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Author(s): C. F. Abdy Williams

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Letters to the Editor

'AN EARLY GREEK HYMN'

SIR,—I am most grateful to your correspondent Mr. E. A. White. Living, as I am compelled to, in a backwater, I often fail to hear of 'things that matter.'

The 'symbols not mentioned in Grove' are the well-known time-signs given by Bellermaun's *Anonymus*, published, with notes, in 1841. Its exact date is unknown, but it is supposed to be within the first three centuries A.D. The symbols are as follows:

The unit of time is the shortest note used in a given composition. It has no sign: a note without a time-sign is understood to be the 'primary time' (*chronos protos*). In translations from ancient to modern notation its value is the quaver.

The two-time note, our crotchet, has over it the sign —

The three-time note, our dotted crotchet, has over it but in the Tralles hymn this is reversed, thus,

The four-time, our minim, has the sign

The five-time, minim tied to quaver, has

The 'empty-time,' our rest, if of quaver value, has the sign $\wedge$. To this is added above it the appropriate sign if the rest is of more than quaver value.

The stigma is a dot placed over the note to indicate the ictus or accent.

The hyphen $\cup$ joining two notes, is equivalent to our slur (see Bellermaun's *Anonymus*, page 21, &c.).

On collating the translation of the new Greek hymn with the original I was startled to find the anapaests translated instead of . The notes bearing the stigma had been placed in arsis. Had I been wrong all these years? Was Monro wrong in his edition of the Tralles hymn? Are all the musicians wrong? And the resulting feminine ending on 'Amen'? Does the stigma indicate a weak syllable?

Now Bellermaun's *Anonymus* distinctly states that the thesis is 'astikton,' i.e., 'without stigma,' and the arsis is 'estigmenon,' 'bearing the stigma.' Bellermaun equally distinctly proves in his notes that the balance of ancient authority is against this assertion. He also remarks on the confusion into which the ancient grammarians fell in the matter of arsis and thesis. I thought it had for many decades been understood, by practical musicians at least, that the thesis is the down beat, the arsis the up beat: that in spite of *Anonymus* the stigma always indicates the down beat.

In this translation the notes bearing the stigma are placed on the up beat, in accordance with *Anonymus*, whom Bellermaun shows to be mistaken.

Now, Sir, I venture to make a suggestion as to how this remarkable confusion arose amongst ancient grammarians, who perhaps were not 'musical.' To put it as shortly as possible, we are told that rhythm consists of arsis and thesis. Arsis is the 'elevatio,' or 'levatio' (raising) of the hand in conducting, the foot in dancing. Thesis is the 'positio' (putting down) of the hand or foot 'with sound.' (It is known that the ancients beat their time audibly.) To the musician this can only mean that arsis is the up beat, thesis the down beat. Some of the grammarians, knowing that arsis meant a 'raising,' thesis a 'falling,' applied these terms to poetry: looking upon the accented syllable as a 'raising' of the voice they called it arsis, and the weak syllable, a 'lowering' of the voice, they called thesis. They ignored the fact that thesis was accompanied by 'sound.' The confusion arose during a period of decadence, when the Greek and Latin languages were losing their 'quantity,' and poetry was beginning to take 'accent' as its rhythmical unit.

For my own satisfaction I have written out the new hymn and shifted the bar-lines so as to make them agree with the stigma in the papyrus, as is done by Bellermaun in his explanation of the mistake of his *Anonymus*, and in some short rhythmical exercises given by *Anonymus* himself.

Again thanking Mr. White and the *Musical Times*.—Yours, &c., C. F. ABDY WILLIAMS.

South Mead,
Milford, Lynton.

'THE RAFF CENTENARY'

SIR,—In the course of this correspondence it has been suggested that some of Raff's compositions might still be acceptable, despite changes of taste. May I call attention to the fact that the London County Council's Orchestra (which used to play twice weekly at the Victoria Embankment Gardens in the years immediately preceding the war) included the *Forest* and *Lenore* Symphonies in its repertory, and played them as frequently as the Symphonies of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, &c.?

Familiarity with these works convinced several of us that the neglect of Raff was as unfortunate as inexplicable—that the *Lenore* Symphony (the music of which is of an almost unearthly beauty) did not suffer by comparison with the finest German masterpieces; and that the *Forest*, though not so undeniably great and original, lost nothing of its fresh and varied charm by repeated hearing. Both these compositions were always enthusiastically received by the audience and never failed to impress, and I remember one occasion when the *Andante* from the *Forest* was spontaneously encored, the only time I have ever known such an honour accorded to symphonic music.

These were not the only works of Raff which figured on the programmes. I was fortunate enough on one occasion to hear his beautiful *Spring* Symphony, and I believe others were occasionally played. From this it appears that Raff's music has stood the test of time; and if any of our conductors had the necessary courage and determination the more representative of his works might be not only successfully revived, but would even find their rightful place in the permanent repertory.

In conclusion might I add two suggestions? One is that if the 'Prom.' programmes were as well arranged as those of the L.C.C. Orchestra a symphony would be played every night, instead of twice a week. This would mean the sacrifice of a few worthless trifles and scrap operatic selections; but it would also allow for the revival not only of Raff, but of other great neglected symphonists—e.g., Schumann and Goetz.

My other suggestion is that a centenary celebration might give the necessary impetus to a Raff revival. It is the composers who have fallen into undeserved neglect whose centenaries should for that very reason be observed, though they seldom are. But what is the use of holding special celebrations for composers like Handel, Beethoven, Verdi, or Wagner, whose music is always with us?

It may interest some of your readers to know that a small choral and orchestral society in North London hopes in the near future to revive Raff's oratorio *The End of the World*.—Yours, &c., B. VINCY.

Highbury.

August, 1922.

'NURSERIES OF ENGLISH SONG'

SIR,—Apropos of the interesting article on 'The Nurseries of English Song' in your September issue, may I make a remark on Mr. Kidson's reference to John Cunningham, whom he describes as 'poor enough to justify his existence as a poet even if his verses did not.' The fact is that John Cunningham was an Irishman of great poetic and dramatic ability; and, as is well known, several complete editions of his poems have been published (as I write I have before me a charming edition published by Whittingham in 1805). Cunningham was the son of a Dublin wine-merchant, and at the age of seventeen wrote a successful play, *Love in a Mist*, produced at Capel Street Theatre, Dublin, on May 22, 1747. Many of his songs were enormously popular, e.g., *Kitty Fell*, *Kate of Aberdeen*, *Fanny of the Dale*, *A Man to my Mind*, *The Miller*, *In Holiday Gown*, &c. Cunningham died at Newcastle-on-Tyne on September 18, 1773, aged forty-three. It is only just to add that, through the zealous efforts of Mr. John Robinson, the monument erected at Newcastle-on-Tyne to the memory of Cunningham, and which had become ruinous, was restored in 1887, and unveiled by Dr. Thomas Hodgkin.—Yours, &c., W. H. GRATAN FLOOD.

'Rosemont,' Enniscorthy.
September 1, 1922.