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THE MUSICAL TIMES,

And Singing-Class Circular.

DECEMBER 1, 1872.

THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF RECITATIVE.

By G. A. MACFARREN.

THE broad distinction between ancient and modern in music dates from the invention of recitative in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Then, an association of Florentine nobles and gentlemen undertook the interesting experiment of restoring to the art of song the characteristics that had marked it in the Grecian age, as opposed to the qualities to which the music of the period was limited. These qualities were rhythmical tune, exemplified in the songs and dances of the people, and the imitations of these by schooled artists; and contrapuntal elaboration, exemplified in the motets or moving parts, and anthems or counter themes, constructed upon ecclesiastical or secular melodies for church use, and in the madrigals of the musicians. In neither of these was there scope for free declamation, nor for any but the most general expression of words, which, in classic times, had been the main if not the sole object of vocal music. The idea was then conceived of recitative. Rinuccini was the poet who first wrote verses to be set upon this novel system; and Caccini, Peri, Cavalieri, and Monteverde were the first musicians who illustrated its principles. The experiment was so entirely successful that the new style of declamatory music not only took a place beside the rigidly ruled art of the period, but has, to a great extent, superseded it, and importantly modified the materials and the structure of subsequent composition.

To secure the perfect freedom of the singer in his declamation, to hasten or retard the words as he might be impelled by the passion they embodied, it was essential that the accompaniment should be of such a nature as might in no respect restrict his performance in the matter of measure, while it might fully guide and support him in the matter of intonation. Accordingly, it was confined usually to a single instrument, in most cases the theorbo or large lute; and this, in the earliest instances, was played by the singer himself, whose fingers were moved by the same impulse that directed his vocal utterance.

It appears that Lully, when he established dramatic music in France, used very freely the recitative form; but it is not so sure that he imported to Paris his country's use of accompanying the colloquial singing with a single instrument, since, in some of his operas, the harmony is sustained by the band during the vocal declamation. The same was probably the case in the earlier court masques written by Lanieri and some English musicians in the time of Charles I. On the other hand, it is evident that at the clubs and like places, where, for the first time in English history, the public paid for admission to musical, not dramatic, performances, it was common to accompany the recitative on some equivalent to the pianoforte—the harpsichord, or virginals, or what not—with also a bowed instrument,—the violoncello or double bass, or both,—to support the bass notes, because of the little resonance of the keyed string instruments of the time. Thus were the Cantatas of Purcell and other composers accompanied, and this was the standard method of playing to recitative for a long time to come.

Near the end of the seventeenth century, Vinci was the first to write what in England is called "Accompanied Recitative." This he reserved for the more dramatic passages in his operas, while he retained for ordinary colloquy and narration what the Italians name "Recitativo parlante." The distinction is, that in the latter the instruments just named were used, and in the former the full orchestra.

Let it not be supposed that the practice ever was, in colloquial recitative, to sustain the chords on any instrument from semibreve to semibreve, as they were habitually written in Italy and elsewhere; these extensive notes imply the prevalence but not the sustenance of the same harmony, which harmony was and is to be repeated according to the punctuation of the words, whenever their sense indicates a

breathing place for the singer. Hence Mendelssohn was at variance with the usage of elder times, even down to the very period in which himself wrote, when, in his accompaniments to *Israel in Egypt*, he wrote sustained chords in four parts for two violoncellos with double stops, in the very few instances of colloquial recitative which occur in that work. In the old days, a skilful accompanist would, so to speak, feed the singer by dispersing the chords so as to have the vocal note at the top, and repeating them in changed positions whenever a different note of emphasis suggested such prompting, and seldom striking them in a mass, but sprinkling them in more or less extended arpeggio as the movement might admit. Here was then what may be termed an atmosphere of harmony, wherein the voice floated with buoyancy unfettered; and, if the analogy be accepted, the changes of chords may be likened to the variations of the wind, or the passing from one current of air into another; almost as imperceptible as the ether was the accompaniment, and yet of substance sufficient for the voice to rest upon it as the clouds repose upon the air.

Let it neither be supposed that it was ever the purpose of Vinci or his countless followers in the accompanied recitative to put upon the singer the limitations of metrical music. In this the voice is left for long periods entirely alone, or, less often, the harmony is either sustained or tremulously iterated with undefined accent; the occasional detached chords of a well-directed band little more restrict the voice than do the spread chords of the pianoforte, while they impart, perhaps, more vigour to the general effect; and the interposed interludes, of a bar or more in length, illustrate the sentiment or picture the circumstances the words describe.

The encomiasts of Rossini accredit him as the first to discard, throughout an opera, the colloquial in favour of the accompanied recitative, and they say that *Otello* (1817) was the first work thus constructed. Close investigation might trace that this, like other assumed innovations of the master, had precedent in the practice of another. The French operas of Gluck, for example, and not of Gluck only, have the orchestra throughout.

What was then exceptional has become usual now. Colloquial recitative is scarcely to be found but in works of fifty years old, the orchestra is employed with far greater prominence in music of our times than in the accompanied recitative of Handel, of Mozart, and of Rossini, and lyrical declamation has consequently acquired a widely different character from that which stamped it of yore.

As there are but few works at present in vogue which are constructed on the old principle, it is as little to be wondered, as it was to be helped, that the tradition of how to accompany recitative should be all but lost, especially as considerations of personal display have mainly induced the desuetude of that practice. To prevent this loss from becoming total, it is desirable to place on record one most valuable testimony on the subject while memory is still fresh to retain it, and while general respect is sufficiently vivid for the person from whom this account was received, to ensure its perfect credence.

The late Sir George Smart, when one of the young gentlemen of the Chapel Royal, was engaged with his co-choristers, from year to year, to sing at the Ancient Concerts. He was, however, excepted from the vocal duties of his fellows, to turn over the leaves for the conductor, Joah Bates. Already, in those early years, Smart entertained aspirations to the conductor's office, to which in due time he rose, and which he discharged, with honour to himself and advantage to music, for more years than would have made the entire lifetime of many another man. His young ambition was therefore highly gratified by his being selected for the post of turner, since this gave him special opportunity of observing all the conductor's ways and habits and rules of action, and he accordingly observed most keenly, and as carefully stored up his observations to become the groundwork of his own future practice.

Joah Bates was born about the year 1740; thus he had reached the age of 19 when Handel died, an age at which, with his fond love of music, he must have been fully capable of noting the manner of musical performances, the effect they produced, and the means whereby such effect was obtained. Here, then, we have a direct line of evidence

from Bates, who must have witnessed performances over which Handel himself presided, through Smart, whose habits of accuracy were most remarkable, and whose statements are implicitly reliable. Bates proposed, and organised, and directed the famous commemoration of Handel in Westminster Abbey, which was intended to celebrate the centenary of the composer's birth; but, from a misapprehension of dates, was held the year before, in 1784. He directed also the similar Abbey performances in the next following years; and, because of his success in this capacity, and of his thorough knowledge of the uses of the elder time, he was appointed conductor of His Majesty's Concerts of Ancient Music, which were instituted to preserve those uses to the world.

Chief among the few works in which the old original form of colloquial recitative is still kept in familiarity, are the oratorios of Handel, and, among operas, the *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* of Mozart, and the *Barbiere* of Rossini. In these the old form is preserved to us, but very little of the substance. The intention was, as has been shown, that the accompaniment should be played on the harpsichord or its representative, the pianoforte, with the support of the principal violoncello and double bass, the players of which read from the same copy as the clavecinist or pianist. So late was the practice continued, that the first engagement of Sir Michael Costa at the opera was to preside at the pianoforte in the orchestra; and there accordingly he presided, until 1832, when, under Monck Mason's management, the first performances in this country of a German opera company were given in alternation with those of the Italians. The German operas were conducted by Chelard of Weimar, who presided not at the pianoforte, but at the conductor's desk raised above the rest of the orchestra, as is the present wont of opera conductors in England. On a certain Monday, *Der Freischütz* inaugurated the German season; on the following Tuesday evening, Sir Michael occupied the conductor's stool which Chelard had filled the night before; and from thenceforward, the pianoforte has never been used in the opera orchestra except to prompt the singers.

Before this time, the violoncello had for long assumed the conspicuous prominence in accompanying the recitative, which it has almost exclusively held for the forty years since. In the latter part of the last century, the celebrated Cervetto officiated as principal violoncellist at the King's Theatre. The rich tone, the beautiful execution, and the fine taste of this artist have better than legendary authority; many of us now living have heard others talk of these his qualities, who had witnessed and delighted in their display. An artist so gifted commanded more than sufferance, even to the extent of admiration and applause, for flights of finger and perhaps of fancy, that would not have been tolerated in a player of less distinction. Accordingly, when the stage waited for the entrance of a new personage, for any necessary business of the scene, or for the ingenious by-play of a popular actor, Cervetto would fill up such otherwise moments of silence with arpeggios or like passages upon his instrument, and the audience would be pleased with his feats of skill. The pianist always resumed his functions with the resumption of the singing, and the escapades upon the violoncello served but as interludes to accompany so much of the action, or to compensate for such casual want of action, as would else make a break in the musical continuity. In Handel's time similar figurations were wont to be set forth upon the harpsichord, and the great composer is reputed to have been so happy in his performance of these that to hear him formed no little part of the evening's attraction. We read of composers of long after Handel's time, even down to Rossini, presiding at the pianoforte on the first representation of their operas; which means plainly that they accompanied the colloquial recitative. Lindley succeeded Cervetto in his post, in his excellence, and in his privilege of flourishing in the casual pauses, and Lindley's successors have taken upon them the last heritage as an heir-loom of the instrument. It is in England only, however, that the violoncello's usurpation of supremacy in recitative has ever been exercised at the opera, and in England only that it has ever disfigured the performance of oratorios.

Cervetto was also principal violoncellist at the Ancient Concerts. There in the recitatives of Handel and his con-

temporaries he pursued his opera practice of passing in all the breaks of the voice part. Then, with firm authority, Bates interrupted him, insisting that the single bass notes, and nothing else, should be played by the bowed instruments. In vain Cervetto quoted his King's Theatre commendations. "It was otherwise at the opera in Handel's time," said Bates, "and we are here to perform Handel's music as it used to be performed under his direction." The young choir boy stood by the side and witnessed this altercation, treasured it as a valuable experience, and, towards the end of 1866, when he was some years beyond the age of ninety, and scarcely two years before his death, related to me the entire scene with the utmost minuteness. Handel did not, neither did Bates, neither did Sir George Smart until his long career was very far advanced, beat time for the band. This was, when necessary, the province of the leader; so that the power was lost to the orchestra of the strongest violinist in it, in every passage of more than usual difficulty or requiring exceptional energy. The conductor then sat at the organ, with a harpsichord, later a pianoforte, so placed that he could reach also its keyboard, and, according to the more or less gravity of the music, he played on one or the other throughout the recitative, and likewise in the rhythmical pieces, adding in these latter, independent counterpoint of such greater or less interest, as his own musicianship, aided by the inspiration of the moment, might prompt.

It is noteworthy that in 1753, when Handel's blindness prevented him from reading his own scores, he sent for John Christopher Smith, his pseudo pupil and the son of his staunch and unalienable friend, who was at the time in France, to whom he believed he might confide the serious responsibility of the unwritten organ or harpsichord part. It would seem that the composer was not content with Smith's performance; for in 1754, he discontinued the services of this really meritorious musician, and resumed his old post in the orchestra. This he must have done with very serious difficulty, since the works were changed from night to night during the Lenten series of oratorios, and, not seeing, he could only accompany if he had the music entirely by heart. His presidency was so important in the orchestra, indeed, so greatly enhanced the interest of the music, and added so much to the attraction of the performance, that he never again relinquished it, and accompanied the recitatives and filled up upon the organ the blanks in his score on that very sixth of April, 1759, which was the day week before his death, when he closed his public career by superintending the performance of his *Messiah*.

When Sir George Smart became a conductor, he, persevering in the principles of his model, required the supremacy of the organ or pianoforte over the violoncello in the oratorio recitatives. Lindley, however, had taken Cervetto's place, and, with his still higher excellence, he far more than filled it. Emulous of the same distinction in an oratorio that he obtained in an opera, the famous violoncellist would have interluded the recitatives, but was stopped by Sir George as Cervetto had been by Bates; and the veteran conductor assured me that the single professional quarrel in which he was ever a party, during the many years of his being at the head of musical affairs in England, was with the brave old Lindley on this very subject. The immediate consequence was that the violoncellist, who would not forego his flourishes, seceded from Sir George's band; but his pre-eminence as a player was too widely recognised for his presence to be dispensable in other quarters or, after a while, even there. It was he then who established the practice peculiar to this country alone, of accompanying recitative with chords on the violoncello, and consequently, unless the usage has been carried to the colonies, the inhabitants of our three kingdoms enjoy exclusively the privilege of hearing the most unmusical exhibitions and the least satisfactory that have ever been habitually offered in public.

About ten years ago, Herr Otto Goldschmidt, assisted by his accomplished wife, revived Handel's *L'Allegro*, and had the recitatives accompanied according to Handel's fashion, Mr. Lindsay Sloper officiating at the pianoforte, as he had done with the same purpose in the performance of Bach's *Passion*, under the direction of Sir Sterndale Bennett. At Mr. Joseph Barnby's revival of this latter work, the

same instrument held its appropriate position, until the *Passion* was taken into its original, natural and fitting home, the Church, when the harmonium if not the organ was, with perhaps better effect, substituted for it. Now, it may be believed, that, of all the thousands of persons who have witnessed these presentations of the works in question, there is not one—or if one, he must be a bass player—that does not infinitely prefer the effect of the keyed to that of the bowed instrument in the situation now being considered. The hard rough tone of the chords upon the violoncello, the indistinctness of their harmony, their questionable assistance to the singers, are all incidents for careful consideration; but, above all, the fact that the composers, whether of later secular or of earlier sacred music, intended an effect utterly dissimilar, should convince directors that, according to the size and uses of the building and the gaiety or gravity of the subject, the pianoforte or the organ ought to be the accompanying instrument of colloquial recitative. Let it be hoped that before long its restitution may be universal, when the richer tone and the fuller resonance of the Pianoforte than of the ancient Harpsichord, especially in the lower range of its compass, will render the bowed basses entirely dispensable.

CRYSTAL PALACE.

THE novelties produced at the Saturday concerts during the past month have been in the highest degree interesting. Mozart's last pianoforte concerto in B flat, at the fifth concert, came upon us with all the freshness of a new composition, for, strange to say, although teeming with beauties throughout, it had never before been introduced in this country. The first movement is thoroughly *Mozartian*, both in the subject and treatment of the principal instrument in combination with the orchestra; but the melodious *Larghetto* and *Finale* (the latter founded on a subject already well known to musical amateurs) were perhaps more really enjoyed by the general audience. The performance of the concerto by Madame Arabella Goddard was one of the purest specimens of pianoforte playing we have heard for years. Not only in executive power, but in the most intellectual perception of the author's meaning, her interpretation of this charming work so thoroughly satisfied even the most exacting lovers of Mozart that the murmurs of approbation during the progress of each movement could scarcely be suppressed, and at the conclusion she was rewarded by a burst of applause as genuine as it was enthusiastic. Herr Reinecke's two *cadenzas*, introduced by Madame Goddard in the first and last movements, seemed scarcely in character with the calm nature of the themes, but they were excellently written for the instrument, and we need scarcely say as excellently rendered. At the sixth concert a Rondo in B flat by Beethoven, for pianoforte and orchestra, was given for the first time, the pianist being Mr. Ridley Prentice. As a novelty, this Rondo was of course welcome; but the name of its composer excited perhaps higher anticipations than were realized; and Mr. Prentice, whose playing was marked throughout by much artistic finish, could scarcely secure for the piece a cordial success. It is presumed to have been intended for one of the pianoforte concertos; but as it is known to have been completed and the orchestration filled up by Czerny, it is impossible to say how much of the composition was really by Beethoven. The performance of Rubinstein's pianoforte concerto, in D minor, by Mr. Fritz Hartvigson, at the seventh concert, scarcely did anything to advance the claims of this composer as a writer of the highest class works for his instrument; but the pianist evidenced much commendable zeal in the cause, and exhibited a vigorous, if not eloquent, touch. The orchestral compositions have been this season remarkable for a perfection of execution even beyond that of former years, Beethoven's "Eroica" and Mendelssohn's "Scotch Symphony," especially, having been rendered with an attention to minute details, which elicited the highest admiration, even from those amongst the audience to whom the works were most familiar. We must mention that Mr. Wingham's Festival Overture (performed for the first time at the summer concert of the Royal Academy of Music) was given with much effect at the fifth concert, and well received. Sir Sterndale Bennett's Cantata "The May Queen," and his beautiful and highly poetical Overture, "Paradise and the Peri," have also been amongst the most attractive items in the programme. There is little to record concerning the vocal music. Miss Margaret Hancock (who gained a prize at the National Music Meetings) displayed some good

qualities as a contralto in the "May Queen," and Mr. J. H. Pearson showed that he possessed a good voice but a defective method, in two songs at the concert on the 16th ult.

NATIONAL MUSIC MEETINGS AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE.

THE Certificates of Merit awarded at the first series of meetings in June last have been recently sent out. The successful candidates for these Diplomas are the Brixton Choral Society; Bristol Choral Union; South London Choral Association; Miss Emrick, London; Miss Hailey, Hanwell; Madlle. Ori, London; Mr. G. H. Woolley, London; Mr. F. Crane, Liverpool; Mr. H. A. Pope, London; and Mr. Sauv, London. The Certificates are signed by Sir W. S. Bennett; Sir J. Benedict; Signor Arditi; A. S. Sullivan, Esq.; Dr. Wylde; J. Barnby, Esq.; J. Hullah, Esq.; H. Smart, Esq.; J. L. Hatton, Esq.; A. Manns, Esq.; and H. Leslie, Esq.—the Judges in the various classes in which the Diplomas were obtained.

A MEETING was held on Saturday evening the 9th ult., at the Albion Hall, London Wall, in aid of the prize fund of £100, to be competed for next summer at the Crystal Palace, by the choirs of North and South Wales. The chair was occupied by Mr. J. H. Puleston, and on the platform were several gentlemen, interested in the promotion of Welsh music. Mr. Brinley Richards addressed the meeting, and after alluding to the excellent singing of the Welsh choir at the Crystal Palace, on the occasion of the National Music Meetings last season, said that he had every reason to look with hope to the realisation of his wishes. Sir Thomas Lloyd had already given his name as a subscriber of ten guineas, and his example had been followed by some of the most influential members of Parliament. In the course of the evening a musical entertainment was given under the direction of Mr. Brinley Richards, supported by Madlle. Angle, Miss Lizzie Evans, Mr. Poole, &c. A feature in the programme was the performance of "God bless the Prince of Wales," in the chorus of which the audience heartily joined.

THE Grosvenor Choral Society gave its ninth monthly concert at the Pimlico Rooms on the 8th ult. The principal solo vocalists were Miss Helliell, Miss Jenny Brown, who sang for the first time "The Return of Spring" (J. T. Torry) and Mr. Warren Wells, all of whom were received with much favour. Several concerted pieces were also sung, and instrumental solos most efficiently played by Mr. Duncan Shaw (pianoforte) and Mr. T. F. Williams (concertina). Mr. Wm. Henry Bridges officiated as conductor, and Miss White as accompanist.

THE monthly concert of the St. George's Glee Union took place at the Pimlico Rooms on the 1st ult. The solo vocalists were Miss Janet King (who received a well-merited encore for her singing of "Truth in absence"), Miss Horder, Mr. James Jekyll and Mr. Tom Ellis. There were several concerted pieces for the choir, which were rendered with much precision and effect. Mention must also be made of the pianoforte playing of Miss Pritchard and Miss Shepherd. The Society gave an evening concert at the Chelsea Literary and Scientific Institution on the 8th ult., when songs by Miss Jessie Jones, Miss Horder, and Miss Janet King were warmly received and re-demanded. Some choral music and a harp solo by Miss Wade were also included in the programme.

ON Thursday the 14th ult., a Literary and Musical Evening with Tom Moore was given, at Westbourne Hall, by Mr. L. M. Myers. A brief analysis of the life of the Bard of Erin was interspersed with several of the poet's choicest songs, duets and glees, by Miss Ellen Glanville (who was much applauded for her singing of "The Minstrel Boy"), Miss Dwight, Mr. Frank Elmore and Mr. Rowland. Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Rayfield Seymour were the accompanists. The proceeds of the entertainment were in aid of the Westbourne Philanthropic Society.

THE Tuesday evening entertainments at the Public Hall, South Norwood, have attracted large audiences during the past month. The managers, Messrs. J. Baucutt and W. Blount, spare no pains to make these pleasant weekly *runions* interesting and amusing; and they will be continued every Tuesday during the winter.

ON Tuesday the 19th ult., Mr. Major J. Smith gave a concert at the Bermondsey Institute, when, in addition to his excellent band, Miss Rosina V. Houghton and Mr. W. H. Starey appeared, and sang some popular songs, which were encored. The programme included some operatic and