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'Bach's Misdemeanours'

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We have received the second number of the Quarterly Record of the National Union of Organists' Associations, and are glad to see in its interesting pages evidence of the growth of the Association movement. In addition to reports from the various centres, there are articles on the organs in Malta, carillons, &c. The Record is published at 115, Duke Street, Southport.

Competition for a Challenge Shield, open to Free Church Choirs, will be held under the auspices of the Free Church Musicians' Union in Hampstead Free Church Institute on May 3. Test-piece: 'As pants the hart' (Mendelssohn). Full particulars can be obtained from Mr. H. F. Nicholls, general secretary, Newport, Mon.

[Owing to unusual pressure on our space, we have been obliged, with great regret, to hold over Recital Notices and some important Correspondence.]

Correspondence.

'BACH'S MISDEMEANOURS.'

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

SIR,—I note and welcome your playful treatment of a concert notice of mine in the *Evening Standard*, in which I was daring enough to describe certain passages in Bach's violin Chaconne as 'really horrible.'

The extracts you give must, however, have puzzled some of your readers, because you have omitted a previous paragraph from which they depend. You poke fun at my asking that the passage should be 'considered purely as sound,' and that the hearer should 'imagine the performer away.' These suggestions, however, in my report followed a reference to the love of all audiences for virtuosity. My words were: 'If the truth were known it would probably be found that the admiration' (*i.e.*, of Mr. Tertis's audience on the occasion in question) 'had a strong background of realization of the difficulty of the piece.'*

My contention was the simple and quite unoriginal one that music should be listened to *as music* (and not as acrobatics). If Tetrassini comes sliding down a couple of octaves of the chromatic scale at breakneck speed, and then darts to the top again like a hawk at its prey, people should ask themselves not whether it is wonderful, but whether there is any beauty or any expressive meaning in it. The other day Hambourg played a piece of César Franck's far too fast, and people applauded far more than they had done for some earlier pieces which he had played with real taste. To put it briefly, audiences are in danger of mistaking muscle for music, and of being carried away by marvellous control of arms, hands, and vocal cords. Hence my wish that they would sometimes 'imagine the performer away and consider the music in the abstract'—a clumsily-expressed thought, perhaps, but surely not so humorous as it has seemed to you.

The heading 'Bach's Misdemeanours' was not mine, but that of a sub-editor. It was not unjustified, however, by the nature of my report, though it startled me when I saw it, and drove me to consider whether Bach could really have been guilty of crime. Turning to Schweitzer's 'J. S. Bach,' vol. i., p. 388 (English translation) I found that the passages of which I complained probably sounded very much gentler in Bach's day, owing to the use of a differently-shaped bow. I see Mr. Herbert Thompson has since been moved by your quotation from my report to give the extracts from Schweitzer in the *Yorkshire Post*, and I wish you could do the same, as it would interest especially any of your violin-playing readers who do not know Schweitzer.

Schweitzer quite supports my view as to the 'hardness' and 'bad effect' of these passages as played to-day—passages in which all our great violinists nevertheless delight.—Yours faithfully,

PERCY A. SCHOLÉS.

* The *Musical Times* report in last month's issue was very similar. It read as follows (my italics): 'Mr. Tertis amazed his audience by his virtuoso playing on the viola of the famous Chaconne written by Bach for the violin and of course transposed on this occasion.'—P. A. S.

Obituary.

We regret to record the following deaths:

ERNEST CHARLES WINCHESTER, I.S.O. (late of the India Office), on February 21, very suddenly, at Bexley, in his sixty-second year. He was the composer of the anthems, &c., published in 'Winchester's Church Music Series,' besides a Grand Festival March and other compositions for the organ, &c. His hymn 'Sing to the Lord,' for four voices, was prize-tune of the College of Organists in 1874. He was formerly organist of Holy Trinity Church, Wimbledon, and later organist and director of the choir of Christ Church, Southwark. On his retirement from the India Office he settled at Bexley.

JAMES HARDIE, in February, at Edinburgh, at the age of eighty-three. Deceased was born in Aberdeenshire, and educated at Aberdeen Grammar School and University. After some years' work as a schoolmaster, he moved to Edinburgh and gave vent to his musico-mechanical ability by violin making, playing, and teaching. He is said to have made over 2,000 violins.

THE ROYAL PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY.

QUEEN'S HALL.

For February 28 a new orchestral work, 'Spring Fire,' by Arnold Bax had been promised, but it was withdrawn because at rehearsals it was found not possible to overcome its great difficulties in time for the concert. There is some moral in this which the composer should take to heart. But, notwithstanding this omission, the programme presented was a fully interesting one. It included Arnold Bax's 'In the Faery Hills'; Sterndale Bennett's Overture, 'The Naiads'; Mozart's 'Symphonie Concertante' for solo violin and solo viola, played by M. Ysäe and Mr. Lionel Tertis; and the 'Scheherazade' Ballet music.

On March 13 the final concert of the season was given. Mr. Frederick Corder conducted his Elegy for twenty-four violins and organ. Mr. Frank Bridge conducted his Tone-poem 'Summer,' which is written for a 'small' orchestra that is practically the Beethoven orchestra; it is, on the whole, an agreeable and dainty work. Schumann's Pianoforte Concerto in A minor, the solo part of which was most charmingly played by Miss Myra Hess, was a much-appreciated item. Mr. Ben Davies sang 'Through the Forest,' from *Der Freischütz*; and Stravinsky's extraordinary Ballet music 'Petrouchka' was repeated 'by request' (we wonder whose), and it was again demonstrated that however its fancifulness may arrest attention, much of its 'local colour' unfits it for performance in a concert room.

Sir Thomas Beecham conducted on both occasions. His bold and, one might add, ruthless breaking of staid Philharmonic traditions has, on the whole, been justified by results. The audiences have been good, if not overwhelming. The 105th season will begin on October 30.

THE ROYAL CHORAL SOCIETY.

ROYAL ALBERT HALL.

'The Dream of Gerontius' was given on the afternoon of March 4. The choir was, of course, not at its normal strength, but nevertheless the choral performance was satisfactory. Miss Muriel Foster, Mr. Gervase Elwes, and Mr. Frederick Ranalow were able exponents of the soli parts, and Sir Frederick Bridge conducted.

THE LONDON CHORAL SOCIETY.

We have often dwelt on the courage of this organization, and now again we have to commend its enterprise. A performance of Bach's 'St. Matthew' Passion is a serious business, especially in these days of depleted choirs. It is a pleasure to record that the Society rose to the occasion when it gave this great work at the Queen's Hall on March 18, before a very large audience. We have no space to criticise the performance in detail. In a word, it was extremely creditable. The chief soloists were Miss Carrie Tubb, Miss Dilys Jones, Mr. Gervase Elwes, and Mr. Robert Radford. Mr. Arthur Fagge conducted.