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The Development of Opera

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FEBRUARY 9, 1892

W. H. CUMMINGS, ESQ.,

IN THE CHAIR.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPERA.

BY E. ALGERNON BAUGHAN.

I PROPOSE to-night to trace the development of opera in broad outlines, not so much from a musical as from a dramatic point of view. It is my contention that music is capable of heightening and interpreting dramatic action, and that it does *not appear unnatural* that the drama should be expressed by song in the place of speech. I mention this because some are of opinion that, inasmuch as music is not the usual form of human utterance, music-drama can never be more than an artistic anomaly, an essentially artificial form of drama striving to be natural, and that, therefore,, the artificiality of both music-drama and opera being equal, the latter is to be preferred as being a more purely musical form of art. I think, on the contrary, that music-drama is natural.

All art is, at bottom, artificial—the salient point is that it should not *appear* so. Singing is, after all, but an idealized form of speech, and therefore can be made to appear quite natural as a mode of human expression. Having thus defined my position I will proceed to trace, to the best of my ability, the development of opera.

The development and progress of music is analogous to that of the human race. Not by fits and starts, nor by the independent thought of one man, but gradually, little by little, it has grown into an art which can express the whole gamut of human feeling. Opera at first was formed, as is well known, on the model of Greek tragic-drama, which, in its turn, was a development of lyric-drama, originally a thanksgiving to the gods, consisting of choral songs and dances. To this somewhat invertebrate form of art a backbone of drama was added ; first, by the introduction of the dithyramb, a song of revellers in praise of Bacchus; subsequently, by rhapsodic recitation. The rhapsodists

were, in a sense, actors, and thus they brought into lyric-drama the germs of theatrical dialogue. Gradually, dialogue having become more predominant, the function of the chorus was reduced, and from this sprang Greek-tragedy, which, having been developed from lyric-drama, never lost its semi-music character, the chant of the actors and the songs of the chorus being sustained by the accompaniment of musical instruments. After the decay of Greek music-drama there was a long sleep, from which this form of art did not awake until the dawn of the seventeenth century.

Until this period, of which I am about to speak, music in Italy had been employed mainly for religious purposes and in complicated madrigal form; but technical artificialities had so obscured the words to which the music was set that their meaning was entirely lost. It was not a union, but a domination of music over poetry. Vincenzo Galilei and a band of Florentine amateurs considered that the purpose and poetic essence of music were thus destroyed, and, impelled by the love of everything Greek which pervaded the cultivated classes, they determined to resuscitate the Greek-drama, which, so far as they were able to judge, seemed to them to be a model of the true relation of music to poetry. The setting of music to verses so that all the words might receive their due emphasis was the principal aim of Galilei and his friends. The music was not to be musical in the ordinary melodic sense of the term, for the intervals were *not* to be chosen for their melodic beauty alone, but in imitation and idealization of the rhythmic rise and fall of the human voice; the time was to be fast or slow according to the exigencies of the sentiment. In fulfilment of these ideas, Peri, already a celebrated musician, in conjunction with Caccini, composed "Dafne," the first lyric-drama produced on the stage.

But the most important of composers to embrace these principles of musical art was Monteverde, well-known as a daring reformer of harmony. He brought out his "Arianna" in 1607, and his "Orfeo" a year later. He aimed at giving distinctive music to each of the *dramatis persona*; he enlarged the function of the orchestra so that the instrumental music, quite as much as the voices, should illustrate the meaning of the scene and words; and he carried out the idea, founded on artistic common-sense, that the action and text should rule the musical expression and design. Not only in these broad aspects did his works resemble the modern music-drama, but also in a constant use of a recitative which was a mean between true recitative, as formulated by Galilei and since used in Italian Opera, and true melody, thus obtaining a ceaseless flow of vocal music.

The first departure from Monteverde's methods was made by his pupil, Catelli-Bruni, who introduced lyric melody into opera; and the aria-form, afterwards developed by Scarlatti, was foreshadowed in his work. And thus opera became gradually more purely musical, and, towards the latter half of the seventeenth century, the great dramatic principles to which Monteverde had adhered were beginning to be forgotten, and the works of subsequent composers had little in common with those of that illustrious musician.

And what were the reasons of the comparative failure of a movement so replete with true ideas of music in relation to the drama? Perhaps it was owing a good deal to Monteverde's classical subjects being out of touch with the people, appealing as they did to a knowledge and love of Greek myth—a love which amounted to a passion among the cultured classes, but which was not shared by the masses. And, again, musicians having just thrown off the shackles of pedantry were naturally inclined to play with their art, to enter the open gates of the heaven of song, and to give up themselves to musical expression without reference to dramatic propriety. However that may be, the introduction by Catelli-Bruni of the embryo of aria-form was the commencement of Italian opera as distinguished from music-drama. It is true that Cambert, a Frenchman, composed some operas on Monteverde's models, but they did not long keep the stage, being supplanted by those of Lulli, who, though he did a service by enlarging the scope of recitative, was guilty of the insertion in opera of that crowning inanity, *the ballet*.

Alessandro Scarlatti brought about a complete change in Italian opera. He used two kinds of recitative, accompanied and unaccompanied, and invented the *Da Capo* ending to arias, an arbitrary form servilely imitated by his successors. The idea of the *Da Capo* ending, giving as it does all the regularity and stiffness of a mere song, is intensely undramatic, and could have only entered the head of a man to whom music was everything and drama nothing. From Scarlatti's day opera drifted farther and farther away from drama, and became more and more a purely musical art. Buononcini, Porpora, Leonardo Leo, and Tomelli, the most important composers following Scarlatti, all helped to make a noble form of art sink still deeper in the whirlpool of virtuosity into which it had fallen.

The laws which regulated opera during the greater part of the eighteenth century were so severely formal that a composer had to surrender his artistic conscience to senseless convention. The five distinct forms of aria, the number of duets, the succession of the species of aria, the *Da Capo* ending—which, by the way, Jomelli

had the sense to discard—the limit of the number of *dramatis personæ*, all went to create an art as symmetrical and as uninteresting as the blazing *parterres* of a landscape gardener. And when, in addition to this, it is remembered that all arias were calculated for the utmost vocal display and that a spoken recitative was freely interspersed with the idea of giving singers breathing time, the mind shudders at the depth of the lyric-drama's degradation. The claims of singers being of the greatest importance and duets and arias being so regular in their occurrence, the poor librettist must not be blamed if, hampered by these restrictions, he failed to produce a poem imbued with consistent dramatic truth. This degradation of the lyric stage was no doubt due to the absurd importance singers had arrogated to themselves on account of the apotheosis by their audiences of the gymnastics of vocalization, a feticism which has not yet entirely disappeared from among us. But the operas of the early part of the eighteenth century were free from that intrinsically artificial form of musical art, concerted singing, which, originally included only in comic opera, is said to have been introduced into serious opera by Paisiello. Now, trios, quartets, and the rest may be very pleasing as pure music, but, from a dramatic point of view, there is no excuse for their insertion in opera. It may be urged that since singing, as a mode of expression, is in itself unnatural there is nothing more artificial in five persons singing at once than there is in singing at all. An assertion such as this really begs the whole question. All art is based on nature, but the expression of all dramatic art has to be idealized and exaggerated; therefore singing, which is idealized speech, may appear perfectly natural (and the appearance is the whole question) when it follows the natural course of human dialogue. But it is not natural that four or five persons should express themselves simultaneously in neatly dove-tailed phrases, nor does it *appear* natural when used in opera. On the contrary, whatever opera gains, musically speaking, by concerted singing, it loses by the weakening of illusion, the end which dramatic art, whether musical or literary, sets out to attain. Under the influence of violent emotion it is natural, and often happens in life, that several persons should exclaim together in short phrases; but to represent this it would be necessary that the clash of rhythm should be given and that hardly would constitute concerted singing. At the same time, there are moments when it seems almost natural for two characters to sing together, and this especially is the case in love scenes, where the souls of the lovers may be said to have become one and their minds to be conceiving the same thoughts. As an example of this, I may mention the great love scene in Wagner's music-drama, where *Tristan* and

Isolde sing a few passage in unison. When emotions too deep for words have to be represented, the most effective method, to my mind, would be to leave the musical expression to the orchestra, while the *dramatis persona*: remain silent save for the interjection of a few broken phrases. But to return to eighteenth century opera. The abuses perpetrated by its composers from Scarlatti downwards combined to bring forward a great change. Reform, like a shadow, follows the footsteps of abuse, and, when opera seemed lost past all redemption as a work of art, a reformer arose. Gluck, now recognised as a fearless man of genius, who dared to raise the axe of reform against the dying tree of operatic conventions, was the man. In his early works, as in Wagner's, there is nothing distinctly foreshadowing the complete change in his artistic methods which distinguished the noon of his creative power. At one time, Gluck was as great an offender against the true principles of dramatic art as any of his predecessors, for it was the unsatisfactory effect produced by a *pasticcio* of his own works that first opened his eyes to the evils of contemporary operatic art, and he attributed his failure to the fact that music appropriate to certain persons and certain situations is inappropriate when used in relation to other persons and other situations. He resolved to throw over all conventions born of custom and aimed at distinguishing his *dramatis persona* by distinctive music, as Monteverde had done before him—the embryo of the *Leitmotif*, for the use and development of which the Bayreuth master has been, and is, so much reviled. Gluck's aims are best described in his own words, "I resolved to avoid all those abuses which had crept into Italian opera through the mistaken vanity of singers and the unwise compliance of composers, and which has rendered it wearisome and ridiculous, instead of being, as it once was, the grandest and most imposing stage of modern times. I endeavoured to reduce music to its proper function, that of seconding poetry by enforcing the expression of the sentiment and the interest of the situations, without interrupting the action or weakening it by superfluous ornament."

In Gluck's works it is not the songs, but the masterly use of recitative which ought to command our admiration. His recitative is a continual stream of sound, rising and falling according to the emotions expressed and sometimes breaking into short melodic phrases when the spirit of the text and the pathos of the poetry demand melody. Gluck's idea was that "it was necessary, above all, to avoid making too great a disparity between the recitative and the air of a dialogue, so as not to break the sense of a period or awkwardly interrupt the movement and animation of a scene." Gluck made the overture foreshadow the drama

which it preceded ; he thought that 'the overture ought to indicate the subject, and prepare the spectators for the character of the piece they are about to see."

The symphonic use of the orchestra, another characteristic of modern music-drama, was employed by Gluck. He made the orchestral portion of his music complete in itself, while the singer declaimed his part in tones which, though combined with the instrumental harmony, seemed to have no connection with it. Previous to Gluck, the orchestra had been used merely as an accompaniment to arias, and in some instances to recitative; but he first gave it the function of illustrating the dramatic action, and enhancing the significance of the situation. I have said Gluck was the *first* to use the orchestra in this way, but there is no doubt that Monteverde, and Lulli after him, so far as the resources of their time allowed, attempted to make the orchestra more than a mere accompaniment.

Of course, Gluck's vital reforms were met by the usual outburst of undiscerning criticism—no, "criticism" is not the word, "vituperation" is a more exact term. He was accused of making his singers scream, and with having banished melody from his operas. How strangely history repeats itself! These accusations are identical with those brought against Richard Wagner: the echoes of which accusations have not yet died away, but, like the distant rumbling of thunder after a storm, are still to be heard in the solemn judgments of a few of our more prejudiced critics.

But with all his theories and actual improvements in opera, Gluck's works are really just as much a conglomeration of recitatives, arias, duets, and dances as any of those of his contemporaries. Reformer as he was, he did not reform opera altogether, and this was only natural, for the times were not ripe for a sweeping reform.

By making the music follow the dramatic action and express the spirit of the text, and by insisting that the drama should not be obscured and overweighted by heavy and inappropriate ornaments of vocal display, he did a service to art which hardly can be overestimated. It is strange how little influence Gluck's theories had on his contemporaries and those composers immediately following him. On the shoulders of Paisiello and Cimarosa fell the mantle of Piccini rather than that of Gluck himself. But the star of Mozart was already in the ascendant, and Italian opera of the old style may be said to have reached its culminating point in the works of Cimarosa. My opinion is that Mozart, strictly speaking, was not so great a composer of dramatic as of absolute music. He introduced into opera much that was fine, musically, but he did not leave it more advanced as drama. His influence, however, has been deep, for he gave

to opera all the dignity of absolute music of the Haydn school and carried on Gluck's idea of symphonic orchestration which later was adopted by Weber and Wagner. Cherubini was the first great composer directly influenced by Gluck, and having had the advantage of the absolute school of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, he brought musical as well as dramatic progress to bear on his work. M6hul and Spontini, though not very important composers, may be mentioned as disciples of Gluck. Rossini, on the other hand, is more a follower of Cimarosa and Mozart than of Gluck, that is to say, his vocal music has all the rhythmic melody of Cimarosa, his orchestration something of the symphonic grace of Mozart; but the treatment of his subject shows very little of Gluck's influence—he revived all those vocal embellishments and flourishes which that illustrious composer had attempted to reform. Melody in Rossini's operas runs mad. He evidently thought that the passions of mankind can be expressed by sugary songs. His music, however, is spontaneous and quite free from pedantry, and, moreover, his orchestration is sometimes clever in its novel combinations of instruments. Rossini's addiction to melody was shared to the full by Donizetti and Bellini, by whose works a kind of sensuous suffocation is produced by the continual stream of languid melody. So the Italian School of opera had, regardless of Gluck's precepts, drifted back into the state of things obtaining before he began his reforms; and, since Rossini, it has never quite thrown off the idea that dramatic situations can be expressed by melodious songs. For instance, in Verdi's early works, though there is more vigour than in Donizetti's and Bellini's, there is the same excessive use of melody, whether appropriate or inappropriate, to the dramatic situation; though it is true that in "Aida" and in "Otello" he has, to a certain extent, mainly in the unbroken sequence of the music and action, followed Wagner's theories. It is strange that composers of Italian opera did not make the whole effect of their works more dramatic; I am not speaking of occasional flashes, for some of the plots of the libretti are dramatic enough. I think this shows that the composers valued musical expression *per se* above the interests of the drama. Meyerbeer goes to the other extreme and becomes melodramatic. The flow of his music is continually being stopped by full closes, as if the composer had purposely given the audience an opportunity to applaud, which, perhaps, was the *raison d'être* of a full close. Distinct songs, arias, scenas, ballets, &c, besides regulation chances for mere vocal display, abound in his works. Meyerbeer's operas are not organic dramas, but a series of detached dramatic situations, sometimes of real power, but more often showily melodramatic.

The most damning evidence of the dramatic artificiality of the works of Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Meyerbeer, and Verdi is the ease with which singers can detach themselves from the action and warble songs over the footlights, while the individual to whom they are supposed to be addressing themselves languishes in the cold at the back of the stage. Such liberties cannot be taken in Wagner's music-dramas because the continual flow of orchestra and recitative does not give the singer time to get back to take his part in the drama. In fact, the dramatic abuses of opera are legion, and could only have been allowed by an audience who went to the theatre more with the intention of hearing fashionable singers sing favourite songs than to hear a dramatic work of Art. Indeed, the opera-house during the period euphemistically called the "palmy days" was a social institution where members of society could out-glitter each other in jewels, and where innumerable flirtations progressed with alarming rapidity beneath the mingled influences of sentimental songs and dazzling chandeliers. A work of Art cannot live in such an atmosphere. And opera is not a dramatic work of Art, but a string of lyrical gems, sometimes not jewels but paste and glass, strung upon a thread of recitative—in short, it is not organic drama. Of the later composers of Italian opera, Bizet, who had real dramatic talent, has been the most influenced by Wagner's theories, but he fell into the error of the Rossini school of carrying on the dramatic action principally by song, and Gounod's works are more remarkable for the sensuous beauty of the lyrics than for their dramatic form or power. Before leaving the subject of Italian opera I must pay it this tribute: its music was not bound by pedantic rules, it aimed at being emotional and dramatic in expression, and in flashes it achieved that aim; but, unfortunately, as drama it was blighted by conventional rules. It has played its part in the history of the musical stage and it has this merit, that it brought about a sweeping reform. Therefore, *requiescat in pace*.

I will return, now, to the development of opera through the works of composers who have been directly influenced by Gluck. Weber is the first to demand attention—of Cherubini, Mehul, and Spontini I have already spoken.

Weber followed Gluck's theory of the importance of drama; he employed, to a certain extent, the *Leitmotif*, and he adopted and developed the symphonic use of the orchestra, which Gluck had originated. But he did not, in any vital way, alter the form of opera, for in his hands it is still, though possessing a strong vein of poetically dramatic interest, a mixture of recitative, arias, and the rest. Weber, however, paved the way for modern music-drama by making the orches-

tral music free in expression, having for its end the interpretation of imagination and emotion. But during Weber's lifetime and after his death Meyerbeer was the ruling planet in the house of opera, and again, as in the eighteenth century, a great genius arose and gave battle to the many abuses of lyric-drama. That genius was Richard Wagner, a man who has done more than any other musician to free music from the bonds of formalism which threatened to, nay, which actually had choked it as a human expression of human emotion. Wagner's theories are very simple, so simple that it is strange how much they have been opposed—or, perhaps, I should say "not strange." His theories are not artificial but based on dramatic laws, which, in their turn, are based on human actions.

Wagner contended that music ought not to be the chief end, but that the text, dramatic action, and music should combine to make an organic *music-drama*; and that, since rhythmic melody is inadequate to convey all dramatic feelings, it should only be employed where melody is required, and even then should never degenerate into a mere song. He adopted and developed the *Leitmotif* which Monteverde, Gluck, and Weber had tentatively used. Wagner did not mean this system to be taken as a puzzle for ingenious musicians to unravel, but as a means of weaving together the threads of drama. He rejected all purely musical forms which retard dramatic expression, and, of course, abolished full closes—I am speaking of his later works, which alone represent his theories to the full. Above all, Wagner desired that music-drama should be looked upon as drama, and not only as music and drama.

But Wagner invented nothing; he only developed ideas which had sprung into being during the natural progress of music. For instance, his recitative, now nearly a rhythmic melody, and then, in more dramatic scenes, of a more declamatory order, was the *mezzo-recitativo* of Gluck, and, it is said, of Monteverde. All Wagner did was to employ it as the *one* vehicle of expression, because it enabled him to make the vocal music flow without ceasing, in the same way as words do in literary drama, except when the exigencies of drama and sense demand interruption. He did not invent the *Leitmotif* nor did he first think of making the orchestral portion of the music symphonic, for Gluck, Cherubini, and Weber, to mention these alone, forestalled him in that idea to a certain extent, and, so far from being a man who arbitrarily invented a form of Art, which he never claimed for himself; he is the composer of works which are a natural development from Greek music-drama through Monteverde and Gluck. Musically, Wagner's works are a development of the "absolute" school of Haydn, Mozart,

and Beethoven, and musico-dramatically a development of Greek tragedy through Peri, Monteverde, Gluck, and Weber. To these influences must be added that of the literary drama of Shakespeare and the European dramatists following him.

But, perhaps, what is new, or at least is so full a development that it seems to be new, is Wagner's use of the orchestra.

Music is, above all, an abstract art, and its whole strength rests in its being able to convey abstract emotions—that is to say, it cannot portray a man's individual character, but it can, and does, interpret the character of the inner emotions and thoughts too vague for words that impel the individual to action. Music can give a more bitter edge to despair; a deeper glow to love; a finer pathos to suffering; a more spiritual tone to religion; it can do all this, but only in the abstract. But when music is united to drama it gains a new significance. It no longer remains entirely abstract, for, when made part of the drama, it loses its abstract character by becoming illustrative of the emotions of concrete individuals. So that *motifs*, besides musically interpreting abstract emotions, gain a precise dramatic meaning by being associated in our minds with concrete ideas and individuals, and thus bring before us the full significance of the ideas and emotions which impel the *dramatis persona* to action. To say that music can *arouse* but not *represent* emotions seems to me to be taking quite a false position. But stay, "represent" is the wrong word. Nothing can *represent* emotion, which is not a fact but a state of feeling, evanescent and impalpable, and therefore cannot be represented. By using the word "represent," opponents of modern dramatic music have employed a well-known rhetorical device—that of putting forward an absurd axiom as if it had been uttered by their opponents, and then proceeding leisurely and with extreme self-complacence to point out its absurdity. "Convey" is, I think, the better word. Music, in my opinion, can *convey* but not *represent* emotion. Music is a means and not an end. The point is, can the composer convey his emotions to the listener by means of his music? I think he can. Why, music originally came into existence as a natural and ideal form of expressing emotions for which words alone were inadequate, and it was only when pedantic rules fettered it as a mode of expression, putting arbitrary musical form in the place of a free interpretation of genuine emotion, that music began to have an existence apart from the conveyance of human emotion. Music can only be judged from a human standpoint; it is not a fact standing outside ourselves, but an emanation from our own natures. There is no nation under the sun that has not had its own form of music, differing, it

may be, as language differs, from that of other nations, but remaining a natural expression prompted by the need of some medium through which emotion may be conveyed to a greater extent than through words. It is admitted that music can arouse emotions and I submit that such emotions are identical, as nearly as possible, with those which cause music ; therefore, to separate it from its cause, emotion, and its effect, emotion, and then to say that the medium means nothing, seems to me an unnecessary and obvious folly.

For example, take ordinary human speech. The mere words cannot do much more than suggest emotion ; but the tone of voice, which is an elementary form of music, conveys to the hearer the precise emotion of the speaker, so that identical phrases have different meanings according to the tone they acquire from the feeling which prompted their utterance. In the relation of the tone of the human voice to words we have the exact and true relation of vocal music to poetry. Music exaggerates, idealizes, and then notates that tone of voice. The expression of the human voice is a matter of rhythm and intervals, so that orchestral music, also primarily a matter of rhythm and interval, may be said to be, though in a very much greater degree than vocal music, an exaggerated idealization of the human voice. When we are told that certain musicians transformed love songs into sacred airs, the question arises: are such airs sacred in effect ? and, if so, what alteration did they undergo in the transformation ? A change of time, rhythm, and harmony would make all the difference in the nature of this expression. You may ask what has all this to do with Wagner's use of the orchestra ? The answer is this. If music cannot convey the composer's emotion to his hearers, all Wagner's striving to express it by music has been quite futile. To understand Wagner's use of the orchestra we must look upon it as an invisible chorus, foreshadowing the fate of the *dramatis persona*, elucidating the present situation and heightening the intensity of the dramatic action by significant music. To insure homogeneity of sound all the *motifs* are weaved together, forming practically new music, but giving a certain colour appropriate to the drama, and then, when Wagner wishes us to understand that the orchestra is speaking of certain individuals, he introduces their special *motifs* either in their original form or metamorphosed according to the exigencies of the dramatic situation. Knowing this, it is difficult to comprehend the contention of some musicians that Wagner's music lacks form; for really it is as full of form as that of any other composer, only it is not the form of absolute, but of dramatic music. With regard to the vocal portions of his works, the words are so naturally set to music that all their emphasis and meaning is preserved, and a new form of

human speech, rich in possibilities for dramatic expression, takes the place of song.

I must touch briefly on the question of absolute music, because if its adherents are right in their contention that music stands strongest when alone, the dramatic form must be the weaker, and, therefore, the inferior.

It is the function of literature and painting to illustrate and idealize life; the former, thoughts and emotions, the latter, externals of life. The followers of absolute music, however, have proclaimed that she should take the standard of beautiful sound as her sole aim. In affirming this, musicians are alike forgetful of the origin of music in the dance and song, and that absolute music is of a very recent growth. The *means* of expression in music have been glorified into an *end*. If music concerns herself only with beautiful sounds, having no origin or meaning beyond their beauty, she depresses herself to the level of the arts of gem-cutting and tessellated pavement.

From this point of view, we might as well say that painting should only appeal to a sense of colour and drawing; that poetry should only comfort a sense of the harmony of words, whereas these are the means and not the end of Art. Music, however, *is* capable of expressing emotions, but from whence is this emotion to be obtained unless it be from a subject or programme? Ought music to seek inspiration from notes? literature from words? painting from pigments? Surely not. Music feeding on itself attenuates to a mathematical science. Musical form has been really the programme of absolute music, but it is a programme of progressions of sound and not of poetic sense. I believe that, as a matter of fact, music does not enter a composer's head unless his emotions have been aroused by thought or imagination, springing from his own experience or caused by reflection and contemplation either of external nature or of the sorrows, hopes, and joys of the human race. Therefore, in a large work of absolute music there are the expressions of many emotions aroused by many causes and all these incongruous expressions are bound together and distorted by musical form. But when composed to a programme of poetic sense there is a relationship between the emotions, and the whole work becomes musically and emotionally organic. When Berlioz treated a complete story in a symphony he rather misunderstood the function of music, which is not descriptive and objective, but should treat of the very essence of poetry and life. One of the charges brought against Wagner's works is that the music is ugly. This question of the beautiful in Art has always raised storms of discussion. The truth is that in a dramatic work of Art the appropriate is the beautiful. In music, if the subject be tragic, or if the darker thoughts of

man are to be represented, it is inappropriate to treat them with melodic beauty. To employ only beautiful sound is to illustrate but one side of human nature. Apply this theory of absolute beauty to Literature, and our "Macbeth," "Othello," "Hamlet," and the rest would have to be swept from the stage, for their dominant characteristics are not so much of absolute beauty as of the dramatically appropriate. As to the subjects for music-drama, the only really important point is that the function of music is the interpretation of the eternal passions, sorrows, and joys of mankind, and not of the external accidentals of life.

Finally, it should be recognised that rules deduced from absolute cannot be applied to dramatic music, for the numerous emotions to which the action of the drama gives rise require ceaseless changes of tonality and expression in the music, and to lay down any rules, except those of appropriate musical expression, is to restrain the genius of a composer within the bounds of formalism. If he be a true artist the product of his brain will be a work of Art, full of dramatic form and carefully thought out musical effects.

But, after all, those who, forgetful of the development of music, try to retard its natural progress by judging modern art-phases by rules culled from the works of past masters, are really only ineffectual enemies of the most eloquent and most touching means by which human emotions can be expressed.

DISCUSSION.

THE CHAIRMAN.—Ladies and gentlemen, before entering into any sort of discussion, there is always a pleasant duty to perform, and that is to thank the lecturer for the pains he has taken in preparing his paper; and I am sure you will accord a hearty vote of thanks to our lecturer on this occasion. For my own part, I feel very much inclined to adopt a phrase common in newspapers which you may frequently have seen at the foot of letters addressed to the editors: "Our correspondents are allowed to express their opinions; but we are not, necessarily, bound by them"—for I feel an absolute antagonism to almost everything that has been asserted this evening. I confess that I should have read musical history in an entirely different way to that interpreted by our lecturer. It seems to me that our position is something like the following: A man may have a house with the front painted white and the back coloured green. My friend has seen the green and I have looked at the white. He maintains that the colour is green, while I insist that it

is white. I will not detain you very long, for I shall be glad to hear the opinions of some of those present who are well able to speak on this subject. I would just for one moment refer to the question of the absurdity of concerted dramatic music. I can adduce an instance from a dramatic play, which I think is an irrefutable reply to the argument brought forward. I need only mention the quartet from "Rigoletto," "Un di se ben." There the effect is something superb. I could point out innumerable other instances in poor, dear old Handel's oratorios. In the "Theodora" quintet, where the various *dramatis persona* express distinctly different sentiments, the effect is admirable. Surely it is possible in human nature to meet with concerted speech and action. If you go down to Billingsgate Market when they are selling fish, you will find everyone talking and shouting, and having the same emotions at one and the same time. Isn't that perfectly natural? Why, even Wagner himself employs concerted music in his "Meistersinger," and we all accept it as just and true. Then we hear a good deal about the inventors of the opera. I often wonder whether those people who are constantly quoting Monteverde really know anything about his operas? It is so very easy to resort to paste and scissors, and cut out passages about old operas. I wonder whether our lecturer has looked into these early operas for himself? Then Gluck was mentioned. He is brought forward as the exponent of this modern theory of what is called "music-drama." And we are told, almost in the same breath, that his music always expresses the precise sentiments of the words of the poet. Now take that song, "Che farò" in "Orphée." To me it is perfectly lovely, and I am always delighted to hear it. But I can quite imagine it might better express *Orpheus* talking to his wife and enjoying her happy company instead of deploring her absence. Here, then, is an instance where his music does not always express the mind of the poet. Then we are told that one of the great advantages of Wagner's writings—and here let me say that I am an admirer of Wagner, though I am not an admirer of those people who push his claims beyond their legitimate and proper limits—is this, that each singer must be in his or her exact place. Singers are frequently accused—and as I have been a singer myself for many years I speak feelingly on the subject—of violating this rule, and thus bringing about a degradation of art. Why, in the case of "Lohengrin," as at present performed in Paris, you will find the singers come down and sing across the footlights to the audience. Meyerbeer has been patronizingly patted on the back, and yet, I fancy, you would find it extremely difficult to mention a more dramatic and effective opera, and one that better expresses the send-

ments combined with dramatic action, than the "Huguenots." I am also quite content to take Gounod's "Faust," in a dark room if you like, without accessories of any kind, or the additional glamour of a bejewelled audience. Though sensuous, to me it always seems good and truthful music. Again, we are told that one of the beauties of Wagner's compositions is the absence of a full close. I should rather have considered that one of his defects. Surely it is a painful and monotonous thing to have a beautiful panorama perpetually passing before you. When travelling through the loveliest districts in Italy, do you not eventually, looking out of the window, tire of seeing the constant succession of grand and picturesque sights? We must feel the want of a little repose sometimes. Wagner has succeeded in one thing, which, I believe, no other individual has ever attempted and, probably, never will again: he has managed to show us how a dragon can sing upon the stage. Then we have heard a word or two about absolute music. I am fain to confess myself that I believe absolute music to be the highest form of music, that is, music which has no programme associated with it. Berlioz was also mentioned, but nothing was said about Beethoven and his symphonies. I refer to those which have no programme whatever. I think that anyone who attempts to put a programme to them is degrading his art. Is not music the outcome of the soul? It speaks of a thing we cannot see. It surpasses anything you have before you, even the most beautiful painting. It was compared just now to a tessellated pavement. The comparison is a very poor one, for there you have something very "tangible" before you. Music stands entirely alone in this respect; I claim that for music.

(The Chairman then put the vote of thanks, which was passed unanimously.)

Dr. VINCENT.—It seemed to me that the lecturer rather sneered at Rossini and other writers of that school, because they were melodious. It was Rossini's nature to be melodious, and he was right to carry out the dictates of his nature, which he did to the best of his ability. If, then, at a subsequent period, his music should fall into desuetude, I cannot see why that should affect his position. He did his duty, and we ought to do ours in the same way. If Wagner followed the dictates of his nature, those who differ from him can only praise him for being honest, while those who agree with him are free to admire and applaud him.

Mr. SOUTHGATE.—Our lecturer dealt with a great many subjects in the course of his paper, to go into which would necessitate our attendance here until the small hours of the morning. No doubt many of the statements made would be accepted, while others again are scarcely admissible. Going

back to the historical period, I heard with some surprise the statement that in the time of Galilei, when the band of Florentine musicians re-established opera, that they carefully guarded themselves, if I understood rightly, against the employment of melodic phrases in their writings, from which I assume that they rather went in for something which was tmmelodious. But I have yet to learn that melody existed in those times as we understand the term. The music of the church and that of the minstrels differed very little, for the very simple reason that there was not much melody at that time, and, consequently, they had not much to eschew. Again, is there any advantage in applying nick-names, if I may use the expression, to particular kinds of music? Our lecturer seemed to sneer at florid music, and called it the gymnastics of vocalisation. What purpose can be served by such depreciation? I see nothing wrong in writing and hiking florid and elaborate music. It affords an opportunity for displaying the powers and proficiency of the singer, and where properly introduced is surely not an objection, pur lecturer very wisely begs the question of the love subject, because Wagner himself has used that; but surely, in the case of a scene in an opera in which many persons have their different parts to play, there are moments when they come together and when they are all united in doing some one thing, and there arises the opportunity for the *finales* in operas. It seems to me to be a legitimate development, and a very effective close to the act which has just gone before. I was very much surprised to hear our lecturer say that Mozart was not dramatic. Surely he could hardly have meant that? He was melodious, and, therefore, according to the new theory that melody is to be tabooed, committed faults; but he was certainly dramatic as well. It is impossible to witness the scene of the Marble Statue in "Don Giovanni" without perceiving that he is intensely dramatic, and, when in the proper frame of mind, one cannot help feeling impressed and charmed with that wonderful music. Some people can be dramatic without being the least melodious. Then again, with regard to Wagner, the expression was made use of—I noted it down at the time—that "melody sometimes degenerated into song." But, if that be the case, Wagner himself has been guilty of this enormous crime. In "Tannhäuser" and the "Preislied" in the "Meistersinger," Wagner has surely given us pieces of very exquisite and beautiful melody, which we can all listen to and enjoy. However, that was probably in his earlier days, before he became regenerated. Then we came to Gounod's music, which is also, to a certain extent, found fault with. I think it is the most picturesque music on the stage. I have only to name the Kermesse scene from "Faust." To my mind it exactly

represents what is going on, and although strongly opposed to encores, I always feel tempted to break through that principle whenever I hear this music. Our lecturer said that Wagner had not invented certain particular forms; I think he is right there. You must remember, however, that he has very much developed them, and he will have to take rank in the future accordingly. But, after all, do not his reform theories rest upon the work of men who have gone before him? I think he has borrowed considerably from the despised Meyerbeer and Spontini, and I am quite certain that he has borrowed enormously from Berlioz. The latter was his friend in his early days, though subsequently, for a purpose which I need not go into here, he became bitterly opposed to him. It is impossible to hear the orchestration of Berlioz, especially that marked feature of it—the division of the instruments into families—without realising that Wagner has borrowed from him one of his most effective devices. One word more as to naturalness. We have the modern forms of Wagner put before us as perfect examples of what takes place in real life, with nothing in the least unnatural about them. But is that the case? Let me recall to your mind the scene in "Lohengrin" in front of the church in which the lovers are going to be married, and where there is a very long parley outside. Now I would ask you is that natural, and true to real life? I think not. In my opinion if such a scene were to take place outside St. George's Church, Hanover Square, the police would very soon say "move on." One word more. I have lately had to deal with a work much more recent than any of Wagner's—I allude to Bruneau's "La Réve," which has attracted a great deal of attention over here; I must say that not only for ugliness, but also for violation of all laws of harmony and beauty, it is difficult to find its parallel. The work, however, has not been mentioned by our lecturer, and I would like to ask him in his reply to tell us if he regards that as a legitimate and still further development of opera since Wagner's time? If so, and it be true that music sprung from chaos, it seems very likely to speedily return there again.

Mr. JACQUES.—I should like to express my sense of pleasure at the whole tenor of Mr. Baughan's lecture, which I thought admirable. I was also very pleased with the careful way in which he entered into the subjects of expression, and of the union of music with poetry. It is upon this last, indeed, that the whole matter must ultimately rest, and for this reason I am tempted to wish that some of our friends this evening had gone into the subject a little more fully. Next to that in importance is the question of form, which has been somewhat shirked. It seems to me that this question of form is the chief cause of difference of opinion on

this matter, and, therefore, it should be thoroughly and dispassionately gone into. The *essentials* of form should first be defined, and then the laws of their application to absolute and dramatic music should be examined. Mr. Cummings's remark about flying through beautiful country in a tram, without coming to a stop, vividly brings to your mind one of the peculiarities of a certain kind of form. It is that question—whether we are to have balanced periods of symmetrical form, or a continuous succession of very much simpler forms, more or less connected, which is the crux of the difficulty. You will not find much difference of opinion between the opposing parties on the actual merit of the short phrases; their quarrel begins when the arrangement of these is in question. I think that unless this point is frankly discussed and gone into without the least shirking of its tremendous difficulties, we shall never come to a clear understanding. Wagner's form is practically an extension of the "free fantasia." It is in that part of a Beethoven symphony that you find the nearest resemblance, for instance, to a page or two of "Tristan und Isolde." I hope that something will be said upon this subject of form before the discussion is closed. I am sorry to have to disagree with Mr. Baughan's statement that music does not enter a composer's head except as an expression of thought or feeling. Holding that opinion myself at one time, I took steps to ascertain from gentlemen who compose a great deal—I will not say great composers—the exact state of the case, and they told me plainly that very often their "idea" simply came as a "theme," and not as the result of an attempt to embody an emotion. They hear a theme and are interested in it as a musical pattern, and develop it as such. That produces, of course, "decorative" music. At the same time, I do not see why we should sneer at decorative music. It has a right to exist the same as decorative art generally. As to its rank in the scale of merit, that, of course, is another matter. It is, however, quite certain that there are many persons who hold that the creative artist has no business to concern himself with the interpretation of a subject, be it event, feeling, or idea. He has, they say, but to produce beautiful effects of form, colour, or sound. As an instance I would mention Mr. Whistler. Some of the theories put forward by these people are not very clear; others again are. My point, however, is this—it is no use ignoring adverse facts, and looking at one side only of the question. Mr. Baughan said that the "beautiful" was the "appropriate." I do not think we ought to confuse words in that way. I think we had far better confine the word "beautiful" to its generally accepted meaning, if possible. Let us say that what we desire is "appropriateness" and not exactly "beauty,"

except where beauty is appropriate. But don't let us say that the "beautiful" is the "true," and the "true" the "beautiful." I don't think Mr. Southgate could have meant what he said, if I understood him rightly, when he contended that melody did not exist before 1600.

The CHAIRMAN.—Oh, yes; at that time, when opera was first making its appearance in Italy, there was only one form of melody. That is perfectly true, and Mr. Southgate was quite right there.

Mr. JACQUES.—I was very glad to hear Mr. Southgate say (and it is a fact that many of Wagner's followers would do well to remember and lay stress upon) that Wagner was not such an inventor and innovator as he is represented to be by the injudicious among his friends, who, in this respect, have done him much harm. It is obvious that Wagner is simply the development of his predecessors in various branches of art. He is a very complex phenomenon, and therefore much care is needed to dissect him properly. There is not the least doubt that he took right and left (I do not mean as a plagiarist, but in a legitimate way, the same as any other genius would have done), and assimilated such appropriations. Later in life he assimilated more, and his work becomes accordingly more homogeneous.

Mr. BERNARD SHAW.—I have listened to this debate with a good deal of interest. When I heard Mr. Baughan deliver his lecture I knew what was going to happen. Mr. Baughan, I am afraid, is a Wagnerite, and, to a certain extent, Wagner himself was not a Wagnerite, and I think we have arrived at that period when no person should be a Wagnerite. This Wagner cult is all very well and very touching, but if it be carried out with too much enthusiasm, the enthusiast becomes a nuisance. Mr. Jacques very aptly remarked in opposition to our lecturer that it was possible to regard the matter from another point of view. There is musical inspiration which is really absolute musical inspiration. To the individual who has no taste for dramatic music, most of Wagner's compositions will appeal in vain. So long as music is absolute, he likes it; but the moment the musical element becomes subordinate to the dramatic, it no longer has any attraction for him. You must remember that there are all sorts of men between the two extremes. I have found that a large number of Wagner's admirers have very little musical faculty whatever. I have also been struck with the number of scientific men who do not in the least care for absolute music, and cannot endure opera, who, on witnessing the performance of Wagner's operas, have said, "Ah, here at last is something that I can understand and appreciate." They simply ignore the musical element altogether, and address themselves to the dramatic alone. Those individuals.

to my mind, are no more to be respected than are Wagner's opponents. I should say that there are few great composers whom one would not put second to Wagner. I think he stands as high as any composer who ever lived. I would like to remind the lecturer that he rather lets slip his argument when he says, that sometimes you have the same air which has served for a love scene in an opera used as a religious air in an oratorio, and there you find a change was made in the rhythm, and, perhaps, in the accompaniment. No such thing, and no such change occurs in Handel's airs, except in the words themselves.

Mr. BAUCHAN.—Are they sacred in effect ?

Mr. SHAW.—Perfectly, and on your own showing. The emotion expressed by music must necessarily be abstract, and only becomes a concrete and specific thing when defined by words. As to concerted music; in the first act of "Siegfried," where they ask each other riddles, concerted music would be absurd, and, consequently, at that particular point they speak alternately. At the end of the act, however, when the two men pursue a similar train of thought, they naturally speak together. In such a wonderful way does Wagner weave all the separate themes together, that to denounce concerted music would be to fly in the face of his own writings. The Italian quartets, &c, so often found in Donizetti and Verdi, to my mind show how much superior opera is to the spoken drama, and our lecturer's hostility to Italian opera can only be accounted for on the assumption that he holds a brief on behalf of German *versus* Italian opera. I think that he should reconsider this question.

The CHAIRMAN.—Let me say that I by no means consider Wagner the greatest exponent of absolute music. I should place Beethoven infinitely higher.

Mr. JACQUES.—I do not think that either wrote "absolute" music. Beethoven said that he always had a picture in his mind before composing. Absolute music is music without any emotional or poetic significance. You cannot mean that.

The CHAIRMAN.—I cannot believe it. I mean just what I say—that Beethoven wrote absolute music. Whether it means heights covered with snow, which the sun lights up into myriads of diamonds, with a goat-herd tumbling down the other side, as someone has said, is perfectly immaterial to me. Such an explanation I think degrading to Beethoven, who, in the matter of absolute music, is unsurpassed, and remains the greatest musical genius who ever lived.

Mr. BAUGHAN.—My only reason for referring to absolute music was to support the contention that the rules by which it is governed cannot be applied to opera. I am a great admirer of Beethoven's music as also of Mozart's. The former always seems to be saying something, and he did mean something by

what he wrote. But, of course, music is not a concrete art, it is abstract in character, except when united to words. When I mentioned concerted singing, my point was that I did not like anything on the operatic stage which seemed unnatural. Unnaturalness does not even so much matter so long as it is not made to appear so. Concerted music in Wagner's operas doesn't appear unnatural. As to Bruneau's "La Reve," his *Finale* spoiled the whole work. The purport of my lecture was to try and bring home the fact that the rules which govern absolute music cannot be applied to opera at all. Of course opera in the Italian form is not opera at all. It is another form of art altogether, a musical form of art. For this reason I would like to keep the two forms distinct. After all, ladies and gentlemen, these are but my individual opinions, which, if you cannot accept them, I feel sure will have done you no harm.