Mr. Newman and Scriabin

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Mr. Warlock (*is it a *nom de plume*?*—if not, it ought to be) has caught the spirit of the words perfectly. All three are first-rate, but the palm must go to 'As ever I saw,' which is as delightful a modern-antique as ever I heard.

PIANOFORTE MUSIC.

Theme and Six Diversions. For pianoforte duet and pianoforte solo. By Edward German.

Valse Lyrique. By Percy E. Fletcher.
[Novello & Co.]

The Good-humoured Ladies. By Scarlatti-Tommasini.
[J. & W. Chester.]

The Joyful Homecoming. By H. Balfour Gardiner.
[Forsyth Brothers.]

First Bagatelle, Pastoral (No. 1). By Cyril Scott.
[Elkin & Co.]

Among recent orchestral novelties, one of the most successful has been Edward German's *Theme and Six Diversions*. The composer has been well advised in arranging them for pianoforte solo and pianoforte duet, in which forms they will surely make a wide appeal. The solo version is fairly difficult, needing a brilliant style. As a duet, the music is well within the powers of moderately endowed players. Has German ever written two more attractive movements than the Gipsy Dance and the Waltz of this work? I doubt it. Nothing is more surprising than the ease and naturalness with which the somewhat ecclesiastical theme is developed into a couple of piquant dances. Readers who have heard the work played by an orchestra may fancy that its success was due largely to the glittering brilliance of its instrumentation. These pianoforte versions prove that the dress matters very little. The music's the thing. Here it is so fresh and tuneful that it will make friends, whatever the medium of its performance.

Mr. Fletcher's 'Valse Lyrique' is a transcription of his popular song 'The Smile of Spring,' and is a pleasing piece of salon music, of moderate difficulty.

The music of 'The Good-humoured Ladies' needs no introduction to the numerous Londoners who have enjoyed it at the Russian Ballet. They will be glad to have a pianoforte edition. It consists of about twenty of Scarlatti's best harpsichord pieces, and so needs no further recommendation.

Mr. Balfour Gardiner's 'Joyful Homecoming' is a piece which was so successful on its first performance at the Promenades that it received the rare honour of an encore. The composer has arranged it as a pianoforte solo, in which form its cheerful strains should reach a wide circle. It presents no difficulties save in the matter of chord playing, a good accommodating grasp being needed to obtain the right sonority.

Mr. Cyril Scott's 'Bagatelle' and 'Pastoral' are easier to play than most of his pieces. They contain a good deal of wayward charm, and not a little that is merely perverse. The best feature in the 'Bagatelle' is its fluid rhythm. I wish Mr. Scott would write some pieces minus shifting sevenths, ninths, and thirteenths. They were so surprising once upon a time, but they have long since become a convention, and a cloying one at that.

ORGAN MUSIC.

Fantasy in A. Carillon in A flat. By J. A. Sowerbutts.
[Novello & Co.]

Two very bright and tuneful pieces. The *Fantasy* is the longer and more ambitious, with three capital themes, not too well contrasted perhaps, as they have all much the same gait. The first and third are combined with excellent results on page 9. Mr. Sowerbutts is at his best in writing of this kind. It has much of the quality of chamber music. There is some neat canonic treatment here and there, an especially effective bit being that over the dominant pedal at the end. Here a good tuba can be made the most of. The *Fantasy* is moderately difficult, and is suitable for voluntary and recital purposes.

The *Carillon* is a recital piece pure and simple. It is an ingenious treatment of a tiny *ostinato* consisting of the notes E flat, D natural, and F—really an ornamented E flat, the dominant of the piece. This chiming figure is played on the choir with 8-ft., 4-ft., and 2-ft. stops, while the right hand and pedals discourse fluently and melodiously. The three

notes are invested with great variety and interest, but there is nothing farfetched. Relief is provided by a middle section in B major, wherein the chime has a rest. The 'Carillon' should be popular. Mr. Sowerbutts is an organ composer of whom a good deal more will be heard, unless I am mistaken. The only fault to find with him at present is a tendency to suspend animation before the entry of a new theme. Such halts are convenient for registration purposes, and are unobjectionable so long as they do not make themselves felt as halts. It is possible to 'carry on' over such points, just as a good singer appears to be singing through rests, and even interludes. When he is over these danger points, and well under way, Mr. Sowerbutts's writing is so excellent that his future work will be looked for with interest.

Letters to the Editor.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY SPECIAL CHOIR.

SIR,—The response to the appeal for members of the above choir, which was made known through the courtesy of the Press, has been most gratifying as regards both the number and the capacity of those who have come forward. The choir is nearly complete, and rehearsals are commencing forthwith. Arrangements are being made for the following performances: Monday, December 8, at 8.0, 'Israel in Egypt'; Monday, March 22, 1920, at 8.0, 'St. Matthew' Passion; Monday, June 7, at 8.0, Unaccompanied Motets.

It is now exigent to appeal to music-lovers, who may not themselves be performers, for an equally encouraging support on the financial side. In a venture such as this there are necessarily certain heavy expenses which will not again recur; but if the music is to be performed in the best possible way, it is hardly to be expected that even the current expenses will regularly be met by the collections alone. We therefore ask, first of all, for donations; but in order that we may be able adequately to meet the initial expenses, these should amount to at least £300. Secondly, we ask for annual subscriptions, in order that we may have a reserve fund to cover current expenses; annual subscribers will be entitled to three tickets for each performance in respect of each guinea subscribed. Thirdly, we ask for a guarantee fund; guarantors will be entitled to one ticket for each performance in respect of each half-guinea guaranteed. In the event of a deficit, the loss will be divided amongst the guarantors *pro rata*.

Donations, subscriptions, or offers to guarantee, should be sent to The Receiver-General of Westminster Abbey, The Sanctuary, Westminster, S.W.-1. Cheques should be made payable to the 'Westminster Abbey Special Choir Fund.'—Yours, &c.,

SYDNEY H. NICHOLSON

(Organist and Master of the Choristers, Westminster Abbey).

MR. NEWMAN AND SCRIBAN.

SIR,—After succumbing to an uncontrollable fit of laughter during a recent performance of Scriabin's 'Prometheus,' I feel myself entitled to the honour of belonging to the species known as the 'plain man' (who rises in revolt) referred to in Mr. Newman's criticism in the *Evening Standard* of September 24. I am told that I do not listen with my imagination and that my ear will tolerate any discord so long as it is the necessary and natural medium of an idea. Be that as it may, I am certain that as long as I am equipped with the brace of ears that I have at present I shall come no nearer toleration than laughter when a theme on the trumpets leaps out at a tangent, as it were, and cocks a snook at me from mid-air, or when a combination of cymbals and dinner gongs proclaim the 'ardours and ecstasies of realised and unrealised desire.'

But is not Mr. Newman somewhat inconsistent, or is it merely that he has turned a complete mental somersault during the last ten years? In his book on Strauss, written in 1908, he says *à propos* the 'Don Juan' dying shudder and the 'Don Quixote' dying sigh: 'But it is one thing to extend the scope of musical speech in this legitimate way and quite another to make a bogus extension by merely *tacking a literary label on to a handful of notes that cannot possibly be made to mean what the label says they mean*' (italics are mine). He then goes on to point out that 'when Strauss writes a sequence of notes and tells us that it is meant to

signify a feeling of satiety in Don Juan's heart, we are bound to tell him that it does nothing of the kind—there is no congruity between the literary label and the musical phrase.' Further: 'So again with the theme of "disgust" that blares out in the trombones at the end of the section descriptive of Delights and Passions in "Also sprach Zarathustra." In the first place this no more suggests disgust than it does toothache; and when at a later stage he brings in the theme in diminution and asks us to see in this the partly convalescent Zarathustra making sport of his previous depression of spirits, we can only say that we are unable to oblige him. All we are conscious of is that a sequence of notes that had very little meaning to begin with is now being made unnecessarily ugly and ridiculous.'

After this we can only conclude that in those prehistoric days Mr. Newman had not yet learned to listen with his imagination. But nothing can stem the tide of Mr. Newman's greedy intellect once it gets going, and now he 'wonders that the ordinary language of music should ever have been so transformed as to make it capable of saying the things Scriabin makes it say—of suggesting these primitive depths and ethereal heights, of finding a voice for the growing pains of the cosmos,' &c., &c. In other words, Scriabin's music apparently presents an exception to the otherwise immutable basis of the most enlightened culinary research: what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Mr. Newman is so fond of pulling other people's legs that I am sure he will not mind my making his nether extremities undergo a respectful process of telescopic haulage, as he knows quite well that no one admires and recognizes more than this particular 'plain man' the immense spiritual services which he has rendered to the cause of music. It is just another instance of the exception proving the rule.—Yours, &c.,

14, Craven Hill, W. 2.
September 25, 1919.

ROBERT E. LORENZ.

ITALY'S VOCAL TRADITION.

SIR,—May I be permitted to express my appreciation for the truth and insight displayed in Mr. Cesari's article 'Italy's Vocal Tradition,' and at the same time to give a few facts which may interest the student of things musical?

After one has studied—say in Germany—for many years, the first thing that strikes the new student in Italy is the ease with which all singers, both male and female, take their top-notes. Every tenor has a 'high C,' whatever else he has not, and every coloratura of the humblest calibre sings E in Alt in Gilda's aria 'Caro nome,' with a security and facility which puzzles the newcomer.

The public has been fed on these ambitious soarings, as well as on the falling into chest notes of the dramatic soprano, for instance, at the end of Santuzza's aria 'Voi lo sapete, o Mamma.' They expect these things, in fact they demand them of the artists, and no one dreams of refusing such luxuries. Therefore, to the smallest provincial opera-house, tenors and sopranos go armed with these accessories, knowing full well that whistling or ridicule will follow if Manrico does not deliver a long sustained Doh in 'La Pirra' of 'Il Trovatore,' or Lucia fails finally to go mad on the E in Alt in the wonderful cadenza.

To us, trained in the ideal that an even voice and equal quality throughout are the chief requisites, these spasmodic outbursts come almost as vulgarities, after a very mediocre performance of an aria. But, with time, one's ear becomes accustomed to these points or rather finesse in art, and then like the rest of the people we wait through long, badly sung operas for just these two or three stunts, actually counting the bars of 'Spirito Gentil' ('La Favorita') to see if the tenor can do the traditional four lines in one breath. 'To such base uses . . .'

Thus, on the surface, it seems that limitation or difficulty of range is quite eliminated from the Italian vocal vocabulary. But all this is very far from constituting 'bel canto,' though it certainly helps when other qualities are present.

I have never heard more indifferent singing than at Milan, during the years 1915-18. There were great exceptions—but not Italian ones—namely, two beautiful tenor voices, Hockett (United States) and Di Giovanni (Johnson) from Canada—men whose names will soon become world wide as true exponents of the real Italian school of singing.

Just before his death, Sabbatini himself said to an English pupil, that Italy had long since lost the art of imparting the 'bel canto,' and pointed out that within the last decade this great land of song and story had produced only one singer of any note, namely Rosina Storchio, and she herself could not be counted among the stars of the very first magnitude—that is, she does not twinkle in the same sphere as Patti, Melba, Sembrich, or Hempel.

Another fact worth pondering over, physiologically, is the undeniable luscious beauty and extra superiority of the Italian male voice in contrast with the white, hard quality of the female. It seems incredible, but it is nevertheless true, that Signorina Muzio, in 1916, was the first Italian woman to sing in a Puccini opera at the Metropolitan Opera House of New York, where the stars of every nationality shine forth in dazzling splendour.

She appeared in 'Tosca' then, war conditions preventing Destinn and others from leaving Europe, and the American manager-himself, discussing this phenomenon with me, said that the Italian men were peerless where voice was concerned, but the women were very indifferent. Look at your opera programmes before the war. The prime donne were Melba, Destinn, Hempel, Von der Osten, Dux, Matzenauer, Schumann Heink, *ad infinitum*—not one Italian name. The men, however, ran thuswise: Caruso, Martinelli, Scotti, Tito Ruffo, Zenatello, Sammarco, &c.

It is a very curious thing—perhaps some one can explain this to us.

The cult of Wagner naturally hindered the Italian in competing outside his own shores, for there was the bar of language, Germany being a *pois astinorum* for these warm, sunny Southerners. But Puccini, Verdi, &c., had no such obstacle. And though modern music, such as Wagner, may be easier to sing, being more declamatory and abrupt than the o'd Italian style, it is infinitely more difficult to learn. And here again Italy fails, as the training in general is not severe enough on the purely musical side. Months instead of years are lightly devoted to acquiring the necessary artistic equipment, with the result that, before the war, one looked in vain for serious exponents of modern music among the Italian school.—Yours, &c.,

LUTE DRUMMOND.

Australia House, Strand, W.C.2.

MEYERBEER AND HIS EXECUTORS.

SIR,—I am glad that Mr. Wotton has called attention to the unpublished compositions of Meyerbeer. These include music to a play by Blaze de Bury entitled 'La Jeunesse de Goethe,' which contains a setting of the Church scene from 'Faust.' The great composer is said to have left also an unfinished opera entitled 'Judith,' as well as a quantity of other works of different kinds. These compositions should have been published long ago, and even now they could not fail to prove highly interesting. Meyerbeer's operas have unfortunately been much neglected of late, and it is probable that many people are unaware of their beauties. The mangled version of 'Les Huguenots' known to Covent Garden audiences gives but a poor idea of a masterpiece which commanded the enthusiastic admiration of Berlioz, Wagner, and Liszt. The enormous influence exercised by Meyerbeer over his contemporaries and successors, including Wagner, Verdi, Gounod, and Bizet, is I think scarcely realised.—Yours, &c.,

ARTHUR HERVEY.

1, Norfolk Crescent, Hyde Park, W. 2.
October 20, 1919.

The Capetown Municipal Choral Society and Orchestra took part in a concert given at the City Hall by Mr. Theo. Wendt on August 19. The chief item in the programme was Elgar's 'The Spirit of England,' heard in its complete form for the first time in Capetown. Familiar numbers, largely of solo music, made up the remainder. Mrs. F. Magers was the soprano soloist in Elgar's work. The same choir and orchestra repeated 'The Spirit of England,' under Mr. Wendt, on September 4, when the programme also included the 'Enigma' variations. The Funeral March from 'Götterdämmerung' was played in memory of General Botha.