'The Rhythm of the Chant'

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Letters to the Editor

ORCHESTRAL ARRANGEMENT OF BACH'S ORGAN SONATAS

SIR,—In his article on Bach's organ sonatas, Mr. Harvey Grace mentions Sir Henry Wood's orchestral version of some of their movements. Is he aware of Wetzler's fine transcription for full orchestra of No. 1? It is published by Messrs. Novello. I have often wondered that so effective a work is apparently unknown. It would, I believe, prove to be one of the most popular of Bach's instrumental compositions. Perhaps Sir Hugh Allen will give it a thought when arranging the next Bach Festival programme.—Yours, &c.,

Latimer Road, Notting Hill.
February 12, 1921.

A. W. C.

SYSTEM IN MUSICAL NOTATION

SIR,—Dr. Tozer writes that he 'does not suppose that there is any system discoverable in the notation of either Bach or Beethoven.' I do not know whether there is or not, nor do I care, but I know there is a vast amount of 'common-sense' in both these composers which goes far deeper than any 'system' or 'surface-logic.' That is why I would undertake, very cheerfully and confidently, to defend almost any example of Bach or Beethoven that might be attacked on the score of notation by either Mr. Button or Dr. Tozer (or, for that matter, by anyone else).

I do not wish to give to this controversy—or rather friendly discussion—any personal tinge; but I cannot help feeling that Dr. Tozer brings to these questions of notation precisely the same rigidity of mind that he brings to the consideration of my poor little sentence about 'youthful exuberance.' 'Do you mean this, or do you mean that?' we seem to hear him saying to the unfortunate composer. But it is precisely the peculiarity of the composer—if he is a good composer—that he often has half-shades of meaning to express, undercurrents of thought, as it were, which cannot be exactly brought out by any system of notation; they have to be hinted at. Hence the composer has to compromise—to fall back upon methods of notation which may not seem, on a hasty view, to be strictly logical, but which, having regard to *all* he wishes to express, are logical in the highest degree. It would be easy for me to give particular instances of this, choosing in fact, examples from Mr. Button's book; but it would need the use of musical notation for any clear discussion, and would, besides, take more space than you could probably afford.—Yours, &c.,

10, Ambrose Place, A. R. CRIPPS.

Worthing, February 10, 1921.

SIR,—If we may judge from Mr. Cripps' recent letter on this subject, he appears to think that the great composers knew how best to put their ideas on paper, and that any attempts to make the rough places plain are a kind of blasphemy. It would be easy to give him, in proof of the contrary, more examples than would fill a whole number of the *Musical Times*, but I will content myself with two out of many I recently noted in César Franck's set of six organ pieces. Here they are, first as Franck wrote them, then as Buttonised by myself:

Ex. 1. ORIGINAL

REVISED

Ex. 2.

ORIGINAL

REVISED

Now it is safe to say that a few such passages as the above—badly laid out, and bristling with unnecessary sharps and double-sharps—in an already difficult work are enough to turn the scale against it, and to cause a busy or impatient organist to abandon the study of it. The more accessible we can make fine music the better. I hope that all new works, and as many reprints of old ones as possible, will be edited on the lines laid down in Mr. Button's admirable book. Such editing is of the letter, not of the spirit. The more one sees of the casual and inconvenient way great composers threw their works on paper, the more one regrets that with all their genius they were in this practical and important respect a Button short.—Yours, &c.,

Balls Pond, N.

WILLIAM CHILD.

February 15, 1921.

'THE RHYTHM OF THE CHANT'

SIR,—An article by Mr. Sidney Grew on the rhythm of the Anglican chant appeared in a recent number, and if this letter does not arrive too late, I should like to be allowed to make a few remarks upon it. The writer, I am glad to see, is breaking away from Riemann and Prout, whose theory of the strength of bar rhythm is about as far from the truth as it is possible to be.

Because the cadence is very important from a musical point of view, Riemann and his followers insist that it is therefore *loud*, and indicates the strong bar. According to this simple theory a penny, being larger than a sovereign, is therefore the more important coin.

In dealing with eternal verities there is no such thing as 'Humming and hawing,' 'It might be,' 'In some cases,' or 'I can conceive it otherwise.' The rhythmic law of bars follows naturally the rhythmic law in bars, the strength being:

IN BARS

Ex. 1. $\frac{4}{4}$ 1 3 2 4

Ex. 2. $\frac{3}{4}$ 1 2 3

OF BARS

Ex. 3. $\frac{2}{2}$ 1 3 2 4

Ex. 4. $\frac{2}{2}$ 1 2 3

The Anglican chant therefore consists of four sentences, the first and third being three-bar sentences, and the second and fourth four-bar sentences. The following illustration shows clearly the rhythm of the bars, and of the sentences. It will be noted that the Anglican chant stands firmly upon

* The figures represent strength. The higher the figure the weaker the strength.

the eternal rhythmic foundation of pressure and release (1-2):

Strength in bars.

I entirely object to what Mr. Grew calls the cadential stress. A cadence is a decline and fall of a strain. Riemann, Prout, and their disciples have helped to kill the gracious and natural flow of music by this unnatural rule of stressing the last bar of a musical sentence, and we must be thankful that our great conductors have enough rhythmic instinct to save them from carrying out this monstrous theory to its logical conclusion. Mr. Grew's attempt at defining the rhythm of an Anglican chant, while avoiding the horrid accentuation at the end of each musical sentence, still breaks the eternal law, the strength of his three-bar sentences being either 2-1-3 or 3-1-2, and his four-bar sentences being vaguely either 4-3-1-2 or 3-2-1-4.

It is a pity that musicians cannot deal with their art without having recourse to the terminology of Greek poetry. The rhythmic analogy between poetry and music is not so complete as a great many people suppose. In poetry the variations of rhythmic patterns are comparatively few: in music they are illimitable. In poetry the discipline of strength is imperative, but not the discipline of length. In music the power to control both strength and length is absolutely essential. 'Rising Anapest,' 'Falling Anapest,' 'Dactyl,' &c., therefore, while sounding very learned, do not carry us very far, and certainly do not help to define the rhythmic foundation of music. Deep down where there is no variableness or shadow of turning the musical law stands 1-2—a movement, then release. The movement must come first, for absolute immobility is death, and the first sign of life must be a movement. Until we know and obey this law, our music will always have an element of weakness.

I have not touched upon the question as to whether the Psalms are pointed suitably or not. I only wish in this instance to stress the eternal law. As this law is not understood, it is not surprising that the pointing in our psalters is sometimes a lamentable misfit. The law, however, must *not* be altered to suit the words: the words *must* be altered to fit the law.

The Riemann theory is hopeless, because it is opposed to the truth and antagonistic to the natural language of cultivated humanity.

So far as I am concerned, the law I have stated is immutable, and I have never found it to fail, whether I am conducting a symphony or playing a chant.—Yours, &c.,

GEORGE SAMPSON

(Organist of St. John's Cathedral, Brisbane.
Conductor of the Sampson Orchestral Concerts, &c.).

The University of Queensland, Brisbane.

January 12, 1921.

A PLEA FOR CATHEDRAL LAY-CLERKS

SIR,—As one who has attended several voice-trials for cathedral lay-clerkships, and thus got into personal touch with the active members of certain choirs, I have been more or less filled with a sense of pity that the majority of such men, who after all are specialists in their profession, find it an exceedingly lean calling in these days.

In the large majority of Cathedrals, choral matins is still in vogue, and as this of course takes place in that part of the forenoon when business is at its height, one can quite appreciate the fact that employers will not consider the engagement of men who are missing from their posts just at a critical hour of the day. As a consequence lay-clerks are practically excluded from taking part in actual commercial

life, and necessarily depend upon a slender teaching connection or upon the precarious emoluments of insurance canvassing, &c.

The two chief drawbacks under which lay-clerks labour are apparently the continuance of choral matins—generally held in an empty Cathedral—and the difficulty they experience in obtaining leave of absence from Saturday Evensong. The necessity for attending the latter service often prevents their acceptance of an engagement on Saturday evening, if a long distance away. The lot of lay-clerks could be improved by the employment of deputy choristers for such services as are likely to prevent the fulfilment of important engagements.

I am aware that at certain Cathedrals considerable licence is allowed choristers as regards absence from duty, but the reverse is the case in many instances.

I suggest, therefore, that a conference of lay-clerks be arranged during the August Bank-holiday week, when grievances could be discussed and a secretary and working committee could be appointed to act on behalf of the whole of the lay-clerks in the United Kingdom with a view to their conditions being improved.

Such a conference would doubtless receive the ready support of a great number of Deans, Chapters, and Cathedral dignitaries, with the result that instead of lay-clerks being, as at present, by reason of their vocation kept out of commercial or professional life, their duties could be so arranged that they would be able to augment the slender incomes derived from Cathedral singing with such extra emoluments as would make their total income derived from all sources equal to that of an ordinary full-time occupation.

I have written on the presumption that a society of lay-clerks is not already in existence. Should my suggestion of a conference be seriously regarded, I shall be pleased to co-operate with a view to its being put into operation.—Yours, &c.,

'INTERESTED.'

'TA-RA-RA-BOOM-DE-AY'

SIR,—In his 'Ad Libitum' notes in February's issue, 'Feste' describes 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay' as 'a wretched tune' and as one of the feeblest airs that have ever obsessed a helpless population. It seems to have escaped his notice that it is classical music. If he will turn to Beethoven's Clarinet Trio he will find that the essential part of this air is the theme of the *Allegretto con variazioni*.—Yours, &c.,

HERBERT W. HORWILL.

159, King Henry's Road, N.W.3.

February 5, 1921.

THE SACKBUT, ETC.

SIR,—The curious implication in 'Feste's' remarks apropos the criticism in the December *Sackbut* of Mr. Holst's 'Planets' is worthy of comment. He ('Feste') says:

What puzzles me is that to-day anybody sufficiently musical and experienced to be allowed to help in the blowing of so advanced an instrument of musical opinion as the *Sackbut* should be able to describe the 'Totentanz' as a 'superlative masterpiece.'

As I myself am an occasional contributor to the *Sackbut*, and as the editor, Mr. Philip Heseltine, is a friend of mine, I may claim to know something of this paper's aims. One of them is certainly *not* to deny expression of approval by one of its contributors of a work that was composed earlier than the last decade, if he deems it a valuable or worthy example.

As, too, within a short space of time the *Sackbut* has published articles of a eulogistic nature on two composers so disparate in date as Gesualdo and Béla Bartók, there seems no reason why it should be called either advanced or reactionary. The *Sackbut* contributors have as little in common with those who think that music ends with Strauss as they have with the press agents of Dada.

'Feste's' assertion of a 'practically unanimous verdict in favour' is not supported by the facts. One other critic, at least, in addition to the syllogistic Barbara, is equally