

'Letters of Great Composers'

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'LETTERS OF GREAT COMPOSERS'

SIR,—The article in your September issue breaks new and fruitful ground. For a long time many of us have looked upon these lives and letters as the best light on the connection between the spiritual and the æsthetic in human personality. It is however rather remarkable that the writer should altogether have passed over the wonderful things that may be gathered from the letters of Johannes Brahms. Though perhaps in some things uncouth and rugged, Brahms was a highly intellectual and educated man, and a man who expressed more intimately than most of the great musicians some of the foundations of his faith. They, as Beethoven said of himself, spoke only in their music, but Brahms and the circle revealed by his life, his letters, and his association with the Schumanns, especially as told in Clara Schumann's life, are unsurpassed in their revealing of the inner things of a great artist's soul.—Yours, &c.,

99, Franklin Road,
Harrogate.
September 5, 1920.

R. B. KETTLEWELL.

VINCENT D'INDY'S VIEW OF HARMONY

SIR,—In his article on the above subject Mr. Richard Capell says:

'M. d'Indy's student is exhorted to weave into the very texture of his thought the existence of the series of Upper and Lower Partials (or rather of the earlier ones). If one cannot hear them in nature, one is to realise them "by second nature." He covers well-known ground by demonstrating the first six of both harmonic series, and the weight of his emphasis is of course against any lingering notion in his student's mind of a "fundamental bass."'

Later he continues:

'M. d'Indy evidently finds insistence desirable to dispel from the student's mind the notion of a "bottom note," of a bass which is a foundation to an edifice—the true notion of course being that of radiation, your deepest possible "bass" ever radiating still lower as well as upper harmonics.'

It so happens that for many years I have taken much interest in the subject of harmonics, and I am quite familiar with the terms upper and lower partial tones, as used by Helmholtz. But this sense is quite different from that in which the terms are used by M. d'Indy, who evidently employs the term 'upper' in reference to the segments of the prime, and 'lower' in reference to 'partials' which are of lower pitch than the prime. As to these I should very much like to see some definite statements, and shall be very glad if you or your reviewer, or M. d'Indy himself, could refer me to some well-established facts.

I notice that M. d'Indy says expressly 'if one cannot hear them in nature, one is to realise them by second nature.' Does he mean that the 'lower partials' cannot be heard by anyone in nature, but are to be imagined?

Of course, if they are to be heard at all, they are phenomena of quite a distinct character from the 'upper partials.' These latter, as is well known, are due to actual vibrations of segments of solid material, and are governed by well-known laws. In the case of the 'lower partials,' however, there is no solid material to vibrate. We can get sounds from half the length of a wire, such sounds being an octave above the prime, because the half-length of wire is there to vibrate; but how do we get the vibrations of double the length of the wire when the double length of wire is not there to vibrate? The same remarks apply to quarter lengths of wire, and four times the length of wire, and so on.

I am not saying that such duple and quadruple lengths of vibration do not occur; I am only asking for evidence, and pointing out the difference in character of such 'lower' partials from the 'upper.'

May I also point out that, in my opinion, in the words 'ever radiating still lower as well as higher harmonics' the term *radiating* is not applicable to the *upper* partials. These are due to the breaking up into vibrating lengths

of a straight wire. There is no 'radiating' about this process. No doubt the vibrations themselves from the various segments radiate in all directions, as all sounds do, but the breaking up of the wire into segments cannot be spoken of as 'radiating.' Of course I say nothing about the nature or causes of the lower partials, except that 'partials' does not seem a very apposite term, and I should suggest 'multiple tones' as more suitable.

At present, I must confess that I am somewhat sceptical as to these multiple tones, and I have reason to think that I am not alone in my scepticism. I am, however, ready and anxious to be convinced if they really are natural phenomena, and I hope that this letter may have the effect of eliciting evidence upon the subject which will enable those interested to judge for themselves.—Yours, &c.,

WALTER H. THELWALL.

3, Earl's Court Square, S.W.5.
October 13, 1920.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE LONDON
SUBURBAN CHORAL SOCIETIES

SIR,—The *Daily Telegraph* of September 1 contained an interesting article by Geoffrey Whitworth on 'The English Stage', in which he said that 'In 1914 English drama was, in spite of the usual grumbles, a fairly vigorous institution.' There have, however, been some unsatisfactory changes in English musical life, and the outbreak of the war was by no means responsible for the extinction of a once prominent feature, the London suburban choral Society. The 'golden' period was from 1875 to about 1895, when almost every district, high and low, rich and poor, had its choral society. The South and South-Eastern districts of London were particularly favoured, and even the German residents had a well-trained Society at Denmark Hill. I attended with a German friend from Breslau a remarkably fine performance of Gade's 'Earl King's Daughter,' with Sir George Henschel and his gifted wife, *née* Lilian Bailey, as principal singers. One winter, M. Padeloup, the distinguished French conductor, came over from Paris to attend the wedding of a young lady, a relative of his and of my family, and before returning he expressed a desire to hear some choral Society performances, which, he had been informed by Gounod, were a great feature in musical England. With the aid of the advertisements in the *Musical Times* and the announcements of the local newspapers I managed to make up a programme for six nights in the week—finishing up with a Sunday afternoon performance at Holy Trinity Church, Tulse Hill, under the direction of Humphrey J. Stark—without leaving the Surrey side of the Thames. One evening we attended a performance of Cowen's dramatic cantata 'The Corsair' and Bridge's short oratorio 'Mount Moriah' at Gresham Hall, Angell Town, Brixton. Both composers were announced as conductors of their respective works, but Sir Frederic Cowen was unable to attend owing to indisposition. M. Padeloup was much struck with the *grandiose* character of the 'Mount Moriah' choruses, and was particularly enthusiastic over the organ-composer's abilities as a conductor. 'André, you will live to see that young man become the conductor of the first choral Society in London,' he repeatedly exclaimed. M. Padeloup was no false prophet. Before leaving London, at Charing Cross Station, he told me he hoped to return soon to attend performances in the North of London, but his many engagements and increasing rheumatism made it impossible to gratify his wishes. His principal object was to write a series of articles on the subject for the long since defunct *Revue et Gazette Musicale*. An unfortunate sufferer by the disappearance of suburban choral Societies was the once popular John Frances Barnett. I attended, when a boy, three performances of his 'Ancient Mariner' in different districts of London in one week. The last time I met him was at Baker Street Station during the summer of 1916. There was a violent air raid on that night. He had in his hand an old copy of Chateaubriand's tale 'Atala,' which he had picked up at a stall in Charing Cross Road, and said would make a fine subject for an opera. I replied there was not much chance for English opera now, 'Why not try a dramatic cantata, and repeat the