The Signature of the Minor Mode

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Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 15, No. 359 (Jan. 1, 1873), pp. 726+731

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

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3351784>

Accessed: 10-11-2015 05:38 UTC

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many Manuals of this kind which have lately come before us afford ample proof that neither thirty, nor any larger number of years' experience will be of much service to a teacher who publishes the result of his labours, unless he has acquired the difficult art of sifting falsehood from truth in the course of his investigations, and of logically arranging his thoughts upon paper, untrammelled by any abstract respect for the many musical errors which have become sanctified by time. In this respect Mr. Helmore's little book is so thoroughly satisfactory that we scarcely know where to begin or where to end our praise. The explanation of the pitch and value of the notes is extremely clear, and interest is given to the subject by a short paragraph informing the student how it happens that the Semibreve, or *very short note*, has in the present "fast age" become the name of the longest note in general use. The Clef signs, too, are shown in their original form, as simple letters; and every effort is made by the author to obviate (as he truly says) "the laborious efforts used to mystify the young musician." Scales are built up gradually, according to the fixed law which decides the place of the tones and semitones, whatever may be the starting sound; and aptly indeed is it said that "the key-note is like home," although the number of poor musical wanderers who never know their "home" is a fact which speaks but little for those to whose fostering care they are entrusted. But it is in the chapter upon Time where Mr. Helmore more especially earns the thanks of those who have the cause of musical education at heart, because this subject—although one of the most important—is the one in which authors of Elementary Treatises almost invariably fail. After a careful explanation of simple, duple, and triple time, we have the facts about Compound Time fairly and rationally stated; and this, to us, is so refreshing that we quote the paragraph as it stands. Speaking of Duple Time, he says, "When a musical composition abounds in triplets, in order to prevent the necessity of the frequent use of the figure 3, the number of minims, crotchets, quavers, or semiquavers, &c., necessary to fill a bar are marked at the commencement of the composition, and the *single notes* are dotted to make the number complete." This kind of Time, he says, is called "Triplet Common Time"; and, in the same manner, "the different kinds of Triple Time have their corresponding kinds of *Triplet Triple*, or rather *Compound Triple Time*, as it is usually named." Precisely so—the truth, at last; but what a pity it is that Mr. Helmore, who has invented the term "Triplet," to replace the absurd word "Compound" (which really means nothing at all), should not have been enabled to carry out his reform thoroughly and *dot* his signs of Simple Time to produce his "Triplet Time," precisely as he dots his notes. But here, of course, the received system asserts its right, not because it is true, but because it is old; and so we must go on expressing the *quantity* instead of the *rhythm*, and confusing our young pupils with a simple subject, when by a mere alteration of the time-signatures all difficulty would be at once removed. Let us be content, however, with the fact of Mr. Helmore's having called attention to the matter by this plain speaking, and wait patiently for the time when other teachers will have the temerity to think for themselves. In the chapter on Intervals the only thing that we object to is calling from C to F sharp a "major" instead of an "augmented" fourth, and indeed we can scarcely see how, *practically*, many of his terms can apply; but this, is after all, a mere matter of opinion; and where there is so much that is good, we are by no means inclined to be over critical upon some minor points upon which we may differ. The book is, as we have already said, the result of acute observation; and we sincerely wish that the majority of teachers would employ thirty years of their professional life with as much credit to themselves and as much benefit to their pupils.

ASHDOWN AND PARRY.

Nazareth (Jesus de Nazareth) de Gounod. Transcrit pour Piano, par Sydney Smith.

WHY an arrangement published in Hanover Square and the work of an Englishman, should have a title-page stating it is "transcrit pour Piano, par Sydney Smith," we are at a loss to imagine; but as the music luckily speaks to the world in an universal language, we can conscientiously recommend the piece to our countrywomen and countrymen as a very excellent and faithful rendering of M. Gounod's popular song. The air is well preserved, and the surrounding accompaniments, which lie well under the hands, are written throughout with a good knowledge of effect.

WILLIAM MORLEY.

The Alps. Two Characteristic Pieces, for the Pianoforte. No. 1. *The Arrival.* No. 2. *The Farewell.* Composed by R. Löffler.

WHAT these pieces have to do with the Alps more than any other part of the world—mountainous or not mountainous—and why one should be called the "Arrival," and the other the "Farewell," we are at a loss to conceive. Apart from the question of their being "characteristic" (a quality which the composer claims for them on the title-pages) we may, however, affirm that they are melodious and easy to play; and these will be considered irresistible attractions by the many purchasers who care not for any powerful employment either of the mind or fingers. The "Arrival" has a simple theme in F major, with an equally simple variation. The "Farewell" is based on a somewhat more tuneful subject, in C major, which passes, by a rather sudden dominant harmony, into E flat. The conventional *arpeggios* then surround the air, in the original key, and the piece concludes.

Broken Dreams. Ballad. Written by J. S. Lyons. Composed by Louis Pereira.

THIS is a fair specimen of a modern ballad, with no particular recommendation except that the melody is vocal, and the accompaniments musicianlike. The greatest enemies of the "sensational" spirit, so characteristic of the present day, cannot accuse our favourite song writers of yielding to its influence; for few compositions of this class aim at eliciting anything from the audience for which they are manufactured save that languid applause which results from a balmy endurance both of the song and the singer. "Broken Dreams" has unquestionably as great a right to a place in the extempore programme of a mild musical party as many songs we could mention signed by a much more popular composer.

METZLER AND CO.

Instruction Book for the American Organ.

Princess Victoria Pianoforte Tutor; with numerous full-page illustrations, especially adapted for the instruction of children.

By E. F. Rimbault.

THE first of these books pre-supposes that the pupil is acquainted with the rudiments of music, and the aim of the work is therefore to give all the necessary instructions for ensuring a good touch upon, and a thorough acquaintance with, the American Organ, which is now becoming a fashionable household instrument. In the performance of his task we are bound to say that the author has been highly successful; and we cordially recommend this Tutor not only to students of the American Organ but of all instruments of the Harmonium class. In the Pianoforte Instruction book the portion which relates to the pitch and value of notes is clear and concise; but we can never be made to understand why those which are written *outside* the staff (or with *leger lines*) are not taught by lines and spaces, as those *inside* invariably are. The manner in which Time is explained we do not agree with. "Compound Common Time," we are told, "occurs when two bars of Triple Time are joined in one;" and then a bar of six-eighths is given, which contains a dotted minim. Is this a sample of "two bars of Triple Time joined in one"? Again "Compound Triple Time is when the measure of Common" (we presume the author means *Simple*) "Triple Time is divided into nine parts, and is expressed by the figures $\frac{3}{8}$." Will a pupil understand anything about the natural accent of this time by being told that it is "divided into nine parts"? In all other respects we have nothing but praise for the work: and we may add that the illustrations are excellent and well selected.

Original Correspondence.

THE SIGNATURE OF THE MINOR MODE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MUSICAL TIMES.

SIR,—The difference of opinion which prevails upon the subjects of the signature of the minor mode, and of the relative pitches of G sharp, and A flat (or rather the *name* that shall be given to the two methods of dividing a diatonic tone) has always appeared to be consequent upon viewing the matter from two different stand-points—*harmony* and *melody*.

The whole question of notation is, after all, only—Which is the most convenient and consistent method of graphically representing certain sounds? Two pitches being given, differing by a minute degree, which is most in accordance

with our ideas of correct theory, to call one G sharp, and the other A flat, or *vice versa*? A succession of notes being given which it is impossible to generalize into a signature, on account of what is evidently the same note being in some places a semitone flatter or sharper than in others, which particular accidentals shall we pick out for the signature, and which allow to remain as accidentals?

The minor scale is of such an artificial character, and at different periods has experienced so many modifications, that discussions about it are often rather vague. If, however, we agree to consider *only that particular form* now most generally used for modern music, we shall have something to start from. Here, then, we shall find a scale which for purposes of harmony, is the same as the diatonic major scale, with two alterations only—the flattening by a semitone the thirds on the tonic and subdominant. If the dominant third be also flattened, as it always is by the usual signature, we shall get a scale in which we may write, in which much very fine music has been written, but which is certainly not the modern scale we have agreed to consider, which decidedly requires that the third in the dominant triad shall be major.

In such a scale, however, a wide interval of three semitones occurs between the sixth and seventh degrees, which some think produces a harsh effect, as melody (although we need look no further than Mozart, in the *Cum Sanctum*, Twelfth Mass, to find good authority for the contrary opinion), hence the occasional flattening of the 7th, and sharpening of the 6th, as passing notes.

Hence if great practical inconvenience resulted from the use of the present signature, an inconvenience great enough to warrant a change and the upsetting of established usage (which there certainly does not), the most correct signature would be such as would represent A minor by G $\sharp$; D minor by C $\sharp$, B $\flat$. The prejudice of musicians against seeing sharps and flats together in a signature would be one of the greatest difficulties to be overcome in such a change; but it is only a prejudice.

Berlioz, in his work on the Orchestra, has made some very bitter remarks on the talented inventor of the English Concertina, because, having unequally divided the interval between G and A, he called the sharper semitone A $\flat$, and the flatter, G $\sharp$, instead of *vice versa*. His argument is entirely founded on the melodial merits of the case, had he paused for a moment to consider the question harmonically, he must have seen that Wheatstone was right in his nomenclature.

The physical laws which govern pure harmony are perfectly exact. We know without the slightest doubt that a musical note is the result of a certain definite number of vibrations in a given time, and that in order that another note may harmonize with it, it is necessary that a simple relation shall exist between the two numbers of vibration, otherwise a decidedly unpleasant effect is produced, and the two notes are "out of tune."

It is otherwise as regards melody, which is very much more the subject of individual taste and imagination. Two single sounds may occur in succession, which as harmony could not be tolerated, if sounded together. It is known that some nations possess melodies that would necessitate the division of the octave into very many more than the twelve divisions of the equal temperament, but it is impossible for any, except as a matter of individual taste, to say their effect is bad. What some may consider harshness, others may call character. Thus it would seem that the requirements of harmony possess the greatest claim to consideration as the basis of a systematic and consistent method of notation.

If we examine a scale of eight notes, tuned to the diatonic scale, so as to produce the purest harmonic effects in that one key, we find the numbers of their vibration bear to each other the following relations:—

In such a scale the fifths in the triads of the tonic, dominant, subdominant, mediant, and super-dominant, are all quite perfect, bearing to their roots the proportion of $\frac{3}{2}$ to 1.

The major thirds on the three first, and the minor thirds on the two latter, are also perfect, bearing to their roots the proportion respectively of $\frac{4}{3}$ to 1, and $\frac{5}{4}$ to 1. The third and fifth on the supertonic are a trifle too flat.

Allowing this scale to remain as it is, let us introduce a G $\sharp$, which of course must bear the same relation to the

E that the E does to the C—major third, that is to say, $\frac{4}{3}$ of $\frac{3}{2}$, or $\frac{2}{3}$. Now let us introduce an A flat, which must of course bear the same relation to the upper C, as the lower C does to the E, viz., 1 to $\frac{4}{3}$, which we find to be $\frac{3}{2}$. This A flat also forms a perfect minor third to the F, for $\frac{3}{2}$ of $\frac{4}{3}$ is $\frac{3}{2}$.

Thus then we have the G sharp $\frac{2}{3}$, and the A flat $\frac{3}{2}$. Which of these is the higher number or sharper pitch? Reducing the fractions for comparison, we have the G sharp equal to $\frac{12}{10}$ and the A flat to $\frac{12}{8}$, the latter greater than the former by $\frac{2}{10}$.

If this interval be so divided, and we reverse the nomenclature, we must form the major triad on E by E A $\flat$ B, and the minor triad on F, by F G $\sharp$, C, which is simply ridiculous. Or if, retaining those names, we write E G $\sharp$ B, &c., we sacrifice all the practical advantage sought to be gained by this hypercritical division of the interval to a mere pedantic fancy. If on the contrary we call the sharper pitch A flat, and in a purely melodial passage wish to slightly sharpen the leading note to A, what practical or

theoretical disadvantage can accrue from writing such an altered G sharp as A flat? I must confess I can see none, for such note cannot be viewed as bearing any relation to the dominant harmony, to which it is quite foreign.

Practically the whole question has little importance, since the equal temperament entirely disposes of the difficulty; but it is well, perhaps, for us sometimes to examine the exact foundations upon which such a beautiful superstructure as the musical art rests.

I am, Sir, yours truly,
ROBT. SMITH.

M. FÉTIS'S TREATISE ON HARMONY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MUSICAL TIMES.

SIR,—The work by Fétis referred to by your correspondent E. LL. is probably his "Traité complet de la théorie et de la pratique de l'harmonie." Of this treatise the fourth edition was published at Paris in 1849, enlarged by a preface and notes, and may be still in print. The usual price of a good second-hand copy is about nine shillings. I have never met with an English translation of it. Fétis also published "Manuel des compositeurs," which has been translated by Mr. W. Guernsey.

Yours faithfully,
December 11, 1872. G. A. C.

BRITISH ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MUSICAL TIMES.

DEAR SIR,—The outcry of "Straniero" in your last number against the above Society on account of its confessed national character is based on the usual lame story of all good music having been written by Germans and other continental composers. That Beethoven, Mozart, &c., wrote music of the best kind, all the world knows and acknowledges. The foreign music of the present day is, however, quite as remarkable for its inferiority to the English as the latter was, perhaps, to the former when those two composers lived—that is, for the sake of argument, admitting that this was the case. But because we admit that they produced good music there is no reason why that of Purcell, Battishill, Arne, Sir J. Stevenson, Sir Henry Bishop, Onslow, Balfe, and Wallace should be forgotten, and what is much more to the purpose at the present time, why we should hear trashy "Savoyard's Dreams" by Lumbye, "Symphonic Poems" by Liszt, wearisome "Serenades" by Brahms, and incomplete scraps of Wagner's operas and other indifferent orchestral compositions by various German (would-be) composers so much oftener than the fine works of Bennett and Macfarren, not to mention others, lest this should be considered an attempt to advertise anyone. Of one English composer we do hear a great deal, and the more the better. From the "Prodigal Son" to "Cox and Box," from the "Tempest" to the Masque in the "Merchant of Venice," his music is better than that of any of the modern Germans I have mentioned. Of course "Straniero" would put me down something, which, judging by his letter, he very strongly resembles, but my impressions are not the result of staying in England and hearing what he would possibly consider as "nothing," but of passing three years in Germany, studying music there