A Rare Instrument

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My songster complies with the first condition only. If I should not have the good fortune to obtain the assistance of Sir Alexander and Sir Hugh, I challenge Mr. Keay and Mr. Tree to do their worst with my nocturnal contralto—but they must devote their attention to the placing of the *individual*, not the voice. As Mr. Keay did not propose asking the permission of his prospective pupil, I of course will follow his example. Neither of us could afford to risk a refusal.—Yours, &c.,

CODA.

Crown Office Row,
Temple, E.C. 4.

THE GRAMOPHONE—PRESENT AND FUTURE

SIR,—I fear your correspondent has attached an erroneous conclusion to my article on the above subject. Two sentences which he combines had absolutely no bearing on the article!

One is obliged to use guarded terms when alluding to a commercial secret, but my words were carefully chosen when I hinted that the wonderful results given by the new machine were dependent mainly upon the 'acoustic properties of the cabinet.' Here there was no suggestion that the cabinet merely housed an enormous horn, as your correspondent seems to imagine!

I agree with him, and admit that the machine with the large horn which he describes must be a great improvement on the average 'table' or 'cabinet' model; but the instrument in question is something more than that—as several independent critics have since generously admitted.

I understand that an entirely new principle of 'sound amplifying chambers' is substituted for the familiar open horn, and to this is due the wonderfully distinct, realistic, and faithful reproductions obtainable from ordinary gramophone records.—Yours, &c.,

ULRIC DAUBENY.

'THE GRAMOPHONE AS AN AID IN TEACHING ORCHESTRATION'

SIR,—May I add a few words to Mr. J. H. Blair's suggestive letter in your September issue, concerning the gramophone as an aid in teaching orchestration?

Your correspondent expresses surprise that the gramophone has not, up to the present, been used by teachers. I think, however, that many teachers nowadays are fully alive to the value of this instrument in teaching orchestration, though, perhaps, its use is not as general as could be desired. I have been constantly using a H.M.V. machine for the past two-and-a-half years for my theoretical courses, and have found it of the utmost benefit not only to orchestration pupils, but in other directions as well. If your correspondent is not aware of the existence of the fine harpsichord records of Mrs. Woodhouse, and the recently-issued records of early English madrigals (Weelkes, Wilbye, Byrd, &c.), I would draw his attention to these. They are invaluable for illustrations in studying history; not many average students have ever heard the works of Bach, Purcell, Scarlatti, &c., played on the instruments for which they were written. Nor is the performance of our own fine choral music of the madrigal period of frequent occurrence in many provincial and country towns.

I should like to add my testimony to the worth of the 'orchestral instruments' records to which you refer in your foot-note to Mr. Blair's letter. The reproductions are altogether admirable, and when used in conjunction with carefully selected records of orchestral works, are just the thing teachers have been longing for for a long time.

Finally, the gramophone is a real boon to the busy musician as an aid to learning new scores. A work like Scriabin's 'Poem of Ecstasy' is learnt much more expeditiously with the score in front of one and the gramophone giving an actual rendering, than it would be without.—Yours, &c.,

A. F. MILNER.

3, Roseworth Crescent,
Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
September 6, 1921.

GRAMOPHONE RECORDS

SIR,—In view of your recent articles on gramophone music, I venture to suggest two matters, in which your influence might be usefully exerted.

(1) It is becoming generally realised that the gramophone is a musical and educational instrument of value; to satisfy the new public thus being formed, a large selection of orchestral and chamber music is now issued. Unfortunately, these records to a very great extent only present 'potted' versions of the works concerned. To give two or three instances out of many hundreds, I have a single-sided record of the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' Overture, which includes the exposition only, and that incomplete. Even the double-sided record by the London String Quartet of the first movement of Mozart's G minor Quintet omits the second subject in the recapitulation, so destroying the balance of the movement. The Æolian Vocalion Company has recently recorded the Elgar String Quartet, which fares far worse, as only one side of a 12-in. record is given to each of the three movements.

Sooner or later the makers are bound to give us an instrument capable of taking a much larger record—16-in. or even 20-in.; but meanwhile it is certain that those who wish for this class of music would infinitely prefer to change the records, if necessary, more than once, in the course of a movement, rather than listen to such inartistic mutilations.

(2) You referred in your article last month to the comparative rarity of the records of good songs. This is the more remarkable, as such songs are most frequently of the right length, and vocal records are on the whole the most satisfactory as reproductions.

The catalogues are crammed with operatic extracts and ballads, and it needs time and patience to find in them even a few examples of folk-song, of the great classical song-writers, or such modern composers as Debussy, Ravel, Parry, or Stanford.

The Æolian Company has recently issued three albums of Russian songs: it is time that the same was done, for example, with a series of English songs sung by John Coates, or of modern song literature sung by, say, Anne Thurstfield. There are many other leading singers who might be invited to reproduce selections (not as sometimes happens only the weakest items) from their répertoires.—Yours, &c.,

The Mount House,
Brasted, Kent.

N. SCHUSTER.

September 14, 1921.

A RARE INSTRUMENT

SIR,—Your correspondent, Mr. Walter Haskell, will find an account of the nail violin in Grove's Dictionary, second edition. It is also described, with a woodcut, in Victor Mahillon's remarkable 'Catalogue Descriptif et Analytique du Musée Instrumental du Conservatoire Royal de Musique de Bruxelles,' 1893. The Brussels example has sympathetic strings, and a compass of four octaves with the chromatic intervals. It belonged to Fétis. In Chouquet's catalogue of the Museum of the National Conservatoire of Paris (1884), three examples occur under the name 'Violon de fer.' One has three octaves, and one has sympathetic strings. Chouquet says little about the instrument but that it 'passe pour avoir été inventé vers le milieu du 18 siècle par Johann Wilde.' Grove and Mahillon give fuller accounts, but both refer to Carl Engel of the Kensington Museum as their authority. As to the value in money, I doubt if it is large.—Yours, &c.,

C. F. ABDBY WILLIAMS.

A WARNING TO LONDON ORGANISTS

SIR,—Will you kindly permit me, through your columns, to warn my fellow organists in the Metropolitan area against a music thief who may be visiting a number of churches? Last week a quantity of music, which would cost £4 or £5 to replace, was stolen from St. George's, Bloomsbury, and I have since traced a small quantity of it to a second-hand music shop in Charing Cross Road.—Yours, &c.,

F. G. DENT.

9, Woodfield Avenue,
Ealing, W. 5.

August 29, 1921.