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The Musical Times

AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR

JULY 1, 1919.

MODERN BRITISH COMPOSERS.

By EDWIN EVANS.

IV.—EUGÈNE GOOSSENS.

(Continued from June number, page 268.)

When a composer is as versatile, both in method and in mood, as is Eugène Goossens, it is not easy to decide upon the order in which his compositions are to be placed. It would not be difficult to group them under the usual headings, but in doing so one would miss the fine thread of personal evolution which runs through them from start to finish. On the other hand, there are two such groups to which his contributions have so far been few in number, and which therefore lend themselves to preliminary removal from the path of the larger task. These are his orchestral music and his songs. The first composition with which he came before the public was an orchestral work, consisting of variations on 'A Chinese Theme,' which was first performed at the Royal College of Music on June 20, 1912, and repeated at the Promenade Concerts on September 6, 1913. It has remained unpublished, as has also a Symphonic-poem, 'Perseus,' introduced at the Promenade Concerts on October 13, 1914. The composer would scarcely regard either of these works as representative to-day, although the Symphonic-poem is of such quality that only the unobservant can have failed to note its importance, if only as a portent for the future. It belongs to the period before he had succeeded in shaking himself free from the extraneous influences referred to in the introductory portion of this article. The emancipation became more visible in a Symphonic Prelude to a poem of Ossian, which was performed at Queen's Hall in the spring of 1915. None of these works being available for study, we will pass on to those of recent date.

The Scherzo, 'Tam o' Shanter,' which was introduced at the Hallé concerts in the autumn of 1917, was a brilliant and exhilarating piece of work, which had only the one fault of over-elaboration in the development and in the scoring. It was recently performed at a Philharmonic concert in London in a considerably-condensed version, which is to be its definite form. Goossens seems to have realised meanwhile that brevity—at all times a valuable quality—is indispensable to a good joke. In this he has been more perspicacious than the poet, for the ballad which has provided him with a subject is somewhat overgrown. In his treatment of the subject he has been compared to Dukas, but the resemblance is a very superficial one, for the French composer in 'L'Apprenti Sorcier' combines an exquisite sense of humour with a grave sense of responsi-

bility towards his musical material, whereas Goossens indulges in fun of a more rollicking kind. This was followed by an Overture and incidental music for a performance of Verhaeren's 'Philip II.' at the Court Theatre. The circumstances did not favour an adequate hearing, but the music has since been remodelled as a Suite, and will be heard again.

Since then his only orchestral composition has been the version of 'Four Conceits,' introduced as a symphonic interlude in the programmes of the Russian Ballet at the Alhambra. These being originally pianoforte pieces, we shall have occasion to refer to them later. Suffice it for the present to say that they display a more finished orchestral virtuosity than any score to which he has so far put his name. To speak of the instrumentation is not sufficient, for apart from their vividness of colour they derive perhaps their main attractiveness from a wholly personal finesse in the selection of combined sonorities. This is important, because herein lies the whole difference between the old scoring and the new. Modern composers have revolutionised the process of distributing musical material among the instruments of an orchestra. They no longer group them homogeneously, but they make one timbre impinge upon another with the effect of a delicate pointillage, which demands the most scrupulous care in performance, but rewards it liberally both in variety and in suggestiveness of effect. It is this method, of which this work proves Goossens a master, which endows the orchestra with a picturesqueness rarely attained in the past, and his remarkable command of it is doubtless due to many years of orchestral experience as performer and conductor. Such proficiency is not to be attained by the study either of text-books, which rarely touch upon it, or of the standard scores, which fail to reach it. It is a new field, only to be explored by the light of practical experience.

Goossens's songs are not numerous—excluding arrangements of folk-songs there are only ten published—but they include some of his most characteristic work. The two De Musset songs, 'Chanson de Fortunio' and 'Chanson de Barberine,' are metrical lyrics, set melodically against harmonies which, thoroughly modern, yet have a quaint suggestion of archaism. Then followed a number of songs for which I must share the responsibility, as I contributed the texts. It was a mere coincidence that I happened to have made a few attempts at *prose ciselée*, both in French and English, at the very time when Goossens was a little impatient of the restraint imposed by metre. He saw my two 'Proses lyriques,' and, somewhat to my own surprise, found in them the starting-point for a type of song that was new to him, a declamatory cantilena making a sparse use of melodic curves, but following, not too slavishly, the cadence of the words, against an accompaniment which formed a kind of harmonic 'backcloth,' sometimes realistically suggestive, sometimes purely decorative. It was said at the time they were first heard that the idiom was

French. Were it so it would be no reproach, since they are settings of French lines, but it is a mistake to regard as French devices in common use merely because they reached us first through French channels. As it happens, there is nothing specifically French in the way the songs are set. If any outside influence is discernible it is at most in the outline of the pianoforte figuration of the first song, 'Hier dans le jardin ensoleillé,' which is faintly Straussian. The second, 'Mon chemin s'était assombri,' contains some interesting examples of picturesque comment in the accompaniment, as when, after the singer has referred to 'arabesques' the pianoforte follows with :

'MON CHEMIN S'ÉTAIT ASSOMBRI'

(Deux Proses Lyriques).

Andante tranquillo.

Andante tranquillo.
8va

mf

Ped.

mf stringendo.

Des diss - o - nan - ces de la vie . . .

p

rall.

. . . elle fai - sait des ac - cords vi - brants,

rall.

Ped.

in which the dissonances furnish a second theme for illustration.

Then followed two 'Persian Idylls,' in which the same musical treatment is meted out to English prose. Despite the subject there is no simulated Orientalism, least of all of the conventional kind, but some illustration, notably in the first song, the subject of which is the ney, a kind of Persian flute. These songs are even more richly harmonized than their predecessors—perhaps it is a concession to Eastern exuberance—but their method is the same,

save that each new work necessarily brings wider experience with it. An example follows :

'HEART OF KALYAN,' OP. 17, NO. 2

(Persian Idylls).

Tranquillo. *mp* *mf*

Think-est thou my heart is dead . . . because it mourns a

mf

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.*

cres.

lov - er? See! The ka-ly-an glows no lon - ger,

una corda.

pp sub.

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.* *Ped.*

animando.

Its cov - er - let of pearl grey ash is like un - to a shroud.

cres. animando. *f*

The remaining songs are 'Epigram,' a clever piece of irony at the expense of the purveyor of drawing-room ballads; two settings of poems by G. Jean-Aubry, and one, 'The Curse,' by Barbor. Of these the most attractive is 'Tea-time,' with its amusing suggestion of a persistent piano-organ whose clatter interrupts a pleasant tête-à-tête. The flight of the seagulls in 'Afternoon,' the scene of which is laid at Westminster, is more subtle but less convincing. The poems are French, but M. Jean-Aubry has followed an example frequently set by Verlaine, in recording by means of English titles the country in which they were written. Apart from these ten songs Goossens has harmonized two Scottish folk-tunes for Mlle. Raymonde Collignon's répertoire, and contributed three verses to her amusing variations on 'Cadet-Rousselle,' the others being by Frank Bridge, Arnold Bax, and John Ireland.

Having disposed of Goossens's orchestral music and his songs, we find that what remains before us—chamber music and pianoforte pieces—represents an unusually sane and consistent evolution of personality. It divides itself readily into groups, which are separated by his rare excursions into pianoforte literature. The Concert-Study separates his early

chamber music from a new and more characteristic vein, and the short, playful pieces assembled in the 'Kaleidoscope' and 'Conceits' herald another phase in which is felt a deeper and more thoughtful emotion, of which the only earlier inkling is given in the 'Cello Rhapsody.

Four works are comprised in the first group: a Phantasy for an octet of strings, wind, and harp; four Sketches for flute, violin, and pianoforte; a Suite for flute, violin, and harp; and 'Five Impressions of a Holiday,' for pianoforte, flute, and 'cello. It will be noticed at once that the flute is a feature common to them all. Perhaps it is merely a coincidence, but I like to think that the nature of Goossens's musical ideas made him seek, consciously or not, for an element to counteract the all too soulful expression of the strings, of which, as a string player himself, he was certainly conscious. Many modern composers are clamouring for the integrity of the note, its preservation from what the player may seek to put into it for the sake of effect. In music which is picturesque rather than sentimental this over-zealous search for expression is fatal, and as these early works of Goossens's, however else they may be described, were certainly not intended sentimentally, the selection of the dispassionate timbre of the flute has contributed considerably to the realisation of their style. The first two have not been published. The third and fourth are not only available in print, but relatively familiar in the concert-room, where their refreshing charm soon made many friends. The Suite comprises a rich-hued Impromptu, a pleasant Serenade, and a Divertissement in which the composer indulges the taste for *chinoiserie* to which he was addicted at this time. The 'Five Impressions of a Holiday' are frankly pictorial, and, apart from their musical charm, it is a great tribute to them to be able to say that, in spite of the triteness of such themes as 'The Water Wheel,' 'The Village Church,' and other titles which have done duty for generations, the composer's poetical instinct has permitted him to place them in new aspects. Some of the figuration is very ingenious, and the composition closes with a scene of infectious merriment, 'At the Fair.'

The Concert Study for Pianoforte which followed is one of those pieces of jugglery in which the modern spirit likes to disport itself in the absence of more serious themes. One would not claim for it that it is rich in poetic content, nor is that the effect aimed at, but the pianoforte with its dulcimer-like effects of chromatic percussion is an arch tempter to the making of ingeniously-amiable rattles, and it would be a great mistake to decry their musical value, for they almost invariably result in happy harmonic *trouvailles*. Such is the case here. The study is full of little discoveries which hold the ear intrigued without the aid of musical eloquence. Its place in the list of Goossens's works encourages me to believe that it represents almost a conscious leave-taking of his earlier manner, for everything which followed it gives an impression of increased reflection and greater maturity.

This second group again comprises four works, three of which are for string quartet. These include the Phantasy Quartet from which an example was given in the earlier portion of this article, the Quartet in C which is dedicated to the composer's colleagues in the Philharmonic String Quartet as it was then constituted, and the two sketches 'By the Tarn' and 'Jack o' Lantern.' It was with intention that I selected as an illustration, in the opening section of this article, a fragment of the lyrical portion of the 'Phantasy' as representing a more thoughtful mode of expression. Had the object been to show no more than increased proficiency, the portion corresponding to the *Scherzo* would have answered the purpose better. As a whole, the Phantasy may be regarded as Goossens's first thoroughly characteristic work, its predecessors having shown the suggestion rather than the achievement of personality. The Quartet is in three movements dedicated respectively to Arthur Beckwith, Raymond Jeremy, and Cedric Sharpe. It might be inscribed 'to my friends pictured within,' had not Elgar the right of priority to the title. We may gather from it, incidentally, that Mr. Jeremy has something of the thoughtful gravity which belongs to his instrument, and that Mr. Sharpe is not averse from an occasional visit to a music-hall, whence he has acquired a liking for the tune 'You're here and I'm here.' These, however, are considerations which do not affect, one way or the other, the musical value of the work, whose recognition they may even have retarded, for it is still far from being appreciated as it deserves. Of the two sketches, it is scarcely necessary to speak, as by now they must be familiar to all frequenters of chamber concerts. They represent modern tone-painting in its most alluring form.

The Rhapsody for 'cello and pianoforte is another extremely characteristic work, rather more full of inner meaning than his other music of this period. There is—notably in its concluding pages—a depth of emotion that one did not suspect then, though there has been further evidence of it since. The *Coda* on a sustained pedal-note (E) is profoundly impressive.

Once again, a phase of Goossens's writing is rounded off with an attack of pianistic playfulness, which seems to be his method of clearing the way for new departures. Once again it would be easy to underestimate the artistic value of his 'Kaleidoscope,' but it would be an error repeated in aggravated form, for these twelve little pieces have other qualities besides their ingenuity and their humour. One may smile at the clever dissonance of the 'Hurdy-Gurdy Man,' or the imitative blattancy of the 'Punch and Judy Show,' but there is genuine poetry in the 'Lament for a Departed Doll,' and remarkable imaginativeness in a 'Ghost-Story,' despite its superficial indebtedness to Moussorgsky. To the critic, these pieces are of great interest because they contain in their simplest form many of the devices which, when elaborated, provide the composer with his vocabulary for utterances of deeper import. One could compile from them a glossary of his method, and even of

his mannerisms, and their simplicity is an aid to the comprehension of his aims in larger works. In the first portion of this article I gave an example from 'Promenade,' showing, naked and unadorned, his characteristic use of parallel chords. They are not always so easy to discern when imbedded in a rich context to which they supply the fundamental colouring.

The 'Four Conceits' belong to the same class of work, in a more advanced state of elaboration. The fourth bar of the following example :

'A WALKING TUNE,' OP. 20, No. 3

('Four Conceits').

represents the same method, but the composition to which it belongs is conceived in a rich vein of musical poetry. The preceding number, 'Dance Memories,' written simultaneously in the two keys of A major and E flat, achieves a fanciful impressionism by means of these superimposed tonalities. The difficulty of reading the two signatures at once must be charged against the inadequacy of our modern notation, for there is nothing inherently complicated in this fascinating little piece, which it would be child's play to read in a notation based upon a scale of twelve degrees. The other two numbers, 'The Gargoyle' and 'The Marionette-Show,' belong to a more obvious order of imagining, as the composer himself seems to have found when scoring the four pieces, for the two middle ones easily assume the garb of miniature symphonic-poems, whilst the first retains, in spite of clever orchestration, something of the nature of a pianoforte piece, and the last had to be elaborated for orchestral purposes.

Turning the page upon this spell of pianoforte writing, we arrive at Goossens's most recent works, comprising a Violin Sonata and a Pianoforte Quintet. If one excepts certain portions of the 'Cello Rhapsody,' it is here that we meet for the first time, in full deployment, the more emotional side of the composer's personality. One might almost think that he deliberately set out to contradict those critics who, because of brilliant external qualities in his earlier works, had assumed that he was

incapable of expressing the deeper feelings. It is perhaps too soon to say in what measure he has succeeded, for the great beauties of the more lyrical portions of these two works are imbedded in a context which has so much of contradiction in it that one is tempted to suspect a gleam of irony. It will need far greater familiarity with both compositions to determine how much apparent contradiction is merely contrast. The Sonata is in three movements, from which we append examples. The first

is taken almost at random from the first movement, and shows one of the permutations of its principal subject. The second (from the slow movement—1st, 2nd, and 3rd subjects together) :

Molto adagio.
sul G.

Molto adagio. L.H. R.H.

f

f *dim.* &c.

shows two subjects in combination in the course of the slow movement, and the third (from the *Finale*, 2nd subject):

Con moto.

mf

cres.

ff &c.

is a characteristic example of harmonization.

The Quintet is in one movement, and founded upon one principal subject, which, however, is shown in such conflicting aspects as to become almost unrecognisable in its many transformations. One perplexing thing about it is that the composer, practically for the first time in five-and-twenty works, has had recourse to some of the devices sanctioned by usage on the part of those of his predecessors who aimed at pathetic effects. It would be interesting to know the exact relation of sincerity to artifice in this, for there is necessarily something of both; but that is one of the secrets a composer must never be asked to reveal. The music must speak for itself, and it depends upon the personal equation with what accuracy the sentiment is communicated.

This ends our summary of Goossens's achievements to date. The rapid, and in fact somewhat disquieting development of his style, must bear the blame if one is led to divide into the three conventional periods the works of a composer of twenty-six as one would those of a composer of seventy. No doubt all this will have to be revised as the perspective broadens. It is at best a convenient method for accentuating certain stages in the evolutionary process, and does not pretend to prove a series of intrinsic changes. Goossens has now written enough for his work to be judged in the aggregate; and, rare good fortune, all of his more important works are available in print. All that is needed is the requisite curiosity; but that, unfortunately, is not the commonest attribute of musicians.

LIST OF COMPOSITIONS.

- 1911 Op. 1. Variations on a Chinese Theme for Orchestra.
1911 Op. 2. Miniature Phantasy for String Orchestra.
(Goodwin & Tabb)
1911 Op. 3. Octet for flute, clarinet, horn, harp, and strings.
1912 Op. 4. (a) Chinese Folk-song for violin and piano-forte. (Goodwin & Tabb.)
(b) Serenade for flute.
1912 Op. 5. Four Sketches for flute, violin, and piano-forte.
1913 Op. 6. Suite for flute, violin, and harp. (Chester.)
(Impromptu—Serenade—Divertissement)
1914 Op. 7. Five Impressions of a Holiday, for piano-forte, flute, and 'cello. (Chester.)
(In the Hills—By the Rivers—The Water Wheel—The Village Church—At the Fair.)
1914 Op. 8. 'Perseus.' Symphonic-poem for orchestra.
1914 Op. 9. Two Songs—Alfred de Musset. (Chester.)
(a) Chanson de Fortunio.
(b) Chanson de Barberine.
1915 Op. 10. Concert-Study for pianoforte. (Chester.)
1915 Op. 11. Symphonic Prelude to a poem by Ossian—for orchestra.
1915 Op. 12. Fantasy for string quartet. (Chester.)
1916 Op. 13. Rhapsody for 'cello and pianoforte. (Chester.)
1916 Op. 14. String Quartet in C major. (Chester.)
1916 Op. 15. Two Sketches for string quartet. (Chester.)
By the Tarn.—Jack o' Lantern.
1916 Op. 16. Deux Proses Lyriques. Edwin Evans.
(Chester.)
Hier, dans le jardin ensoleillé.
Mon chemin s'était assombri.
1916 Op. 17a. 'Tam o' Shanter.' Scherzo for orchestra.
1916 Op. 17b. 'Persian Idylls.' Edwin Evans. (Chester.)
Breath of Ney—Heart of Kalyan.

- 1917 } Op. 18. 'Kaleidoscope.' Twelve short pieces for
1918 } pianoforte. (Chester).
1. Good Morning.
2. Promenade.
3. The Hurdy-Gurdy Man.
4. March of the Wooden Soldier.
5. The Rocking Horse.
6. The Punch and Judy Show.
7. A Ghost Story.
8. The Old Musical Box.
9. The Clockwork Dancer.
10. Lament for a Departed Doll.
11. A Merry Party.
12. Good-night.
- 1917 Op. 19. Three Songs. (Chester.)
Afternoon—G. Jean-Aubry.
Epigram—Edwin Evans.
Tea-time—G. Jean-Aubry.
- 1918 Op. 20. Four Conceits for pianoforte. (Chester.)
1. The Gargoyle.
2. Dance Memories.
3. A Walking Tune.
4. The Marionette Show.
- 1918 Op. 21. Sonata for violin and pianoforte. (Chester.)
- 1918 Op. 22a. 'The Cows' (Barbor). Recitation with
pianoforte. (Chester.)
- Op. 22b. 'The Curse' (Barbor). Song. (Chester.)
- Op. 22c. Two Scotch Songs. (Chester.)
Behave yourself before folk.
I'm ow'r young to marry yet.
- Op. 22d. Three Variations on 'Cadet-Rousselle.'
(Chester.)
- 1918 Op. 23. Overture and Incidental Music to Verhaeren's
'Philip II.'
- 1919 Op. 24. Quintet in one movement for pianoforte and
strings. (Chester.)

THE CZECHOSLOVAK FESTIVAL.

BY ROSA NEWMARCH.

The Czechoslovak Festival, held at Queen's Hall and Wigmore Hall between Monday, May 26, and Wednesday, June 4, has left us wondering what to admire most: the innate musical capacities of this valiant and rapidly-advancing people or the courage and foresight of the new Republic which did not shrink from equipping and sending to London over two hundred artists to speak to us in the one language that admits of no misapprehensions.

I use the word 'equip' in its most literal sense, for Bohemia has been throughout the war so systematically denuded by Austria of all she possessed, and is so cut off from a renewal of her supplies, that I understand it was necessary to purchase in this country sufficient cloth to ensure the orchestra and choirs being presentably dressed for the occasion. These gentlemen did justice to their new clothes—one wishes all artists looked as happily unconscious of them as they did. The same thoroughness characterised their musical, as their sartorial, preparations. It made the hearts of several British conductors envious to hear of the month's steady, and almost daily, drill carried on by this little musical army before it started on its friendly invasion of our country. Once arrived, rehearsals were reduced to a minimum, which accounts for the fact that though the performances were wrought to the highest degree of perfection, there was never the least sign that the singers or instrumentalists were stale from over-training.

The Festival week opened with a pleasant informal afternoon at Æolian Hall on Sunday afternoon, May 25, to which the Press and a number of music-lovers were invited. An atmosphere of friendly interest was created which no doubt contributed to the ultimate success of the Festival. As an old friend of the Slav ideals, I was asked to speak a few words of greeting and explanation. A fuller elucidation of the meaning of the folk-songs might have been an advantage. But this was impossible, because until the choirs arrived, at midnight on Saturday, bringing their music with them, the programme could not be definitely arranged.

The first public concert took place at Queen's Hall on Monday evening, May 26, with a strong combination which included the orchestra of the Prague National Opera (Narodni Divadlo), under its conductor, Karel Kovarovic, the Prague Choral Society of Teachers, and Madame Emmy Destinnova as soloist. It was happily decided at the last moment that the Moravian Choral Society of Teachers should also take part in the programme.

The orchestra came in its full strength—ninety players—and it was good to see once again such a full body of strings on the Queen's Hall platform. One was immediately struck by the admirable quality of the ensemble—the rhythmical piancy and resilience; the fine balance of tone; the ease and perspicuity of the conductor's gestures, and the instant and intelligent response they evoked. In these respects the orchestra is above criticism. When, however, it came to weighing the merits of individual instrumental groups, one felt that our own orchestras could very well bear comparison with the Praguers. The quality of our own strings is richer. If circumstances compelled the Prague Orchestra to reduce the number of their strings to that which is generally employed by the Queen's Hall Orchestra, for instance, the effect would be much less telling. I admired the fine horn-playing, less mellow perhaps than that to which we are accustomed, but worthy of the country in which the traditions of Palsa and Janatka still linger. The lovely tone of the first clarinet seemed 'to bathe us in a clear delight'; but I have heard better oboes here, especially in the Queen's Hall Orchestra, where the suspicion of a sticky tone does not commend itself.

Passing on to the larger question of interpretation, it is not too much to say that the music of Smetana and Dvorák as played by Kovarovic and his orchestra stood out in a new light—a light thrown on it by the most intimate knowledge and emotional kinship. Personally, the choice of Smetana's symphonic-poem 'Sharka' as the opening work of the Festival had disappointed me. Neither the poetic basis nor the score of this work appealed to me very strongly. I thought of it as a kind of Slavonic 'Walkürenritt' with a dash of the 'Joy of Vengeance' movement from Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Antar.' Kovarovic made me realise for the first time that Sharka does not merely depict a virago—a prehistoric militant-