires this stream of life in some degree, but *The Magic Flute*, let us say, or *Così fan tutte*, with their relatively self-contained episodes, are in less vital need of this; whereas *Don Giovanni*, without it, flies into lifeless segments, be the voices never so beautiful and the orchestra never so precise and responsive.

It was this unity and life that the Aix performances possessed. Without them, the subtlety and depth of the music would not, indeed, have vanished, but would have remained stillborn. And the chief credit for this goes to the male singers. Donna Elvira sang in an exquisitely civilised and musical fashion, which made Signora Danco an admirable Fiordiligi at the Edinburgh *Così fan tutte*, but the very virtues of her well-tempered singing seemed too civilised and too cultured to convey a past so harrowed and tragic, and Donna Anna perhaps did not altogether rise to her role, which is admittedly one of the most exacting, mystifying and complicated in

opera. But the main thing was that the performance never sagged or drooped. At no point was there a sudden letdown, or a discordant clash, there was no sudden thinning of the texture, nor a tendency to grow mechanical. The voices blended, the movements of the actors fitted into the seamless pattern, the conductor's honesty and devotion kept the proportions true. No individual inserted himself – his own personality – between the audience and the music, there was no exaggeration, no over-insistence, no self-dramatisation, and the results were balanced and beautiful.

There was, of course, a great deal of good music in Aix besides Mozart; beginning with such old writers as Monteverdi and Gabrieli and Vivaldi, and the wonderful Third Lesson from the *Tenebrae* for Holy Wednesday composed by François Couperin in 1714, and ending with the noble *Motets for a Time of Penitence* by Francis Poulenc, written in 1938–9. But *Don Giovanni* overshadowed them all.

Since it is a most complicated and most delicate, most precariously balanced, infinitely shaded work, every performance of it is a far more perilous enterprise than is commonly realised. Enigmatic and tantalising, it strews the path of the listener with musical and dramatic (and at moments almost moral) question marks, even while it ravishes his senses. Despite the familiar beauty of the famous arias and duets, much of this music remains as fresh and original and mysterious as on that evening, one hundred and sixty-two years ago, almost to a day, when the citizens of Prague, more intelligent than the citizens of Vienna a year later, rose to the occasion and gave Mozart an ovation. It needs, in its performance, a degree of tense absorption and active and perpetually changing sensibility which is seldom present in those over-confident, slightly blasé singers, with too much experience, who turn it all too easily into a cosy and meaningless string of agreeable airs, tied to a ridiculous story. Those who took part in the Aix Festival are still in a rising phase of eagerness and continuous creation: with their modest means, their audiences interspersed with enthusiastic students from the local university, and the uniquely beautiful harmony of nature and of art which they have chosen as its setting, they have succeeded in accomplishing a masterpiece.

Mozart at Glyndebourne

First published as 'Mozart at Glyndebourne Half a Century Ago' in John Higgins (ed.), *Glyndebourne: A Celebration* (London, 1984: Cape), 101–9

I wish that I could say that I was a member of that small company which, drawn by friendship, curiosity, hope, or simple faith, boarded the historic train which went from Victoria to Sussex in May 1934 for the inaugural performance of *Le nozze di Figaro*. Nor, I am ashamed to say, did I go in 1935. I thought only about the Salzburg Festival, which I visited every year from 1929 until the *Anschluss*. I was not, before the war, as I now am, an addicted reader of periodicals, and had simply not taken in the new musical phenomenon. Nobody I spoke to at Oxford, where I lived as undergraduate and don, so much as mentioned Glyndebourne's existence before 1936 at the earliest. Yet I did not move in wholly philistine circles.

In 1936 I did go to Glyndebourne, and heard a performance of *Le nozze di Figaro* which, as I can confidently testify after almost fifty years, I still remember vividly: and remember as having been simply wonderful. Mariano Stabile was the best Figaro I have ever heard, in Salzburg and Milan as well as Glynde**[102]**bourne; and he was, if anything, even better in Rossini's *Barbiere*. The Countess at Glyndebourne, in that year and later, was the Finnish singer Aulikki Rautawaara. The conductor and director were then, and for many excellent years, Fritz Busch and Carl Ebert. Busch was the equal of, and at times superior to, even Franz Schalk and Bruno Walter; and the Glyndebourne orchestra under him rose to unexpected heights. Ebert must have been the best director of classical opera in Europe. Both were, as is not always the case with even the most gifted artists, men of inborn aesthetic sense and taste; and no composer requires this as much as Mozart. The orchestra was far less accomplished than the Vienna Philharmonic, yet the freshness, the wit, the sheer verve, the inner pulse, the forward movement, the marvellous enthusiasm lifted it above any performance of *Figaro* I had heard in Salzburg, Munich or anywhere else.

Lotte Lehmann in Salzburg was incomparably the best Countess that I or any member of my generation could have

heard; but both the Count (Brownlee) and Figaro (Stabile) acted and sang better at Glyndebourne; Cherubino (Helletsgruber) and Susanna (Mildmay) both sang exquisitely. Not only the gardens, the flowers, the summer evening, the novelty of it all, but that something so enchanting could happen in England at all, that was to me – and surely to many others – a source of lasting astonishment and delight.

There were, of course, the Covent Garden summer seasons, with international casts, often marvellous. But a festival devoted to a particular composer or particular type of opera is something very different. A combination of a great many factors is needed to constitute a festival of the first order. There is the pattern formed by the relationships of the works performed; there is the central conception, the precise direction of the imagination, the **[103]** care and unrelenting concentration, which generate a particular style; there are the genuine love of music and responsiveness of the audience; above all, the quality of ensemble, the depth of inner understanding which, for example, players of chamber music can achieve at their best – a coherent vision which singers and players can attain, but all too seldom do. The ensembles achieved at Glyndebourne were, and are, of unique quality, found, so far as I can tell, nowhere else.

The right combination of these elements can be reached momentarily even under repertory conditions: but continuously only where long preparation and patient genius are at work. Busch and Ebert created ensembles which approached perfection. This was made possible at Glyndebourne where the entire company lived together for many weeks – their lives and artistic work became interwoven with one another's during the late spring and early summer months, so that even those of moderate gifts were inspired to rise above themselves. The guidance of the two great masters filled the musicians with sufficient confidence in their own powers to achieve a degree of understanding that enabled them to create their own unique version of the great Mozart operas. The working conditions at Glyndebourne were and are unique. Who, in their senses, could have predicted then with confidence that in an England not notably devoted to opera in general, or Mozart in particular, such a venture could be successful? So brilliantly successful almost immediately after the first few performances?

As everyone knows, this would not have happened without the peerless personality of John Christie. He had the single-mindedness of a secular visionary; he swept aside objections and apparently insuperable difficulties pointed out to him by cautious advisers. His boldness, indomitable will and total independence – above all this **[104]** last attribute, more often found in England fifty years ago than it is today (for reasons on which I will not speculate), were a major cultural asset to our country. Like every great intendant in the history of opera, he displayed a degree of personal authority, indeed, of the indispensable element of *terribilità*, which rivalled that of Diaghilev and Toscanini.

It was easier, after all, to create the Salzburg Festival – music in general and opera in particular had been for many years an intrinsic part of Austrian culture and life. Opera in this sense, despite the international seasons at Covent Garden, was not part of the British cultural heritage. John Christie intuitively understood how to realise his ideal, more, I suspect, by instinct and temperament than by rational calculation – the mere appointment of Busch and Ebert was an inspired decision.

Neither of these great masters was a pioneer of methods of interpretation of classical works. Both, I believe, took it for granted that no matter how closely a musical score was related to every nuance of the words or the story, it and it alone played the dominant role: *prima la musica*. The essence of the drama was conveyed by the music. It followed that what mattered above all else was the quality of the singers, the orchestra, the conductor and the chorus master.

After the revolution brought about by Wagner and the conception of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, production and design in opera were intended, above all, to serve the music and the words: this alone required the producer, in particular, to be profoundly musical. The libretti might carry clear moral or social or political implications, like those of, for example, *Figaro* or *Fidelio*; but this was not, in the days of which I am writing, as yet generally thought to require additional underlining by the production or the decor: it was assumed that the words and **[105]** music carried their own overt meaning, given them consciously by their creators; all this set limits to the freedom of performers and producers alike.

Even after the rise of the modern movement in poetry and the visual arts, and despite the bold new stage productions of

Meyerhold in Moscow and Piscator in Berlin in the 1920s, relatively little attempt was made to bring out by extra-musical means the 'inner' political, sociological or psycho-pathological significance of the libretti and the scores, of which the composer and poet showed no conscious awareness. The political import of, say, *Figaro* was, no doubt, clear enough to Mozart and Da Ponte, and certainly to Beaumarchais and the imperial censors, that of *Rigoletto* and *Don Carlos* to Victor Hugo and Schiller, as well as to Verdi and probably his librettists. But there is, so far as I know, no evidence that – even if any of these artists suspected that their creative imagination might be affected by subliminal forces – they were the unconscious vehicles which carried psychological or sociological content very different from their own conscious conceptions and purposes; that they wished these latent structures or drives to be revealed by the type of techniques later employed by symbolists, expressionists, surrealists, dialectical materialists and the like. Whatever the value of this kind of approach to art in general, and opera in particular – and its interest and originality cannot be denied – it is the product of our own day. Neither the composers nor the librettists of the golden age of European opera, from Gluck to the First World War, so far as I know, thought in this fashion; nor did their most admired interpreters before and after and during the interwar years. Neither Fritz Busch nor Bruno Walter, neither Arturo Toscanini nor Erich Kleiber, supposed that they were engaged on a task of exhumation, of attempting to breathe a kind of new life – sometimes drawn from the world of the unconscious, **[106]** individual or collective – into what might otherwise remain noble corpses, museum pieces of little contemporary significance. The masterpieces of both the past and the present spoke to them directly, without reference to processes unknown to their creators, and they, and their producers and designers, so conveyed them.

This, too, has in general been the practice of their most gifted successors – we have not been lacking in conductors of genius in our own day. I wish to offer no judgements on the explicit value of these wide differences of approach. The new conception of the immense importance of the producer and the designer, as called upon to lay bare non-rational processes in the minds of the librettist and the composer, and their personal or social roots, can be fascinating, and in the hands of musically gifted producers has

been sociologically and aesthetically revealing and transforming; and this effect may well be permanent. I wish to do no more than point to the difference between this attitude and the ideals of the founders of Glyndebourne, which seem to me to have given life and sustenance for half a century to this nobly conceived and entirely delightful institution. Long may it flourish.

In 1936 all five of Mozart's most celebrated operas were performed at Glyndebourne. Few who heard Alexander Kipnis (identified correctly, but oddly, as American) as Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* are likely to forget it; nor Salvatore Baccaloni as Osmin, nor Julia Moor as Constanze, in *Die Entführung*. Moreover, wonder of wonders, it presently became clear that good British singers existed: excellent artists such as Roy Henderson or David Franklin, who, provided they were given adequate conditions, could hold their own in the company of celebrated foreign virtuosi.

Of course the charm and beauty of the Sussex countryside, the divine nature of the music, the techni**[107]**cal perfection and exceptional artistic quality of the performances, and, year after year, the undiminished sense of occasion, all played their part in creating the idyll. For such it was for me and, I wish to believe, for most of the audience at Glyndebourne. But there was also something else: the spontaneity, informality, lack of solemnity of the atmosphere, the total absence of the kind of pomp and circumstance which were such an inevitable (and to their audiences to some extent welcome) attribute of Salzburg and, more particularly, Bayreuth; the sense of continuous enjoyment pervaded everything. All this was, without question, principally due to the personality and clearly felt dictatorship – unpredictable, benevolent, idiosyncratic, generous, life-giving – of one man.

I well remember, both before and after the war, the wonderful spectacle of John Christie, vaguely John-Bull-like, perhaps more Churchillian, standing in front of his opera house, at the point at which the cars and buses discharge their loads of visitors, waving them on with impatient gestures into the open doors of the building, much as he must once have marshalled boys at Eton during his career as a master in that establishment. His presence – despite the motley international amalgam of artists, visitors, critics – made the scene utterly and indescribably English, not British but English.

I recall a most exhilarating *Don Pasquale* and a good, but not exceptional, *Macbeth*. But my predominant memories of Glyndebourne before the war are, naturally enough, of Mozart. I have mentioned excellent British singers. As for the masters from abroad, no one who heard Willi Domgraf-Fassbänder as Figaro, Guglielmo, Papageno; Irene Eisinger as Despina, Blondchen, Barbarina; Luise Helletsgruber as Elvira, Dorabella, Cherubino; Salvatore Baccaloni as Leporello; Stabile and Baccaloni as Figaro and Bartolo, or as Malatesta and Don **[108]** Pasquale; Walter Ludwig as Belmonte – no one who heard these could possibly ask for a higher degree of musical pleasure, short-lived but intense.

When the young and the middle-aged say, as they often do, that it is a common illusion of the old that there were better singers and performances in the days of their youth, this is not always so: gramophone records (and even some memories) do not delude. The recorded ensembles towards the end of the second act of *Figaro*, in the scene of parting in the first act of *Così*, or the unmasking of Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, are there to testify to the reliability of our memories.

Glyndebourne spread its wings far more widely after the war. *Fidelio*, the brilliant succession of Rossini comedies conducted by Vittorio Gui – a repertoire which outdid the Piccola Scala – the operas of Richard Strauss, Britten, Stravinsky, Donizetti, Bellini, Henze, Monteverdi, Cavalli, Prokofiev, Janáček: the mounting of these with varying, but often splendid, results, is a source of justified pride on the part of the house.

But it is, in the end, its first love – the operas of Mozart – which has continued at the heart of the enterprise. Of course Munich, Vienna, Covent Garden have served Mozart nobly, and above all Salzburg then and now. But I wish to testify that for me, and I believe I speak for a good many of us in this country, the idea of what an opera by Mozart is and can be, was altered – indeed, transformed – by Glyndebourne and it alone. For a good many members of my generation it was the performances (and, perhaps, at least as much the magnificent recordings, technically imperfect as they must now seem) that shaped our outlook, and vastly raised the ceiling of our expectations. I cannot help rehearsing the sacred litany again: Willi Domgraf-Fassbänder and (the now almost forgotten) Aulikki Rautawaara, John Brownlee and Ivar Andresen, Mariano Stabile and **[109]** Salvatore Baccaloni,

Irene Eisinger, Audrey Mildmay and Luise Helletsgruber – even the mysterious Zinaida Lisichkina (over-correctly and uninformatively identified as Nicaraguan) as Queen of the Night – and, above all, the matchless ensembles which only Glyndebourne seemed (and still seems) able to generate.

All this became for us the original ideal, the Platonic Idea, imprinted for life on our memory and imagination, no matter how much overlaid and transformed by later experiences, of what the canonical operas by Mozart (including *Idomeneo*) are and remain. It may be that I speak for myself alone. I am reluctant to believe this, but even if it is so, I can say only that in that dawn it was bliss (musically, not at all socially or politically) to be alive.

Tchaikovsky and Eugene Onegin

Glyndebourne Festival Programme Book 1971, 58–63; repr. as 'Tchaikovsky, Pushkin and Onegin' in *Musical Times* 121 (1980), 163–8, and in *Eugene Onegin* (Oxford University Opera Club programme) ([Oxford], 1992)

On 18 May 1877[10] Petr Il′ich Tchaikovsky wrote to his brother Modest Il′ich:

> Last week I happened to be at Mme Lavrovsky's. There was talk about suitable subjects for opera. Her stupid husband talked the most incredible nonsense, and suggested the most impossible subjects. Elizaveta Andreevna smiled amiably and did not say a word. Suddenly she said, 'What about *Eugene Onegin*?'[11] It seemed a wild idea to me, and I said nothing. Then when I supped alone in a tavern **[59]** I remembered *Onegin*, thought about it, and began to find her idea not impossible; then it gripped me, and before I had finished my meal I had come to a decision. I hurried off at once to find Pushkin, found one with some difficulty, went home, re-read it with enthusiasm, and spent an entirely sleepless night, the result of which was the scenario of an enchanting opera on Pushkin's text. Next day I went to see Shilovsky[12] and he is now working furiously on my scenario.

Tchaikovsky goes on to sketch the scenario:

> Here it is in brief: Act 1, Scene 1: The curtain rises on old Larina and the nurse: they remember the old days and make jam. Duet of the old women. Singing heard from the house. Tatiana and Olga sing a duet accompanied by a harp on a text by Zhukovsky. Peasants appear bearing the last sheaf: they sing

[10] Dates are given according to the pre-Revolutionary Julian calendar: for the Gregorian dates used in the West add 12 days.

[11] The correct phonetic rendering is 'Yevgyéni Anyégin'. But *Eugene Onegin* is the ordinary English title of both the poem and the opera, and will be used hereafter.

[12] Konstantin Stepanovich Shilovsky (1849–93), a minor poet, justly forgotten.

> and dance. Suddenly the servant boy announces "Guests!" Panic. Enter Onegin and Lensky. Ceremony of their introduction and hospitality (cranberry juice). Evgeny talks about his impressions to Lensky, the women to each other: quintet à la Mozart. Old woman goes off to prepare supper. The young stay behind and walk off in pairs; they pair off (as in *Faust*). Tatiana is at first shy, then falls in love. Scene 2: Scene with the nurse and Tatiana's letter. Scene 3: Onegin and Tatiana. Act 2, Scene 1: Tatiana's birthday. Ball. Lensky's jealous scene. He insults Onegin and challenges him to a duel. General horror. Scene 2: Lensky's aria before his death, duel (pistols). Act 3, Scene 1: Moscow. Ball at the Assembly. Tatiana meets rows of aunts and cousins. They sing a chorus. Appearance of the General. He falls in love with Tatiana. She tells him her story and agrees to marry him. Scene 2: Petersburg. Tatiana is waiting for Onegin. He appears. Enormous duet. Tatiana, after the explanation, yields to a feeling of love for Onegin and struggles against it. He implores her. Enter the husband. Duty wins. Onegin flees in despair.

This libretto was preserved almost intact, save that the penultimate scene was replaced by that of the ball in St Petersburg at which Onegin meets Tatiana and Gremin, and the episode of Gremin's proposal to Tatiana was omitted. The opera opens with a duet of Tatiana and Olga (not of the 'old women') on a text by Pushkin (not Zhukovsky): Gremin does not appear in the last scene. Tchaikovsky continues:

> You won't believe how passionate I have become about this subject. How delighted I am to be rid of Ethiopian princesses, Pharaohs, poisonings, all the conventional stuff. What an infinity of poetry there is in *Onegin*. I am not deceived: I know that there will be little movement and few stage effects in this opera. The poetry, humanity, simplicity of the theme, combined with a text of genius, will more than make up for these shortcomings.

Nine days later he wrote to his adoring patroness Nadezhda von Meck that a libretto on Pushkin's text was being composed for him: 'a bold idea, don't you think?'

Why should he or anyone else have thought this idea 'wild', or even 'bold'? The plot of Pushkin's 'novel in verse' has a certain intrinsic operatic quality: indeed, the famous monologues and dialogues between Onegin and Tatiana, Tatiana and the nurse, Lensky and Olga had been recited by actors on the Russian stage since the early 1840s. What daunted Tchaikovsky was the mere thought of touching this great and sacred national masterpiece, of tampering with it at all; he constantly confesses to a feeling that he might be committing a sacrilege, and he defends his treatment of it as an act of sincere homage to a poet of unsurpassed genius.

Tchaikovsky's fears will be intelligible to anyone who knows that Pushkin occupies a unique position in his country's literature. Since his death in a duel in 1837 (and, indeed, to some degree in his lifetime), he has been recognised by Russians as being beyond all question the greatest poet and prose writer their country has produced. What Dante is to Italians, Shakespeare to Englishmen, Goethe to Germans, Pushkin is to the Russians. *Eugene Onegin* is his supreme masterpiece, the first and, for some critics, the greatest novel in the Russian language. It has dominated the imagination of virtually every major Russian writer since its day.

In Pushkin's story, for the first time, simple and uncorrupted human beings come into contact with falsity, inhumanity, craven weakness – the debased values of the society in which they are condemned to live. Tatiana is the ancestress of the pure-hearted, morally passionate, at times *exaltées*, heroic Russian women whose unswerving idealism and suffering is celebrated by the great Russian novelists of the nineteenth century, notably Turgenev, and is in danger of becoming a stereotype among their successors in the twentieth. Lensky and Onegin, too, are just as hopelessly alienated from this society: Lensky, passionate, poetical, his head deep in German metaphysical clouds, is incapable of facing the dreary reality of the Russian society of his time, escapes into romantic illusions and lives and dies for his fantasies. Onegin, a stronger and more ambitious man, stifled equally in a society in which he cannot develop his nature and his gifts, runs away from genuine feeling, and protects himself, like Byron's demonic heroes,

by defiant coldness, cynicism, and a self-dramatising, sardonic rejection of common humanity and its traditional values.

Both represent types of 'the superfluous person'[13] – those unusually sensitive and gifted human beings who cannot find a place in the society to which they are born, or a form of life that would satisfy their moral and intellectual needs, or at least not reduce them to impotence or despair. For all its exhilarating brilliance and wit, the poem is an expression of a bitterly frustrated society. No one, save the light-hearted Olga, is contented in Pushkin's poem: everyone suffers and comes to terms in the end with a bleak reality. Even the conventional Mme Larina was forced to abandon the man she loved to marry her brigadier and settle down to her round of routine duties and boring country life; she carries on with the aid of the saving grace of habit – 'habit [she sings with the old nurse Filipevna in the very beginning of the opera] is heaven's gift to us: sent us in place of happiness'. Filipevna, too, sings Tatiana to sleep with the story of how bitterly she had cried when she was led to the altar with an unknown boy chosen for her by her parents.

Tatiana's silent, inward-directed passion, nourished on the sentimental novels of her day, generates an image of the ideal lover; blindly she identifies it with Onegin; the Onegin of her imagination screens the true Onegin from her eyes. His smooth, faultlessly phrased, polite, faintly ironical, wholly sensible rejection of her love inflicts a wound upon her that never heals. In due course she, too, learns her lesson. Like her mother, like the nurse, she marries without love a general who adores her, and to whom she is grateful. When, in the last scene, she rejects Onegin, whom she still loves, it is because she has firmly stabilised **[60]** her life at another level, has capitulated, has renounced the possibility of personal fulfilment.

This is Tolstoy's morality in *Anna Karenina*, not Anna's. Tatiana, like Turgenev's heroines, is Anna's direct antithesis. Onegin,

[13] [The concept of the 'superfluous person' was given its familiar name by Turgenev in *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka* ('Diary of a superfluous person', 1850): see entry for 23 March 1850: I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow/Leningrad, 1960–8), *Sochineniya*, v 185–9. The term was also used as a catchphrase by Dostoevsky in *Zapiski iz podpol'ya* (1864), *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo v XVIII tomakh* (Moscow, 2003–6), vi 7–80.]

whose new passion for Tatiana is excited by her refusal to take notice of his pursuit, sees the door to a genuine life shut to him for ever, and is left with no further motive for existing. Lensky is destroyed by a total inability to come to terms with reality: he is wounded by Olga's light-hearted flirtation with Onegin, which he mistakes for betrayal of his love; infuriated by his friend's callous desire to amuse himself; dominated by a romantic conception of honour and by fear of seeming a poltroon, of cutting a ridiculous figure. He discovers that Olga's feeling for him, such as it is, has in fact not changed; but it is too late to retreat: he dies (as Pushkin was to die) because he is caught in a net, partly of his own making, from which he cannot, and does not want, to disentangle himself.

Loneliness, frustration, inability to find fulfilment in a human relationship, a bitter sense of failure, self-pity and, finally, despair – these are the feelings that Tchaikovsky knew most intimately, and he wished to write about what he knew:

> The sensations of an Egyptian princess, a Pharaoh, some mad Nubian, I do not know and do not understand [he wrote to the composer Sergey Taneev on 2 January 1878]. Some kind of instinct tells me that these people must move, talk, feel, and therefore also to express their feelings in a peculiar fashion of their own – it is not ours. Hence my music […] will have as much connection with the personages in *Aida* as the elaborate, gallant speeches of the heroes of Racine, who address each other as *vous*, have in common with […] the real Orestes, the real Andromache, etc. […] I don't want kings, queens, risings of the people, battles, marches, in a word, everything that makes up the attributes of 'grand opera'. I am looking for a drama which is intimate, yet powerful, based on the conflict of attitudes which I have myself experienced or witnessed, which touches me to the quick. […] What I want to say is that Aida is so remote from me, her unhappy love for Radamès (whom I cannot imagine either) moves me so little, that my music would not be genuinely and deeply felt, as all good music must be. Not long ago I saw [Meyerbeer's] *L'Africaine* in Genoa. The miseries of this poor African! Slavery, imprisonment, death under a poisonous tree, her rival's triumph as she herself lies dying, all this she suffers – but I don't feel in the least sorry for her. Yet

> here do we have 'effects'! – a ship, fights, all kinds of goings on. To hell with them all – all these 'effects'!

Onegin's feelings, Tatiana's feelings, as he understood them, meant everything to him:

> I have always [he wrote to Taneev on 14 January 1891] tried to express in music as sincerely and truthfully as I could that which was in the text. Such truth and sincerity come not from the work of the intellect, but spring from inner feeling. To give this feeling life and warmth I have always tried to choose stories in which the characters are real, living men whose feelings are like my own.

The sweet, at times perhaps over-sweet, melancholy and resignation of the principal figures in the opera are to some degree read into Pushkin by Tchaikovsky, because these 'feelings are like my own'. Tchaikovsky was not the ideal composer for Pushkin's poem. Pushkin's verse is taut, crystalline, of classical simplicity and purity, luminous, direct, passionate, sometimes ironical or gay, at other times sublime and magnificent, always of an indescribable freshness and beauty. It is as untranslatable as Sophocles or Racine. The only modern artist whom he resembles is Mozart; with Mozart and perhaps Goethe he can claim to be the greatest and most universal genius since the Renaissance. Yet Tchaikovsky's setting of *Onegin* is neither silly nor vulgar, as some ferocious literary critics have maintained. He knew himself how far he fell below Pushkin – hence his acute nervousness about scaling this unapproachable peak. He adored the poem, and tells us that he had been – like so many of his compatriots – in love with Tatiana from his earliest youth. He found the subject irresistible; and his opera, whatever the relation or absence of relation of the score to Pushkin's text, remains a deeply nostalgic, melodious, lyrical masterpiece, in its own way as moving a memorial to the dying, but still elegant and attractive, life of the decaying country houses of the Russian gentry as the novels and stories of Turgenev, with whom indeed he has much in common. The lyrical *arioso* recitatives, the long monologues (Tatiana's sleepless night, Lisa's in *The Queen of Spades*) are vocal symphonic poems which

convey a vivid psychological portrait of character, and express intimate personal feeling and experience. They have their counterparts in Turgenev's (and to some degree Chekhov's) writings.

Tchaikovsky set to work with the enthusiasm that gripped him whenever he contemplated a new and ambitious work. He began *Onegin* towards the end of May 1877, and finished two-thirds of it by 23 June. 'This opera will […] have little dramatic movement in it; on the other hand, its social aspects will be interesting; and then how much poetry there is in it all!' he had written to Nadezhda von Meck on 27 May. 'I feel that Pushkin's text will work upon me in the most inspiring manner, if only I can find that peace of mind which is **[61]** necessary for composing.' The opposite occurred. He received a letter from an admiring lady suggesting marriage to him. He explained to her that he could not love her, and would at most be a good and faithful friend. She declared herself prepared to marry him on these terms. He decided that in his position he had no choice. The marriage occurred on 6 July and led, inevitably, to a severe nervous breakdown. In a hysterical condition, approaching madness, he fled from his wife; towards the end of August he slowly began to recover. He now had no doubt that his opera was doomed to failure:

> Now that the first transport of enthusiasm is over […] [he wrote to his ever-faithful friend on 30 august], I feel sure my opera […] will be misunderstood by the mass of the public. The content is too artless, there are no theatrical effects, the music is neither brilliant nor 'effective'. […] Only those who look in an opera for the musical re-creation of feelings remote from the tragic and the theatrical – ordinary, simple, human feeling, only they will (I hope) like my opera. In a word, it is written with sincerity, and it is on this sincerity that all my hopes are based.

In October he went to Clarins, where he orchestrated his Fourth Symphony. Having finished the symphony on 6 December, he worked on the opera, which was completed on 20 January 1878 in San Remo. As always, regular hours of dedicated work restored him to himself. His letters grew more calm. Taneev had complained to him that the first act was too static: he tried to express the character of the *dramatis personae* not by action or by

music, but by the words they spoke, the words which Pushkin used to describe them; but the methods of a novel or a poem cannot be effective in opera; here character must be conveyed by the music, not by self-descriptive statements. Agate in Weber's *Der Freischütz* conveys her dreamy nature by being heard at prayer, or singing on a balcony at night, not by declaring that she is dreamy: whereas Olga in Tchaikovsky's opera informs her audience that she is gay and thoughtless, Tatiana explains that she is pensive and fond of books, and so on.

Turgenev, who had looked at the piano score in 1878, wrote in similar terms to Tolstoy on 15 November: 'the music is marvellous, the lyrical and tuneful moments are particularly good, but what a libretto! Pushkin's verses describing the characters are put in the mouths of the characters themselves. For example, the lines about Lensky, "He sang of the faded flower of his life – when he was scarcely eighteen years of age", in the libretto become "I sing about the faded flower of my life" etc., and so everywhere.'[14] This did not worry the composer, who was tormented by only one thought, that his music might not be worthy of the divine poet. 'Pushkin's exquisite texture will be vulgarised if it is transferred to the stage, with its routine, its idiotic traditions, its veterans of the male and female sex.' As for the fact that the opera might not be effective on the stage:

> You may be right [he wrote to Taneev on 2 January 1878] when you say the opera is not 'scenic' enough. The answer is – to hell with scenic effects. That fact that I haven't got a theatrical streak has long been recognised and I don't feel particularly gloomy about it. If you find that the work is not 'theatrical', don't stage it, don't play it. I wrote it because one fine day I suddenly felt an inconceivably strong desire to transform into music everything in *Onegin* that asks for it. I did this as well as I was able. I worked with indescribable absorption and pleasure without worrying much about movement, 'effectiveness', etc. Damn effects. […] What I need is human beings, not puppets – […] beings similar to myself who have experienced sensations which I, too, have experienced and which I understand.

[14] In fact no such lines are to be found in the libretto, but Turgenev's (and Taneev's) general charge is perfectly valid.

And on 24 January he writes:

> I have one anxiety – far more important than any fear that the public will not tremble with excitement about the *dénouement*. I am talking about my sacrilegious presumption when, reluctantly, I have to add to Pushkin's verse my own or, in places, Shilovsky's lines. That is what upsets me. As for the music, I can tell you, that if ever music was written with sincere passion, with love of the subject and the characters in it, it is the music for *Onegin*. I trembled and melted with inexpressible delight while writing it. If the listener feels even the smallest part of what I experienced when I was composing this opera, I shall be utterly content and ask for nothing more. Let *Onegin* be a tedious spectacle with warmly written music – that is all I want.

The central scene of the opera is Tatiana's letter scene in the first act, which he composed before the rest. Tatiana's fevered night, and the outpouring of love and terror, self-doubt and self-torture determine the mood of the work. Its central theme (in E flat major) occurs in the prelude to the opera. Her tormented doubts about Onegin – does he come as a guardian angel or a tempter? – is echoed in the prelude to the fatal birthday party in Act 2. The music of her resolve to write, come what may, is heard again in Onegin's mounting passion for her at the ball in Act 3. (Act 4, which expresses sober reality and an end to romantic revolt against convention, is sharply different.) Ernest Newman's description of the letter aria as 'one of the masterpieces of musical-dramatic psychology'[15] would surely have pleased the composer, who wrote of this scene: 'if I burnt with the fire of inspiration when I wrote the letter scene – it was **[62]** Pushkin who lit this fire; if my music contains a tenth part of the beauty of the book, I shall be very proud and content'.[16]

Onegin must not be 'an opera': Tchaikovsky called it 'Lyrical scenes in three acts'.[17] He will not offer it to the Imperial opera

[15] Ernest Newman, *Opera Nights* (London, 1943), 105.
[16] Letter of 28–30 September 1883 to Nadezhda von Meck.
[17] Letter of 2 August 1878 to Petr Jurgenson.

houses of St Petersburg or Moscow. The opera must be treated as an intimate piece of lyrical chamber music, best played and sung 'in private houses';[18] in this way, it would enter the consciousness of sincere, musically sensitive people. Then, when the demand 'from below'[19] rose to sufficient pitch of intensity, the great opera houses would be bound to ask for it. That was the way to do it: let the pupils of the Imperial Conservatoire in Moscow do it first. He wrote to Karl Albrecht, choirmaster at the Moscow Conservatory, that the singers in the Conservatoire need not be first rate, but they must be 'very well disciplined and firm', and must be able 'to act simply and well'.[20] The production must not be luxurious and meaningless; care must be taken about fidelity to the period, above all the historical accuracy of the costumes, 'the choruses must not be the flock of sheep which appear on the Imperial stages, they must be human beings who participate in the action of the opera; […] the conductor should not be a machine, or even a musician like Nápravník,[21] whose only anxiety is that where the score says C sharp, the musicians should not play C natural, but rather a real leader of the orchestra. […] I need […] artists and, moreover, friends.' As for the singers, 'to wait for an ideal Tatiana may be to wait until some distant age'. 'I adored Tatiana,' he told his friend Nikolay Kashkin, 'and was terribly indignant about Onegin, who seemed to me a cold and heartless fop.'[22] Again, Onegin is 'a cold dandy, penetrated to his marrow by the odious conventional values'[23] of the *beau monde*, and 'a bored social lion who out of boredom, out of trivial irritation, without deliberate intention, as a result of a fatal combination of circumstances takes the life of a young man whom, in fact, he loves'.[24] But he is not a monster: his tormented self-disgust at the destruction he wilfully causes is both dramatically and musically fully expressed. As for Lensky, 'he must

[18] Letter of 4 February 1878 to Petr Jurgenson.

[19] ibid.

[20] Letter of 3 December 1877 to Karl Albrecht, from which the next three quotations are also taken.

[21] Eduard Francevič Nápravník, chief conductor of the St Petersburg opera.

[22] N. N. Kashkin, 'Iz vospominanii o P. I. Chaikovskom' ['From My Recollections of Tchaikovsky], in *Proshloe russkoi muzyki: materialy I ussledovaniya*, *I: P. I. Chaikovskii* (Petersburg, 1920), 99–132 at 119.

[23] Letter of 16 December 1877 to Nadezhda von Meck.

[24] Letter of 28 September 1883 to Nadezhda von Meck.

be a youth, eighteen years old, with thick curls and the impulsive, spontaneous movements of a young poet *à la* Schiller'.[25] Sincere young singers, Pushkin's marvellous words – this will compensate for everything.

And indeed Pushkin's text is extensively used. From the opening duet (of Tatiana and Olga) in the first scene, which is a setting of a poem by Pushkin that is not in *Eugene Onegin*, to Onegin's lines to Tatiana before entering the house with which the first scene ends, virtually all but the peasants' chorus (which is an adapted folk song), and the words of the second half of Lensky's first aria ('I love you, Olga') is authentic Pushkin; there are interpolated connecting links, but they are scarcely noticeable. In the second scene, the confession of love which Tchaikovsky is the heart and centre of the work, scarcely a word of the text has been tampered with. In the third scene, even the words of the chorus of peasant girls are Pushkin's own. In the second act, the proportion is a good deal smaller. Onegin's stricken speech at the Larin's party after he provokes Lensky's insult, and, in the second scene, only Lensky's famous last aria and the rivals' melancholy duet over a predicament which neither desires, but neither seems able to avert, come from the poem. In the third act, Onegin's monologue, the first half of Gremin's aria, and the dialogue of Onegin and Tatiana, and, in the final scene, Tatiana's opening words to Onegin were composed by Pushkin; the rest were supplied by the faithful Shilovsky.

Even more faithfully than Bizet in *Carmen*, which he so much admired, Tchaikovsky sough to fuse every word in the text with its music; his letters to his various correspondents give evidence that he lived through this work more intensely than even he was accustomed to when composing a major piece. He is himself Tatiana, he is Lensky, he is at times even the bitter and disdainful Onegin in his moments of misery. If these are not Pushkin's creations, they have been transmuted into an equally authentic work of art. This is not Gounod's *Faust*, nor Thomas's *Mignon*; the wedding of music to words is genuine. *Figaro*, or *Falstaff*, or *Pelléas* (for all Maeterlinck's protests) are closer parallels. Nevertheless, critics have from time to time complained that the libretto of the opera is a monstrous travesty of Pushkin's text. In particular, it is

[25] Letter of 16 December 1877 to Nadezhda von Meck.

said that too much in the poem has been left out. Where, it is asked, are Pushkin's brilliant evocations of the St Petersburg social scene, of Onegin's character, of his day from early morning until late into the night, which the poet describes so marvellously? Where is Onegin's own agonised letter to Tatiana? Where is the irony and the charm with which Lensky's complex relationship to him is conveyed? Where, above all, are the marvellous descriptions of country life and nature to which there is no parallel in any literature? Why is the minor but marvellously drawn figure of Zaretsky reduced **[63]** to nullity? Why is Gremin, who in Pushkin is still in his thirties, transformed into a pompous, limping old general, vastly older than his wife or, indeed, his kinsman Onegin? Why does Triquet sing a worthless little tune – that of *Dormez, dormez chers amours*, described as a *nocturne à deux voix* by Amedée de Beauplan, and not Pushkin's original, taken from *Reveillez vous, belle endormie* from *La belle dormeuse* by Dufresny, scored by Grandval?[26] These questions, some more valid than others, have multiplied as time has gone on. The Russian public paid no attention to these grievances; it responded to the intentions of the composer, and continued to love both Pushkin and Tchaikovsky.

The opera was not an immediate success. The singers at the Conservatoire performance found the music strange: it was too unlike the Rossini or Donizetti to which they were accustomed. Only the set 'numbers', the only really conventional writing in the entire work – Triquet's couplets and Gremin's aria – were greeted with genuine applause. Triquet's pretty rhymes in particular were the kind of *pastiche* at which Tchaikovsky was so brilliant. Nevertheless, his plan worked in the end. The opera became more and more popular in the Russian provinces until it came back in triumph to Moscow and St Petersburg. In the original version, the work ended with the happy embrace of Onegin and Tatiana, which is alleged to have lasted for five minutes. After a unanimous protest by the critics, this was altered in 1889 to the present finale. The Moscow critic Kruglikov expressed his fear that to put a

[26] Beauplan wrote in the early years of the nineteenth century; Dufresny and Grandval are versifiers and composers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. No dancing master worth his salt would use a tune a hundred years old for his *pièce d'occasion*. This fully justifies Tchaikovsky's choice of a contemporary piece.

modern sitting room on the operatic stage and to allow singers to appear in prosaic frock-coats or jackets was much too bold. Moreover, to end an act with the nurse's recitative – without any bravura climax – was to ask for trouble: how could the public tell that the act had ended? The curtain had come down on a profoundly puzzled audience. Nevertheless, the work made steady progress in popular esteem. The performances in 1881 at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow under Bevignani, and then in St Petersburg, evidently left much to be desired. The first full-scale performance took place on 21 October 21 1884, in the Bolshoi Theatre in St Petersburg. The grandest, however, was the hundredth performance, conducted by Napravnik in St Petersburg on 8 November 1982, with the famous tenor Figner, then not in his first youth, as a very dashing Lensky, and his Italian wife Medea Mei as Tatiana. Medea Mei learnt her part in Cernobbio with Toscanini (who knew no Russian), and asked for directions from the composer. She tells us that he gave her none: said only that she was his ideal Tatiana. The best singer of Lensky's part was, by all accounts, Leonid Sobinov, who first sang it in 1898; his terrible battle in 1901 in St Petersburg with the jealous Figner, who coveted the role, is part of Russian operatic history. Tchaikovsky's favourite Onegin was Khokhlov. He declared that after seeing him, he 'could not imagine Onegin except as Khokhlov'.[27]

Some of Tchaikovsky's worst fears were duly realised, and not in St Petersburg alone. In the Prague production of 1888 the curtain rose on the interior of an Italian Renaissance palazzo; the dancers of the *écossaise* in the sixth scene wore Highland dress; but the Tatiana was 'marvellous', better, the composer wrote, than any Russian, and this made up for everything; the quality of the singers meant incomparably more to him, as to every true composer (at any rate before the dominant influence of Wagner) than decor or production.

The opera grew in fame. Gustav Mahler conducted it in Hamburg in 1892 and then in Vienna; he took it to France and Italy. In 1922 Stravinsky attempted a production on the lines of Chekhovian psychological realism (his comments on Tatiana are still worth reading), but this proved an honourable failure. In the

[27] L[ev Mikhailovich] Tarasov, *Volshebstvo opery: ocherki* (Leningrad, 1979), 145.

present century, it grew to be virtually a national opera, better loved, if not more respected or venerated, than the masterpieces of Glinka or Mussorgsky. In the middle 1920s, the fashion among zealous Communist critics in the Soviet Union was to attack it for being soft, sentimental and decadent, an entertainment for the declining gentry, not for workers. Tatiana was described as anaemic, pathetic, passive, embodying the reactionary 'spiritualist' morality of the *ancien régime*. This proved a passing phase. Lenin did not waver in his loyalty to the work: 'So I see,' he said to some students in 1921, 'you are against *Eugene Onegin*: well, we old people, we are for it.'[28]

Eugene Onegin is a work of the late Victorian summer. It looks back with nostalgia upon an almost vanished world, and this communicates a sweet, intimate and haunting melancholy to the entire work, in which the central themes reflect and echo each other. Only those who find the novels of Turgenev and the poetry of Tennyson intolerably cloying, and still react violently against the elegiac mood of some of the most beautiful works of art of the nineteenth century, will harden their hearts against this lyrical masterpiece.

[28] Aleksandr Maisurian, *Drugoy Lenin* (Moscow, 2006), 97.

Khovanshchina

First published as 'Historical Note' in *Khovanshchina* (opera programme) ([London], 1963: Royal Opera House), 5 unnumbered pages; repr. in the 1972 programme as 'Programme Note: Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881)', as '*Khovanshchina*' in the 1982 programme and *San Francisco Opera*, Fall Season 1984, 34–8, and with revisions as 'A Note on *Khovanshchina*', *New York Review of Books*, 19 December 1985, 40–2 (the page numbering used here); excerpted as 'Stasov, Mussorgsky and Khovanshchina' in *The Kirov Opera* (opera programme) ([London], 2005: Royal Opera House), 24

In the spring of 1872, Vladimir Vasili′evich Stasov, the friend, inspirer, critic, historian and principal standard-bearer of the new national school of Russian art, conceived a new theme for an opera, which he urged with characteristic vehemence upon his admiring friend Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky. The composer had just completed his second version of *Boris Godunov*; that work, too, owed a great deal to Stasov, whose sympathies, like those of the painters, sculptors and composers whom he influenced, were against the regime and with the populist movement. For him and his friends art was not an end in itself; its primary purpose was not to give delight but to communicate truth. This truth was of necessity social and historical, for, as Mussorgsky wrote on 18 October of the same year to Stasov:

> The artistic representation of beauty alone in its material manifestation is crude, immature, and belongs to the infancy of art. *The subtlest traits of the nature* of both the individual and *the masses* – to explore these little-known regions and to conquer them, that is the true mission of the artist. To new shores! Boldly, through storms, shoals and underwater rocks, to new shores! Man is a social being and cannot be otherwise; masses, like individuals, invariably possess elusive traits that no one has seen, that slip through one's fingers – to note them, study them, read, observe, conjecture, to dedicate *one's entire being* to their study, to offer the result to humanity as a wholesome dish which it has never before tasted, that is the task – the joy of joys!

> This is what we shall try to do in our *Khovanshchina* – what, my dear Oracle?[29]

Unswerving service to the cause of truth – scrupulous fidelity to every nuance of human character and action, the invention of a special musical idiom for 'the re-creation in musical terms not only of thoughts or feelings, but also of the melodic quality of actual human speech'[30] by means of which what is significant in the flow of life can be directly conveyed to his contemporaries: that, according to the 'oracle' – Stasov – is the task of every progressive artist. To do this, to follow every pulsation of the constantly changing human spirit, was to abandon fixed rules: this was what the great innovators 'Palestrina, Bach, Gluck, Beethoven, Berlioz, Liszt' (and in Russia Dargomyzhsky, whom Mussorgsky described as a composer of genius) had done.[31]

The principal enemy was the spiritually empty music of the West. Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi were singled out by the new Russian school as purveyors of lifeless, mass-produced artefacts which, with their conventional arias, mechanical harmonies and absurd plots, were only too obviously designed to satisfy the routine demands of commercialised Western taste. Tchaikovsky was condemned as their cosmopolitan imitator; Wagner's music was dismissed as pretentious cacophony. The heroes were Berlioz, Liszt, Dargomyzhsky, who had created new vehicles to express a contemporary vision of life. To see and understand the ever-varying stream of experience, above all the evolution of the life of societies (in the light, for example, of Darwin's theories, which greatly excited Mussorgsky), and to communicate this in images – in this lay the whole duty of the artist.

Mussorgsky and his friends believed in what today is called commitment. The Russian artist must transmute into his chosen medium that which is most significant in his world, however painful or monstrous. Russian history, Russian society, what are

[29] To V. V. Stasov, 18 October 1872, in Modest Petrovich Musorgsky, *Literaturnoe naslednie*, ed. A. A. Orlova and M. S. Pekelis, vol. 1, *Pis'ma, biograficheskie, materialy i dokumenty* (Moscow, 1971) (hereafter LN1), 141.

[30] 'Autobiographical note' (1880), LN1 270; cf. letter to L. I. Shestakova, 30 July 1868, LN1 100.

[31] ibid.

they but the life of the submerged, helpless, trampled-on Russian people? It was for this *Volksseele* in all its protean forms, ignored by officials and aesthetes, that the artist must seek to find – to be – a voice. This was the doctrine of the new school, at once nationalist and naturalistic, that created the painting of Kramskoy and Repin, the sculptures of Antokolsky and Ginzburg, the compositions of Balakirev, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui. This outlook had affinities with some of the ideas of William Morris, Ruskin and Tolstoy: it was part of the opposition to commercialism on the one hand and to unhistorical, 'pure' aestheticism on the other. It was idealistic and democratic, national and naturalistic; it looked in history and anthropology for the unique, the individual, the quintessential – the authentic inner core of a people, a movement, a period, a historic outlook.

Boris Godunov was one of the early fruits of this conception, but in it the Tsar himself is so dominant a figure that it preserves continuity with an earlier tradition of drama in which individuals and personal relationships, and not impersonal forces, are the chief agents. *Khovanshchina* goes further. It is an attempt to recreate a moment in the history of the Russian people in which the personages are, in the first place, embodiments of historical movements, for each of which the composer attempted to find its own unique type of musical expression.

The subject chosen by Stasov was a turning point in his country's history, when the old Muscovy perished and the new Russia, led and symbolised by the gigantic figure of Peter the Great, was born in the throes of political and religious confusion and conflict. The year chosen is 1682. Some two decades before this, in the reign of Alexis, the second Romanov tsar, Russia was torn by schism. The Patriarch Nikon did not touch dogma, but he sought to bring Russian ritual into line with the contemporary practice of the Greek Church and the Eastern Patriarchs. His reforms, which were officially adopted, led to violent (and to some degree nationalistic) opposition within the Church and among the peasantry and merchants, and led to the defection of a large body of dissenters (Old Believers or Old Ritualists). In the autobiography of one of their leaders, the Archpriest Avvakum, who was burned at the stake for his belief, this widespread movement, which has survived until our own day, created a celebrated religious and literary masterpiece.

Tsar Alexis died in 1676 and left three sons – Fedor (Theodore) and Ivan by his first wife (Mariya Miloslavskaya), and Peter by the second (Natal′ya Naryshkina). After the death of Tsar Fedor in 1682, violent strife between the followers of the Miloslavsky and Naryshkin factions culminated in a riot outside the Kremlin by the Streltsy (musketeers) regiments, which were becoming a kind of Praetorian Guard dominating the city. In the course of it the boy Peter – then aged ten – saw his nearest relations lynched by the mob. The Streltsy helped to set up a new regime with Peter's half-sister Sophia as regent, and the two surviving sons of Alexis, Ivan and Peter, as joint tsars under her tutelage. The Streltsy were placed under the command of Prince Ivan Khovansky. Having acted as kingmakers, the unruly soldiers and their commanders showed a good deal of independence and some disrespect towards the person of the new regent. Sophia's former lover and principal minister, Prince Vassily Golitsyn (an intelligent, cultivated, psychologically ambivalent figure, swaying uncertainly between Muscovite traditionalism and enlightened plans for reform in a Western direction), for a while attempted to play off the fanatical Old Believers against the reformers and Westernisers. Suspecting that the Streltsy, who were getting out of hand, would soon attempt another palace revolution, Sophia managed, in true Renaissance style, to lure Prince Khovansky to the manor of Vozdvizhenskoe, where she had him arrested and shortly afterward beheaded; his son, Prince Andrey, was also executed, and his immediate followers scattered into exile. The cowed musketeers were placed in the charge of Fedor Shaklovity, Sophia's trusted agent.

During this time Peter and his mother lived quietly near Moscow in Preobrazhenskoe, where his chief distractions were the hours he spent in the company of the Moscow foreign colony – soldiers, craftsmen, traders and technical experts of various kinds, for the most part Protestant – and in arranging, with their help, sham battles and naval games of an apparently innocuous kind. In 1689 Golitsyn and Shaklovity decided to clear the path for Sophia by getting rid of Peter and his entourage, but their plot miscarried and the bulk of the Army and Church went over to Peter. Shaklovity was executed and Golitsyn sent into exile. Sophia was incarcerated in a convent for the rest of her life. A few years later,

after his half-brother Ivan's death, Peter formally ascended the throne, and a new period in Russian history began.

It is clear that both Stasov and Mussorgsky conceived the opera as a kind of epic. Mussorgsky plunged headlong into study of the literature of the period, and in particular of the liturgical music of the Old Believers. He dedicated the work to Stasov: 'It would not be absurd', he wrote to him, 'if I said "I dedicate myself to you – myself and my life during this period" […] Please accept from me "my entire incongruous being".'[32] He called Stasov 'généralissime'[33] and often referred to the opera as his. They called it a 'musical folk drama',[34] and it **[41]** was plainly their intention to present a broad historical panorama – a slow unfolding of a dramatic situation mounting toward a crisis – in which the individual characters and groups would embody the social and spiritual forces out of whose growth, combination and collision modern Russia was painfully born.

Mussorgsky and Stasov took large liberties with historical facts: they conflated the events of 1682 and 1689; caused Ivan Khovansky to be killed by Shaklovity's assassins, and not formally executed; sent Golitsyn into exile seven years too early; represented Shaklovity as working for Peter, and not merely for Sophia; described Peter at the age of ten as a 'tsar who inspires dread';[35] identified Dosifey, the leader of the Old Believers, with an obscure Old Believer, Prince Myshetsky, and represented him as inspiring the collective suicide by burning which the historical Myshetsky had condemned; and so on. This passionate wish to be true to social and psychological reality evidently did not entail concern for precise detail. Stasov wrote:

> In the centre of the plot I wanted to put the majestic figure of Dosifey, the head of the Old Believers, a strong, energetic man, a deep spirit […] who, like a powerful spring, directs the actions of the two princes – Khovansky, who represents ancient, dark, fanatical, unfathomable Russia, and Golitsyn, the representative

[32] Letter of 15 July 1872: LN1 138.
[33] *passim*, e.g. ibid.
[34] [In the opera's subtitle, *A Musical Folk Drama in Five Acts.*]
[35] In the words of Khovansky at the end of Act 3.

> of Europe [i.e., the West], which some, even in the party of the Princess Sophia, had begun to understand and value.[36]

He goes on to speak of a contrast between the two 'settlements',[37] that inhabited by the foreign colony, and that occupied by the musketeers. He conceived a sharp contrast between the Lutherans (exemplified in the final version only by the girl Emma) in their orderly, pious, tidy households, and the drunken, superstitious, savage Streltsy. He wanted to set side by side the proud, arbitrary, violent feudal lord, Ivan Khovansky, with his face turned to Old Russia, and his foolish, amorous, ambitious son, who is in love with Emma; and to show the cunning, civilised, vacillating, uneasy Minister Golitsyn, and the ruthless (but in his own way patriotic) intriguer Shaklovity, determined to ruin the Old Believers and with them the clan of the Khovanskys and all they were and stood for ('Khovanshchina').

Stasov provided character sketches of the Old Believer Marfa, violent, devout, unbalanced, given to clairvoyant prophesying, tormented by her love for Prince Andrey; of the squalid and craven scribe; of the boastful, handsome young musketeer Kuz′ka; above all, of the ignorant, helpless people, represented by bewildered passers-by, then (as in his own day) unresisting and voiceless victims of forces too strong for them. Over the entire scene broods the vast, fanatical presence of the mythical old priest Dosifey, 'a mighty Russian Muhammad, bigoted and menacing, a Savonarola, a John the Baptist, crying "Repent, the time has come!" '[38] Only when Dosifey finally realises that the new, satanic forces – Peter and his Horse Guards and his foreigners and the accursed Church perverted by the arch-heretic Nikon – are too powerful does he call upon his followers, including Marfa (who draws with her the by now helpless, wretched Andrey Khovansky), to cast off the city of the Devil, and enter the city of God by a great single act of collective self-immolation.

[36] 'Modest Petrovich Musorgsky: biograficheskii ocherk' (1881), in V. V. Stasov, *Izbrannye stati o M. P. Mussorgskom*, ed. A. S. Ogolevets (Moscow, 1952), 122.

[37] ibid.

[38] Stasov to Mussorgsky, 15 August 1873, LN1 322.

The love themes – Marfa's violent passion for Andrey Khovansky, and his infatuation with Emma – are (unlike the love scenes in *Boris Godunov*) intrinsic to the story of *Khovanshchina*, and the actions of the leaders – Golitsyn, the Khovanskys, Shaklovity, Dosifey – are given highly realistic expression. Yet in the end, unlike *Boris Godunov*, the opera has neither a hero nor a central plot. It is a succession of historical episodes, each with its own colour and pattern, culminating in what the composer regarded as his artistic triumph: the final scene in the last act, in which Marfa, to the sound of hallelujahs, 'clothed in a white shroud and with lighted candles in her hands',[39] circles round her lover, 'as stupid as the German girl he pines for';[40] the Old Believers' chant is heard in another key and with different harmonies; Dosifey, in a shroud and holding a candle, chants 'The time has come to win in the flames a martyr's crown and life everlasting.' Mussorgsky composed this scene in 1875, and spoke of it as 'Requiem of Love'.[41] It rises to its climax in the fire in which the Old Believers destroy themselves; the dark, 'Phrygian', Orthodox cadences mingle with the Western, secular theme of Peter's gaily marching troops – the heralds of the bright, hard, realistic new world.

Each scene, each human group, is characterised by its own musical phraseology. Apart from the three genuine pieces of Russian folk song[42] and the old liturgical music of the Old Believers, which Mussorgsky had unearthed,[43] all the rest is entirely his own. The constantly varying rhythmical structure and the fusion of meaning, sound and action into a single unbroken musical dramatic line in which the music is directly determined by the words – even more than in *Boris Godunov* – is an extraordinary musical achievement. It seemed merely barbarous to the musical director (Nápravnik) and the opera committee of the St Petersburg

[39] Mussorgsky to Stasov, 23 July 1873, LN1 154.

[40] [Probably ibid., but if so, very free for 'he preferred a German girl as stupid as he was'.]

[41] To Stasov, 2 August 1873, LN1 161.

[42] Marfa's love song, 'Through the meadows I wandered' [at the beginning of Act 3]; the song of praise for Ivan Khovansky (in 17/4 time) in the first scene of Act 4; and (probably) Andrey Khovansky's last song before his death in the final scene.

[43] For example, the 'Aeolian' chorus of the Old Believers in the first act, and their 'Phrygian' chorus in the last.

Opera, to whom the vocal score was submitted in 1880; they rejected it on the ground that one 'radical' opera (*Boris Godunov*) was enough.[44]

Stasov reacted violently to this. Despite his altercations with Mussorgsky for making ruthless changes and cuts **[42]** (which in his view disfigured their original conception, and were a sign of the composer's declining health and waning powers), he published an article in 1883, two years after Mussorgsky's death, in which he warmly praised Rimsky-Korsakov and Cui for resigning from their posts on the opera committee over this issue; this was followed by a furious diatribe against the administration of the Opera as cowardly and philistine. In 1886 Stasov wrote a lyrical review of the first performance of *Khovanshchina* by the semi-amateur 'Musical Circle' in St Petersburg, and spoke of the 'abominable' attitude of the State Opera.[45] He did not live to see the vindication of his views. Five years after his death in 1911, *Khovanshchina* was finally given in the Mariinsky Theatre, conducted by Albert Coates, with Fedor Chaliapin in the part of Dosifey. The orchestration and some reorganising of the score were supplied by the faithful Rimsky-Korsakov, who, while deploring the oddities and irregularities of the score, nevertheless recognised its original genius. He was duly criticised (as in the analogous case of his 'revision' of *Boris Godunov*) for distorting and taming the idiosyncratic, boldly original, natural genius of his friend.

Besides Rimsky-Korsakov's version, there exists one commissioned by Diaghilev from Igor Stravinsky and Maurice Ravel in 1911, as well as a version composed more recently by the Soviet composer Asaf'ev. Mussorgsky divided the opera into five acts and six scenes, of which only Marfa's song and the chorus of the Streltsy that followed Shaklovity's aria were orchestrated by the composer. Mussorgsky's original vocal score was not published until 1931, by Pavel Lamm in Moscow, and forms the basis for the version in six scenes, orchestrated by Dmitry Shostakovich in 1959, that was first given in the West, at Covent Garden, in 1963.

[44] Stasov, 'Po povodu postanovki "Khovanshchiny"', *Izbrannye*, op. cit. (**28** note), 186; id., 'Konets li "Khovanshchine"?', ibid., 190.

[45] ibid.

Performances Memorable – And Not So Memorable

Opera 26 (1975), 116–20

From 1916 to 1920 my parents lived in St Petersburg, or Petrograd as it was called during and after the First World War. The first performance of an opera that I remember at all clearly was that of *Boris Godunov* in 1916. Chaliapin, of course, sang the title role, and his enormous voice filled the Mariinsky Theatre, as much in lyrical legato passages as in the great dramatic monologue, and in the dialogue with Shuisky. I was seven years old at the time, and this naturally meant little to me, save that even then I noticed the enormous difference between the marvellous sensation of those huge, slow, all-sustaining, wholly delightful waves of musical sound, with their almost orchestral effect, and the voices of the other, more ordinary, singers. But what absorbed my attention and fascinated me completely was the scene in which the Tsar sees the ghost of the murdered Prince in a remote corner of the stage, starts back in horror and utters panic-stricken cries. Chaliapin, on his knees, seized the table legs, burying his head in the folds of the tablecloth which hung from it, and on which the map of Russia was stretched for the geography lesson of his young son in the earlier part of this act. Whether deliberately or not, in an exceedingly realistic performance of the scene of panic and hysteria, he pulled the tablecloth and the map over his head. The spectacle of this gigantic figure crawling on the floor, with the rich cloth and his own robes inextricably tangled over him, crying 'Choo! Choo!', and waving his arms desperately to drive away the terrible ghostly presence, was something at once so frightening and wonderful that I myself, apparently, began to utter cries of **[117]** mixed terror and pleasure, and had to be silenced by my parents and the hissing of indignant neighbours. I do not think that I had any idea of what the hallucination really signified, but even children respond to acting of genius.

I saw Chaliapin many times after this, in *Boris* (on one occasion he sang the parts both of Boris and Varlaam in the inn scene – I wonder whether his distinguished successor, Boris Christoff, could not be induced to do this), as Khan Konchak in *prince Igor*, as the Miller in Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka*, as Mephistopheles in Boito's opera (I never saw him, alas, as *Ivan the Terrible* in Rimsky-

Korsakov's *The Maid of Pskov*). But the exciting and fearful memory of that heroic frame crawling on all fours, swathed in the rich tablecloth and map, uttering wonderful cries, and singing at full-throated ease, barbarous and marvellously and consciously artistic at the same time, lingers with me to this day. For a long time after that I thought of opera as a particularly terrifying sort of entertainment. It took a good many performances of French and Italian opera to obliterate this fixed idea.

My parents occasionally took me to Paris from London, where we lived, in the early 1920s, and we invariably saw *Carmen* at the Opéra Comique. One of the proofs that *Carmen* is an immortal masterpiece is its capacity for preserving its shape and essence through the most terrible renderings. Just as the genius of Shakespeare triumphs over the most appalling translations and performances, so the great popular classics – *Figaro*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, **[118]** *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, *La Bohème* – survive the most unspeakable productions and the most appalling singing. That is, indeed, what makes them classics, gives them claim to immortality, and divides them from such masterpieces as the operas of Gluck, or *Fidelio*, or *Tristan*, or *The Ring*, or *Falstaff*, or the works of the twentieth century, few of which can survive such treatment. This is surely true of *Carmen*. I doubt if either Bizet or Meilhac and Halévy would have put pen to paper if they had anticipated the free performance by the Latvian National Opera (in Lettish) which I heard in 1928; the curious renderings in Hebrew (Tel-Aviv, 1962, I think);[46] in English (Carl Rosa in the 1920s, at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith, or perhaps somewhere else); or the most dreadful performance of all, by the Molotov Opera Company, in Leningrad in 1956, in very old-world Russian, sung by some wildly untutored singers from the Urals, whom nature had endowed with bittern-like vocal organs, and produced by someone whose notion of Spain, the entrance to a bullring, bore little relation to nineteenth-century life in any part of Europe. Yet *Carmen* stood up: it defied the forces arrayed against it; it came through – no amount of distortion or misinterpretation, of grotesque acting and terrible singing, could ruin it entirely. This is indeed proof of the vitality of genius. The city of Molotov has long since, for obvious reasons, reverted to its original name of Perm; perhaps *Carmen*, too, now

[46] [Possibly 1963, when Plácido Domingo first sang Don José in that city.]

obtains worthier performances by its singers. I must own to never having heard a perfect performance of the part of Carmen in my life. If only Maria Callas had sung the part on the stage and not only on records. The best *orchestral* performance of it I ever heard was by Leo Blech, in Berlin in the late 1920s – better than any, I truly believe, by Beecham or any living conductor; better than the stage or film performances of *Carmen Jones*, or the version where the cigarette factory is situated in Warsaw, of which I once heard a private performance. The dry fire, the passionate pulse, the great lyrical passages were of a standard not again attained in my experience. I cannot now remember who sang in it: it was not Conchita **[119]** Supervia. I remember now only Blech and the orchestra.

Superb performances and grotesque ones linger in the memory. I shall not forget the Swedish baritone John Forsell, in *Don Giovanni*, conducted by Bruno Walter in Salzburg in the very early 1930s: this was certainly the best performance of that part, and the best performance of the work, I have ever heard. This is equally true of Toscanini's performance of *Falstaff* in 1937, and of *Fidelio* too, both in Salzburg; and of *Don Carlos* in the original Visconti production at Covent Garden, conducted by Giulini and sung by Christoff, Brouwenstijn, Tito Gobbi and many of those who still sing it at Covent Garden.

The oddest performance I ever saw and heard was perhaps Act 2 of *The Marriage of Figaro* performed in an Istanbul cinema (in Turkish); it appeared to take place in a seraglio with a decor that would be more appropriate to *Die Entführung*. The Countess as the favourite European wife of an oriental Almaviva was dressed in half-Turkish, half eighteenth-century Western garments, rather like an Albanian in *Così*; Susanna as the favourite slave, Figaro as a kind of Phanariot Greek or Armenian factotum, Bartolo and Marcellina as a foreign consul with his plump native housekeeper, and Basilio as the chief eunuch – all combined into a fantasy at once farcical and exotic, which I should love to see again.

Far the most absurd moment in opera that I know of was seen not, alas, by **[120]** me, but by my friend Nicolas Nabokov in Berlin, in the early 1920s. It was during the years of inflation, when there was much poverty and a great dearth of food in Germany. The opera was *Götterdämmerung*. Nabokov described the moment when Brünnhilde's faithful Grane, played by an emaciated and

evidently starved carthorse, appeared on the stage; a foot away stood Hagen, with a long tow beard suspended from his chin. The horse suddenly lunged forward, whipped off Hagen's beard and devoured it in one gulp. This apparently stopped the performance; while the feeble old horse was being hurried off the stage even the solemn German audience could not contain itself. Animals on the stage are always a potential embarrassment and cause nervous strain both to the performers and to the public. Someone once remarked that they are very inattentive, look for distraction and distract the audience; fear of misbehaviour adds to the strain. Only grand opera of the nineteenth century demands their presence: I cannot think of any work in the twentieth which calls for horses or swans, stags or golden cockerels, or even bumblebees. This indicates some failure of theatrical nerve, but it must be a relief to both singers and producers. The bats which on summer evenings fly above the heads of the audience in the later acts of operas at Glyndebourne add little to the pleasures of those delightful occasions.

Surtitles

First published as 'A Personal View of Super-Titles', in *Glyndebourne Touring Opera 1986* (programme) ([Glyndebourne, 1986: Glyndebourne Festival Opera]), 54–6; repr. in *About The House* 7 no. 8 (Spring 1987), 8–9, *Translation Ireland* 15 no. 1 (Spring 2001), 14–15, and as 'Titlemania: A Voice in Favor' in *Opera News* 54 no. 16 (May 1990), 6–7

It is a truism, though an important one, that the words to which composers set their music are of crucial importance to the act of composition, especially in opera, where the words are an intrinsic element not only of the expression of the meaning of what is sung, but of the dramatic action; and not only the words, but syllables, inflections, accents, rise and fall, emphasis. Hence the natural concern of musicians and of the most responsive part of the public that opera be sung in the original language of the libretto; and hence, too, the opposition to this by those who, with no less reason, want the libretti translated into their own languages if they are to grasp the meaning of what is sung, and of the relation of the words both to the unfolding story and to the music – to its shape, texture, melodic, rhythmic, harmonic structure, its movement, nuance, accent, inner pulse and other attributes – all that makes the total pattern essential to its full aesthetic and psychological impact.

The difference made to appreciation of words set to music between understanding and not understanding exactly what is being sung is far greater than those who are content merely to listen to the music (or very nearly so) might begin to imagine. This may be more obvious in the case of the operas of Wagner or Debussy or Berg than in, say, those of Donizetti or Gounod, or even Handel; but it is very great in all works of genuine artistic merit. Consequently there arises a problem: should accessibility of the meaning of words be sacrificed (and, if so, to what degree) to fidelity to the composer's intended fusion of word and sound? Or, on the contrary, should the fidelity on which purists insist yield to intelligibility? Is there an inescapable incomparability between the two approaches? Are the alternatives mutually, or even largely, exclusive? Some would say that this is a matter of degree: libretti have, after all, been translated with reasonable success, even if

many translations are grotesque. I cannot, in this connection, help remembering Dent's grotesque translation of a line by the poet Pushkin in the libretto of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* (Act 2, Scene 2), which begins the aria of Prince Gremin:

> Onegin, I should not be human
> If I did not adore that woman.

The German version of *Don Giovanni,* the Russian version of *La traviata* do well enough: but, all the same, something – at times too much – is lost. Poetry, said someone, is what is lost in translation.[47] Most libretti are, as often as not, a pretty debased form of poetry, some more so than others; but Boito, Hofmannsthal, Auden, even Wagner at times, wrote poetry; Metastasio, da Ponte, Meilhac and Halévy have stood up pretty well. Why, then, it may be asked, can the real opera lovers not read the libretti in languages they do understand – and in this way follow every bar, or at least every phrase, of the opera in a foreign language? If they truly want to obtain a full experience, they must do their homework. This, after all, applies in many spheres of life: is this not all it comes to? I believe not.

To obtain full enjoyment one would have virtually to memorise the text. Can one really demand this of ordinary listeners, however musical, however sensitive? A general sense of the knowledge of the story of the opera read in Kobbé, or even in a double-column libretto with translation, does not, and cannot, do much more than give one a general sense of what is going on. Let me take the least esoteric example: Rigoletto's famous words (Act 2, Scene 2), which convey at once fear and hatred of the courtiers of Mantua, and an effort to ingratiate himself with them in order to discover where his daughter is after her abduction, the falsely jaunty 'La rà, la rà, la rà, la rà …' (offstage), followed by apparently insouciant, mocking repartee which half conceals his agonised suspicion, until he finally bursts out into 'Cortigiani, vil razza dannata …'.[48] This marvellous, desperate, profoundly moving, broken-hearted passage, unique in

[47] Robert Frost in conversation with Louis Untermeyer, quoted in the latter's *Robert Frost: A Backward Look* (Washington, 1964), 18.

[48] 'Courtiers, vile, damnable rabble'.

opera, must be followed word by word if its impact is to be fully responded to – and the effort is supremely worth it.

This, of course, applies even more to the majority of Wagner's operas, where the words play an immeasurably more significant role than in, say, Weber's *Oberon*. I should like to urge that the least imperfect solution is the use of surtitles: ideally, of the entire text – even of ensembles when the various characters may all be saying something quite different – but if this last is impracticable, as it may well prove to be, then at any rate the words of the arias, dialogue, choruses, recitative – or at the very least the words that matter most – should be illuminated above the proscenium. But will this distract attention which should be concentrated only on the stage? Undeniably, to some degree. But not enough to be a serious obstacle to the vast majority of the audience.

The difference that the simultaneous appearance of words and music can make seems to me immense. There is no doubt in my mind that the extraordinary, wholly unexpected, success of the televised Bayreuth Chéreau-Boulez *The Ring of the Nibelungs*, while no doubt it owed a very great deal to the originality of the conception and the gifts of the conductor, director, designer, singers, owed even more to the captions, which even in translation brought home to the millions of viewers the truly organic unity of music and meaning, sound and word, which, in Wagner's fully developed style is everything. Many of that television audience, I suspect, had never seen any other production of *The Ring*, consequently they had no basis of comparison: yet they were undoubtedly fascinated, deeply affected, and some no doubt converted to Wagner's art, which, it may be, they had not initially expected to enjoy so much.

This courageous experiment alone seems to me to support strongly the thesis that opera-goers – and above all those who may either underrate the beauty and depth of operas because they cannot follow the words, or perhaps be deterred from going to see opera altogether – can be converted and illuminated and made enthusiatic by becoming able to understand the meaning, musically and emotionally, of what is going on, instead of being made to listen to mumbo-jumbo. Everyone has that experience of this last, and I need not labour the point. This is true, sad as it may be, even of opera in the public's native language. Articulation in opera is notoriously imperfect: English texts, whether original or translated,

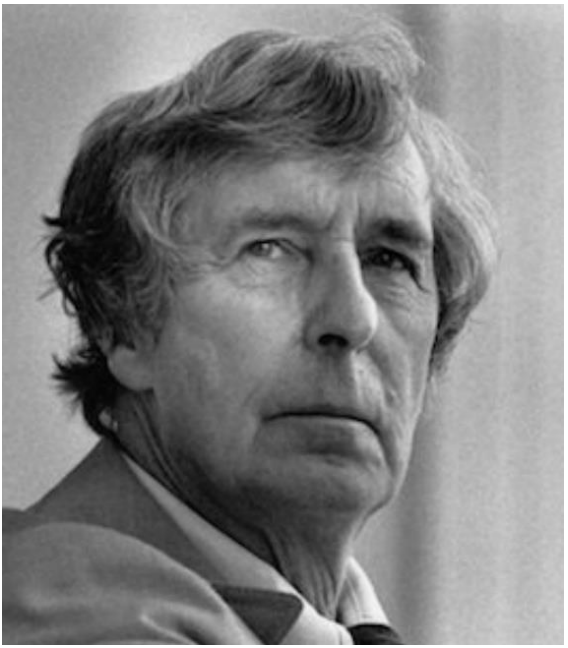
which should be so much more intelligible to British audiences than German or Italian, rarely succeed in being so; occasional sentences articulated by singers with exceptional powers of clear diction can achieve this, otherwise, as often as not, one grasps one word in three, in four, in five, or, at the very best, in two.

There is, of course, an obvious difference between a television screen which can be taken in – stage and subtitles – in a single glance, and the stage of an opera house, where surtitles do require a brief upward look; but I cannot persuade myself that such interruptions need materially interfere with attention to the action on the stage; not even the openings of trapdoors, or assassinations, are so unexpected in an opera that reading the surtitle could cause a serious distraction of attention. Of course, a great deal depends on precise synchronisation, the angle of vision, the size of the letters, the type of illumination, punctuation, the exact position above the proscenium and, where this is unavoidable, selection and condensation of the text. Other techniques have been suggested – of special spectacles which reveal the illuminated text to those who wish to see it and them alone; or of illuminated words on the back of the seats in front of those who wish to read them, screened from adjacent seats, so that only those who wish to switch them on need do so, without fear of disturbing others. But the last seems to me to be inferior, since it requires constant bobbing up and down. Even so, this would be an improvement on the present 'non-titled' situation.

The advantages of surtitles seem to me greatly to outweigh the shortcomings. Understanding of opera would be transformed, to the great profit of performers and audiences alike. Opposition to this method is, I suspect, based on mere conservatism, habit, misplaced aesthetic canons, or an obscure psychological resistance to a small but beneficent, pleasure-enhancing innovation. I feel sure that a poll of opera goers, certainly of those who watch opera on television, would produce a very significant majority in favour of this method, and that the sceptical would be converted. Glyndebourne Touring Opera is a brave and enlightened pioneer in this regard. Like all other beneficiaries of this new departure, I wish to offer it my gratitude and admiration.

The Depth of Michael Tippett

Contribution to Ian Kemp (ed.), *Michael Tippett: A Symposium on his 60th Birthday* (London, 1965: Faber), 62–3



THE PHILOSOPHER Schelling, writing a century and a half ago, came as near as any European writer to conveying the mysterious union of free activity with rigorous adherence to a self-imposed discipline that is involved in creating a work of art. He neither analysed nor described, but in language often appallingly obscure, but evocative and communicating moments of wonderful insight, he wrote about the process of human self-understanding and its expression in symbol and myth; this, according to him, formed the heart of poetry, religion, music, and touched depths not attainable to the critical, analytic, discursive intellect.

The notion of depth is hard to analyse. No writer on aesthetics has come nearer to putting into words what is meant by saying of a work of art, or of philosophy, or of any form of human self-expression, that it is deep, in the sense in which we say that Pascal, for example, was a 'deeper' thinker than Descartes (although the importance and originality of Descartes were perhaps greater), or

Dostoevsky a deeper writer than Tolstoy, or that Hopkins wrote poetry that is profounder than anything by Tennyson or Baudelaire or Heine, or that the last quartets of Beethoven have more depth than his symphonies. Depth is a concept different from truth, genius or beauty or nobility of expression, or any of the other terms in which, however inadequately, we seek to describe the nature of human accomplishment; there are no doubt kinds and degrees of it, and ordinary prose, intended to be understood, has not so far proved a good medium for explaining what is meant by it.

This is the quality which, it seems to me, Mr Tippett's music possesses above all others, and for this reason I am convinced that it will survive when much admirable music of our day will fade into history. Moral and metaphysical ideas and symbols are as indispensable to Mr Tippett as Celtic mythology or Indian theosophy was to Yeats; even when they are obscure, they convey to the straining, often puzzled, but always moved and at times wholly transported listener a vision of experience about whose authenticity there can be no doubt.

In the dispute between those who say that art in general, and music in particular, are, and can be, only patterns of sounds or colours or images that touch the senses or the emotions, and those, on the other hand, who say that it is a voice speaking or it is nothing, the compositions of Mr Tippett, particularly his works for voices – his oratorios and his operas – weight down the scale in favour of the latter. This most poetical, most serious and very passionate composer is among the very few who have created worlds of their own, worlds any part of which is easily recognisable as uniquely theirs, from any distance. He is a major asset to our age, morally as well as aesthetically, and I take great pride in being allowed to associate myself with the homage that is being offered to him on his sixtieth birthday.