

Decentralisation: An Experience

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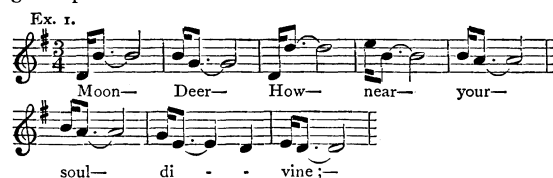


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afternoon, however, was supposed to centre in the 'Jewel Song' from 'Faust,' Puccini's 'Addio,' Lieurance's 'By the waters of Minnetonka,' and Tosti's 'Good-bye,' and in the encores, thoughtfully announced beforehand—'Home, sweet home' and 'Annie Laurie.'

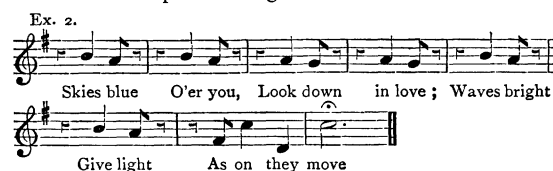
Maybe you have so far escaped 'Minnetonka,' but you must not be let off an extract. It is well that we should place on record a sample of the kind of thing sung at 'the musical event of the year' by a great prima donna:



This 'tune' is practically repeated to:

'Sun Deer  
No fear  
In heart of mine.'

The second portion begins thus:



The accompaniment of almost every bar consists of tonic and dominant arpeggios, with the dominant 9th used lavishly in its most sentimental fashion.

Look again at the last batch of head-lines. 'The Diva to go home.' By all means. Why not? As the Diva has melodiously declared (only too often), there's no place like it. 'And teach 100 girls herself.' If the Dame can give those hundred girls her own beautiful voice, well and good, but for heaven's sake let a musician be called in to attend to their repertoire. We cannot lightly face the prospect of a hundred débutantes let loose on us a year hence full to the epiglottis with 'Minnetonkas,' 'Jewel Songs,' and 'Home, sweet Homes.'

'I am torn at leaving England,' the Dame said to the *Evening News* representative. Naturally. In how many other countries will she find a hall accommodating ten thousand that can be filled thus easily with admirers at 10s. 6d. to 4s. 9d. per head (including tax)? Where else will she meet with a Napoleon of the Press spreading himself to make his country a land fit for prima donnas to live in?

However, one may be 'torn,' yet determined, and the Dame is gone. For at least a year there will be little doing in the world of music, no 'Minnetonka,' no Tosti's 'Good-bye,' no queues outside the agents, no nothing beyond a couple of hundred promenades, symphony, chamber, and choral concerts, with a gross or so of recitals by mere musicians.

Perhaps in the meantime one of us may get the ear of the Viscount, and tell him something of the music and musicians that really matter—of the London Symphony Orchestra playing at concert after concert for mere honour and glory, of another orchestra practically disbanded, of silent opera-houses, of choral societies and competitive Festivals living from hand to mouth, all for the lack of the support that he has so gratuitously whipped-up on behalf of one of the least important musical events of the season.

## DECENTRALISATION: AN EXPERIENCE

BY C. À BECKET WILLIAMS

The subject of Decentralisation of music has for the last few years so engaged the attention of the pundits of the Press that a few remarks on my practical experiences cannot fail, in theory at least, to interest the reader. For I, with many others, have given time and money (stupidly) in trying to prove that the hypothesis is a true one, viz., that music has only to be decentralised to be a success, both from the point of view of Golders Green and Lombard Street.

And, reader, I believe it is true.

My first move was to interest Mr. Philip Ashbrooke in my scheme, and henceforward I will refer to our joint efforts in the plural. We, then, got busy and formed a committee to help us which consisted of Lady Cooper, Messrs. Harold Samuel, Dr. Somervell, Gilbert Webb, and Harvey Grace—a representative body I am sure you will agree. But now we came to our first fence, and fell. We had an old-fashioned idea that societies and committees of this kind should be self-supporting, and that the public should pay for its musical medicine. What we *ought* to have done was to appeal for funds, like everybody else. . . . Instead of that we made it clear to the committee that membership involved no financial responsibility, and that unless the scheme was self-supporting it would be abandoned. However, as we eventually learnt, this first fence proved our undoing.

We next informed the Press of our project, and of course were duly patted on the back and blessings were called down on us. On the other hand the *Daily Telegraph* allowed Dr. Hull, with his usual enthusiasm, to ask why we did not join the British Music Society, or words to that effect (I was one of its first members!), and somehow omitted to print a letter we wrote in reply.

It is now perhaps advisable to quote the words of our manifesto, so that our subsequent actions may appear the less remarkable:

For some time it has been apparent that concerts of the best class have been too much confined to the West End of London, and the above committee has been formed with the object of arranging for concerts by famous artists to be given at Town Halls in and around London.

The reader will note the words 'famous artists.' Plenty of infamous artists decentralise ballads in the drawing-rooms of Balham and Blackheath, but we wished to cater for a larger circle. We therefore decided to give a series of concerts at the Town Hall at, let us say, Colney Hatch, in the centre of a big nest of both the upper and lower middle classes, which were the classes we proposed to entice into our net. At an interview the Town Clerk adopted an attitude of surprise, mixed with an engaging optimism and hopefulness. We were grateful for his sympathy and help throughout the whole series. But, alas! his hands were not altogether free. There were certain things he could not do, as you shall hear.

We decided that we must fix on the same day in each week for our concerts in order, so to speak, to form the habit. But we found that nearly every night the Hatchonians disported themselves jazzily in the hall we wished to hire. What about Sundays? We were informed that concerts *could* be given on

Sundays, but with two provisos, namely, that the L.C.C. should sanction them, and that any profits accruing should be handed over for a charitable purpose. As we were only out to pay our way we agreed. We were then informed that we would have to pay for the hire of the pianoforte in the hall—the pianoforte sacred to jazz—whether we used it or not. However, after lengthy correspondence, the council waived this demand. Then we found that the local cleaning staff not unnaturally refused to work on Sunday without extra pay, and even then Mr. Ashbrooke had to provide all the programme sellers, booking-clerk, and the rest of the *personnel* of a concert-hall. Would the authorities permit us to put up our bills on their notice board, place leaflets on the counters of their offices, and would they be responsible for the advance bookings? Yes, but (to put it mildly) little enthusiasm was displayed in any way—the minimum was done to help us. All looked on with cold and suspicious eyes, and the L.C.C. hung up our arrangements while, presumably, examining our dossiers at Scotland Yard.

But we were determined to continue with our project, and realising the importance of starting well we decided to engage Mr. Mark Hambourg for our first concert, and for days beforehand huge representations of the great pianist's features pontifically presided over the pedestrians perambulating the pavements. As the hour approached the advance bookings showed that no interest whatever was being taken. But this was nothing to go by, and indeed on the night itself the audience was large and shriekingly enthusiastic. But we charged very small prices (1s., 2s., and 3s.), and the concert did not pay. The audience at the next concert was very much smaller, but our overhead charges were not so high, as some of the artists generously gave their services for the cause. Nevertheless, we lost money over the whole series. We have no cause for self-reproach from the technical point of view. Mr. Ashbrooke's skill in using all advertising resources was as amazing as it was admirable. The hall was situated opposite an important station, on the main road, and the route of several omnibuses. Furthermore it was in a district without any rival attraction. Yet the public response was practically nil. Why then did we fail? Not because we performed good music instead of rubbish. There is plenty of good music which is much more attractive even to the unsophisticated proletariat than bad music, as everybody knows. No; it was the lack of funds to carry on the enterprise and form the habit. The concerts would have paid if we could have continued them, of that I am certain, but it was not for us private individuals to do so. At this point we decided the authorities, should come in. They should make themselves responsible for a dozen concerts at least, so as to give matters a fair trial. We have circularised every London Borough, and put our machinery at their disposal. The next move must come from them. It would be better for all concerned if the powers-that-be would cease wasting money on grandiose schemes for child education, and spend about a hundredth part on educating and uplifting their parents.

The above article may perhaps give the impression that our energies were confined to these concerts only. This is not so. We have been as far afield as Hertford, and if reasonable chances occur of making both ends meet we shall continue our activities. We are quite aware that we are not the only people

who give concerts, but claim that so far as we know our committee is unique in possessing the equipment for giving such concerts with no idea of profit or personal gain.

## RUTLAND BOUGHTON'S 'THE IMMORTAL HOUR'

BY ROBERT LORENZ

On June 18, 1821, Weber's 'Der Freischütz' was performed for the first time at Berlin and fell like a bomb-shell on a nation saturated with the imbecilities of current Italian opera. The moment was well chosen: the ground was ready. On August 14, 1876, the platform of Bayreuth station was baized to lighten the footsteps of Kaisers, Kings, Tchaikovsky, and Mr. Joseph Bennett, of the *Daily Telegraph*. The moment was well chosen: the ground was ready. On August 26, 1914, 'The Immortal Hour' was performed in the moth-eaten Assembly Rooms of a mediocre townlet, to the accompaniment of an imperfect grand pianoforte. Needless to say, the moment was not well chosen: the ground was not ready, for on March 31 of the present year the same work was performed in the same townlet (increased in stature and football proficiency, but not in understanding) to the accompaniment of a still more imperfect grand pianoforte.

Yet Rutland Boughton's 'Immortal Hour' is perhaps the most significant musico-dramatic work produced anywhere since 'Parsifal,' and in England for over two hundred years.

The purpose of the present article is not to provide a guide to the work nor to do more than touch the fringe of a masterpiece that sooner or later will figure prominently in musical history; but to try to communicate some, at least, of the writer's enthusiasm for a score which has genius stamped on almost every page.\*

Rutland Boughton calls his work a Music-Drama: a complete misnomer to start with, for music-drama was a title coined by Wagner to distinguish his mighty synthetic brain-bursts from other peoples' operas, and conveys to most minds the picture of a huge stage, huge singers, a huge orchestra, and a huge conductor. Now from the beginning to the end of the 'Immortal Hour' there is much that is strong, nothing that is huge; or rather, I should say, that the few attempts at hugeness are the few complete failures of the score. It is indeed not the least of Boughton's achievements (and a rare tribute to his commonsense) to have steered clear of Wagnerian hugeness without at the same time becoming petty and affected like Debussy in 'Pélleas and Mélisande.' I myself have crossed out the word music-drama in my score and written instead: 'A lovely noise of myriad leaves'—for *that* is the secret of this music, if indeed its secret can be wrung from it in mere words. It is green, it is lovely, and its greenness and loveliness are the greenness and loveliness, not of a highly civilized intellectual cosmos but of the very fairest parts of this fair country. One simply cannot conceive the work being performed in any country except England or one rich in Anglo-Saxon traditions. I suppose 'Bells of Youth' ring

\* The work has been published under the scheme of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust by Messrs. Stainer & Bell, to whom I am indebted for permission to select a few musical examples. The vocal score costs 15s.