Scriabin's Music and the Three Choirs Festival

Author(s): Cambrensis

Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 63, No. 948 (Feb. 1, 1922), p. 124

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/910983>

Accessed: 25/01/2015 08:26

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Musical Times Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

me, adding that he was 'very much obliged' to me for 'finding so friendly a way out of the difficulty.' The censor, however, thought otherwise, for after my songs had been ruthlessly turned down, I was informed that 'no songs should be sent unless they have first been accepted by a publisher.'

I wrote asking if I might be allowed to know in what respect my unfortunate little songs had offended, and suggested that much trouble and annoyance would be saved if the censor would reveal the principles to which musical settings of Mr. Yeats's lyrics are expected to conform.

To the more personal query no reply was given. It appeared, however, that insuperable difficulties prevented compliance with my 'admirable suggestion,' because,

'however carefully principles are laid down . . . so much in art must always be a matter of individual feeling. For instance, might it not be perfectly possible to follow every given rule, and yet for the general atmosphere and character of the music to be utterly unsuited to the poetry it was intended to enhance?'

But unless 'individual feeling' is controlled by some principles, criticism becomes a mere matter of caprice. If the music of a song were so flagrantly at variance with the poetry with which it is associated, it would not be impossible for any capable critic to show the reason why. (Mr. W. J. Turner might go further, and praise it for being so!)

Mr. Yeats himself is, on his own confession, completely insensitive to music. If he were not, a great many settings of his poems—which, since they are to be had in print, have presumably been passed by his censor—would cause him considerable pain. But however great an aversion he may have to the very idea of his beautiful rhythms and cadences being distorted to suit the fancy of any Tom, Dick, or Harry who pays the publishers their fee for the use of the poem, it is not, I think, unreasonable on the part of composers to request that he shall appoint as his censor some competent musician who will be consistent in his judgments and articulate when they are called in question.

I enclose, Sir, for your inspection two of the rejected MSS. with the request that if you find the 'general atmosphere and character of the music to be utterly unsuited to the poetry' you will not print this letter.—Yours, &c.,

PETER WARLOCK.

SCRIABIN'S MUSIC AND THE THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

SIR,—It is with considerable astonishment that I observe, in the preliminary programme of the next Three Choirs Festival, that it is proposed to perform Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* in Gloucester Cathedral. Without advocating a narrow division of music into two definite categories of 'sacred' and 'secular' according to the subject-matter with which it is associated, it will, I think, be generally admitted that there is music of a kind which, however admirable some people may find it in the concert-hall, is nevertheless quite unsuitable for performance in a place of Christian worship.

The fact that this work of Scriabin's is associated with a so-called theosophical 'programme' may have given rise to an impression that it is a work of religious character. This, however, is very far from being the case. It is thoroughly morbid, erotic, and sensational in the worst sense of these terms, and its performance at Gloucester would create a most undesirable precedent. Music performed at these festivals cannot fail to influence the general opinion as to the style of composition that is fit and proper for use in our churches.

At present the tendency of taste in Church music is, happily, towards a return to those ideals of dignity and sanity which are embodied in the glorious heritage of English music that has come down to us from the 16th century. The admission to our Cathedral festivals of a composer whose influence, were it to make itself felt, would be even more destructive of good taste than that of the saccharine school of the last century, might prove a serious hindrance to the success of devoted and learned enthusiasts such as Dr. Edmund Fellowes,

Dr. R. R. Terry, Archdeacon Gardner, Mr. Martin Shaw, and last, but by no means least, yourself, Sir, who are now endeavouring to purge our worship music of the impurities of this school—of whom Scriabin is a fitting successor—and to reveal to us the more worthy treasures of our grand old English tradition.—Yours, &c.,

CAMBRENSIS.

January 9, 1922.

HYMN SINGING

SIR,—Your correspondent, Mr. Arthur S. Warrell, gives a very accurate reason for the omission of hymn practices, but I venture to suggest that this omission does not altogether originate in dull tunes. Organists and choir-masters are largely to blame for the present status (a not very important one) which hymns hold in our services. The senior boy who says 'We know this tune,' and the choir-men who will speedily hunt up a hymn having the same metre (rather than learn a new tune) wield an unfortunate influence over organists, and until it is borne in mind that *the words have a meaning* (also, that there are such things as commas in the middle of a line, &c., &c.), I am afraid that our hymn singing will continue to suffer.

It does not necessarily follow that because a tune is dull or sentimental that it cannot be well sung; on the other hand, because a particular tune is bright, interesting, spirited, and varied, it must not necessarily be assumed to be more acceptable than a dull tune. It will still need as careful singing as the dull tune, and so I would formulate an opinion and say that 'what's best rendered is best.' Such a tune as 'St. Cuthbert' (207 A. & M.) is just as acceptable to me as 'Sine Nomine' (641 English Hymnal) when decently interpreted.—Yours, &c.,

ORGANIST AND CHOIRMASTER.

'THE IMPORTANCE OF CORRECT PLACING OF THE VOICE': THE CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

SIR,—In my controversy with Mr. Charles Tree the time appears to me to have arrived for examining the facts of the case. A letter by Mr. Tree appeared in your issue of April, 1921, propagating his own particular theory. I thought it not uninteresting to discuss the subject dispassionately from another point of view. Mr. Tree chose to make light of my observations. I proceeded to specify wherein I found his theory wanting, and, in order to attain a practical result, issued a challenge to him, which he declined. In my turn, I stated my reasons for not accepting his invitation.

Now Mr. Tree has given my challenge a new and quite unwarrantable direction. He advocated his own theory, while I supported the time-honoured method which has produced all the really great singers of the past, and needs no new demonstration. Thus only a difference of opinion lay between us, yet he has contorted that into a direct challenge in which he is supposed to be the injured party. To put it mildly, it seems to me to be a decidedly irregular proceeding on Mr. Tree's part. However, I am not daunted by his post-war manner, and, with reasonable reservations (which I hope to arrange with him privately), I accept his challenge.—Yours, &c.,

A. KEAY.

2, Gledstanes Road, W.14.

January 4, 1922.

UNKNOWN WORKS OF THOMAS TOMKINS

SIR,—I have been asked by the assistant-librarian of the Paris Conservatoire of Music, Mlle. Pereyra, to state that she would be glad of any lists of compositions by Thomas Tomkins, organist of Worcester, early 17th century, with a view to forming a complete catalogue of his works. It seems unlikely that more of his virginal and organ works exist than those found in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, the Bodleian, and in the libraries of the Paris Conservatoire and at New York, but there may be vocal works of his hidden in Cathedral libraries that are unknown. If any librarian will kindly send such information to me, I will forward it to Mlle. Pereyra.—Yours, &c.,

The Well House,
Ewell, Surrey.

MARGARET H. GLYN.