The Sacred Harmonic Society

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Durante, three; Leonardo Leo, one; Catel, one; Pitori, two; and several of less note.

It is to be hoped that Dr. Hullah has taken more care in verifying the other facts and inferences appearing in his Report than he appears to have done in this matter of Wüllner's book.—I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

G. W. BULLEN.

59, Victoria Road, Clapham Common,
April 19, 1880.

ORCHESTRAL NOTATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—So many generations of composers having passed away without, as far as I am aware, a single remonstrance ever having been raised against the chaotic system adopted in writing for orchestral instruments, it seems rather rash in a young musician of neither influence nor reputation to suddenly uplift his voice and cry for reform. My only excuse is that music is the most conservative of all the arts, and that it is only the young musicians who can push the old ones on.

What I would ask is this: What practical reason can be given for transposing the music of *some* instruments into relation with the natural scale of those instruments, and not doing so to all—or rather, why do it for any?

A violin-player is not in the least embarrassed by mere change of pitch when he has occasion to play the viola, nor a cello-player when he takes up the double-bass. Why then should an oboe-player not be able to play the corno Inglese without having his music transposed a fifth? Has he no ear, no mind, no sense to comprehend that the one instrument is pitched lower than the other? Possibly orchestral players in bygone times were a dull set, but they cannot have been so devoid of musical sense as to play only by finger and not by ear. It seems to me, indeed, that instruments which alter their pitch, as the clarinet and horn, must be extremely perplexing to the player at first, if he have any ear. I know from my own experience how difficult it is, when singing in a choir, if the piece be transposed, to avoid pitching upon a wrong note at every "lead." To this day my father is greatly distressed on first sitting down to a piano to find the pitch more than a semitone higher than it was in his youth.

But my argument here is that the transposition of the music for certain instruments cannot be necessary, else why should it not be general? The trombone is an enormously difficult instrument. Yet whether it stands in E♭, B♭, G or F, the player has to work out the problem of whereabouts his required note lies for himself. Again, the bass tuba and the euphonium, which are saxhorns in E♭ and B♭, are both written as non-transposing instruments, while all the other piston instruments without exception are written for in their particular keys. More absurd still, the ordinary flute stands in D, yet the real notes are written for it, while the E♭, F, and other flutes are written as transposing instruments. The most exasperating anomalies of all, however, occur in writing for the horn. Even granting that this instrument at least should always be written for in the key of C (which I do not see the least necessity for), why should one half of the scale—that written in the G clef—be written an octave higher than the half which is written in the bass clef? And why should not sharps or flats appear in the signature when required? These absurdities are beginning to be felt very severely now that the German valve-horn in F is—thank goodness!—fast superseding the clumsy old "hand-horn." What possible objection can be raised against at least writing the scale of the new instrument in an uniform manner and with the requisite signatures? Why should we have to choose between the two following awkward ways of writing a passage:—

* The same inconsistency exists in the case of the basset-horn, but this instrument is now superseded by the bass clarinet.

When it might just as well be written—

Or far better with the real notes:—

If the system of writing the *real notes* were adopted it would only be necessary to use the alto clef for the horns, supplemented by the bass clef for the lowest notes. The same remarks as to signature will apply to the valve trumpet. Nothing is more annoying to the musician than to read the F trumpets and horns together, the one a fourth higher and the other a fifth lower than the notation. Why should a score be made a Chinese puzzle—a puzzle so senseless and gratuitous that writing for the orchestra instead of being a delight is a brain-rending misery? That improvements in notation have been so few during the last century is indeed a marvel. It was long before it was discovered that it would be as well to write the real notes for the drums as to write always C, G. How long will it be before the same discovery is applied to the horns and trumpets? Wagner is the first composer who has had the courage to break through the silly custom of writing for the bass clarinet a major ninth higher than the real sounds. The major second is bad enough. We are slowly struggling clear of the wretched complication of clefs, and perhaps in another fifty years or so it will dawn on musicians that three only are necessary: the treble, alto, and bass. To put the C clef on any line but the middle one is to wantonly confuse an already foggy and clumsy system of notation.

I am well aware that changes such as I suggest must meet with much opposition, but the total abolition of the tenor clef, and the writing of valve-horns and trumpets in their relative keys instead of in C, are reforms within the reach of every musician to make and every player to adopt. The abolition of transposition must be left to a more sensible generation. I would fain be allowed the use of the alto clef for the horns however.—Very truly yours,

F. C.

THE SACRED HARMONIC SOCIETY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—Mr. Bishop deserves the thanks of all the members and supporters of this great institution for his letter in your last issue. The regret expressed on all hands at the probable demise of the Society warrants the hope that any well-considered and practicable scheme for its reorganisation and re-establishment on a basis more in keeping with the requirements of the times would meet with sufficient acceptance to justify its adoption. The concerts now drawing to a close were announced as "the final series in Exeter Hall" on the ground that that building would not be available for musical purposes after the present season. But the latest published intelligence on that subject states that the efforts which have been made to preserve Exeter Hall for religious and philanthropic purposes have been crowned with success. If this be true, it is surely not too much to expect that it will still be available, on reasonable conditions, for the Society's purposes also; and in that case the alleged cause of the Committee's present embarrassment will no longer exist.

However that may be, it is clear that the suggested reorganisation of the Society must be planned on very different lines from those on which its constitution was laid down nearly half a century ago. Mr. Bishop hits the right nail on the head in hinting that "a far less exclusive policy should have been adopted by the Committee as regards the election of new members." But I would go further, and say that the recognised aims and pursuits of the Society should be such as to attract and secure the hearty co-operation of all genuine and enthusiastic amateurs, and this on such financial conditions as would render it independent of the capricious support of the public.

I would respectfully suggest that, if the Committee and the present little circle of members find themselves unequal to the elaboration of a scheme calculated to effect the desired object, a suitable appeal, on the ground of the splendid service rendered by the Society to their art in

past years, should be made to some of our more prominent musicians, professional and amateur, to make common cause with them, and thus avert the impending crisis. Any idea that "vested interests" should be primarily considered will, I am sure, be scouted by all who take worthy views of the matter.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

JAMES E. ASHLEY.
7, Romilly Road, Finsbury Park, N.,
April 22, 1880.

CHOPIN'S PRELUDES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—It is always painful to have to give up cherished beliefs, and to do so without resistance is hardly natural, if possible. The story of Chopin's Preludes having been composed at Majorca, in the old and nearly deserted Carthusian Monastery in the winter of 1838-39, has been supported by the high authority of Georges Sand's autobiographical statement, and so far in detail that one Prelude, that in B minor, is now for ever coupled by her, as to its inspiration and composition, with her absence from the monastery during a violent spate or storm-flood in the island. This occurrence has been referred to quite lately by Dr. F. Hueffer, in his admirable monograph on Chopin published in the *Fortnightly Review* (September, 1877); and must be well known to all those who have cared to inquire about the friendship that existed between the two great artists. There is a religious depth of feeling in several of those wonderful sketches that is in direct relation to the romantic circumstances in which Chopin was placed.

Fontana, the editor of Chopin's posthumous works, a fellow-student with him at Warsaw, and always an ardent disciple as well as his intimate friend, told me that he received from Majorca the MSS. of the Preludes as they were written, being intrusted with the revision of the proofs for immediate publication, a statement that coincides with Georges Sand's narration. Now, in Germany, in No. 2 (1880) of "Gartenlaube," Herr Stavenow, relying upon the high authority of Gutmann, a favourite pupil and very dear friend of Chopin's, comes forward with a statement, repeatedly he says asserted by his informant, that the Preludes were composed in Paris, and were sold by Chopin in August, 1838, to Camille Pleyel for 2,000 francs, Gutmann copying them out for the engraver, and the receipt of this money enabling Chopin to proceed to Majorca. I think both statements are partly true and may be reconciled. Chopin had very likely written in August, 1838, the more important Preludes, and sold them; but Pleyel requiring twenty-four (fourteen for the first book, and ten for the second), Chopin, then in Majorca, composed and sent some of the shorter and more solemn, as a kind of make-weight, consigning them to Fontana, who was in Paris at the time. Fontana was a man of high character, incapable, I think, of intentional falsehood.—Yours truly,

Kensington, April 8, 1880.

A. J. HIPKINS.

MR. H. WALL AND COPYRIGHT MUSIC.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—Mr. H. Wall is still continuing his operations. A few weeks since, my wife played a pianoforte solo, entitled "Skating Polka," at an entertainment in connection with a Sunday School Institute in Lambeth. Last week she received, through the gentleman who presided on the occasion, a letter from a "Mr. H. Wilson," asking the name of the composer of the piece "so brilliantly performed." In her reply to this polite request, my wife gave her address, and thus furnished the information needed by Mr. J. C. Hyett, solicitor, 8, Colebrooke Row, Islington (late of 5, Hind Court, Fleet Street), who demands, on behalf of "Mr. H. Wall," payment of two pounds. Failing the receipt of this amount within two days, legal proceedings will be taken. I purpose resisting this claim, and beg to suggest to those who take part in entertainments for benevolent purposes, and afterwards receive "Mr. Wall's" communications, that they should not too readily accede to his demands. There may be differences of opinion as to the state of the law upon the subject, but public opinion will surely demand the amendment of certain Acts, if, by their obscurity, they countenance such proceedings as this. When "all rights are reserved" the

fact should be distinctly stated on the cover of the music. I learn that the manager of the entertainment has received a similar demand, for having "caused or permitted" the solo to be performed.—I am, Sir, yours obediently,
Forest Hill, April 19.

F. T. GAMMON.

SPEED OF HYMN-TUNES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE MUSICAL TIMES."

SIR,—With your permission I should be glad to say a few words in your valuable paper touching the speed at which hymn-tunes are taken nowadays.

The subject appears to me of the utmost importance now that there are signs of the musical education of the people being taken in hand. The one thing that strikes us in England is the apparent total want of National Song. I include in this term "National Song" both sacred and secular, but confine my present remarks to the sacred.

If we go into any church in this country I do not think we shall find one where there is any real congregational singing. I am well aware of the fact that some musicians of standing have deprecated congregational singing, but I do not think that many would now agree with them. There is in some congregations a manifest attempt to follow the tune, but with no better success than a general hum; there is no singing in the true sense of the word.

What I want is to get the various opinions of organists and others interested in the question, so that if possible some understanding may be arrived at. The remedy I suggest, having experienced its good effect on the rare occasions on which I have been allowed my own way, is, the taking of the tunes at a slow pace.

I appeal to any musician who has ever heard the German chorale in its own land to support me in my suggestion. I cannot quote Bach, as he gives no tempo-marks to his chorals, but I would point to the metronome tempi to the chorals Mendelssohn introduces into his oratorios.

Apologising for the length of this letter, which I hope may call forth replies,—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

RICHARD J. HOPPER.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

* * Notices of concerts, and other information supplied by our friends in the country, must be forwarded as early as possible after the occurrence; otherwise they cannot be inserted. Our correspondents must specifically denote the date of each concert, for without such date no notice can be taken of the performance.

Our correspondents will greatly oblige by writing all names as clearly as possible, as we cannot be responsible for any mistakes that may occur.

Correspondents are informed that their names and addresses must accompany all communications.

We cannot undertake to return offered contributions; the authors, therefore, will do well to retain copies.

Notice is sent to all Subscribers whose payment (in advance) is exhausted. The paper will be discontinued where the Subscription is not renewed. We again remind those who are disappointed in obtaining back numbers that, although the music pages are always stereotyped, only a sufficient quantity of the rest of the paper is printed to supply the current sale.

W. BAILEY.—In tuning pianofortes, as in many other things, a little knowledge is of little practical value. A tuner, to gain a living by his art, must be tolerably efficient, and such efficiency is never secured under two or three years of close application in a piano factory where the instruments are what is called "rough"—that is, have not yet been brought by repeated tuning to standing in tune. The pupil should be young enough, at least at first, not to have the hand fully grown, and skill in "fine" tuning as well as experience have to be gained after the workshop time is past. It should be evident, therefore, to any one who will reflect, that a few months' study, even if constant, will neither qualify the student to gain a competent income, nor do more than teach a tyro to make indifferent octaves and unisons where they happen to have been worse than it is usual to endure.

STRIVER.—Your earnest letter assures us that you will attain your object in time. You cannot do better than persevere in the course you have taken; but do not keep exclusively to exercises, or your musical feeling will remain dormant.

A SUBSCRIBER.—The piece of music you send us is altogether incorrect.

A CONSTANT READER.—I. St. Andrew's, Tavistock Place, W.C. 2. Apply to the Crystal Palace for a prospectus.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF COUNTRY NEWS.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for any opinions expressed in this Summary, as all the notices are either collated from the local papers or supplied to us by correspondents.

ABERGAVENNY.—On Wednesday, the 21st ult., the Abergavenny Choral Society gave the second Concert of the season at the Town Hall before a large and appreciative audience. The principal vocalists, were Miss Bateman, R.A.M., Miss Augusta Morgan, and Mr. Wilson,