Debussy as Critic: A Concert of Spanish Music

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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 60, No. 921 (Nov. 1, 1919), pp. 605-606

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

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3701583>

Accessed: 19-01-2016 23:24 UTC

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Her talent, and her remarkably trained ear, maintained control over the beauty of her singing and of her voice. The fortunate circumstances of her life preserved her from all injury. The purity and flawlessness of her tone, the beautiful equalization of her whole voice, constituted the magic by which she held her listeners entranced. Moreover, she was beautiful and gracious in appearance.

The accent of great dramatic power she did not possess; yet I ascribe this more to her intellectual indolence than to her lack of ability.

Such a tribute to Patti's genius, from such a source, is worth recalling at this moment.

DEBUSSY AS CRITIC.*

A CONCERT OF SPANISH MUSIC.

On October 29 last we listened to some Spanish music played by real Spaniards. For a large majority of people this was of the nature of a revelation, as with the exception of some vague memories of performances of it at exhibitions the music of Spain is very little known in France. The public had gone out of curiosity to 'La Feria'; the names of 'La Macorona,' 'La Soledad,' &c., had sufficed to keep up a taste for things Iberian which had not however been directed solely to the music. And yet on these occasions one heard that admirable folk-music which, by reason of a wealth of imagination combined with a variety of rhythm, is the finest in the world. This opulence seems even to have accounted for the tardy development of that 'other' music. A certain delicacy restrained the professional musicians from enclosing so many beautiful improvisations within iron-bound formulæ. For a long time they contented themselves composing those popular 'Zarzuelas' in which the sound of guitars ascends almost unaltered from the street to the stage. But the rugged beauty of the old Moorish cantilenas remained unforgettable while the fine traditions of such men as Escobada, Morales, teachers both of them of the great Vittoria, famous names all three of the Spanish Renaissance, were unremembered.

There seemed no reason for any change. What more was needed in a land where the very stones on the highways dazzle the eyes with a voluptuous glitter and where the voices of the muleteers are instinct with accents of the sincerest passion? Why need one be astonished by last century's decadence, and should it even be designated as decadent when folk-music still retained its beauty! Wise and blest will be the nations that shall jealously keep these wild flowers protected from classic depredators.

It was at a period in our own epoch that a pleiad of composers grouped themselves together and formed the resolution to exploit the great treasures lying dormant within the folk-music of Ancient Spain.

Among these let us retain the memory of Isaac Albeniz. At first an incomparable virtuoso, he acquired later a wonderful knowledge of the *métier* of a composer. Without in any way resembling

Liszt he yet recalls him by the abundant wealth of his deas. He was the first to turn to account the varied melancholy and the special wit and humour of his native province. He was born in Catalonia. There are few pieces of music that excel 'El Albaicin' from the fifth book of 'Iberia.' It evokes the perfumed atmosphere of Spanish evenings redolent of the scent of carnations and *aguardiente* It recalls a memory of muffled sounds of a guitar, with its nervous tremors and brusque accessions of sound. Without any exact reproduction of folk-melodies, it is the work of one who had absorbed and assimilated them until they had filtered into his music leaving no distinct traces of their passage.

'Eritana,' from the fourth book of 'Iberia,' reproduces the joy of early morning, the chance discovering of an inn where the wine is fresh and good. A varying stream of people passes along; the merry peals of laughter are punctuated by the sound of Basque trumpet calls. Music has never recorded such a diversity of brilliantly-coloured images; one feels one's eyes closing as if dimmed from having looked at too many pictures.

There is a great deal more in these books of 'Iberia.' Albeniz poured all that was best of himself into them. They manifest an attention for detail carried to exaggeration and prompted by those generous impulses that caused him almost to squander his ideas. The other composers followed the same paths without overtaking Albeniz; only his influence was very plainly French while theirs seemed inclined to be German,—at any rate, in form.

'La Procession del Rocio,' a symphonic poem by Turina, is apportioned like a beautiful fresco. Ingenious alternations of light and shade render it easy of comprehension in spite of its dimensions. Turina's work, like that of Albeniz, is strongly impregnated with folk-music. The methods of development he uses are still dubious, and he finds it useful to borrow from illustrious dealers in these wares. It is certain that Turina could do very well without them, and might listen to more familiar voices nearer home.

'Ami tierra' ('To my country'), a poetical Murcian suite of Perez Casas, saturated with Eastern languor, contains some novel orchestral combinations in which a persistent seeking after colour is nearly always justified by the sincerity of the impressions.

'La Divina Comedia,' of Conrado del Campo, approximates itself to Strauss's symphonic poems on account of its strength of construction. It is to be regretted that we were only able to hear the concluding parts. . . .

S.I.M. (December 1, 1913).

MOUSSORGSKY'S 'THE CHILDREN'S NURSERY.'

This title is given to a series of seven songs, each of which depicts a scene of child-life. The whole is a *chef-d'œuvre*.

Moussorgsky is not well-known in France. We can, of course, excuse ourselves by saying that he

* Other contributions to this series have appeared in the July, August, and November, 1918, issues of the *Musical Times*.

is not any better known in Russia. He was born at Karevo (Central Russia) in 1839; he died in the Nicolas Military Hospital at Petersburg, in 1881. It can be seen by these dates that he had little time to lose in order to become a genius; he did not lose any, and he has left indelible traces in the memories of those who love him or who will love him some day. No one has addressed himself to what is best in us with tenderer or more penetrating accents; he is unique, and on account of his unaffected art, devoid of all withering formulæ, he will continue to remain unique. Never has such a refined sensibility used such simple means for revealing itself. It resembles the art of a strange savage discovering music by the tracks of his own impressions; there is never any question either of any particular kind of form, or at any rate the form is so many-sided that it is impossible to connect it with any authenticated, or what one might call administrative forms. It is held together by, and composed of, a succession of little touches bound by mysterious fetters and by a gift of luminous clairvoyance; occasionally Moussorgsky evokes a vision of restless, shuddering spectres which takes possession of one's being and almost wrings the heart with anguish. 'The Children's Nursery' contains the prayer said by the little girl before going to sleep, in which the actions, the tender perplexity of a child's mind, and even the charming way little girls have of showing off before grown-ups, are recorded in a tone of feverish accuracy that is peculiar to this song. Every word of the 'Doll's Lullaby' seems to have been divined. It is a wonderful assimilation of the special faculty possessed by children of imagining scenes out of fairyland; the termination of this lullaby is so soothingly soporific that the little *raconteuse* is lulled to sleep by her own stories. There is also the terrible little boy astride a stick, who transforms the room into a battlefield, breaking here an arm and there a leg of the poor defenceless chairs. These deeds are not done without a certain amount of personal injury! And then there are screams, tears, and a good-bye to happiness! But the injuries are not serious . . . two seconds on his mother's lap, kisses that make him well again, and—the battle recommences and the chairs once more know not where to hide themselves. All these little dramas, I repeat, are set to music of an extreme simplicity; a chord suffices to Moussorgsky that would seem commonplace to Monsieur . . . (I cannot remember his name!), or such a perfectly natural modulation as would appear strange to Monsieur . . . (as above). We shall have more to say another time about Moussorgsky; he has numerous claims to our regard.

Madame Marie Olenine sang these songs at the last concert of the Société Nationale in a manner that would have satisfied Moussorgsky himself, if I may be permitted to make this affirmation in his name.

Revue Blanche (April 15, 1901).

Translated by Mrs. L. Shirley Liebich (Copyright).

NEW LIGHT ON EARLY TUDOR COMPOSERS.

BY W. H. GRATTAN FLOOD.

I.—WILLIAM NEWARK.

Notwithstanding the researches of many painstaking historians of English music, the biographical data to be found recorded in regard to the great English masters of the period 1485-1545 may be regarded as meagre in the extreme. For instance, the details of the lives of Newark, Burton, Cornish, Crane, Aston, Pigot, Ludford, Taverner, Farthing, Gwinneth, Redford, Sturton, Whytbrooke, and others, have eluded previous investigators, and hence musical readers will, I am sure, be glad to learn new facts as to these worthies. Although it is only by the properly-organized help of a band of skilful investigators that we may reasonably expect to pierce the obscurity which has so long veiled the personalities of many of those early Tudor composers, yet it is to be hoped that the present series of articles will be helpful, especially as the information is gleaned at first hand from Patent Rolls, State Papers, and other official sources. Fortunately, much of the music of those old English masters has escaped the ravages of time, and not a little of it has been edited by careful musicologists like Mr. G. E. P. Arkwright, Mr. Barclay Squire, Dr. R. R. Terry, Mr. H. B. Collins, Mr. Royle Shore, and others. But as to their biographies, as Dr. Ernest Walker well puts it in his commendable 'History of Music in England' (1907), 'the information we possess is but scanty, and dates have often to be supplied approximately, if at all.'

Let us commence with William Newark, who was Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal from 1493 till his resignation in September, 1509. Seven of his vocal compositions are included in the Fairfax volume preserved in the British Museum, one of which—for three voices—has been printed by Burney, while another ('Thus musing in my mind') has been published by Messrs. Novello.

William Newark was a native of Newark-on-Trent, where he was born *circa* 1450. He became a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal in 1477, and served as such under Edward IV., Edward V., Richard III., Henry VII., and the first year of Henry VIII. He must soon have got into favour, for in 1479 we find him in possession of a *corrody** in the monastery of St. Mary, Thetford, a fact made known by an entry on the Patent Rolls of November 28, 1480. Four years later his services were recognized in a more substantial form, and he was given a grant for life of a yearly rent of £20 accruing from the King's manor of Bletchingly, Surrey. This grant is entered on the Patent Rolls, 2 Richard III., and is dated April 6, 1485.

Gilbert Banestre, Master of the Children, resigned his office on September 29, 1486, but retained three valuable *corrodies* till his death on August 19, 1487. One of these *corrodies* was that in the Monastery of St. Benet, Holme, Norfolk; and on September 1, 1487, King Henry VII. granted it to Newark for life. Meantime, Laurence Squire, Chaplain to the King, and Canon of the Collegiate Church of St. Mary, Warwick, was appointed Master of the Children at a salary of forty marks a year, on September 29, 1486. This, however, was only a temporary arrangement, and on the death of Squire, May 30, 1493, William Newark was given the Mastership—the patent for which was formally enrolled on September 17. On

* A *corrody* was a right of sustenance, or a certain refection of victual and provision for one's maintenance, in an Abbey or Monastery, and frequently compounded for by a yearly pension to the recipient.