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Publisher: Routledge
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Proceedings of the Musical Association

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rma18>

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Published online: 28 Jan 2009.

To cite this article: Thomas F. Dunhill A.R.C.M. (1907) The Evolution of Melody, Proceedings of the Musical Association, 34:1, 101-122, DOI: [10.1093/jrma/34.1.101](https://doi.org/10.1093/jrma/34.1.101)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jrma/34.1.101>

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APRIL 21, 1908.

JAMES E. MATTHEW, Esq.

IN THE CHAIR.

THE EVOLUTION OF MELODY.

BY THOMAS F. DUNHILL, A.R.C.M.

I AM going to speak to you this afternoon upon a subject of universal interest. Music as a science, as an intellectual power, or as an expression of the indefinite and undefinable forces which dominate the soul of the artist and crave for outlet, may not appeal with any great measure of certainty or directness to the popular mind. So many and various are the claims of more tangible things in this busy world of ours that very few can find time to study the historical development of a complex abstract subject. The scope of my present paper, however, is confined, as far as possible, to melody—and this is not at all a forbidding word! To the great majority of ordinary listeners, indeed, melody is the one quality in music which really counts; a composition in which melody is obscure, or not of paramount importance, is voted dry and uninteresting. Moreover it is a quality concerning which every listener considers himself competent to express an opinion. And the musician himself, no matter how well-tutored he may be, can never afford to lose sight of those elements in music which strike straight home to everybody—which elicit sympathetic response not only from the musically educated, but from those who, without technical knowledge, are keenly perceptible to the influence of beauty. The development of harmony, of musical forms, of instrumentation, and so forth—these are subjects for the initiated to sit in judgment upon, or squabble about; but melody is “enthroned in the hearts” of men, and I am inclined to think that the composer who fails to recognise its potent power, or proves himself incapable of making a direct appeal by means of its employment, has mistaken his vocation and misunderstood the elementary functions of music.

First of all, What is a melody? The Greek word "melos," from which our word is derived, had a very general meaning, for it is said by Plato to denote "speech, music, and rhythm." Nowadays we generally mean something far more primitive when we use the term. A succession of simple sounds produced by a single voice or instrument would, I think, be a possible definition of the most elementary form of melody. But the word is difficult to define, because it expresses something which is difficult to analyse or describe. A mere succession of simple sounds may be either meaningless or full of beauty. The sounds may be ordered and arranged in the most careful and well-balanced manner, and yet create no impression whatever; while on the other hand a few notes springing up unconsciously in an untutored brain may represent an idea which grips the imagination and is of lasting value.

It will perhaps be more to the point if I attempt a new definition of melody—one which you will not find in any dictionaries or books about music. I am going to call it "the simplest possible manifestation of an inherent feeling for beauty, through the medium of single musical sounds."

The love and understanding of beauty is, fortunately, by no means confined to the educated classes. It is not a privileged property, but a universal inheritance. We need only look to the sources of some of the most beautiful and abiding melodies in existence to prove this. Mozart, Beethoven, or Schubert wrote few finer tunes than some of the folk-songs of England, Ireland, or Scotland, which owe their birth to no distinguished composers, but which have been kept alive by the peasantry after having sprung up spontaneously from their midst. The gradual development and elaboration of music is a very important thing, and the exercise of the high intellectual power of musical minds has been necessary to bring music to its present exalted and influential position; but it has little to do with musical inspiration. We cannot explain or analyse inspiration—neither artists nor scientists can tell us what it is. So we must content ourselves with an examination of the medium through which it is expressed.

Two essential things must be in existence before a melody can be created. Firstly, a musical scale; and, secondly, design. Now design is a necessary quality in all arts. It is the equivalent, it has been well said, of organization in the ordinary affairs of life,—the ordering of the various factors of effect in their proper places. The value of design in painting and sculpture is universally felt and recognised, and if it be an essential characteristic of arts which, so to speak, are the expression of outer surroundings, how much more must it be needed in the giving of utterance to inner feelings which are

based entirely upon vague personal sensibilities, and not upon anything visible or audible in nature. We sometimes hear a good deal of nonsense talked about the music of nature, and some writers would have us believe that the only possible basis of all art is *imitation*, and that music began by imitating the cries of birds. This is a pretty idea, but it is a very poor theory. Music most certainly must have begun by crude, but direct, expressions of human feeling. The utterance of human cries, the cadences of primitive speech,—these things may be regarded as the natural beginnings of our art, and music has grown out of them just as surely as speech grew out of the inarticulate mummings and growlings of primeval savages.

The study of the music of uncivilised races enables us to gain a very good idea of what the earliest forms of melodies were like. "The examination of the music of savages," says Sir Hubert Parry, "shows that they hardly ever succeed in making orderly or well-balanced tunes, but either express themselves in a kind of vague wail or howl, which is on the borderland between music and informal expression of feeling, or else contrive little fragmentary figures of two or three notes which they reiterate incessantly over and over again."

One of the most interesting of my own-experiences during some rather extensive travels of two years ago, was a brief visit to one of the islands of Samoa, in the Pacific, where I had the great pleasure of hearing a really characteristic song sung by the natives. It consisted of a short phrase of two bars repeated many times over with growing intensity. The fragment was peculiar and fascinating, and was very decidedly cast in a rhythm of five beats to the bar. This circumstance struck me very much, because, when a certain celebrated modern composer wrote the whole of a symphonic movement in that time it was generally regarded, in spite of some established precedence, as a new evidence of some fresh possibilities in rhythm. Yet here were the far-away, primitive Pacific islanders singing a tune in a similar measure, naturally, persistently, and with no evident consciousness of its unusual pulsation.

It takes a very long period of human development before the crude utterances of savages become systematic enough to be definite in their repetitions and permanently established. But through such primitive expressions of feeling in past ages there is no doubt that *scales* began to formulate. They developed slowly, and it was not until certain races had arrived at an advanced stage of civilization that men began to pay much attention to the relations of different notes one to the other. When the first scale was planned out, then the first step towards definite melody was arrived at. The subject of scales is a vast one, and it is not my

intention to speak to you in detail upon a matter which has been most thoroughly and exhaustively treated by many learned writers in the past. It is evident, however, that without recognition of some decided relationship of different notes to each other in respect of pitch, it is impossible to construct a succession of sounds which can be appreciated, or retained in the memory. So accustomed are we to the familiar major and minor modes of our day, that it is not only difficult for us to imagine the state of things which prevailed before scales were invented, but we find it hard to realise that our modern European methods do not by any means represent the only possible or satisfactory development. As a matter of fact these scales have been adopted because it has been found that they are, on the whole, the most suitable for the modern harmonic scheme to be built upon; in other words, they are used because of the needs of harmony, not because of the needs of melody. Many of the melodies of olden times, as we know, are constructed in such a way that to harmonise them entirely ruins their particular character. I shall speak later on of the extraordinary changes in the style of melodies which have been brought about by the employment of a uniform system which divides the octave into twelve equal parts; but in certain respects I think we may assume that the development of harmony has not always tended towards the most natural development of melody. There might have been many remarkable possibilities of variety revealed if composers had continued to utilise the many different modes formulated in ancient times, possibilities which have been thrown aside by confining attention to a form of scale which happened to be more suitable for that side of music which represented the greatest culture and intellectuality.

If we want to study melody in its original form we must dismiss modern European music altogether, and turn to the music of the Oriental and savage races, which is purely and absolutely melodic. Sir Hubert Parry tells us, in his "Art of Music," that scales were originally not built upwards, but downwards, the idea being to imitate, as far as possible, the cadences of the voice in speaking. When a man raises his voice at the end of a sentence he is either asking a question or expressing astonishment,—and these are not normal expressions of feeling. The general tendency of all extremely primitive forms of singing is for the voice to imitate the inflexions of speaking and to drop at the end of a sentence; and so the melodies of untutored peoples generally fall instead of rise in the scale when they finish. The first scale which is known in history as having been used by the Greeks is, indeed, simply a group of three descending notes, the intervals of which can be expressed by playing C followed by the A flat

and G below it. That this scale really represents an attempt to formulate the natural inflexions of the voice receives striking confirmation in the fact that a practically identical scale is known to have been used very largely by the Japanese, and is also the basis of some of the songs of the aborigines of Australia, and the Red Indians of North America.

It is harder to account for the great and universal prevalence of a much more developed scale, that which is known as the Pentatonic,—the foundation not only of the music of China, Japan, Java and the Pacific Islands, but also of many of our own British folk-songs. As most of my listeners are probably aware, this scale can be very well represented by playing the five successive black-notes on the pianoforte, beginning on F sharp. I remember, as a child, finding infinite amusement in trying to play all manner of Scotch and Irish airs upon the pianoforte without touching a white key, and it is really surprising how many examples of National melody will adapt themselves to this method of performance. To pass on to further developments, we all know what great discoveries in scale-making we owe to the Greeks. Although we have very little evidence of what Greek music was like, we have the most definite information regarding their scales, for upon this point they theorised a great deal, and indulged in much thought, study, and mathematical calculation. All the nations which have expended time and energy on the cultivation of music sought, in the early stages, to set forth a definite series of notes in distinct positions suitable for singing; and this was the first step towards real melody. But a mere succession of notes, however varied and ornamentally devised, was not in itself sufficient to satisfy. Something more than this was needed before melody could be considered to possess any very definite character or value. I have already alluded to *design* as an essential characteristic. Well, the simplest and most elemental foundation of design is certainly *rhythm*,—the feeling for accent and the grouping of accents. It is, quite as much as the mere uttering of inarticulate sounds, a natural talent possessed by the most primitive types. In all the rough music of savage races rhythm is the dominating feature. Such figures of tune as they invent are, however, only fragments, and show a lack of intelligence and the power of concentration. When the understanding of the value of organization in a race becomes more apparent, a much stronger feeling for design asserts itself, and there appears a capacity to balance the rhythmic periods with greater regularity.

It happened, however, that the earliest forms of intellectual music did not draw very largely upon these qualities, but proceeded on different lines; and for some centuries rhythm

had really very little to do with the development of melody. The early cultivation of music was, as we know, entirely on the vocal side, and the serious study of the art was confined to those who worked in the service of the church. From a mere inflected monotone there arose an elementary form of plain-song melody with practically no rhythmic value—and from plain-song was developed a crude type of polyphony, in which rhythm was still practically non-existent. By polyphony I mean unaccompanied vocal music in which each part is made to sing a melody of its own. If we look at some of the early attempts in this form of music, belonging to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, we find very naturally that the harmonies made by the combination of the melodies are, to our modern ears, extremely bare and sometimes discordant. But each part has its own work to do, and one is no more important than another. The origin of the invention of polyphony was, no doubt, simply a desire to provide each singer with something interesting to sing. But the development of the polyphonic idea was destined to proceed still further in mediæval music. The next step was that every voice should take its share in the development of a *single* melodic thought—not simply singing its own part for its own sake, but answering and extending passages prominent in the other parts. This idea was the basis of nearly all the great early Flemish music of the fifteenth century, and the art advanced considerably, and was passed on to the masters of Italy. It was during this epoch, of course, that what we call the laws of strict counterpoint were formulated, and at no period in musical history, I suppose, were the limitations of music so great, or composers so restricted by hard and fast rules which were never allowed to be disregarded. The culmination of this development came with the appearance of Palestrina, who brought this form of writing to such a high stage of perfection and beauty that musical composition could hardly, within the same limits, have progressed further. Palestrina died in 1594, and this was virtually the end of the school. After this we find a disregard for early contrapuntal laws everywhere apparent. Monteverde and other notable pioneers overthrew the existing ideas altogether, dispensed with the ingenuity of vocal writing, and sacrificed the richness and purity of independent melodic outlines for the sake of dramatic, and more or less descriptive, methods, which were destined to hold great sway, and exercise an enormous influence upon the music of a later day. The leaders of this revolt against the strictness and severity of polyphonic music are often spoken of as the founders of the Homophonic school, and their system of composition alluded to as Monodia—music in which the melody is confined to a single part. But the feeling for combining sounds in

harmony with each other, which had been fostered by Palestrina and his predecessors, could not be suddenly banished altogether; at all events it could not possibly fail to have its effect upon the new school. Something had to be substituted for polyphony, and so it came about that *instrumental accompaniment* was resorted to. At first the accompaniment to the single melody was of the simplest possible description—nothing more than an exceedingly unpretentious bass-part played by a solitary instrument. But the success of early efforts in this direction led to further developments. A good deal of boldness was exhibited by some writers, notably by Monteverde, who, for the first time, made use of “discords without preparation,” and other devices which were considered to be horrible innovations in their day by the stricter musicians, but which opened up enormous possibilities of expansion and progress. The work of the Homophonic school might certainly be regarded, by itself, as a retrograde movement, but historically it proved to be really a new beginning on new lines. Unisonous vocal music had, of course, existed long before the polyphonic school itself. But to a large extent the adoption of the polyphonic methods had cramped melody as a separate thing, and this new beginning was calculated to give freedom to melody as a means of expression, and to make everything else subordinate to it. If we compare the early efforts of the monodic school with the ripe creations of the polyphonic masters, they seem poor things indeed—and we can quite understand what a terrible falling off it must have seemed to those well-versed in the earlier methods. But, nevertheless, there were in these crude new beginnings germs of an entirely novel element. In exchange for the glorious contrapuntal achievements of the sixteenth century, the composers of the seventeenth century offered a certain graceful elegance and symmetry of melody which had been unknown to the masters of the older school, and indeed quite foreign to their methods. The idea was seized upon and developed with great rapidity. Rhythm and symmetrical form were cultivated in conjunction with a system of part-writing which could not be called counterpoint, but which was eminently suitable to the requirements of instrumental accompaniment: and to these beginnings we undoubtedly owe much that is grandest and most important in modern music.

In speaking of the influence exercised by rhythm upon the development of music after the establishment of the monodic system, there are several things to be taken into account. I have already alluded to rhythm as a natural instinct possessed by the most primitive types. It is a characteristic understood and expressed, I believe, by every savage race on the face of the earth. It is exhibited in its most elemental

forms by the beating of drums or tom-toms, by the regular movements of the human body in dancing, and also by the emphasis of words in language. All these things have had an enormous influence upon the progress and development of melody. Many of our most important art-forms are the result of the instinct for dancing; and as for speech, we have only to compare the strong contrasts of emphasis in a language like that of Hungary with the rhythmic designs which are familiar to us in Hungarian music to see how great and how direct can be the inspiration from that source. When the polyphonic methods were thrown aside and the homophonic established, all these influences were quickly at work. The 17th century, as we all know, saw many innovations in the domain of secular music. The traditions of dramatic and operatic writing established by Monteverde were handed on in Italy to his pupil Cavalli, and from him to Lulli, who introduced the new methods into France.

In England, when Charles II. was recalled to the throne, secular music advanced with great spirit, and the popularity of masques and other such entertainments brought dance-music into considerable prominence. Moreover, these were the days when inventors were hard at work producing harpsichords, and perfecting the art of violin-making, and great stimulus and incentive were afforded to the composer by the rapid opening up of new channels through which his talents might be displayed. So it is not to be wondered at that during all this time melody underwent many developments and transformations. The influence, in particular, of dance measures very strongly affected melodic design. Tunes, in order to be suitable for being danced to, had to be cast in very definite periods, generally of eight or sixteen bars; certain subordinate phrases were required for contrast, and there was a necessity for repetitions. These features, at first exigencies, came at length to be considered as desirable qualities in music of all kinds. Composers began to see that music gained greatly by an adherence to some intelligent rules for dividing and subdividing melodic periods. In other words, melody became a counterpart to poetry, whereas previously, at least in the case of cultivated music, it might be said to have been more nearly equivalent to prose than to verse. What is perhaps most important of all, from the historic aspect, is the fact that these new methods invaded the church itself. Some of the greatest composers of the 17th century—such as Henry Purcell—were not only associated with secular and dramatic music, but were also entrusted with the high responsibilities of writing music for the offices of religion.

Purcell, who had in every way most fully absorbed the characteristics of the new movement, was greatly influenced

both by Italian and French developments, and wrote an enormous amount of church music which could not fail to be somewhat new and experimental in design. As regards melody, one of the most noticeable features of the changes made at about this period was the adoption of a florid style of writing for solo voices. This, we must suppose, was in the first instance a concession to the vanity of the singers, who desired first of all to exhibit their powers of flexible vocalization. Now virtuosity is nearly always a terribly bad thing for art. So great was the vogue of this particular style of florid writing during a long period which succeeded the revolutionary movement of the 17th century, that such changes could not fail to exercise a great influence upon the general development of melody. It is almost unnecessary to mention Handel's name in this connection, for even to this day his solo-songs live to satisfy that very vanity that they helped to foster—and live, it may be said, because of the glorious qualities which outweigh their defective utterance. It is undeniable that conformity to the methods of florid vocalization became, in some instances, so strongly a habit with composers that it represented, in time, a natural mode of musical expression. One could not suppose, for example, that any music written by Bach could have been the direct outcome of a desire to flatter his interpreters, and yet even he was largely affected by the style of writing for solo voices which prevailed in his day. There is no doubt that, in many ways, this influence was not altogether a bad one. There was a certain freedom and elasticity in the florid melodies which had been absent from the rather stiff and formal dance-measures of the preceding age, and from the rigid declamation of the recitatives and arias of the early operas. And this in turn had its effect upon instrumental music, and in time helped to free it from too great a preponderance of formality. The mention of the name of Bach brings to my mind the necessity to dwell for a moment upon his achievements as a melodist. We all know the wonderful power he had of combining melodies, of developing fugue-subjects, and so forth; but what appeals to me even more strongly, as being especially important, is the fact that in his work, almost for the first time in music, melody seems to be based upon harmonic structure. In the music of the older polyphonic writers melodies were combined, and harmony, so to speak, was almost accidental: in the music of the succeeding homophonic writers melody was paramount, and was simply accompanied and supported by harmonies. But Bach seems to have felt the beauty of harmony as a thing in itself—the beauty of melody as a thing in itself—and the possibility, also, of combining melodies without, on the one hand, destroying the harmonic scheme, or on the other,

impairing the perfect and melodious flow of the individual parts. In this art—surely the supreme art of the musician—he seems to have been prodigiously in advance of his time. He understood it far better than Haydn or Mozart, better even than Beethoven; and I am not sure if he did not understand it better, or at all events practise it with more consummate mastery, than Wagner.

It may be said that the invention and succeeding popularity of the Sonata form did a good deal to retard the progress of the development of melody on the lines which Bach had formulated. In the sonatas of Haydn and Mozart, and to some extent in those of Beethoven, however strong the relationship between melody and harmony may be, we do not find the same continuity of ideas in combination. A good deal more attention is paid to clear-cut outlines and variety of material. The melodies, or subjects, are generally strongly contrasted, and given out at first singly and with little elaboration,—so that their individual import may be clearly recognized,—and afterwards subjected to treatment which is more often in the nature of expansion or reiteration than anything else. The design was planned upon a larger scale, and a great deal more importance was attached to the method of gaining variety by the use of different keys for the various sections of the work. All these changes had their effect upon the character of melody. At first, during the Haydn and Mozart *régime*, melodies became more regular in their periods, more exactly constructed in their divisions and sub-divisions, more clearly balanced. It was not until Beethoven's genius began to develop upon independent lines that melodic periods lost, to any great extent, their habit of formal elegance and decorative poise. The finest melodies in Beethoven's later works give one a sense of awe,—they impress one with the idea that there is some tremendous unfathomable depth of meaning behind them. They could not have proceeded on conventional lines, for the mind that conceived them had little in common with the minds that, in previous years, had been content with the presentation of beautiful ideas in a beautifully perfected shape. Therefore we find them full of sudden surprises, curious haltings and pauses, and violent contrasts of unexpected emphasis. The beginnings of almost all the modern developments of music may be traced to the innovations of Beethoven in breaking forth from formalities of expression; and in his treatment of melody, as much as in anything else, he has laid the foundations of our modern fondness for curious outlines and capricious accentuation. The great freedom of his harmonic changes, his skill in modulation, have much affected the aspect of music generally and melody in particular. The need for a clear sense of tonality is not always strongly felt by some

modern composers, and this may or may not be a decadent sign. Certain it is that great musicians of recent years have taken fuller advantage of the scope afforded them by the universal adoption of the chromatic scale than had hitherto been regarded as desirable. Upon this scale the most wonderful harmonic schemes can be built up, and it is obvious that melody, once a simple thing, has largely changed in character from the fact that infinitely greater possibilities for expansion have been opened up by the free use of this elaborate system of scale-division.

People are sometimes heard to deplore what they call the absence of melody in modern music. But, whether our sympathies are with the moderns or not, it surely is scarcely necessary to point out that melody has been put to new uses by the great composers of our day: it may not always appear so clearly on the surface, or be couched in such easily recognizable forms as hitherto, but it has never been allowed to disappear.

One of the most important of the new uses to which melody has been put is, of course, exemplified in what is called the system of the *Leit-motif*,—a name closely associated with Wagner and his operas, though in point of fact its use by Wagner was simply an extensive development of an idea which had been adopted experimentally by operatic composers for some years previously. It is hardly necessary to reiterate the principles of a system now so well-established. The *Leit-motif* is, briefly, a short figure or passage of melody of definite character, which is employed to depict or illustrate some personage, situation, or idea which has prominence in the dramatic scheme. When the personage appears, or the situation occurs, or the idea is referred to in the text, it is the function of the *Leit-motif* to accompany such appearances or references. It is plain that a wonderful composer like Wagner was able to employ this idea in many very subtle ways: for instance, not only was the *Leit-motif* used in his operas to emphasise and illustrate the action, but also to give meaning to points in the story which otherwise might be lost or misunderstood, and to indicate to the audience the thoughts and emotions which are supposed to be passing through the brains of the principal characters at certain critical moments. The elaborate employment of melodies in this manner makes, of course, a considerable demand upon the intellect and musical perception of the listeners, and almost presupposes a certain preliminary knowledge of the works on the part of an audience before they can be fully understood and intelligently followed.

I allude to the *Leit-motif* merely as a marvellous instance of the development of melody, and its application to the most complicated musical structures. But at the same time

the principle of its employment is a crushing answer to those who maintain that melody is losing its place in music, and is neglected by modern composers. Wagner, at any rate, so far from neglecting the claims of melody, invariably placed it in the forefront, employing it for his highest purposes in the most definite and systematic manner possible. And yet this was one of the very points which the opponents of Wagner seized upon as a sign of decadence, as evidence of the supposed poverty of his melodic invention! Happily those days of sharp and bitter controversy are now over, and Wagner is recognized and accepted even where he is not appreciated.

The consistent use of the *Leit-motif* system more than anything else, no doubt, led Wagner to adopt again the contrapuntal methods which had been associated with Bach's name. For the representation of complex emotions it was frequently necessary for several melodies, or "motives," to be combined at the same time.

All the innovations and fashions introduced by Wagner have had their effect upon composers who have arisen since his day. As in the case of every big genius with a strong personality, he had some very marked mannerisms which have detrimentally influenced a great many modern composers. But on the whole it would be hard to say that the influence of Wagner has been in any sense a widely mischievous one. Perhaps the most curious direct influence has been the wholesale invasion of the dramatic element into the domain of purely instrumental music. Nearly all the most conspicuous successes by great modern writers since Wagner have been achieved in departments other than opera, but very many of them have been based upon dramatic ideas expressed by melodic methods undoubtedly founded upon the *Leit-motif* system, and more or less operatic in character. The "symphonic poem" may not be altogether a new invention, and what we call "programme-music" was known long before Wagner was born. But at the same time it is undeniable that a new impetus was given to descriptive music of an intellectual and subtle nature, by the success of Wagner in those musical delineations of human character and emotion which formed the groundwork of his operatic structures.

The most widely talked-of and probably the most genuinely powerful of all the adherents to these newly-applied principles is Richard Strauss. In every particular, in melody no less than in other attributes, he is the undaunted champion of the most modern developments of music. His aim as an artist would seem to be to accomplish in music a searching and comprehensive expression of life and experience. Nothing is too vast for him to attempt—nothing is too trivial to be

seized upon and illustrated with the keenest enthusiasm. The wild pranks of the freakish "Till Eulenspiegel," the jabbering of the hero's critics in "Heldenleben," even the bathing of the baby in the "Sinfonia Domestica," are depicted with almost as much care and zeal as the gruesome realities of a tremendous battle-scene, or the splendour of the soul's enlightenment after death. For all these things he has adopted a rhetorical style of melody. As the subjects and programmes which he chooses are generally of a more or less audacious nature, he is constantly at pains to impress the revolutionary character of his thoughts upon his listeners by means of melodic outlines which are both daring and extravagant, and not infrequently strike one as being dangerously near burlesque. In his earlier compositions, and in certain passages in his more recent works, he shows that he is keenly alive to the value of sustained and dignified melody as a means of expression; but latterly it would seem that he has felt a marked preference for the capricious treatment of small melodic fragments, and a tremendous complexity of conflicting rhythms which, perhaps, hardly come into the category of melody at all. It is difficult, for instance, to give any accepted name to music such as the long solo-violin passages in the "Heldenleben," or some of the phrases which illustrate certain homely incidents in his more recent "Domestic" symphony. I have no wish to enter into a discussion of the merits or demerits of these undoubtedly remarkable works, but only as far as possible to discover in what way they are influencing the development of melody. It is perfectly clear that new standards must be established. One hesitates to speak of successions of sounds, which are deliberately bizarre and intentionally ugly in outline, as melody—yet can one really deny that name to phrases which are evidently sincere attempts to express emotions through the medium of single notes? It is sometimes said that ugly music is a contradiction in terms. But Strauss, an acknowledged composer of much music of very rare and exquisite beauty, must at least be allowed his opinion, and it is neither fair nor generous-spirited, in a swiftly-changing age, to assert (as some do) that much of the work of such a man lies outside the domain of real art. We must wait and see what impression such writings will produce when the sounds fall upon ears better prepared to receive them.

In other quarters the symptoms of melodic progress are, on the whole, less disquieting than in Germany. In England, Edward Elgar, who represents the height of the modern movement, has shown a great fertility of melodic invention of a peculiarly new and individual stamp. Works like the "Enigma" Variations, the "Sea Pictures," "Cockaigne," and "In the South," contain many melodies of a genuinely

beautiful cast, full of point, precision, and vitality. No one living understands better than he does the art of developing his material, and enhancing its value by the splendour of the instrumental setting. In his recent oratorios he has, perhaps, used the *Leit-motif* system with even more persistence than Wagner,—so that one begins to wonder if, when the successor to "The Kingdom" appears, we may not find ourselves growing a little tired of some of the re-statements of those significant themes which first arrested our attention in "The Apostles." But to the man who could imagine the poignant phrases which depict the remorse of Judas Iscariot, or the exquisite scene at the Sepulchre, and realise with outlines of such intense earnestness the tremendous power committed to the Apostles and the priesthood on the Day of Pentecost, melody is evidently a very real and living thing. To Elgar we may, I think, look hopefully for a real progress on perfectly intelligible lines.

In France, an apostle of impressionism, Claude Debussy, has been working great changes, and exercising a very considerable influence not only upon French, but upon all European music. Debussy represents a distinct school of thought. His methods are stranger, indeed, than those of Strauss, though one feels that they may not possess the strength to create any lasting impression upon his successors. There is in all his music a sort of shadowy groping after something inexpressible, which is extremely fascinating. If we examine his setting of Maeterlinck's "*Pelléas et Mélisande*" we shall see the most characteristic of his qualities well displayed, for here is a theme with which he is evidently in closest sympathy. In the entire opera there is absolutely no melodic outline for the voices, it is studiously and expressly avoided. The whole of the vocal writing consists of repeated notes, the degrees of the scale employed varying only slightly and occasionally. The orchestral part—one cannot call it accompaniment—consists chiefly of strange, elusive harmonies which are made to throb gently, and rise or fall in expressing the sentiment of the moment. The absence of tonality, which is everywhere the most striking feature of the music, gives it a peculiar air of mystery: of definite melody, as we know it, there is scarcely anything. When an occasional melodic phrase is introduced it is generally repeated. This is a feature which puts one in mind of two widely different musicians,—Mendelssohn and Tschaiikowsky,—who almost invariably employed the same device for impressing their ideas upon their listeners. Almost the entire charm of the music may be said to lie in a sort of delicacy of rhythm and quiet tinting of the orchestration: it is rhythm with all the coarseness and sharpness eliminated, and colour with no depth of tone or sonority.

Debussy's orchestration, however, is clear and not generally complicated; he does not, like Strauss, fill his scores with a multiplicity of detail, making the whole conception appear complex and bewildering. It is only the atmosphere which is misty and veiled; apart from the actual harmonic structure and rhythmic elusiveness, the music is clear enough. The score of "*L'Après-midi d'un Faune*" (Debussy's best-known work in England) is, as a piece of instrumentation, simpler by far than the score of the "*Siegfried Idyll*," for instance. If our art is to progress on the lines of Debussy we shall not, at any rate, look forward to an increase of complexity in the music of the future, but rather a return to simpler and quieter methods. But in both Strauss and Debussy we must feel very strongly certain unquestionable symptoms of change. The use by Wagner of short expressive phrases instead of regularly balanced tunes, for a set purpose in operatic writing, has undoubtedly had a vast effect upon the instrumental music of to-day. In spite of the enthusiasm which has greeted the work of Brahms, of Dvořák, and Tschaiikowsky—work in which the melodies were modelled on classical lines, and definitely dependent upon design—it would seem that the immediate effect of their example upon the rising generation has been comparatively slight. It is impossible to close one's eyes to the fact that the music of to-day is plunging headlong into a new sphere, and that the designs presented are not only more curious and irregular, but a great deal less decorative than those of any preceding period in the whole of musical history. It is as if we were to some extent reverting to the earliest forms of expression,—the vague, half-articulate utterances of primitive man,—whilst at the same time employing all the vast resources of modern instrumentation in order to create an atmosphere or form a background. In listening the other day to that most remarkable and striking composition of Frederick Delius, in which he sets forth his impressions of Paris, the awakening of the city to gaiety and pleasure, the movement, the life and romance of a great metropolis, I could not help being struck by the fact that the melodies themselves were but a small part of the whole scheme,—prominent phantoms which flickered for a moment and disappeared, leaving their impression on the mind, but never glowing with proud independence or dominating the score with the majesty with which symphonic writers from Beethoven to Dvořák and Tschaiikowsky were wont to assert their mastery.

Whither these changes may lead us it is impossible to conjecture. One thing is certain: the great classical traditions are passing away. The aim of the present-day composer would seem to be to break down every barrier which checks the free expression of his conception of life.

He demands a larger orchestra than formerly, and players so skilled that they can perform every passage he chooses to write, however unsuitable it may be. Nothing must stand in the way of the direct utterance of his inner thoughts. In the words of one of our most earnest and distinguished poets—a poet who realises as few have done the import of music and melody:—

“The simple days are dead, the rich tides roll,
And we, the inheritors of toil and tears,
Utter the ampler message of the soul.”

Music is becoming more and more bound up with our own life and experience—more strenuous and complex in a strenuous and complex age, and less a vehicle for the expression of quiet personal thoughts. And melody, that combination of primitive instincts which can never be wholly absent from our art, must perforce adapt itself to these changes, however it may suffer in the process and however wildly some of “the inheritors of toil and tears” may cry out for a return to melodic simplicity. That music should go back to the earlier methods of Mozart, as some prophecy, is unthinkable. The experience and evolution of years cannot lead to nothing, or be altogether wasted. There may be reactions, and some of the accumulated methods may be abandoned for a time when a climax has been reached on the present lines—just as the reaction after the polyphonic period of Palestrina’s day was followed by a fresh start on new lines in the 17th century. It is probable that we live in an age in which music is chiefly of transitional value. Our present developments, however, must assuredly have their effect upon succeeding schools of thought, just as the developments of the early polyphonic school had their effect upon the achievements of such successors as Bach and Wagner.

Activity is a sure sign of life; and if melody were merely standing still, and speaking to us in the same accents throughout succeeding generations, it would be a certain proof that its life was at a low ebb. Let us try, therefore, to believe very firmly in its vitality, and we then need not be dismayed if some of the shapes into which it is moulded in these latter days seem wayward and crooked; for each year of growth has its purpose, and the most restless age may well prove to be the age of the greatest progress towards some unknown regions of noble and splendid accomplishment.

DISCUSSION.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I am sure, ladies and gentlemen, you will all agree with me in thanking Mr. Dunhill for his very exhaustive paper, which one is inclined to call, "The Birth, Life, and Death of Melody"; for certainly it has been a good deal of trouble to many of us in more modern compositions to trace the melody, which no doubt exists there, though I must confess I feel sorrow for the poor singers who had to sing the very unvocal parts which Mr. Dunhill describes in the opera of Debussy. The main object of music it seems to me is delight; and one of the bases of delight in music is no doubt in the first instance, melody. When melody is lost sight of, it appears we have frequently to listen to what we would rather not hear.

DR. SOUTHGATE.—The paper ranged over a wide period and, as the Chairman aptly said, it has dealt with the birth, progress, and possibly the death of melody. I do not take such a very gloomy view as to think that melody will entirely disappear; though there are certainly signs of it in some modern music. As our Chairman said, it is often difficult to find that which we have hitherto associated with the term melody. Melody is, according to the old text-books, "a well-ordered succession of pleasant or agreeable sounds." That definition certainly cannot be applied to a good deal of what passes now for art and melody in symphonic and orchestral works. I am afraid the same sort of thing is permeating vocal art. There is often little for the singer to do now. In some of our modern music the singer plays much the same part as some orchestral instruments, and has very little of interest to say. As for much of what is set down for singers, I can only say that if I were a singer myself I could not and would not sing it. There are two or three points in the paper that struck me as calling for some remark. I do not know whether I clearly understood our lecturer that at the death of Palestrina the particular style which he so glorified was at an end, and that a fresh departure commenced. If so, I am unable to agree with him. I say that because I have vividly in my mind a magnificent anthem or motet which was sung at the recent Maundy Thursday Service at the Abbey. It was a composition of the English musician Dering. Very little is known about him; to most of us he is only a name, but lately there was found in the library of Westminster Abbey a set of motets in parts. The book was printed, with the leaves uncut, and the Dean and Chapter were so careful about it that they would not allow them to be cut. But we could see inside, and when the parts were put

together it was found to be extraordinary music for that period. Dering was the son of a Kentish gentleman. He was a Roman Catholic, and was sent at an early age to Rome to be educated. He was there for some time, and then went to Brussels, where he acted as organist to a convent. Then he came to England to take a degree at Oxford, and was made organist to Queen Elizabeth, though still keeping to his own faith. Then he went abroad again, and backwards and forwards two or three times; and eventually died, quite young. It was believed that he had written several motets, but little or nothing was known about them. However, they have since been found at Westminster Abbey. Sir Frederick Bridge has edited them carefully, and some have since been published. I am quite certain that if our lecturer had heard the motet, *O sic vobis*, I listened to on Thursday—I think it was also given by Sir Frederick Bridge at one of his Gresham lectures—he would have admitted that Palestrina's style did not die with him. On the contrary, this Englishman produced music which, to my mind, is finer and more advanced than Palestrina's, and yet it must have been written near Palestrina's time, for Dering was in Rome about the end of Palestrina's life. In the book of motets there is another one by Vittoria, a Spanish composer, who outlived Palestrina. Again I would say, I think this is still finer than Palestrina. I admit that after that, when the great madrigalian period commenced, there was a new element introduced. We imported a good deal of melody into our madrigals, and it lives to this day, and we hear it with delight. It is different from the contrapuntal music of Palestrina; one might call it a melody harmonized, though each part has something of its own to say. There was another remark the lecturer made, in which he seemed to ascribe the invention of the union of different melodies to Wagner. I am unable to agree with him. In England we have plenty of beautiful old rounds, which are practically the union of different melodies, long before the time of Wagner. Even *Sumer is icumen in*, which is many, many centuries older than Wagner, has the same character. I admit that the melodies combined by these old composers are nothing like so long, nor nearly so effective, as the splendid portion of the "Meistersinger" overture in which Wagner takes three themes from the opera and unites them with a result that is delightful as music, and of course very brilliant in orchestration. A word about Handel. I grant that Handel fell into the fashion of the day in writing a great deal of florid music just to show off the singer's voice. That is what opera composers of that day had to do, because the signers were dominant and demanded it. But though Handel wrote "Rejoice

greatly" and "O Thou that tellest," and many other florid airs, remember that he also wrote songs of exquisite expression and pathos, highly emotional pieces, and I think they quite outweigh the florid music he wrote to please the singers.

Mr. STATHAM.—I should like to add, not one more definition of melody, but a remark as to the difference between melodic invention and any other kind of invention in music. A man who invents a new melody which has character and individuality has created an entirely new existence. To a certain extent harmony and instrumentation can be taught, but melodic creation cannot be taught. It is almost impossible to define in what a melody consists, beyond saying that it must have a certain unity of character and expression. I was rather inclined to question the opinion that virtuosity is always an evil. We can only adequately express music through a high cultivation of vocal and instrumental execution; does not virtuosity help to keep up the standard of execution? Even if a piece of display music is not very valuable intellectually, it serves to develop powers which may be applied to a higher form of music. Even Beethoven's concertos are displays of virtuosity, though there is much more behind that. Handel's "Rejoice greatly" is a show piece of vocalization. But it is not a mere piece of display, it is a very apt expression of the sentiment of the words; and I should say that Bach, in his own way, was as much a *virtuoso* as any one. It is on record that he was exceedingly proud of his own execution on the organ; and it was said of him that he could play as fast with his feet as other people could with their hands. I cannot feel much in sympathy with the modern movement in music. Composers are now trying to make music do more than it can do. I listened with interest to Strauss's "Tod und Verklärung," but I do not think it would be intelligible unless the title had suggested the meaning. So with Debussy's "Après-midi d'un Faune"; the title takes you into a dream of ancient Greek legend, and you are interested to see how the composer expresses this. But without the title it would be difficult to say what it meant. Beethoven's Seventh Symphony wants no interpretation; we enjoy it as it is, and each gives his own interpretation to it. Music which requires a literary explanation before we can entirely enter into and enjoy it, is to that extent a failure—as music. But I listened to that part of the lecture with much interest, and perhaps the lecturer is right in thinking that something new may come out of this literary element in music, but I doubt if it will be anything equal to what pure instrumental music has already given us. I understood the lecturer to imply that Beethoven's melodies

were less complete and rounded in form than those of his greatest predecessors. That is true in some instances, but surely not as a rule, even in his latest works. There is not a more perfect example of straightforward expressive melody than the episode in D major in the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony; and the melody which forms the principal subject of the *Finale* is one of the most purely vocal "tunes" ever written. It would seem, however, that he arrived at perfection in his melodies rather by a process of working-up and developing them than by a spontaneous inspiration.

MISS DAYMOND.—There is just one point I should like to mention. It struck me that it is not exactly the fact that melody is being discontinued by modern composers. One often hears that objection, but is it not rather that the function of melody is changing, and therefore the style of melody is changing also? Melody has to minister to the total effect in a different way, which means that a melody should no longer be a formal tune. Impressions hurry past so quickly that a long melody would be out of place. I do not say whether it is a good thing or not. To me there is nothing more beautiful than the tunes of Beethoven and Brahms, and others, who thought out their melodies; but it seems to me that it is one of the necessities of the case that the melodies which are used in modern music must be more or less fragmentary. The *Leitmotif* has surely had a good deal to do with that view. If music is, so to speak, to label a person or a situation, it must be short. It is the condition of things that has altered the character of melody. This surely is not dropping melody, but merely altering its character. The idea is not so much that each part should have something to say that it is complete, but that every part is to minister to the atmosphere of the general composition. Not long ago I had to sing in a very modern choral composition. It struck me all through that one has very rarely a melody to sing. With very few exceptions one has simply to contribute one's quota to the general atmosphere. When I listened, afterwards, to the whole composition, I felt how completely the scheme worked out—the atmosphere had been the paramount consideration. If this is the modern conception, it stands to reason that phrases must come in a great deal more, and the formulated melody must go out, whether one deplors it or rejoices.

DR. SOUTHGATE.—I should like to ask the last speaker if she considers Tschaikowsky a composer of modern music; and if so whether one must not note the great length and prolonged flow of his melodies?

MR. THELWALL.—The lecturer has given us a definition of melody; and I propose to suggest a definition from quite a

different point of view, *i.e.*, the acoustical. It seems to me that the most general definition one can have of it is this: Melody consists of a series of vibrations of air varying within defined limits in (A) rate, (B) duration, (C) amplitude. It also sometimes includes periods of silence. (A) The rates vary between the limits of about 30 and 8,000 vibrations per second, and are selected approximately from a series in geometrical progression having a constant ratio equal to the $\sqrt[10]{2}$; which is nearly $1\frac{1}{17}$. (B) The durations vary from $\frac{1}{10}$ th of a second to 5 seconds. These, I think, are about the extreme limits. The variations in any one melody both in rate and duration are considerably less than the above limits. (C) We have not any means of measuring the amplitudes, but they vary in two different ways; (1) periodically dividing the melody into more or less equal measures; (2) either periodically or irregularly within the measure. All these elements are subject to artistic variation in singing, and also on some instruments. Duration and amplitude together form rhythm, which may be defined as the variations in amplitude and duration of the series of vibrations in a musical sentence. That seems to me fully to define melody from an acoustical point of view, always remembering that the series of vibrations may be interrupted by periods of silence.

Mr. DUNHILL.—I do not think that many of the points brought forward are points of controversy. I tried to make my paper as uncontroversial as I could. But some of the remarks made really seemed to misrepresent what I said, and I have been credited with statements in direct opposition to the views I tried to express. I do not like the expression "The life and death of melody": I would not, under any circumstances, allude to melody as "dead," though I might admit a "serious illness"! Regarding the influence of the florid style, I certainly did not mean to say in any sense that Handel simply wrote songs to please the singers. In fact, I merely mentioned Handel's name to show how very strong the influence of the florid style of singing was upon even the greatest of composers; I certainly did not mean to speak of him in any derogatory spirit. I said that virtuosity was a bad thing for art, and I alluded, of course, to virtuosity *as such*; that great works may have something in them which appeals to virtuosos is quite a different thing. With regard to what Dr. Southgate said about Palestrina, I did not mean that the polyphonic style came to an end in him, but simply that in the music of the next generation polyphony did not play an important or predominant part. I am aware that the great madrigal writers did go beyond Palestrina in certain instances, but after all they do not represent what we may call, historically, the greatest of the music which followed

Palestrina. I did not say that the device of combining melodies was the invention of Wagner! It is older, even, than the development of rhythmic design. Regarding the question as to Tschaikowsky's place amongst modern composers, I should not call him a representative of the newest school; and in my remarks upon present-day tendencies, I was referring more especially to those who are plunging headlong into new spheres.