A Letter from Kiesewetter to Pearsall

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A LETTER FROM KIESEWETTER
TO PEARSALL.

The following letter, the original of which came into my possession about eighteen months ago, was written by R. G. Kiesewetter, the musical historian and antiquary, to R. L. de Pearsall, the English composer. As the former is not much known nowadays, it may not be out of place to state that he was born in Moravia, in 1773, and spent the greater part of his life as an official in the Austrian War Office. From his childhood he was an ardent lover of music and collector of antiquities. In 1803 he studied Thorough Bass and Counterpoint with Albrechtsberger and Hartmann, and gradually came to be a recognised authority on questions of musical archæology. A list of his chief works will be found in the Dictionaries of Grove and Riemann. He died in 1850, at Baden, near Vienna, leaving his collection of musical scores to the Imperial Library. Though his letter to Pearsall is not of much literary value, it seemed to me worth printing, not only for the sake of the very quaint English in which the writer expresses himself, but also as a pleasant illustration of the friendly feeling existing between the veteran Viennese archæologist and the English composer, whose reputation was at that time still in its infancy. The letter is for the most part in the handwriting of a copyist or secretary, but it has been corrected and signed by Kiesewetter. It is here printed exactly according to the original.

W. B. S.

Vienna the 28th February 1838.

My dear Sir!

I return you my sincere thanks for your worthy letter of the 29th January, accompanied of an interesting Series of Madrigals of english composers, delivered to me by Mr. Haizinger.* I am no less flattered Sir, by the remembrance you would preserve me than I am obliged to you for the increase of my collection, and in the mean time for the interesting historical hints touching the fates of a national Musick in England, which, I assure you, gave me better light of the matter, than Burney or Hawkins.

Your reproaching to me to have pass under silence in my Compendium of musical Story† the english composers, who had succeeded Tallis and Bird, is but too well founded. I feel, Sir, that I may have more to repent than to congratulate myself of this book, which I should better have pressed *nonum in annum*, as Horace says, (had I not well past the sixty;) and you are kind enough making a more than indulgent mention of it. All what I can adduce for excusing the omission, is that in this evidently too compendious work I treated not better a fool‡ of composers, celebrated by their contemporaries, amongst Italians and Germans. However I hope you will have remarked with some pleasure the well

merited praises I have attributed to your Tallis and to his well bred disciple Bird, composers, whom I did not hesitate to compare expressly to the best of the period elsewhere. And in this occasion I would you might know, that it was I myself, who required by Mr. Rochlitz for a certain piece serving to a choice collection* to be published (and printed afterwards by Schott at Mayence) has sent him the motets of Tallis, which you can see there, as worth to be exhibited a side of Palestrina or Lasso themselves. The English composers of the XVI Century, not deriving from the Flemings like those of the continent, but arisen of a native country school, had already been very estimable emulators of the Flemings by common prepossession supposed to be the best: Tallis was superior to the best of them, a composer in the very style of Palestrina, who could not have served him for model. The composers of the succeeding period are, I think, to be regarded as sprung of the school of Tallis and Bird: their period was the evening of a bright day. However I find in their madrigals a more pronounced propension to melodious phrases than by the italian madrigalist of this time, as for instance by Marenzio, Monteverde, &c., not to speak of the Principe di Venosa, whom I always found abominable: it is to see, that the English composed for good humoured circles of amateurs, the Italian for learned. And when reading a *vista* had passed the *mode*† with the amateurs, the Englishmen, almost [always] disposed to the liberal pleasures of the table with chosen friends for table-talking and occasional singing, never wanted ditties, catches and glees, spirited enough and perhaps better fit for encreasing sociable joys.

I find striking your reflexion belonging the flourishing state of english musick at the time of Queen Elizabeth and its decay under James I. imbibed by his mother with the predelection for italian singing. *Regis ad exemplum* &c. It is thus, that the Court of Vienna was throughout musical under the reign of the Emperors Ferdinand III, Leopold I, Joseph I and Charles VI (1640-1740) the two first beeing fond of Musick and qualified composers themselves, Joseph a true lover and Charles a perfect practitioner. It would not be difficult to prove the extended influence of them upon the progress of the art in a period, when dramatic style was in it's spring and stept toward perfection; these princes undertained a numerous band of the best musicians and their chapel was even the very school for the art of singing: the idolized Baldassarre Ferri,‡ the *first musico* of high and general reputation mentioned by the historians, was sprung of the Vienna-school, where he had past his youth and many years (1655-1675) in the service of Leopold I., before he left Vienna to become immediately the delight of Italy and England: though here, as it is to be found in old papers, he was not yet regarded as the first among his fellow-singers of the chapel. Love of music was in this period a necessary part of education amongst high nobility: Among the musical works preserved in the archives left by the Emperors above-named and lastly extraded to the imperial 'Hofbibliothek' (an innumerable [innumerable] mass of nearly two thousand dramatic compositions, viz.,

* Anton Haizinger (1796-1869) a tenor singer, who was long connected with the Karlsruhe Hoftheater. Pearsall lived at Karlsruhe for several years.

† This evidently refers to the writer's 'Geschichte der europäischen archaischen oder unserer heutigen Musik,' which appeared in 1834.

‡ Kiesewetter seems here to have neglected to consult his dictionary, and to have concluded that the French 'foule' was identical with the English 'fool'!

* 'Sammlung vorzüglicher Gesangsstücke der anerkannt grössten . . . Meister der für Musik entscheidendsten Nationen, gewählt. . . von F. Rochlitz.' 3 vols. The Motet by Tallis, 'Verba mea auribus percipe,' is printed in the first volume.

† The writer evidently meant to say 'had come into fashion.'

‡ Baldassarre Ferri was a male soprano at the Court of Poland about 1643. From 1655 to 1680 he was a member of the Imperial Choir of Vienna. There seem no records of his having visited England, as stated by Kiesewetter.

Dramas or Operas, Oratorios, Serenatas, Feasts, and Cantatas of greater size, written here or sent to the imperial connoisseur and Mæcenas by foreign composers) there are some, which were performed by persons of the highest nobility; nay I had under my hands an opera in *trè atti* (by Caldara, 1723) which not only on the stage, but also in the orchestre for the instruments of every kind, and for the ballets, was performed exclusively by gentlemen and ladies of the first families even of the reigning: The names of the performers (about 60) are recorded in the store-book and likewise in the Vienna-Gazette of the year above mentioned. All these facts are unknown till to-day to all historians, as they are still unknown here even to musical literati of Vienna. When Maria Theresia (1740) began a troubled and misfortunated reign under hard embarrasments of finances, when the number of musicians and their appointments were reduced, the Court ceased to be musical, and the high classes dispensed themselves from the pains of learning music, finding it more convenient to pay their ticket in theaters or concerts, in the mean time become accessible to every body; the musical art, having penetrated in the middle classes, needed no more the patronage and munificence of a court. The art may change for its fates, but it can never die: And as it is a maxim of œconomy not to produce things, that we find well fit and at a convenable price by the neighbour, it was well done, that the wealthy and industrious England drew the article *Musick* out of Italy and Germany; and I think, that under this point of view England may have more contributed to the encreasing of the art, than it would have done by fabricating his musick at home, and as for opera-musick it seems we have the same maxim.

Your Countrymen, Sir, I know, always had preserved the esteem and the love for ancient music, more than it may be said of the inhabitants of the continent elsewhere: We never have founded an 'Academy of ancient musick' as it was existing at London; and if in later times we show any preference of Handl [*sic*], it was excited by the ecstatic encomium attributed to this eminent composer in England. As to elder composers, of the XVII or XVI Century, I may say to have been the first in Vienna to exhibit some of them in the historical concerts in my lodging since 22 years. I am surprized, though not astonished, to hear, that there is in London a Society even for Madrigals of such a high antiquity.* The Series of them, you gratified me with, Sir, is indeed very interesting, and I am the more obliged to you of this present, as my collection was still wanting for composers of the english school.

Now, my dear Sir, as you have the kindness, to express some interest for my musical life, you will permit me, to give you a little account of it. A collector of any thing, may it be medals, pictures, books, musick, watches, boxes, or pipes of taback &c never will have finished, nor want for occupation. As to my historical collection I find ever something to do about it; nevertheless not intentioned to accumulate a mass of musick, and having brought up at least the more celebrated works of the most celebrated authors, besides a sufficient quantity of such of second rang and of *autores minores*, to show the progress and the very state of musick through all ages, my zeal for encreasing it is now less fervid than it has been still a few years ago. Besides I love to see musical friends with me for performing *ex tempore*

* The London Madrigal Society was founded in 1741.

something of old authors, *in camera charitatis* [*i.e.*, 'for the love of the thing']. Likewise I am arranging greater concerts of ancient musick three or four times a year during [the musical Season in my house. Sometimes I am disposed to pen down my remarks or doubts on various themes of musical literature, or a little dissertation, when incited by an accidental question or by a perverse assertion (like the numerous chimerical* hypotheses given for historical facts by Mr. Fétis). To all this accedes a little correspondence upon similar matters with a few persons that participate the predilection for these specialities. As to my literary essays I am, it seems me, always predestined to dip into problems disdained by men of better learning; as it may be concluded by the articles inserted in the Leipzick Gazette in various times, for instance: the notation of Gregorius M†: or the *nota romana*‡; the living-period of Franco§; the transposition of the songs of old masters for beeing performed to-day; the different tablatures of practical musicians since the invention of the time-table; and some other not yet published; item the memoir (prize-concurrent) of the influence of the old Netherlanders on Musick. It is thus that late I was induced to treat the musical Systems of modern Greeks; but not finding an editor because of the great number of plates, I laid it aside and wrote a more compendious treatise on the matter, to which I added a refutation of certain erroneous assertions of Mr. Fétis about it, and an additional article of the musick of old Egypt. This work ('Über die Musik der Neugriechen nebst freyen Gedanken über altgriechische und altegyptische Musik') is to be published by Breitkopf and Härtel, who also will publish a little memoir 'Über den weltlichen und volksmässigen Gesang im Mittelalter.' Besides these essays I sent to the Redacteur of the Allgemeine musicalische Zeitung a memoir: 'Über die Lebensperiode Franco's' being a species of Duplic|| against Mr. Fétis, which I hope will appear in short time.

When here, my dear Sir, perhaps I have spoken too much of my insignificant person and of my still more insignificant writings, pray, Sir, you will ascribe it to the desire, to be known to you, an estimable literate yourself in the matter, indicating the direction and in the same time the limits of my studies; and as to my few publications, never think, Sir, that I may be proud of them, having considered them only as bare essays, not intentioned to teach new things never heard of, but to provoke researches and incite criticism by liberal and sometimes hazarded propositions: and perhaps, that already it was not done quite in vain.

At last, Sir, pray you will pardon me the long and perhaps tiresome talking; but as I had only little moments to profit of your conversation, I was now the more pressed to speak with you epistolary; and when I had the boldness to do it in english, I beg your pardon, because doubting if my bad french, though more practised by me, would have better satisfied you, and I must fear to incommode you with a german letter, as it was my purpose to write you a great one. Hoping at least you will have understood, what I was intended to say, I am sure your good heart excuses the germanismes or

* The word 'chimerical' has been added in Kiesewetter's own handwriting.

† *i.e.*, Gregorius Magnus.

‡ Meaning the notation of Plain Song.

§ Franco of Cologne, the celebrated theorist of the 13th century.

|| *Duplic* is a German legal expression meaning a rejoinder.

even the solecismes, my letter may abound of, the more as I have nobody to correct my sketch and not having written a line in this idiom since almost half a century.

As the gentleman your Son is pursuing his studies here in Vienna I keep still a little hope to see you again, to profit of your conversation and then to renew personally and by hand-shaking the assurance of the high esteem and true attachment, with which I am, Sir,

Your most affectionate

R. G. KIESEWETTER

K. K. Hofrath.

Occasional Notes.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY TO:—

Madame Clara Butt	-	-	-	February 1
Frederick Niecks	-	-	-	" 3
James Kendrick Pyne	-	-	-	" 5
Franklin Taylor	-	-	-	" 5
Nicholas Kilburn	-	-	-	" 7
Sir Walter Parratt	-	-	-	" 10
Madame Adelina Patti	-	-	-	" 10
Herbert Austin Fricker	-	-	-	" 12
Bertram Luard Selby	-	-	-	" 12
Hugo Becker	-	-	-	" 13
James William Elliott	-	-	-	" 13
Edward German	-	-	-	" 17
Tobias A. Matthay	-	-	-	" 19
Charles Marie Widor	-	-	-	" 22
Arrigo Boito	-	-	-	" 24
Philipp Scharwenka	-	-	-	" 25
Leonard Borwick	-	-	-	" 26
Mrs. Mary Davies	-	-	-	" 27
Sir C. Hubert H. Parry	-	-	-	" 27
Miss Marie Brema	-	-	-	" 28
Charles Santley	-	-	-	" 28

IN MEMORIAM. QUEEN VICTORIA.

The music sung at the Memorial Service at the Royal Mausoleum, Frogmore, on the 22nd ult., the first anniversary of the death of Queen Victoria, consisted of the following: Charles Wesley's hymn 'Let saints on earth in concert sing,' to the fine old tune 'Dundee'; Tennyson's 'The face of death is towards the Sun of Life,' and Mr. A. C. Benson's hymn, specially written for the service and founded on Psalm xx., 1-4, 'She hath her heart's desire,' both set to music by Sir Walter Parratt; and Tschaiakowsky's anthem 'How blest are they whom Thou hast chosen and taken.' The music at the service, which was attended by the King and Queen and the Royal Family, was sung unaccompanied by the choir of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, under the direction of the organist, Sir Walter Parratt, Master of the Musick to the King. It is not surprising to learn that the service-music was most beautifully rendered.

The King has been pleased to nominate H.R.H. the Prince of Wales to be President of the Royal College of Music in succession to His Majesty.

Sir Frederick Bridge has been appointed by the Earl Marshal to direct the music at the approaching Coronation Service in Westminster Abbey.

Mr. Morton Latham has done an excellent piece of biographical work in his 'Alfredo Piatti, A sketch,' which Messrs W. E. Hill and Sons have recently issued in a dainty little tome. In writing this deeply interesting sketch of the eminent violoncellist, Mr. Latham has wisely refrained from any attempt at a panegyric of his hero. The life-story, and—may we add?—the lively stories, are simply told. 'Mere laudatory phrases,' he says, 'are out of place in the biography of a great artist; they are without interest to those who have not heard him play, and superfluous to those who have.' True, and to this we will only add, also in the words of our author, that Piatti's 'tones will ever live in the memory of those whom they once enthralled.'

The book is so full of good stories and interesting incidents that two extracts, as specimens of the plums contained therein, must suffice. Young students who are making haste to become rich may be encouraged (or otherwise) to know that Piatti began his professional life as a humble 'cellist in a theatre orchestra, at a fee of twopence per night. It is true he was only a boy, and one so small that, as the chairs were too high for him, he had to be seated on the edge of the platform. To quote his biographer:—

It was the universal practice in Italy, between the acts of the Opera, to interpolate a lengthy Ballet, so that the second part of the Opera commonly commenced as late as eleven o'clock. For a child such performances were most exhausting. On one occasion, while Madame Pasta was singing in Norma, in the last scene with Pollione, the air 'In mia man al fin tu sei,' one of the most touching numbers in the opera, the poor boy, who had fallen asleep, tumbled off his perch and broke his violoncello. Madame Pasta's performance was of course interrupted; but, far from showing any annoyance, she burst out laughing and afterwards generously gave the boy another instrument.

This was at Bergamo, Piatti's native city, of which Johann Simon Mayr was the chief musician. Mayr showed a special fondness for the little Alfredo, and recognised his genius. Of his composing achievements we are told that—

Mayr produced some seventy operas and a large number of Masses, but it must be admitted that he not infrequently took subjects from works, including those of Beethoven, unknown in Bergamo. Mayr died at Bergamo, and on his monument in Santa Maria Maggiore has been engraved a passage from the Kyrie in one of his Masses. Unfortunately the passage thus selected for a lasting memorial is identical with the opening of Beethoven's Trio in C minor.

Much interesting information is given concerning Piatti's early experiences in England, his adopted home, where at first he had 'many ups and downs, especially downs.' It should not be forgotten that at one time he played in the orchestra of the Opera and the Sacred Harmonic Society. He was an enthusiastic tennis player, and a remarkable judge not only of violoncellos, but also of violins. The pages of this entertaining book bear eloquent testimony to the artistic attributes of the greatest violoncellist of his day, who, as a man, was lovable to a degree. A photographic reproduction of Frank Holl's portrait forms an appropriate frontispiece. He was one of the very few musicians who bore the name of a musical instrument—Piatti being the Italian for cymbals; the only other instance we can recall is that of the composer of 'Cherry Ripe,' with the patronymic of Horn.