

Scales and Tonality

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MUSICAL APPRECIATION

SIR,—I believe that the chief obstacle in the way of musical appreciation, so far as the average provincial concert-goer is concerned, is not so much lack of education or apathy as lack of acquaintance. We have heard a great deal about 'beastly tunes' and so on in the last few months, but I doubt whether the real reason for their popularity has yet been found. What appears to be the only satisfactory explanation is that these tunes, being simple and easily grasped, are at once apprehended and appreciated by the average 'unmusical' person, while more advanced works are rejected as 'too difficult.'

One of the most interesting and instructive occasions for the man who wishes to ascertain the real musical tastes of the masses is to mix among the enormous crowds that assemble at any of our great inland or seaside provincial towns, to 'hear the band' on Saturday afternoons or evenings. We all know the symptoms of rapturous enjoyment which pervade the crowd when the strains of 'The Lost Chord,' Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song,' Dvorák's 'Humoresque,' or even 'Un Peu d'Amour' are wafted on the breeze; the tapping toes that accompany the 'Sylvia' Pizzicato (usually played with fearful agility by a perspiring solo cornet); the murmuring voices that sing in undertones to the airs of 'The Gondoliers.' The superior critic may find it unworthy of his notice, but it is really of profound interest because the enjoyment is so obvious and so patently sincere. They are not trying to ape their more educated brethren; they are in their own element and completely free from affectation. And why do they like these works? Partly, no doubt, because they are tuneful, but chiefly, I am certain, because they know them as old and intimate friends.

And it is the same with concerts in a hall. We deplore the greater popularity of ballad concerts than that of more serious affairs. But the attraction of a ballad concert for the average man is the secure knowledge that the programme will contain at least one or two items that he knows, and that all the others will be so easy to grasp that he will always be able to recognise them after one or two hearings.

The only real remedy is repetition. The other day I attended a Beethoven concert at Edinburgh given by Lamond. The large audience was composed almost entirely of people who were evidently music-lovers rather than advanced musical experts. At the end of each of the three Sonatas, one heard such comments as 'Isn't that beautiful! I should like to hear it again.' There are many people who would willingly pay to hear great music repeated within a reasonable space of time from their first hearing. Is it too much to hope that one day a great artist—pianist, violinist, conductor, or organist—will announce a series of three or four subscription concerts of great music, the programme at each concert being exactly the same? It is only thus that the average musical amateur will really come to know and love the great masterpieces of music so that there shall be a popular demand for them. For the busy amateur who has no time to give long and detailed study to the scores of classical works, frequent hearing is the only method of becoming really familiar with such works. I believe, moreover, that the decrease in the size of an audience at such repeated concerts, caused by the absence of the dilettanti, the lukewarm, and the superior, would be more than compensated by the increase of real musical ardour and keenness, coupled with the sense of having achieved a real educational object.—Yours, &c.,

J. W. HUNTER BLAIR.

Eaglescarnie, Haddington, Scotland.

November 14, 1921.

SCALES AND TONALITY

SIR,—Mr. Ainslie Hight, on pages 859-60 of the December issue, animadverts against Equal Temperament whilst adopting, for Just Temperament, 'the simpler ratio of the minor seventh (7/4)'—instead of its actual ratio 16/9. Apparently the fact was overlooked that this minute difference, 63:64 (which Helmholtz and Prout consider negligible), is nevertheless rather *wider* than the greatest difference between E. T. and J. T., viz., 1.666:1.681 at the

major sixth = 111:112. The ratio 7/4 is virtually an augmented sixth, 224/128 (225) where the minor seventh = 228-230/128. For your correspondent this surely is a very serious matter, for, if the ear is still to be more *vitiated* by J. T. than by E. T., wherewithal shall we be saved?

Something would appear also to have gone wrong with that part of the instruction where we are invited 'to feel the fourth (4/3) as the minor third of the supertonic (27/20).' Can Mr. Ainslie Hight have meant 32/27? There are obviously pitfalls in this field of knowledge.—Yours, &c.,

Chesham Bois.

GEORGE E. PRINCE.

December 8, 1921.

MODERN SCALES AND ACOUSTICS

SIR,—My attention has been drawn to the letter from Mr. J. E. Sainsbury in your December issue, in which he states that Prof. Rankine is 'at present experimenting at the Northern Polytechnic with apparatus by which he will be able to register the quality of a musical sound.' I must ask your courtesy kindly to correct this statement, as Prof. Rankine is on the staff of the Imperial College at South Kensington and has never carried out any experiments at the Northern Polytechnic. The confusion probably arose from the fact that he and I both read papers on the same day at the Convention of the Federation of British Music Industries held in 1920 at Scarborough.—Yours, &c.,

R. S. CLAY

(Principal, Northern Polytechnic Institute
Holloway, London, N.7).

December 2, 1921.

WHY USE WORDS?

SIR,—The article by 'G. M. C.' contains many truths, but is yet not quite convincing. The writer says that he does not need to know German in order to enjoy a Brahms lied. No one does. The point is that such enjoyment is that of abstract music—not of a song *per se*. But it is the literary content of the song that supplies the composer's creative impulse, and this is handed on to the hearer, he the words banal or even 'Greek' to him. A song-writer has not laboriously to search for suitable words to set to his music, as 'G. M. C.' postulates. That is the method of the uninspired writer of pot-boiling stuff. Certainly neither Brahms, nor Schubert, nor Schumann, ever composed songs that way. 'G. M. C.'s' analogy of the picture and the frame is also a little unhappy. Artists do, in fact, paint to fit frames; but it is not the frame that inspires them: it is the phenomenon of nature to which their beauty-sense responds.

A song without words is therefore not a song proper. It is instrumental music—the voice being regarded as an instrument: and that is right and proper enough. Some years ago—in the days of your predecessor, Sir, I think—I submitted an article to the *Musical Times* on 'Wordless Opera.' But I was before my time; the 'difficulty of vocables' put the idea out of court. 'G. M. C.' disposes of that difficulty easily enough, and he also points out that in opera the eye co-operates with the ear, and thus apprehends the dramatic element. This was my point in the suggestion of wordless opera: words are substituted by pictures. Except by a fortunate accident, words are not much heard in opera; but the action is obvious to all, and by action I mean not only movement, but passion and emotion. Thus the necessary 'programme' for the music is secured. Opera is appreciated in no other way. The words are negligible except in the brilliant case of Gilbert and Sullivan—where, however, the objective is not upon the high plane of grand opera of the Wagner type.

That music and action can run in double harness without mutual disqualification is beyond dispute. Music need not be the handmaid, as in the cinema: it can be the mistress, as in the ballet. Let the thing be tried. If any composer would care to look at a scenario for wordless opera which I prepared when writing the aforesaid article, I should be flattered in acceding to his request. But I maintain that wordless songs are anomalous.—Yours, &c.,

Walden, Chesham, Surrey.

F. C. TILNEY.