Spurious Violins

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prosody, and even sometimes of actual idea, with the rest of the paper, or the policy of the editorial authorities. In a daily newspaper, and to a less extent in a weekly one, such a subject as music must of necessity suffer at times. When, in the case of a daily paper, copy is handed in by the critic before midnight, there is still time for news to come to hand that will change the whole appearance of the paper, and possibly cause everything except the new item to become of minor importance. When this happens the sub-editorial blue pencil is applied ruthlessly, and in the rush not always with discretion. The results so far as music and other arts are concerned, cause mingled feelings of dismay, anger, and amusement on the part of the contributors. It is not often that a paragraph is cut short in the middle of a sentence, though this has happened. What frequently happens, however, is that a criticism which discusses both the faults and merits of a work is cut in two so that only one side is shown. Of course the writer is then branded by his readers as being favourably or unfavourably disposed to the criticised work or its composer, when really he has been entirely impartial and dispassionate.

In a report of this character on a recent viola recital, the full deceptive effect of drastic sub-editorial action was brought into play. The writer was heartily in sympathy with the efforts which Mr. Lionel Tertis, the recitalist, was making to popularise his instrument. Two of the works included in the programme were arrangements of violin works, and the report drew attention to the defects of these arrangements. Eulogies of the instrument, the player, and of a work specially prepared for the instrument, were, however, cut down before the paper was printed, in order apparently to make room for details of an air-raid or a murder. It was inevitable, for the taste of the wider public to which a newspaper must appeal is still morbid, and is interested rather in murders than in music. But it gave a wrong view of the critic's impression of the recital in particular and of viola music in general.

So, gentle reader, when you peruse the music criticism in your daily paper, remember, if you would not be deceived, that at its best it is a partial statement, and at its worst a mangled one,—mangled probably by a man who knows nothing of the subject, and who, perforce, cares less.

MUSIC AT ETON COLLEGE.

The Eton College Musical Society gave its annual Christmas concert in the School Hall on December 17. The choir consisted of a hundred boy trebles, forty boy altos, eighteen tenors, and seventy-seven basses (in the two latter parts masters and other gentlemen connected with the staff assisted). The band consisted of seven first violins, seven second violins, four violas, five 'cellos, three double-basses, two flutes, timpani, harmonium, and pianoforte. The programme was as follows:

PART I.	
Selection from 'Messiah'	Handel
PART II.	
Two movements from the Suite in B minor	Bach
(Strings and Flute)	
Song—'The Old Mother'	Grieg
H. R. ROGERS.	
Pianoforte Solo—Study in E major	Chopin
H. M. STRICKLAND-CONSTABLE.	
Part-song—'Since thou, O fondest'	Sir C. H. H. Parry, O.E.
Song—'Up in the saddle'	William Wallace
(Freebooter's Song)	
D. O'B. E. FRENCH-BLAKE.	
Flute Solo—Adagio in C	Mozart
W. L. RUNCIMAN, K.S.	
Part-song—'A wet sheet and a flowing sea'	Dr. C. H. Lloyd
Scotch Song—'Annie Laurie'	Arr. by Lisa Lehmann
B. C. NEAME.	
Part-song—'Lullaby of Life'	Leslie
String Orchestra and Flutes—'Mock Morris'	Grainger
Soldiers' Chorus—('Faust')	Gounod
School Songs—(a) 'To the School at War'	A. M. Goodhart
(b) 'Vale'	
(c) 'Carmen Etonense'	J. Barnby

'GOD SAVE THE KING.'

It will be observed that of the fourteen miscellaneous items, nine are by British composers.

SPURIOUS VIOLINS.

BY ROBERT ALTON.

The observant student of the violin is often surprised (and as often disgusted) by the number of violins he sees on the market which are purposely 'faked' and constructed to represent something which they are not. Musicians, especially violinists, have to be chary when purchasing instruments reputed to be made by skilled or famous makers. It is safe to state that seventy per cent. at least of instruments commonly seen labelled as Betts or Banks or Duke (especially the latter) are 'faked' instruments pure and simple, and at the most are not worth more than a sovereign. Yet many instruments of this class are priced at from five to fifteen guineas.

In examining a violin with a view to purchase, the first thing the amateur or unwary individual looks for is the label. This is about the last thing the expert would examine. Even the common German copies are labelled Stradivarius, Guarnerius, Montagnana, &c., although the instruments themselves would deceive nobody who had the slightest acquaintance with the subject. Labels can be altered or removed almost at will, and are no guide whatever to the genuineness (or otherwise) of an instrument. Examine the rest of the instrument first, and if it agrees in every particular of importance with the maker's characteristics of which it is supposed to be a specimen, then it may be taken as a genuine label in a genuine instrument.

The inside of an old violin purporting to be genuine is frequently in a very dirty state. This, it is almost needless to remark, is very easily imitated. The wood is sometimes stained with chemicals, and these may be detected by their smell. A genuine old violin, speaking generally, if of any value at all, has in most cases been taken care of by its previous owners, who have had too much regard for the instrument to have allowed thick layers of dirt to penetrate and settle on the inside. The days when valuable instruments were allowed to hang on farmhouse walls, &c., year in year out, are long past, and no sensible person nowadays hopes to become possessed of a Stradivarius violin from such quarters. Therefore, treat with suspicion a violin which is loaded up with dirt and dust on the inside. It is many chances to one that the dust did not get there without design. Again, in a genuine old violin, say about a hundred years old, the wood itself is old and brown. The atmosphere will do this without other aid, or indeed in spite of it. Therefore, scrape away the dirt, and see what the wood itself will tell you. And even if it is brown inside the instrument do not rest satisfied with that. If the inside is brown with age the outside should be more so. Under the scroll at the front, which is frequently unvarnished, should be brown too, but if it shows white and new that tells a tale.

The varnish of an instrument is a good guide to genuineness, but previous acquaintance with violins is necessary if this test is to be applied. For instance, Duke finished most of his violins with a yellowish golden varnish, and a very few with a poor, meagre looking brown varnish, but this knowledge is not of much use unless a genuine Duke has been examined and its peculiarities in this respect noted. However, a list of the various makers and their peculiarities in this direction is so far useful that it helps in a measure to act as a check in the examination of an instrument. It is also to be noted that most violins with pretensions to value are oil-varnished; in fact a spirit-varnished instrument, no matter how well made, will not last so long as a well-made oil-varnished instrument. The spirit-varnish cracks and chips off comparatively easily. The oil-varnish 'wears,' and does not chip, and improves in mellowness of appearance as the violin increases in years.

The manner in which a violin is purfled is also a guide to its status. In 'faked' instruments there is not the time to spare to inlay the purfling as it should be inlaid, and consequently this work is often carelessly or hurriedly executed. In good work it is very neatly performed, and is a test of fine workmanship. So far as lines ruled in the place of purfling are concerned, it may be stated (some few notable instances to the contrary excepted) that the fiddle-maker who cannot purfle his instrument may not be trusted very far in the workmanship of the other parts of it, some of which are every whit as difficult to execute properly as

the purfling. Look well at the corners when examining the purfling. If the mitres are badly made and the black edge of the outermost line of the purfling is broken off short, instead of being carried right into the corner in what is called the 'bees sting,' it is careless work, and scores a black mark against the fiddle.

Another very good test with regard to violins purporting to have been made during the 18th century is as follows: Look at the front of the peg-box, *i.e.*, the cheeks, and see if there is a joint running down each side of the edge, about half the depth of the peg-box, and carried round the back of the neck under the chin of the scroll. This joint should be seen in all violins dated previous to the last century. The reason of this is that violins, previous to the alteration of the standard pitch, had shorter necks, and had to be altered with the alteration of the pitch. This was done by cutting off the scroll or head, just at the top of the neck, and regrafting it into a new neck, the joint being made just under the chin of the scroll, and finishing at the front, halfway up the edges of the peg-box. Now, this joint has been imitated by scratching a line in the position which the genuine joint would occupy in the ordinary way, and filling up the groove with glue. This fraud may be detected by examining the wood on each side of the supposed joint. If the wood does not show a difference in grain, one side of the cut from the other, it is very evident that it will not be a genuine joint at all, and the evidence in such a case is sufficient to prove that the violin is a fraud. The genuine joint is often extremely well executed. The imitation joint is more often very badly imitated, and condemns itself in many cases by its very appearance.

Again, in old violins the peg-holes were often filled in and re-bored, owing to wear. The old holes were simply cleaned up with a wood-worker's 'reamer,' plugged, and re-bored. In this case the ring of new wood showing round the hole should be the same thickness all round. In 'faked' instruments they are very often put in to one side of the proper peg-holes, and consequently show by their position that they could not possibly have been put in to repair a legitimate fault, such as wear.

The state of the inside fittings and the inside finish of a violin is also a good guide to the worth of the instrument. A genuine violin, made by a conscientious man, is well finished,—the blocks properly rounded and sandpapered, the linings bevelled off and sandpapered smooth, the corner blocks gouged to follow the sweep of the ribs, and the bass-bar nicely rounded over and smooth as possible. 'Faked' instruments betray their origin by the rough and badly-finished inside. Rough wood, unfinished blocks, badly made or fitted bass-bar, linings not bevelled or not fitted into the blocks, and in general a careless, slovenly, hurried appearance about the whole interior—all these signs show to the careful observer the fraud in its naked ugliness. Do not purchase an instrument of this kind, no matter what the dealer says. If there is any doubt at all, the purchaser should have the benefit of it, not the fiddle-dealer.

A fair idea of the age of a violin may be formed by taking out the tailpin and noting the colour of the blocks and the kind of wood of which they are made. Good violins are fitted with good blocks of pine, well matured before they are put in. Poor blocks betray a cheap, worthless instrument, or a fraud. Imitation cracks in the belly or back may be detected by looking for them on the inside, through the tail-pin hole. If they are not showing on the inside, be sure they are not real cracks at all, but there for the benefit (or rather, very much otherwise) of the unwary.

Worm-holes are another favourite device of the 'faker.' So far as the writer is concerned he would hardly purchase a worm-eaten violin at all, no matter what was its make, if the instrument showed signs of being at all badly attacked. Wood-worms are very destructive insects, and extremely difficult to eradicate from any piece of wood they have attacked, and fiddles are no exception. But in the case of the proposed purchase of such an instrument, be very sure the violin is genuine and not 'faked.'

Finally, remember that a guarantee should be given where an expensive violin is purchased. The buyer cannot be too careful in view of the many frauds which are on the market. And if an expert can be found, by all means take him with you when making the purchase. His advice, if followed, may save both money and temper.

A CONTRA-VIOLIN.

At a chamber concert given recently at St. Helier, Jersey, a string quartet was performed on instruments all of which had been made by a local resident, Mr. H. Newbould. The 2nd violin parts were played on a violin of special construction which Mr. Newbould describes as a 'Contra-Violin.' Below we give Mr. Newbould's answers to various questions we put to him. He says:

- (1) The contra-violin is strung exactly the same as the violin (that is, to the notes E A D G), of the same pitch as the violin, and with ordinary violin strings (three gut and one covered);
- (2) The length of string from bridge to nut, and consequently the 'stop' of the fingering, is exactly the same on both instruments; therefore
- (3) Any violinist can take up the contra-violin and play it with the same ease as his own violin.
- (4) *Re* Balance of Tone. The contra-violin can be played with all the delicacy and pianissimo of a violin, as well as all the nuances up to *fff*, therefore the balance of tone need not be upset either in quartet or orchestra.

The great point is that the 2nd violin part acquires a new and interesting distinct individuality of tone, blending perfectly in the quartet when required, but unmistakably speaking out with a voice of its own in any solo passage.

It may interest you to know the development of the new instrument. Being somewhat of an expert carpenter as well as a retired professor of strings, in the spring of 1914 it occurred to me to design and make a violin, which turned out quite a success. Possessing no proper viola of my own, I set about making one in the winter of 1914, with equal success, and having the same kind of pure, free tone as my violin. Always a great lover of chamber music, and particularly of quartet-playing, the idea of completing the quartet of home-made instruments took hold, and the 'cello followed early in 1916, with again the same kind and quality of tone. When this year it came to the turn of the 2nd violin, and the decision as to whether it should be a replica of the former or of a different design, I remembered from my experience of vocal quartets and choral singing how important it was to have real and good contraltos to perfect the blend of the other parts. If so in the vocal quartet and chorus, why not in the string quartet and orchestra? It seemed illogical to have in the latter what would under no circumstances be tolerated in the former, *viz.*, two equal sopranos, tenor, and bass. Then arose the question, Can a violin be produced with a contralto tone? I was told No!—which decided me to make the experiment and try.

My musical friends and critics here say I have succeeded, and that the quality and interest of the string quartet is greatly enhanced by the innovation. One can imagine the tonal effect when multiplied in the full orchestra.

RUSSIAN-ENGLISH transliteration.

In our November and December, 1917, issues the problem of Russian-English transliteration was fully discussed. A consistent scheme of spelling was advocated, and a list of some hundreds of names of Russian musicians and their works was given. No attempt was made in this scheme to give phonetic spelling, but accentuation was shown. In view of the fact that there has grown up in this country various ways—we cannot call some of them methods—of spelling which writers and others have got more or less accustomed to, it was not to be expected that the new proposals would be readily adopted. This being so, we are unable to do more than bring the water of the proposals before that noble, free, and independent animal, the critic; but, of course, we cannot make him drink. It is to be regretted that there is no ruling authority in this country—no spelling controller—to lay down the law. But it is worth while to note that the War Office, where the staff of course is under orders, has compiled rules for Russian transliteration that are to be followed in their map-making. Here, then, we have the nucleus of an official authority to guide us.