"Tampering with the Classics?"

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CORRESPONDENCE.

"TAMPERING WITH THE CLASSICS?"

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—The London critics have surely been caught napping at last! At his concert on the 13th ult., Herr Mottl availed himself of Wagner's suggestion for re-scoring certain ineffective passages in the *Scherzo* and *Finale* of Beethoven's Choral Symphony. That the effect was a great improvement no one with ears to hear can deny; but there are, doubtless, many people who prefer Beethoven pure and simple, however ineffective, to Beethoven *cum* Wagner, however effective, just as Cromwell wanted a portrait painted of Cromwell pure and simple, "warts and all"! But how was it that, as far as I am aware, not one voice was raised in the press to protest against what would, no doubt, have been called by very ugly names if the course taken by Herr Mottl had been announced beforehand? How about their intimate knowledge of the work to let this "tampering with Beethoven" pass unnoticed? You spoke of the most important of Wagner's emendations in your issue of July, 1896, where your special correspondent, at the Lower Rhenish Musical Festival at Düsseldorf, described the effect of a performance under Herr J. Buths. He wrote:—

"Herr Buths had the courage (the impertinence some may call it) to adopt Wagner's suggested change in the instrumentation of the passage in the *Scherzo* where the second subject is played by the wood-wind against the *ff* figure—

for all the strings in four octaves. Nobody who has heard this passage played by a modern orchestra of, say, sixty or seventy strings against eight or twelve wood-wind instruments can affirm that he has heard the *effect* which Beethoven intended. For either the theme is altogether drowned by the strings or the latter *must* play *piano*, which I fancy is not in the least what the composer wanted. For to me it is clear beyond any doubt that Beethoven at this passage wished for an outburst of unbridled, boisterous gaiety, and to make the strings play softly appears a ludicrous misinterpretation of his intentions. To remedy this miscalculated orchestral effect of Beethoven's, Wagner suggested that the horns, which are only employed to mark the already very pronounced rhythm, should strengthen the wood-wind, and this is what Herr Buths did. He made his eight horns play the theme *ff*, and his eighty-eight strings hammered out their 'figure' with all their might without being able to cover the melody."

The other important alteration is in the "fanfare" in the *Finale*, directly after the opening discord. A glance at the full score will show that here the trumpets play only "open" notes, and thus cut the melodic phrase to pieces, as it were, and disturb its flow in a most irritating, jolting manner. If Beethoven had had the modern valve trumpet at his disposal who can doubt that he would have assigned the *whole* theme to them, instead of only a note or two here and there? At any rate, this is what Wagner suggested and Herr Mottl carried out! Personally, I hope that in future all conductors will follow Herr Mottl's courageous example, whether the critics profess to be "shocked" or not. The strange thing to me is, Why were they not shocked *this* time?—Yours faithfully,

16, Margravine Gardens,
West Kensington, W.

A. J. JAEGER.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—All who take sufficient interest in the orchestra to occasionally follow the performance of a symphony or an overture with a full score, must have noticed that the *arpeggios* and scales so frequently written for the violoncellos and double basses in *ff* passages for full orchestra are, as a rule, totally inaudible. For example, in the *Finale* of

Beethoven's C minor Symphony, just before the end, occurs the following:—

Here the violoncellos and double basses are assisted by the violas and bassoons, but they are, nevertheless, completely drowned by the *ff* of the trumpets, trombones, and drums. To make the passage properly heard the violoncellos and double basses would probably have to number something more than a dozen each, and an orchestra with the strings on this basis would be altogether too expensive for ordinary occasions. But why not help the double basses with some such instrument as the B flat double bass of the military band (preferably in C and constructed on the principle of Besson's cornophones)? The smooth tone of such an instrument would blend admirably with the string double basses, and I suppose it would be a very easy matter to make a brass instrument of a somewhat more penetrating tone (but not so blatant as the trombone) to double the violoncellos—indeed, I think I heard such an instrument at Besson's some time ago; the euphonium, of course, would never do.

Against this suggestion the usual cry may be raised about "tampering with the classics"; but can it seriously be supposed that Beethoven did not intend the above passage to be heard, or that he would object to making it heard by supporting the string bass with a brass bass of similar tone? That he did not make use of such instruments is sufficiently explained by the fact that they did not exist at the time he wrote. But even if we refuse to have a Beethoven symphony performed except by just those instruments for which it was originally scored, it cannot be denied that a brass bass of less incisive tone than the trombone, and more capable than the slide trombone of executing rapid passages, would be of great value to modern composers, for they might then write passages like the example I have quoted with the advantage (not possessed by Beethoven, Weber, &c.) of having them heard by the audience.—Yours respectfully,

W. F. DUNTON.

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[Without in the least degree endorsing the views of our correspondents, we insert their letters as containing matter upon which some of our readers might like to express an opinion.—ED., M.T.]

THE TRIUNE ELEMENT IN BEETHOVEN.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—Your kind notice of my paper read before the Musical Association on March 9 hardly conveys a correct impression of what I said on a few points. May I, therefore, ask you to allow me to make the following *corrigenda*?

(1.) "In the second class the latter part of the repeated phrase was sometimes heard twice." Here is evident confusion of classes 2 and 3. Class 2 has nothing to do with *phrases*, but only concerns such small fragments as cadences, &c. It is in class 3 that there are certain examples in which a two-fold repetition of the latter half of a phrase is substituted for one repetition of the whole.

(2.) The three-fold repetition occurs *but seldom* after the "Appassionata," *until we come to the last Sonata*.

(3.) The examples in Clementi are of three-fold repetition, not triune element. I particularly stated that it was the *triumity* (as opposed to mere three-fold repetition) in Beethoven's examples that specially impressed me.

(4.) It was only Mr. Gilbert Webb who raised the question whether Beethoven employed this device more than other idiomatic forms. Mr. Southgate, Mr. Shedlock, and Dr. Warriner raised many other interesting points; but, to quote the words of the chairman (Mr. Southgate), I "answered all the questions satisfactorily."

Yours faithfully,

GEORGE LANGLEY.

[In the necessarily short notice of the lecture it was almost impossible to explain all the details of so elaborate a theme.—ED., M.T.]