A New Form of Choral Composition (Concluded)

Author(s): S. Royle Shore

Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 60, No. 918 (Aug. 1, 1919), pp. 403-406

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3701880>

Accessed: 29-01-2016 13:43 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Musical Times Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

A NEW FORM OF CHORAL COMPOSITION.

BY S. ROYLE SHORE.

(Concluded from June number, page 282.)

In the first part of this article the writer sought to show how the cathedral model in service music, providing as it does for a choir only, is not an ideal form for the ordinary parish church, in which a congregation as well as a choir have to be taken into account. Unsatisfactory shifts and compromises were referred to. As against these he advocated a new form of composition in which due provision should be made for both the unison, or rather octaves, of the congregation singing in medium voices, with the harmony of the choir singing in the proper range of the respective voice-parts. He indicated two or three ways in which this could be done, and gave examples. It is now proposed to give some extracts from recent compositions which have been expressly written to encourage carrying into practice the principles advocated.

In an address before the House of Laymen for the Province of Canterbury on February 18, 1914, by the present writer—possibly the first time for about half a century since the subject of Church music was ever dealt with in the Assemblies of the Church, when Convocation, after a silence of three centuries, said something on the point and happily did nothing—he called attention to our inability, from lack of a suitable setting, to join in singing a Te Deum of thanksgiving, although Italian peasants were understood to be able to sing with fervour a simplified form of the theoretically well-known Ambrosian or authentic chant. This is doubtless identical with that edited by Dom Gregory Ould, O.S.B., as the 'Melody sung by the Roman people.'* After advocating an attempt to popularise the Ambrosian chant in its full form for general use and narrating the steps that he had taken in that direction,† he went on to say:

'It would be possible for this House, with the weight of the Convocations at our back, besides promoting the singing of this ancient music, to secure the composition by musicians who can do great things, of a standard Te Deum on modern lines with a broad melody for the people, responded to by the choir—this would be optional—in music of an exalted character on the antiphonal lines to which I have already made reference. . . . The ancient form is ready to hand through the labours of great English experts. The modern form has yet to be composed. If this House gives the backing required, I am prepared to approach some of our great musicians and negotiate matters. . . . The universal singing of these two settings, ancient and modern, would be merely a matter of organization, diocese by diocese, deanery by deanery, or parish by parish.'

Not content with obtaining a well-nigh unanimous resolution of approval to the proposals made, the writer made out a specification of what he thought was wanted on the modern side of things, and submitted it to three eminent musicians, cathedral organists. One was frankly hostile to the idea, another non-committal, but the third was interested. Instead, however, of the last-named composing a Te Deum himself on the lines indicated, he advised the present writer to do so. With regret and misgiving he took the matter in hand, and made a commencement a few weeks before the war broke out. On that dire event happening, he expanded the form of the work, wrote concurrently in Latin as well as

English, made a prophetic provision for the variations in the American Prayer Book, and finished it in the first month of the war, as an initial war job, so that it might be available for thanksgiving purposes when the inevitable end came. The music of this pioneering experiment* takes the form of a composition for two choirs, one singing in harmony and the other in unison, or rather octaves, the latter leading a congregation. The choral part is optional and can be omitted, and the whole rendered without a skilled body of singers. On the other hand a congregation can be dispensed with, one side of the choir taking its place.

The first example is taken from a portion of the Te Deum which is admittedly capable of treatment in two directly opposite ways. Every composer of a Sanctus is familiar with it. The words 'continually do cry' and the context certainly suggest plenty of tone; but on the other hand the ascription of holiness to anyone is usually associated with devotional quietude. What is to be done? The writer was publicly rebuked at one of his recent lecture demonstrations for what he had done 'in the premises,' as exemplified below. He ventured to suggest that that was not the point of the lecture, and that moreover there were two recognised methods of treating the passage, and what was good enough for Sir Edward Elgar was good enough for him—adding that he would like to inquire whether the absence of Elgar's Hereford setting in F from so many cathedral lists was on account of its length and 'because of the Dean.' If so, somebody ought to go and do something. It is said that it is no answer to balance a long canticle with a short anthem. The Te Deum, in particular, must have a strict time limit. This would effectually rule out for all time such a masterpiece as Gibbons in D minor, when it becomes available. It is reported of Lord Palmerston that before advising the Crown on an appointment to a Bishopric, he put the following questions to the object of his favour: 'Can you suffer fools gladly?' 'Can you answer a letter by return of post?' Could not the Incorporated Society of Musicians, or the Royal College of Organists' suggest some suitable questions to be put to a prospective Dean, or Canon for that matter, by the Prime Minister of the day, to ensure that the nominee of the Crown had some fitness for the post, besides being mainly an exponent of or an experimenter in modernism, socialism, or pessimism?

As will be seen, the example contains specimens of contrasted and antiphonal treatment between the two choirs, and shows how the two can combine chorally, the unison singers doubling the alto part in octaves at 'Heaven and earth':

ROYLE SHORE, 1914.

CHOIR 1.
WITH PEOPLE.

CHOIR 2.

ORGAN.

Adagio e solennemente.

Adagio e solennemente. ♩ = 54.

p

p

p

Ho . ly,

Ho . ly,

Novello.

* Novello.

† 'Diocesan Music,' No. 5; and 'Cathedral Series,' No. 8 (Novello).

Piu mosso.
mf
Lord God of Sa -

Piu mosso.
mf

f
Lord

ff
Heav'n and

ff
God of Sa - bá - oth; Heav'n and

ff

Occasionally the choir and congregation combine in a broad unison passage.

At a lecture by the present writer before the South London Society of Organists on April 20, 1918, on 'Choir v. Congregation (Reconciliation or Rivalry),' at which examples were sung from the Widor Mass, quoted in the first part of this article, and his own Te Deum, the lecturer pleaded for the

'democratising of our choral music, and trusted that our great composers would seriously consider the possibilities of this form of composition, and apply it to music for the concert platform as well as church music. When we came to

celebrate the Peace after the war, it would be a misfortune if Te Deums and the like followed conventional models, whatever their musical merit might be. They might well provide a part for a unison choir—a mighty one for a place like St. Paul's—with which trained contingents from our naval and military forces, and war workers, could be associated. The effect of the choir proper would be heightened, for there was nothing more impressive in music than the contrast between unison and harmony, and their occasional combination.'

The possibilities held forth certainly attracted some of those present, and there was an encouraging sequel to the lecture. Under the guidance of the chairman, Mr. Stanley Roper, sub-organist of Westminster Abbey, the committee of the Society offered substantial prizes for settings of the Te Deum and Canticles embodying the features advocated in the lecture. The writer is now permitted to give extracts from one of the prize compositions, that from the pen of Mr. B. Vine Westbrook, which, it is hoped, will soon find a publisher. The first extract shows the combination between the two choirs in an effective manner, the longer notes of the unison singers contrasting well with the quicker movement of the choralists' parts :

Allegro. B. VINE WESTBROOK, 1918.
CHOIR 1.
WITH PEOPLE.
Heav'n and earth are
Heav'n and earth are

CHOIR 2.
Heav'n and
Heav'n and earth are

Allegro. ♩ = 108.
ORGAN.
Heav'n and

full of the ma - jes - ty of thy
full of the ma - jes - ty of thy
earth are full of the ma - jes - ty of thy
full of the ma - jes - ty of thy
earth are full of the ma - jes - ty of thy
earth are full of the ma - jes - ty of thy

glo - ry. The glo - rious com - pa - ny
glo - ry.
of the A - pos - tles: praise thee.

The following example is from the concluding portion of the great Hymn, and admirably illustrates an effective way of treating its antiphonal structure:

B. VINE WESTBROOK, 1918.

CHOIR 1.
WITH PEOPLE.

CHOIR 2.

ORGAN.

*Moderato. **

O Lord, save Thy people:

and

Moderato.

p

Ped.

senza org. ad lib. Man.

bless Thine her - i - tage.

* Founded on the Sarum Epistle Tone.

In former days it is well remembered that St. Paul's Cathedral gave a very strong lead in the matter of Church music, and the action that it took—to give one instance only—in popularising the choral rendering of the Eucharist had remarkable results. Much that it then did, particularly in the treatment of Plain-chant, has however now to be reconsidered in deference to modern light. Until this leadership is 'restored again (which is much to be wished),' it is very encouraging to note the inspiration which is coming from Westminster Abbey as a centre, under Mr. Nicholson's guidance. It is one of the hardest things in the world for a musician whose business in life it is to extract the uttermost musical farthing from a body of highly-trained singers, to interest himself seriously in parochial musical problems and the singing of the multitude, or even the semi-skilled. The late Dr. Sinclair was so sensitive on the point that he could not bear to hear the hymn-singing of a congregation in his cathedral, partly on account of its imperfections and partly on account of the bad choral balance that it set up. He had not realised the possibilities which it is the intention of these articles to make known generally, and how what he deprecated could be avoided if one got away from the normal cathedral model. As in hymn-singing, so with service music. Yet here is Mr. Nicholson, who probably, musically speaking, is quite as sensitive as our dead friend, going out of his way to combine choral and congregational principles in a *Te Deum** of thanksgiving recently composed. This was produced at the Abbey on May 9, at the annual Festival of King's College, the students singing the part of a unison choir intended to lead a congregation. The following example gives some admirably contrasted writing between the two groups of singers:

SYDNEY H. NICHOLSON.

DESCANT FOR
BOYS' VOICES.

CHOIR AND
CONGREGATION
IN UNISON.

ORGAN.

Majestic and not too fast.

The glo - rious com - pa - ny of th'A -
Majestic and not too fast.

praise

pos - tles: praise Thee

The music is laid out for a choir singing in unison, or rather octaves, some of the treble singers adding an optional descant in two parts. This at once discloses an apparent variation in the form advocated,

* The Faith Press.

and suggests that, when the idea is generally taken up by composers of skill, many unthought-of possibilities may be brought to light. The unwillingness of amateur choirs to sing anything in unison will, however, have to be taken into account.

At the end we have antiphonal treatment of the concluding Versicle and Response portion in Anglican chant form, freely treated to meet the character of the different verses. This shows also the possibility of an elastic form of modern chant for the *Te Deum*, a great need in view of the shortness of so many of the verses.

All interested in the reform of parochial music agree in deploring subservience to the cathedral model, but have nothing to suggest in its place, save, in the case of some, the use of Plain-chant, which can never be more than a partial substitute, and that only where the people have direct instruction in singing it. The Report of the Archbishops' Committee on the 'Worship of the Church' is no exception to this, and also takes no cognisance of Plain-chant save in the case of the Psalter, quite the most difficult and least attractive branch of the subject to handle in the interests of congregational singing, in the absence of properly marked psalters in the Prayer Book. The Report, on its musical side, if it is to be of any real service should be done nearly all over again, with the help of wider expert assistance, particularly after the way it has been dealt with by the Royal College of Organists. The remedy—so far as the Holy Communion, the *Te Deum* and Canticles in modern music are concerned—seems to lie in the proposals made in these articles. If there is any better suggestion to make, let it be heard. Composers should note the importance of considering the capabilities of a large body of unskilled singers, and not expect them to trip along too fast. The provision of handy books for the use of unison choir and congregation at a popular price will be almost a necessary feature. Both the present writer and Mr. Nicholson have kept this in view, the latter adding Tonic Sol-fa notation.

Of course music of this kind is not intended to be thrown at a congregation, expecting them to take part by merely hearing it frequently. The singing of the multitude is quite worth cultivating. Experience shows that something like 98 per cent. of people can sing a simple unison melody with a little help. What is really required is the organization in every congregation of a special body to form a subsidiary choir of unison singers to lead them. Half an hour before the Sunday evening service is an unoccupied time both socially and ecclesiastically. They could easily receive occasional instruction then, and sometimes unite with the rest of the congregation and the choir proper in a combined instruction at the close of the service, or in lieu of the sermon.

Mr. Ernest Newman has recently recorded in the *Birmingham Daily Post* his impressions of a great multitude singing, as follows:

'I was in Glasgow the week before last for the Competition Festival, and was greatly struck by two things—the knowledge of and love for the Scots folk-songs that the Scots people have, and the thrilling effect of what the Americans call community singing. I have rarely enjoyed anything so much in a concert hall as the singing of the splendid Hebridean tramping song ("The road to the Isles") by an audience that must have numbered well over three thousand people. . . . The thing is not so much the song as the singing—the unanalysable sense of uplift that one gets from being part of a crowd that is enjoying itself rationally. Provided the music be not actually banal, almost anything

with the right swing will do, though of course the better the popular music is the more pleased the musicians in the crowd will be.'

Cannot our cathedral organists, no friends as a rule to the singing of the multitude, follow the example set by Westminster Abbey, and go outside their traditions? Diocesan choral associations, instead of occupying themselves with propagating a mild representation of the cathedral service, might very well take up the new suggested form, and encourage the co-operation of subsidiary choirs. If they did this, many fine compositions from our leading composers would soon become available, and command ready publishers. An article in *The Times* of July 13 on 'The People's *Te Deum*' should stimulate interest and inspire composers to experiment. Choral music, instead of being the property of the few, would become the possession of the many, while nearly all could develop into performers according to their lights and skill, and opportunities for being trained. Modern musical developments have not much of a message for the multitude. Perhaps the writer's proposals may do something to supply this deficiency. If their practicability is doubted, then, in the ecclesiastical domain, he would refer doubters to the resolution passed by the Canterbury House of Laymen on February 18, 1914, and suggest that they should try to act up to it. It runs as follows:

'That the demand for more and better congregational singing would best be met, as a branch of practical Church music reform, by standardising certain suitable music, ancient and modern, for use by the people, with or without the help of a choir, publishing it in a handy form, and organizing the singing of it diocese by diocese.'

If, instead of talk about Church music reform, this resolution of five years ago had been seriously regarded and universally acted upon, our recent Thanksgiving Services would have gained greatly in impressiveness.

The Musician's Bookshelf.

BY 'FESTE.'

Probably the art of interpretation never had a greater exponent than Yvette Guilbert. It is difficult to understand a more complete contrast to the singers who capture the public ear mainly by a fine voice lavished on a safe and limited repertory. What is the secret of the wonderful Frenchwoman's success? While under her spell, we say at once 'personality,'—an obvious answer, which, however, is not complete. The rest of the secret is to be found in her book 'How to Sing a Song' (Macmillan), and may be summed up in two words—hard work. And yet no art is apparently so spontaneous as that of Yvette Guilbert.

Judged by ordinary canons, Guilbert has no remarkable singing voice. Apparently she regards a fine organ as a hindrance rather than a help to the singer of songs. She says:

If you want to make a real career as a singer of songs, the career of a *chansonneur*, you must have a long special voice-training. You must not be either a soprano or contralto, either a baritone, bass, or tenor, you must be a soprano and contralto, you must be a baritone, bass, and tenor, all in one. This will prevent you from singing a song as a 'uniform' work, like an operatic part. The singers who have what is called 'one register' normally placed, like operatic stars, are out of the question for the singing a song. Their voices