The Public, the Critic, and the Native Composer

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- 'Appalachia,' 1903. Tone-poem for orchestra and final chorus. Produced at the Lower Rhine Festival in 1905; first performed in London, 1907.
- 'Sea-Drift,' 1904. For baritone solo, chorus and orchestra. Produced at Tonkünstlerfest at Essen in 1906; first performed in England at the Sheffield Festival of 1908.
- Part-songs: 'Midsummer song' } mixed voices.
 'On Craig Ddu' }
 'Wanderer's song' (male voices).
- 'A Mass of Life,' 1905. After Nietzsche's 'Thus spake Zarathustra.' For soli, chorus and orchestra. First given in its entirety in London under Beecham in 1909.
- 'Songs of sunset,' 1906. For baritone solo, soprano solo, chorus and orchestra. Words by Ernest Dowson.
- 'Brigg Fair,' 1907. English Rhapsody for full orchestra. First performed in London, 1908.
- 'In a summer garden,' 1908. Tone-poem for full orchestra. A Dance Rhapsody for full orchestra, 1909.
- Three Verlaine Songs, 1893-1910.
- 'Fennimore and Gerda,' 1910, 1911, 1912. Lyric-Drama taken from J. P. Jacobsen's novel, 'Niels Lyhne.'
- 'The Song of the High Hills,' 1911-12. For orchestra and chorus.
- 'An Arabesk,' 1912. For baritone solo, chorus and orchestra.
- Two Tone-poems for small orchestra, 1912-13:
 'On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring.'
 'Summer-night on the River.'
- North-Country Sketches, 1913-14.
- Songs:
 'Chanson d'Automne' (Paul Verlaine).
 'The Nightingale has a lyre of gold' (Henley).
 'Black Roses' (from the Swedish of Josefson).
 'I Brasil' (Fiona McLeod).
 'Spring' (J. P. Jacobsen).
- 'Requiem,' 1914. For solo voices, choir, and orchestra. (Not yet published.)
- Sonata for violin and pianoforte, 1905. Revised, 1915.

THE PUBLIC, THE CRITIC, AND THE NATIVE COMPOSER.

BY ERNEST NEWMAN.

Although 'A Native Composer' must be feeling rather sore after the belabouring he has had from Mr. Gilbert Webb and 'A Critic,' I cannot resist the impulse to launch just one more thwack at his pate. He bewails the sad lot of himself and his kind. It seems that nobody loves them; and 'A Native Composer' has tried to discover the reason for this lack of affection. Three sorts of people, it seems, are at fault—the public, the critics, and the publishers; which is very much as if a convict should tell us that he was really an excellent fellow and most unjustly convicted, everybody being on his side during the trial except the judge, the police, the jury, the counsel for the prosecution, and the spectators in the court. 'A Native Composer' paints a pathetic picture of hundreds of Englishmen putting endless notes upon unresisting paper, and every now and then asking themselves sadly whether, after all, it is worth while. I am not in the least unsympathetic to these worthy people, but there is an aspect of the question that naturally they could not be expected to see, yet that needs to be exposed in a high light, for it explains why things are just as they are with the Native Composer. With his complaint against the publishers I have nothing to do. As a matter of fact I think too much music is published; there is certainly more bad music published than good in any country. But as

regards the public and the critics the case is clear. The public is an utterly insoluble problem. The more I have to do with it, the less I flatter myself that I understand it. I used to think I could explain why it showed a liking for this composer and not for that, why it preferred one kind of music to another, and so on. I have given up these futile speculations; now I simply accept the facts. But this much is certain, that the public makes no more mistakes with regard to foreign music than it does with regard to English. Native composers complain that we English are too ready to listen to anything that comes from abroad, and too little inclined to listen to music by an Englishman. It is one of the things that everyone says, because it is so easy to say it; but I doubt whether there is much truth in it. A concert of works by unknown English composers would only attract, as the Irishman might say, an empty hall; but a concert of works by unknown German or French composers would not draw any larger audience. It makes one sad to see Queen's Hall only one-third full when Mr. Ronald gives a concert devoted to Elgar's music; but I can remember the time when it was hard to get an audience for Richard Strauss in London. Almost every foreign composer now popular in England has had to wait a longer or shorter time before the public took him to its heart. The reason for the ultimate success of these people is probably that behind them was the general public opinion of the world, which sooner or later makes its impression on the British public. Our native composers suffer from the lack of this motive force at their backs. It is not that the British public pays undue deference to Continental opinion merely because it is Continental; but that it has an intuition—and a perfectly sound one—that a person cannot become a world-figure in music without there being something in him; and that something the British public is willing, as a rule, to sample, without at all committing itself in advance to liking it. This explains why a certain number of people in England will go to hear a new work by Strauss or Debussy or Puccini or Stravinsky or Scriabin, while very few of them will go to hear a new work by John Brown or William Robinson. But for the *undistinguished* crowd of foreign composers the British public really displays no more enthusiasm than for the undistinguished crowd of English composers. 'It cannot be denied,' says 'A Native Composer,' 'that the very sound of "A New Symphony by Johannes Schmidt" would have fallen pleasingly and appealingly on the ears of the average English concert-goer, and would have been a "draw," while if it had been written by John Smith, it could hardly have been considered a business proposition.' I venture to deny this point-blank; and every conductor and concert promoter in the country will agree with me. I do not say that a New Symphony by John Smith would 'draw,' but I am positive that a New Symphony by Johannes Schmidt would not. If 'A Native Composer' thinks I am wrong, I invite him to back his fancy, so to speak. Let him induce, say,

Mr. Percy Harrison to put down a new symphony by—I will not say an unknown Johannes Schmidt, but a well-known Schmidt such as Sibelius or Max Reger, or an unknown or almost unknown symphony by a known Schmidt, such as one of Bruckner's or one of Mahler's, or the fourth of Brahms—for his next orchestral concert, on the condition that 'A Native Composer' will compensate him for any loss he may incur. If Mr. Harrison were to take 'A Native Composer' seriously, I do not think the latter would have much money left for his summer holiday this year.

No, the public is shy not merely of unfamiliar British music but of all unfamiliar music. This shyness we can at any rate understand. The average man goes to a concert to enjoy himself. He is not at all certain of enjoying himself when he learns that a quarter or a third of the whole concert is to be given up to music by someone whose name conveys nothing to him. Can it be wondered at that he saves his half-crown or half-guinea for a concert of familiar things, on which, he feels, his money is less likely to be thrown away? The caution he exercises is simply a form of the caution shown by every prospective purchaser of an untried article. The plain man does not buy a picture without having seen it; he does not buy a book without having read a favourable review of it, or having heard it well spoken of by someone in whose judgment he has faith. It is true he is not asked to buy the new symphony; but he is asked to pay as much for listening to it as would buy a book outright, and his caution is as intelligible in the one case as in the other. I am not suggesting that the public should always act like this. On the contrary, I should prefer it to show a little curiosity with regard to new things, and a willingness to risk a little cash and comfort for a fresh experience; but so far as this caution operates against new English music it operates also against new foreign music. Native composers, *quâ* native composers, have no special complaint against the British public on this score.

Against the critic I do not see that the composers have any complaint at all. The critic's authority over the public is always over-estimated, both by composers and by performers. I am in thorough agreement with the critic who writes on this subject in the February number of the *Musical Times*. We critics spend one half of our time in telling the public that certain musical works are commonplace and not worth hearing—without thereby dissuading a single member of the public from going to hear those works if he wants to,—and the other half of our time in telling the public that certain works are very good and that it is desirable that it should take them to its heart—without thereby inducing a single member of the public to go to hear one of those works if he is not otherwise inclined to do so. And as for the common charge against critics that they 'slate' new works, I can only say, after a pretty long experience of the business, that nine criticisms out of ten, both of compositions and of performances, are too favourable. The truth is that far too much space is given in the Press to

the doings of the ordinary run of musicians. That the experienced critic does not become wildly enthusiastic over a new work by John Smith is easily intelligible; how can he be expected to feel wild enthusiasm except for something quite out of the common? There is an enormous quantity of great music in existence by now, and the critic carries most of it in his head; any new work he hears has of necessity to bear comparison with the music he already knows. How can it stand that comparison unless it itself is great, and how much of the new music that is produced in any country in a given year deserves that title? The vast bulk of the new music we hear is bound, in the nature of things, to be merely derivative; and the first thing that strikes the old hand in connection with it is its lack of originality. And if it is so unoriginal, why in the name of commonsense should it be noticed at all in the papers? Let me speak a plain word to the native composer, young or old. He exaggerates his gifts and overestimates his importance in the universal scheme. Tens of thousands of people nowadays can write quite good music; to do so really indicates no more ability than is shown every day by the surgeon, the journalist, the railway manager, the naval officer, or people in hundreds of other walks of life. None of these people is so vain as to suppose he has an indefeasible right to have his doings commended in the papers. Why should the man who can string a few notes together imagine that *he* has such a right? The bulk of the new music I hear and see, whatever be the country of its origin, suggests no more than average human ability. Go to your club some afternoon, and run through the best of the daily and weekly and monthly journals, and in a couple of hours, I venture to say, you will come across at least fifty articles to the making of which has gone more fundamental brain-power than can be found in a similar number of new musical compositions. But for the journalist the writing of a good article is simply part of the day's work. He has not the vanity to cut his article out and send it to most of the papers in the kingdom and ask them to print their opinion upon it. Why should the minor composer—and of course the great majority of composers are bound to be minor—expect the Press to worry about *him*? He may think it cruel of me to speak of him in this way; but the truth must be told sometimes, and this is one of the cases in which we have to be cruel to be unkind. I have an idea that before many years are out the newspapers will have given up the notion that it is their duty to bestow valuable space on every Tom, Dick or Harry who can put together a piece of unoriginal music and get it published or performed. The musical critic will, I hope, tend to become less and less of a reporter and more and more of a critic. It will not be his business to tell the public everything that has happened at this or that concert: if the public were really interested in those happenings it would go to the concert on its own account. Newspapers in the future will keep a critic not for the sake of the composers and the

performers but for the sake of the critic ; that is to say, it will be his business to interest the public in his own views of music as an art. He will choose his own subject, and choose it where he will ; he will go to many a concert and preserve a stony silence about everything he heard there, for the simple reason that none of it was sufficiently out of the ordinary even to be worth mentioning ; and he will take his theme from some happening that to the composers and performers engaged in the concert may seem a matter of little importance. He will, in a word, put the crowd of ordinary performers and composers in their proper places. If they are really big people, he will talk about them and what they have done ; if they are only ordinary people,—and nine-tenths of them are no more than that—he will as little dream of discussing them, or even mentioning them, as he would of writing half-a-column upon the restaurant cook who was answerable for his dinner. And so my last word to ‘A Native Composer’ is this: the mere fact that you are a composer, even a native composer, does not entitle you to any more consideration in the Press than other honest and reasonably capable workers get ; if you wish to be taken very seriously you must show that you are big enough to be worth taking seriously in a world that is crammed almost to overflowing with ability of a really high average. You yourself unconsciously give your own case away. You appeal for ‘treatment as sportsman-like and fair to the aspiring champion of Queen’s Hall or Covent Garden Opera as that received by the idols of the National Sporting Club or the Crystal Palace on Cup-tie Day.’ But the people we go to see at the National Sporting Club or the Crystal Palace are performers who have proved their possession of exceptional ability. It is right that Carpentier should have his column in the papers: Carpentiers are scarce. But minor boxers are plentiful—almost as plentiful, shall I say, as minor composers—and no newspaper would think of conferring publicity on every local bruiser who can put on a pair of boxing gloves. I myself can grow enthusiastic over Carpentier, because I know that if I were to train till doomsday I should never be as great a pugilist as he ; but I cannot grow enthusiastic over the friends I spar with every day, and whose abilities I know to be just about what my own are. I can grow enthusiastic over a great composer, but not over a man who, I instinctively feel, has no more real originality in him as a composer than I have. ‘A Native Composer’ may say I am blasé : all critics are supposed to become blasé after a few years of their strenuous life. I find myself, however, more keenly sensitive to great music than I was twenty years ago ; and if this is to be blasé, if this is the result of years of daily immersion in music, then I can only pray the gods to give me long life, and let each day of that life be filled full with music. But it must be great music. All that ‘A Native Composer’ has to do, then, if he wishes to be treated deferentially by the critics, is to be a great man. I am sure that will be easy to him.

TEACHERS AND TEXT-BOOKS.

By G. H. CLUTSAM.

Mr. Corder as teacher and Mr. Newman as critic have certainly provided entertaining matter in the last two numbers of the *Musical Times*, but the controversy can hardly be described as seriously argumentative. The one modestly eulogises his own particular functions as the producer and protector of the sound musician, and the other simply anathematises the whole process of pedagogical parturition. As we are living in an epoch of universal belligerency, with an invisible and fateful Samson tumbling the walls of a thousand-and-one ideals, conventions, sentiments, doctrines, and other fool’s paradises about our astonished heads, a destructive policy in discussing such contentious subjects as music-teaching and music text-books seems for the moment the only thoroughly sound and significant means of dealing effectively with their inherent incapacities. It is true that as far as Mr. Newman is concerned, he is content to belabour the text-books with the effective but obvious bludgeon afforded by a reference to consecutive fifths, a detail in rules that was dodged in innumerable instances by the older masters, and is entirely dishonoured by the modern ; but the point is only the most delicate of caramboles in a system which persistently buffets, batters, and baffles the infatuated coterie that endeavours to sustain its complete efficiency.

All attempts to reason that modern music is the outcome of the old theories are manifest and flagrant subterfuges. It is nothing of the sort. It is based on other considerations altogether, and the very attempt to bring the opposing material into line, is at the outset bewildering to the innate commonsense of the modern music-student. Any composer who has marked the development of musical art with a white stone has done so independently and in spite of his text-book or teacher, and the nearer we approach to our own time the less reason is there to treat with the smallest reverence or respect the old washed-out principles that have obtained universal recognition since Rousseau fiddled about with his system of chord inversions nearly two hundred years ago.

The present-day teacher, who, as Mr. Corder suggests, is generally a composer with only failure to his credit, spends the best part of his plodding autumnal lifetime in pleading to the young and ambitious student principles and rules that have generally been the cause of his own downfall. If he buried himself instead of his head in the sand when confronted with the necessity of considering modern tendencies, the mass of entirely discredited knowledge that gives his person a dubious authority would no longer disturb the peace of the intelligent pupil.

This remark, of course, is not intended to be abusive or personal. The teacher, after all, is only the embodied text-book with the cover off, and moth-eaten in the pages that might possess a little value. If the most generous view of the most complete text-book be taken, the chances of