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DECEMBER 6, 1880.

W. CHAPPELL, ESQ., VICE-PRESIDENT,
IN THE CHAIR.

A NEGLECTED MUSICAL BENEFACTOR.

By WILLIAM H. CUMMINGS, Esq.

IN studying the story of the progress of music, as narrated by the historians of the art, I have looked in vain for some account of the rise and development of accompaniment music ; and yet I can hardly imagine a more interesting subject for investigation than the history of the gradual development of accompaniment music specially written for keyboard instruments, represented in days gone past by the organ, the virginals, the spinet, the harpsichord, and the clavichord. Let us carry our minds back a couple of centuries. What had the performer of that time to guide him in playing accompaniments to vocal music on either of the instruments I have named ? If fortunate, the accompanist might possibly have put before him a manuscript score of the music he had to accompany, but generally he would be compelled to content himself with a meagre skeleton in the shape of a treble and bass, and in both these cases he would be without the aid of figures to represent the harmonies which ought to be superposed on the bass ; and further, in both cases, supposing the vocal bass-part ceased for a beat, or for any number of bars, an instrumental bass would then not be written at all. A very skilful musician at the organ or clavichord might possibly contrive to produce a decent accompaniment from a score, and might fairly represent the mind of the composer ; but in the other case, where there was only a melody and a bass, he would be compelled to invent his own harmony, which might or might not be like that intended by the author.

I have here a work, published in 1624 at Hamburg, entitled "Scheidt's Tablatura Nova," by which you can judge of an organ score of the time ; and I have also a volume of songs, the "Ayres and Dialogues by Henry Lawes," 1653, from which you can easily appreciate the difficulty an accompanist must

have had in endeavouring conscientiously to interpret his author.

The first improvement on this state of things was made about the year 1597 by a monk named Lodovico Viadana, or Lodovico of Viadana. He invented what he called the *basso continuo*, or continued bass, a method which presented great advantages, inasmuch as the bass part was continued as long as there was any voice part or melody. The next, and perhaps a more important invention, was that technically known as a "figured bass." This, of course, was a most admirable aid to the accompanist, as by its means he was able to a great extent to follow the expressed intention of the composer. A "figured bass," as you all know, is a sort of musical shorthand, the figures used, such as 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, indicating corresponding notes or intervals calculated from a given bass-note. It is perhaps not possible to ascertain who was the inventor of a figured bass. Probably it was such a natural outcome of the *basso continuo*, and so essential to it, that several minds may have conceived the advantages which would arise from using figures to indicate chords; certain it is that Peri, Caccini, Viadana, Monteverde, and Deering all employed figures at about the same period. It is curious that none of these eminent musicians ever thought of going a step further, and perfecting their work by adding a fully written-out accompaniment to their vocal scores. They had ample materials which might have suggested such an improvement to them; there were notably the clavier compositions of Frescobaldi, not to mention other works by organists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

I have here, a very remarkable *MS. of Italian organ music written before 1600*, from which we can see that the accompanists must have had plenty of skill both in reading and playing music, and also that they were accustomed to write their organ music with all the parts fully developed. The same statement will apply to England—we know from the "*Parthenia*," published in 1611, that the organists here must have equalled their brethren of Italy. I have brought with me a *MS. volume of organ music written at the beginning of the seventeenth century*, to show what sort of music was played in England, and also what kind of copy was used at the period referred to.

The duple invention of a "figured and a continued bass" seems both in England and in Italy to have positively postponed the time when a fully written keyboard accompaniment to vocal music would be generally adopted; you may see that by referring to the printed organ parts of Rovetta's "*Mottetti*" published at Venice in 1650, and of Bassani's "*Salmi*" published in Venice in 1697, and then for examples at home in England you can see the "*Choice Psalmes put into music by*

Henry and William Lawes," published in 1648, and Henry Purcell's Sonatas, published in 1683, of which I have brought the "organ or harpsichord" parts, which are only figured *basso continuo*, wanting even a right-hand or treble part.

It must not however be forgotten that there are instances of organ parts of services and anthems which were written in short score in the seventeenth century; the very rare book called "*Musica Deo Sacra*," by Thomas Tomkins, published in 1668, is a case in point, but, notwithstanding this, the fact remains that composers universally wrote and printed their songs and solos and vocal music with the accompaniments simply indicated by a figured bass; and it is still more remarkable that this habit and custom extended down to the close of the eighteenth century.

Let us think for a moment what a world of beautiful and appropriate thought we have probably lost, owing to this unfortunate method of indicating accompaniment! To speak of Purcell—we know that he accompanied his own music on the organ or harpsichord, but what that accompaniment was like we may only imperfectly imagine—what exquisite fragments of melody—what beautifully interwoven figures, motives, and subjects he may have worked up into a musical picture we cannot tell, but judging from the flow and melody of the parts which he did write out in full, we are forced to believe that his own performance as an accompanist of his own music must have been a thing of beauty; but, alas! owing to his want of knowledge of a method or language for the expression of his musical thoughts, his accompaniments have not remained a joy for ever, but, like many other rich treasures, have become lost in the unfathomable ocean of time.

Again, take the music of Handel; who would confidently assert that he could reproduce the accompaniments the "mighty master" was wont to add to the various recitatives and other solo music? his habit, as we know, was to superintend the performance of his oratorios and operas seated at the harpsichord or organ, but what he played we can only guess.

In Handel's case we may say that he has been a special sufferer; some time early in this century his "recitatives" were divorced from the accompaniment of the instruments for which they were intended, and were relegated to the tender mercies of two performers on a violoncello and double bass, whose vagaries were sometimes fearfully wonderful.

I remember some years ago a distinguished American musician went with me to a great musical festival, and after the rehearsal of an oratorio he enquired of me whether it was the usual thing to accompany Handel's "recitatives" with a combination of scrapes and growls such as he had heard that morning. On my replying that it was, he expressed his astonishment, and said, "Why, sir, it's like a Japanese festival;"

and yet we have at this day some good folk who fondly imagine that the miserable accompaniment of a violoncello and double-bass was the thing intended by Handel.

Of course I know there is something to be said on behalf of playing from a figured bass; doubtless when the player was a man of genius or of more than ordinary talent—like the deceased musicians, Attwood and Wesley, not to mention some few living examples of kindred power—then the accompanist, being free and unfettered, would frequently produce most beautiful “additional accompaniments,” perhaps in their way as beautiful as those written by Mozart for Handel’s “Messiah”—but the majority of the musical world, whether professional or amateur, is not nor was it ever made up of geniuses, and such being the case, in ninety-nine instances out of a hundred the performance of accompaniments must have been of a very inferior kind. Some of us probably are old enough to remember the style of accompaniment which was fashionable with our grandmothers, a constant series of arpeggios rolling up from the bass, full chords in both hands, a sort of angry sea which seemed to be anxious to overwhelm and drown both singer and player. It perhaps will surprise some of you to learn that the early songs of Haydn were printed with simply a figured bass; the songs of our lesser lights, Dibdin, Shield, and others, were printed in the same way. Suppose then this manner of writing accompaniments had continued to the present day, where would have been the lovely pianoforte parts of Beethoven’s “Adelaide,” of Schubert’s songs, of Schumann’s, of Mendelssohn’s, and of those by recent living composers?

I have seen a song of which the accompaniment was so elaborate that three staves were needed to permit its being written out properly. Duet accompaniments for the pianoforte (to vocal pieces) were written by Attwood, Spohr, and others. I might dilate to a considerable length on this matter of written accompaniment, but I think I have said enough to induce you to believe with me that the inventor of a properly written part for the harpsichord or pianoforte was indeed “A musical benefactor,” and, as his claims have not hitherto been generally recognised, I think I may justly call him “a neglected musical benefactor.”

At the Caxton Exhibition, in 1877, I called attention to the inventor of the written harpsichord accompaniment, by exhibiting the publication in which he announced his invention; and I further invited a recognition of his work by inserting a special note in the catalogue. Since that time the publication of the capital “Dictionary of Music and Musicians,” edited by Mr. Grove, has commenced, and although not yet complete, it has so far progressed as to have passed in review the life and labours of my hero, Domenico Corri, who was born in 1746, and died in London somewhere about 1825. He came

to England in 1771, but soon went to Edinburgh, where he pursued his profession as vocalist and singing-master, and published the work of which I shall speak presently. He was a prolific composer of music, and published largely, but his so-called operas, like his educational works, are now almost forgotten.

The book which entitles him to our lasting gratitude is his "Select Collection of the most admired Songs, Duets, &c." There are four volumes of this work, of which I have brought the first, as that will suffice to show the nature of Corri's innovation or improvement. I will read you the title of Corri's book, and also some extracts from his preface:—

"A Select Collection of the most admired Songs, Duets, &c., from Operas in the highest esteem, and from other works, in Italian, English, French, Scotch, Irish, &c., &c., in three books: the first consisting of Italian Songs, Rondeaux, Duets, &c.; the second of English Songs, Duets, Terzets, &c.; the third of Airs, Rondos, Canzonette, Duettini, Terzetti, Catches, Glees, &c., all in their respective languages. The music in this work is divided into phrases—as, in reading, sentences are marked by points—and to each are appropriated its Graces, Cadences, &c., with accurate directions for the management of the voice in the execution of them. A proper Accompaniment is also arranged on a plan so distinct as to enable any Harpsichord player to accompany himself with ease, although unacquainted with the rules of Thorough Bass. By Domenico Corri. Edinburgh, printed for John Corri; sold by him and by C. Elliot, Parliament Square, and C. Robinson, Paternoster Row, London."

"Instrumental accompaniment, with respect to song, may be defined, the addition of such parts as are not only just according to the laws of harmony, but also selected and disposed in such a manner as may best serve to support and give effect to the vocal part or parts. There are then three things to be considered: first, the parts themselves; secondly, the choice; and thirdly, the disposition of those parts. The parts themselves are ascertained by the fixed rules of harmony, the choice and disposition belong to taste alone. Agreeably to this definition of accompaniment, Mr. Rousseau, in his musical dictionary, has so fully shown the impossibility of accompanying properly by any method yet in use, that the author thinks it unnecessary to say anything on that head, as he would be obliged to repeat what any of his readers may see on turning to that work, at the article *Accompaniment*. The method of accompanying by the score, by figuring the bass, by the rule of the octave, and by Mr. Rameau's, are there explained with great accuracy, and the disadvantages attending each of them pointed out with respect to the execution. In addition to what Mr. Rousseau says, the author begs leave to observe that in

accompanying, either by the score, by the help of figures, or of certain other signs proposed by Mr. Rameau, the performer still plays by the eye merely; and that his execution is simply an effect of quick sight and practice, and altogether unconnected with the fundamental laws of harmony. The being able, from habit, to read several lines of music at once, to calculate instantaneously the different intervals on an instrument, and to know by certain established rules which note is to ascend, descend, or remain the same, is a very different thing from knowing why this is to be done. This is the science by which those figures or other signs are placed, and with which the mere execution of those signs has no more connection than the reading of a book has with its composition. If then it be granted, as it ought to be, that accompanying by the score, by figures, or by any other signs, is limited to the simple execution of what is noted, figured, or signed, it surely follows that the simpler and more explicit those signs are, the better calculated they must be to answer their end. Now that these and many other advantages particularly belong to the method proposed by the author will be evident on the slightest consideration. For instance, let the mode which is most practised, that of figuring the bass, be compared with that which is now offered to the public. A performer who accompanies by figures, on seeing a note marked thus:—

knows that to this note he must give the accompaniment of the third, fifth, and octave; but this is the extent of his knowledge. It remains to him then to calculate such intervals; and, after having found them, to set them down thus:—

If then this operation of reading the figures and calculating the numbers answers no other purpose than merely that of finding out the notes as written in the second example, is it not evident that having those notes written down will answer every end proposed by the other method, whilst it will save all the trouble which attends it? Let us suppose now, that by practice a performer has attained the greatest facility of calculating on the instrument the numbers expressed in the writing; yet, after all, unless he be thoroughly acquainted

with the fundamental rules of *contrapunto*, he will scarcely be able to play two or three successive chords without committing some blunder, which the knowledge of the figures alone can neither warn him of nor enable him to avoid.

"Thus it has been shown that the method of accompanying by figures is not only attended with the continual trouble of calculation, but is even insufficient to answer the end for which these figures are employed; and, on the other hand, that by the method here proposed every harpsichord-player will be enabled, at sight, and without a single lesson on the subject, to accompany any piece of music with taste and elegance, as easily as he can play the most simple harpsichord lesson or air. It is true indeed that the rule of the octave, if thoroughly understood, will enable a performer to accompany without making any mistake in point of abstract harmony; but as to the choice and the proper position of these figures, and as to other refinements necessary to accompany with delicacy and expression, the rule of the octave, though ever so well understood, does not in the smallest degree lead to the knowledge of them. This is so true that a performer accompanying according to the laws of thorough-bass, without committing even a single mistake, may produce such an accompaniment as will totally destroy the effect of the music; and, indeed, it almost always happens in the execution of the harpsichord-accompaniment, that the delicate arrangement of parts, which cost the composer the greatest pains, is totally subverted and spoiled by the thorough-bass player; who, instead of attending to this arrangement, endeavours to show his knowledge in his own science by cramming in as many full chords as possible, to the entire confusion of the melody and expression of the composition. The reason of this will be obvious if the reader considers what has already been said in the definition given of accompaniment; from which it is evident that to accompany properly it is necessary to possess both a profound knowledge of the science of harmony, and a refined taste in the choice and disposition of its parts. Now it is well known that these things are perfectly distinct and unconnected; insomuch, that a person may be a complete master of the science of *contrapunto* without having any taste at all. The laws of harmony are deduced from the physical principles of sound alone: they are a subject of calculation; and, as such, may with propriety become the abstract science of a deaf man as well as of one who has the nicest ear. On the contrary, the art of arranging the parts of harmony depends on a strong and exquisite feeling of their effects; and it is, of consequence, the production of sensibility alone. It is the united operation of that science and of this feeling which produces a fine accompaniment; and every composer knows how much labour this part of his

work costs him. How then can it be supposed that a performer, though a master, can dispose an accompaniment as judiciously at first sight as the best composer is able to do in his closet after deliberate study and reiterated experiment? The absurdity of such a supposition is glaring. If then the impossibility of accompanying tolerably by any of the methods hitherto invented be obvious; and if another be found, at once easier to the performer, and more perfective of the harmony; it is to be wished that the public would enforce their approbation of it, by obliging the editors of music, instead of writing figures to the bass, to give a single line, as done in the present work, in which the proper accompaniment is expressed by notes."

"To conclude. In pointing out the errors and defects in the present mode of noting music, and stating the improvements which the author offers to the public, he is not conscious of misrepresentations: he assures his readers that he has been guided only by a love of truth, and an ardent desire of improving the science he professes. But if, notwithstanding, some persons should make objections to his work, he entreats they will not attempt to depreciate it in private companies, where the subject may not be perfectly understood; but state their objections in a public manner, and address them to the author in Edinburgh; and if it shall appear that he has fallen into error, he will be ready to acknowledge and retract it."

This is a very clear statement of the author's suggestion as to accompaniments; yet Fétis never mentions this part of Corri's labours. Although he gives an extended biography of him, it is clear he never saw the book. The notice of Corri in Grove's Dictionary is but scant, and wholly incorrect, and moreover it omits all mention of his invention. Other musical biographical works appear to be equally ignorant of Corri's special achievement.

I now invite you to look at Corri's beautifully engraved book, and at the special accompaniments; I ask you also to notice the frontispiece, pictorially depicting the "old system" and "*Corri's new system*." And I trust that in future when, either as composer or executant, you are revelling in the delight of creating or of interpreting some charming accompaniment, you will not fail to think of him whom I have ventured to call "a neglected musical benefactor."

In speaking of Corri as the inventor of a written accompaniment, of course I refer only to England. I do not know what is the first instance of its use on the Continent. As I have before said, Haydn's earliest printed songs were published with a thorough-bass only, and, indeed, the first pianoforte accompaniment to Haydn's "Creation" was the work of Muzio Clementi.

It is interesting also to note that Corri was the publisher of

Haydn's well-known canzonets, which had a pianoforte accompaniment. The title-pages of all the copies of these canzonets issued in the first edition were signed by Haydn, and had his address, 1, Bury Street, St. James's, and also Corri's address, Bridge Street, Edinburgh, with a notification that copies might be had at both places.

It should also be remembered that Mozart, when eight years of age, had published and sold at his lodgings, Thrift Street, Soho, a set of sonatas for the "clavecin" and violin or flute, in which the clavecin part was printed under the violin part. This was in 1765. The clavecin part, although without figures to the bass, is so thin and meagre that we may be quite sure it is only a skeleton of what the juvenile composer himself played.

DISCUSSION.

Major CRAWFORD.—I should simply like to ask Mr. Cummings one question—whether he has made any investigation as to the period when the new practice originated in France or Germany?

Mr. CUMMINGS.—No. I might have said that, and I had intended to, but that I thought I had already said too much. I have not made any inquiry as to the practice in France or Germany, but I can mention this as a curious fact, that when Haydn came to London, his first set of canzonets were published in London, and with the proper accompaniment. Curiously enough he signed all the copies himself. He then lived in Great Pulteney Street; afterwards he lived in Bury Street; and he signed the copies himself: but that work was actually engraved and published by Corri in Edinburgh; therefore it looks very much as if Corri had some hand in it. Whether Corri, being an Italian, had obtained some hint abroad for his work I cannot say; possibly he did; all I know is, I have not met with anything anterior to it; and to him belongs clearly the merit of having introduced it into England—there can be no doubt about that.

Mr. SALAMAN.—Who was Haydn Corri?

Mr. CUMMINGS.—A son of this man.

Mr. J. DUKE COLERIDGE.—It is not a matter of very much importance, but probably it might have some bearing on what you were just saying. If I remember rightly, Mrs. Hunter, the wife of John Hunter, the great anatomist, wrote the words of the celebrated canzonet, "My mother bids me bind my hair," and that may possibly account for the publication of the canzonet in Edinburgh, she being a Scotch lady.

Mr. CUMMINGS.—The canzonets are dedicated to her. I am not certain she did not write the words of the whole six.

Mr. SALAMAN.—Corri was the composer of several operas; one called "The Travellers," which I have at home. He was also professor in London for some time.

Dr. BRIDGE.—Have you any idea when accompaniments to ecclesiastical music were introduced?

Mr. CUMMINGS.—Not until Attwood's time, I think.

Dr. POLE.—It must be recollected that Mozart wrote a great many of his songs with a pianoforte accompaniment, and he only died about fifteen or sixteen years after the date mentioned. So that the pianoforte accompaniment must at any rate have come into use in Germany soon after that date, if it did not exist before; but it may be discovered by searching Köchel's Catalogue whether any of the songs written by Mozart with an accompaniment are anterior to that date. Many have no pianoforte accompaniment.

The HON. SECRETARY.—Dr. Pole's remark has reminded me that the celebrated harpsichord song of Handel's in "Rinaldo" was written with an accompaniment for the harpsichord, with additional accompaniments for stringed instruments.

Dr. BRIDGE.—That did not include all the accompaniments, it was only a part of the whole.

The HON. SECRETARY.—No, it was treated as a part of the concert.

Mr. CUMMINGS.—It should not be forgotten that Mozart was in London when eight years old, that was in 1763, when he published a set of sonatas for the clavecin, a very rare book, but there the clavier part is written out underneath the violin part. I think we shall find instances of instrumental, but I do not know of any vocal music previously. I have referred entirely to vocal music, not to instrumental.

Mr. SALAMAN.—It is a very interesting discovery indeed.

The CHAIRMAN.—If there are no other remarks to be made I will call on Mr. Cummings to read the next paper.