

Some Notes on Delius and His Music

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The Musical Times

AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR.

MARCH 1, 1915.

FREDERICK DELIUS.

Frederick Delius is a composer whose works are being gradually assimilated in this country. The process has been, and probably will be for some time, slow, for the appeal of his music is not to the popular ear. His idiom is unconventional and subtle, and his expression of himself inclined to be moody and introspective. You have to learn to twist yourself into his moods, and to adopt his peculiar standpoint before you can listen sympathetically. Some there are whose powers of appreciation are not sufficiently plastic, and so they rebel. But all who are happily more receptive and can claim familiarity with Delius's music predict that it has a future of much importance. Mr. Beecham has been one of the most persistent apostles of the composer, and has certainly done more than anyone else to make the musical public feel that Delius is a musical force to be reckoned with.

Delius was born at Bradford (Yorkshire) in 1863. His father settled in England in 1842, and became naturalized, and his mother was a German. Delius remained in Yorkshire until 1883. During this period he devoted as much time to musical study as the preparation for a business career permitted, and amongst his musical accomplishments he became a fair violinist. Wishing to escape the sordid commercial environment that threatened to kill the artist within him, he had a bad quarter-of-an-hour with his father, and looking around for a new start he was attracted by the singular idea of emigrating to Florida in order to establish himself as an orange planter. Oranges after they are planted take care of themselves to a large extent, and so there was the prospect of much leisure in which to pursue musical study and composition, although there was practically no music to be heard. Hundreds of sheets of music were covered with notes, but the young composer was wise enough to destroy these early efforts. His self-criticism has always been severe. After a few years in these surroundings his soul yearned for contact with music and musicians, and abandoning his oranges he entered the Leipsic Conservatoire. Here he met Grieg, and he studied under Jadassohn and Reinecke, but considered that he learnt little or nothing that was of value to him; yet on the other hand he heard a great deal of music. Practically he is a self-taught composer.

Since 1888 Delius has resided in France, either at Paris or in the small village Grez-sur-Marne. On the Continent his music is frequently performed. It is noteworthy that he has had to have the English words to which he has set music translated into German in order to get a hearing.

It is gratifying to hear from Delius that he is convinced that there is more creative talent in

England than there is in Germany. He believes that the turning-point of music in this country is approaching. Although resident in France, he seldom hears any French music. He prefers to stay at home, and quietly develop his own musical inspirations. He tells us that he composes slowly, and does not allow any compositions to go out into the world until he is satisfied that they fully express his conception. Every chord written is meant. He has no theory of chord treatment, but just writes what fits his feeling.

Delius does not conduct. Very wisely he is content to leave this business to the experts. In discussing choral and orchestral balance, he agrees with us that the matter calls for more scientific treatment than it obtains at present, when all the members of a huge festival choir are allowed to sing throughout a work. If fifty voices sang here, 200 there, and 400 elsewhere, there would be many possibilities of tonal effect not at present realised.

At present he is residing near London, having been driven from France, and he will probably remain in this country until the conclusion of the War. It seems that during this unhappy period he, in common with many other composers who are not alien enemies, will enjoy the consolation of finding their music much more frequently performed here than otherwise it might have been.

Below we give an appreciation of Delius's compositions contributed by Mr. Philip Heseltine, who is an enthusiastic admirer of the composer.

SOME NOTES ON DELIUS AND HIS MUSIC.

BY PHILIP HESELTINE.

Delius's position in the musical world of to-day is one of curious isolation; he has ever held aloof from the great public, and it is scarcely surprising that he is regarded with a certain bewilderment, as a mysterious, enigmatic, albeit,—as many are certainly beginning to realise,—a very arresting, figure. The details of his life are shrouded in a certain amount of obscurity, which the programme-annotators, with their inevitable catalogue of the places where he has resided, and nothing more, have not conspicuously helped to clear away. The somewhat elusive problem of his nationality has given needless trouble to many, and recently the superstition that he is really a German was made use of in a particularly disgraceful manner by intriguing parties, in order to defer a certain public recognition of his genius that has long been overdue. From the purely musical point of view, however, nationality is not a factor that counts for anything in the case of Delius. Indeed, he himself never vaunts his English origin, preferring to be considered a pure cosmopolitan, 'a good European' as Nietzsche would have called him. Nevertheless, vagueness of nationality is a source of great mystification to many; and, from the point of view of the public, there are many other puzzling things about the composer in question. He is fifty years old, says the public, yet he holds no official position in the

musical life of the country; he does not teach in any of the academies, he is not even an honorary professor or doctor of music. He never gives concerts or makes propaganda for his music; he never conducts an orchestra, or plays an instrument in public (even Berlioz played the tambourine!).

A composer who cares for none of these things is indeed a strange phenomenon. The explanation, however, is not very far to seek, and incidentally it strikes the key-note of Delius's personality and of his whole art. Delius is one of those very rare persons who, possessing a remarkable individuality, are permitted by the circumstances of their lives to develop it and to exploit it to the fullest extent, unfettered by any external considerations. And further, he is one of the still smaller number who have taken the fullest advantage of this concession of fate, and have lived long enough to nurse their genius to complete maturity. He is emphatically not one of those who believe the artist to be the 'servant of the public.' Preposterous and degrading as such a conception of art undoubtedly is, one is bound to face the sad truth that in music, as in the other arts, there are few who have not, for one reason or another, produced work which a servile attitude towards the grosser public can alone explain. In fact, Delius is the almost unique example of a composer who did not rush into print at an early age with an unworthy work, and who has never degraded his name by attaching it to a 'pot-boiler.' His first printed work was a set of five delightful, if slightly Grieg-like, little songs which Augener published in 1890. These were followed three years later by the far more individual Shelley Songs and the Seven songs from the Norwegian—amongst them being 'Abendstimmung,' one of the most perfect lyrics in existence. After this date, nothing was published till, fifteen years later, some of the large choral works began to appear, from the firm of Harmonie, Berlin.

One of the most striking features of Delius's music—even in the early and more or less immature works—is the almost complete absence of any other composer's influence. Even in the Shelley Songs and the 'Legend' for violin and orchestra there are foreshadowings of the intensely personal style of the later works, whilst in the second music drama, 'The magic fountain,' we find the composer experimenting with motifs and progressions that are actually the germs from which many passages in the most mature compositions have sprung. This work is remarkable in that the libretto—written in rhymed verse by the composer himself—shows markedly the influence of 'Tristan,' whereas the music is conceived on wholly non-Wagnerian lines. The drama is saturated with the romantic spirit, dealing as it does with the quest of the fountain of eternal youth, and the inevitable bungling on the part of the hero at the last moment, which leads to death and disaster and a second 'Liebestod.'

The work was accepted for performance by Edouard Lassen, at Weimar, in 1894. A pianoforte score was made by Florent Schmitt, and much of

the material was prepared; but the composer became dissatisfied with the work at the last moment, and withdrew it. The next work of importance was 'Koanga,' the picturesque and entirely original negro opera, founded on G. W. Cable's novel, 'The Grandissimes,' but the high-water mark of the early period was undoubtedly reached in the Pianoforte concerto, which dates from 1897. This is the most romantic—in the best sense of that much-abused word—of all the composer's works. It records no introspective subtleties, and reveals little of the reflective aloofness of the later works; it is just the direct and passionate expression of one who looks out on life as upon a wondrous spring morning, with all its presage of growth and strength and joy. There is no hint of tragedy, no trace of the possibility of failure. It is a song of triumph for something accomplished, for the fulfilment of a desire, the realisation of a dream. Its mood is one that Schumann was constantly striving after, but which the gloom of ill-health, combined with that vein of typically German seriousness of which he could never rid himself, prevented him from wholly attaining.

It is one of those works in which one feels the artist's tremendous sense of power, at the first realisation of his maturity: it could only have been written by one who has mastered life and made it his servant.

The two orchestral poems, 'Life's Dance' and 'Paris,' mark a period of transition in the composer's style and orchestral colour-scheme. There is a curious similarity in the design and conception of the two works. They are both full of an amazing vitality and exuberance, and the texture of both is more diffuse and complex than that of any of the later works. Through 'Life's Dance' there runs a sinister undercurrent of impending fatality; there is a feverish restlessness in the music which rises, at moments, to a white-heat of intensity. Indeed, there is one passage of a penetration and subtlety that even Delius himself has never excelled. It occurs when the headlong course of the dance is suddenly interrupted by an absolutely uncanny phrase for wood-wind and muted brass, which is twice re-echoed before the music dies away into silence; immediately following it is the most passionate utterance in the whole work. Its significance in the context is clear enough to anyone. It is one of the most vital moments in the whole of music, suggesting as it does one of those flashes of insight which leave one overawed and dazed—changed in the twinkling of an eye. It is as though the shadow of another world passed over one.

'Paris' is termed by the composer 'A Night-Piece.' The opening pages depict the awakening of the city at nightfall, and the close reflects the mood of those who return home from scenes of revelry in the pale morning twilight, to be lulled to sleep by the sounds of the wakening streets. This is the rough, subjective programme which determines its form; but the work must not be regarded as literal programme music.

Distinctions between subjective and objective are prone to be a little confusing when applied to music, seeing that all music—even the most admittedly pictorial and reproductive, is in the strict sense, necessarily subjective. But apart from the little call of the goatherd's pan-pipes, there is no portrayal of external things in this record of Paris; realism has no part in the work. The more superficial, materialistic aspect of *la vie Parisienne* has been adequately treated by Offenbach and Charpentier. For Delius, Paris is not merely a city of France, whose collective life is something to be studied objectively, from a place apart, much as an entomologist studies an ants' nest; it is rather a corner of his own soul. All the riotous gaiety and all the wonder and passion of these Parisian nights have been felt by the composer even more intensely than by the throng that surrounds him. In him alone are all these impressions stamped vividly and definitely enough to become articulate. The artist who would interpret the atmosphere, the spirit of any place or people, must necessarily attune himself to such a pitch of sensitiveness to his surroundings that these become an integral part of himself no less than he a part of them. Thus it is not in mere externals that the artist seeks his inspiration, but rather within himself, where all these fleeting things are reflected, and their essential qualities transmuted by his genius into the material of lasting beauty.

In this work we have an image of the night-moods of the city, together with much that is of a more purely personal nature, which—clear as are its broad outlines—each listener will interpret in terms of himself, even as the composer has given voice to the moods of a multitude in terms of his own moods. This subjective symbolization is indeed the most important element in the whole of Delius's music. It is even more pronounced in the succeeding work—the music-drama 'A Village Romeo and Juliet,' based upon Gottfried Keller's story of that name.

This is in many respects the most beautiful thing Delius has done; it shows an enormous advance in style upon all the previous works. Harmonically it is more concentrated, and a greater freedom and expressiveness is obtained by simpler and more direct means than heretofore. The significance of the work as a whole, however, was generally misunderstood when it was produced in London by Mr. Beecham in 1910.

The outline of the story is very simple. The love of a boy and a girl is marred by the quarrel of their respective fathers over a piece of land which separates their two properties, and which belongs by right to a bastard vagabond, the Black Fiddler, who cares nought for it. Fate dogs the footsteps of the two lovers in one way and another, till finally they resolve that life is impossible for them, and decide to end it together upon a note of ecstasy. It is an idyllic little story, with a flavour of remoteness, of unreality about it. Regarded literally as a series of incidents, there is nothing in it. Hence the almost universal

condemnation of the work by the London critics as 'undramatic.' There could be no more mistaken attitude towards this work than that which seeks to estimate its value by comparison with former standards of so-called 'opera.' Delius's aim was to produce an entirely new *kind* of music-drama: and in the task he set himself he has been entirely successful.

'A Village Romeo and Juliet' is a series of pictures (it is divided into 'pictures' and not 'acts' in the score) of delicate psychological studies of the life of the unhappy lovers. Each scene is a glimpse taken, as it were, directly from the continuity of their existence. There is no quickening of the action for dramatic purposes, no rearrangement of circumstances for the sake of a situation. It is only natural that the figures in the play should seem shadowy, and the whole action somewhat inconsistent and dream-like. It is not the figures that matter, but the emotions they portray to us: it is not *their* lives that are of the greatest significance, but *ours*. For in their little commonplace tragedy the whole gamut of the fundamental human emotions and passions is sounded. It may be that no two lovers have ever lived through the experiences of Sali and Vrenchen continuously; but there are very few who are not moved by some throbbing pang of intimate memory, at one point or another in the drama. The detail of the plot is unessential: the symbolism of the action is everything. What infinite suggestiveness there is in the mysterious figure of the Black Fiddler, who, bearing no one any ill-will, is the passive cause of so much disaster which he himself is powerless to avert! What a depth of understanding and sympathy is displayed in the portrayal of the ill-starred couple's relations with the different types of their fellow-beings—with their parents, with the Fiddler's little band of vagabonds, and with the mixed crowd of strangers at the Fair, which typifies the harsh, unfeeling multitude of the outside world.

The final entr'acte, 'The walk to the Paradise-Garden,' is an epitome of the whole dramatic situation: but it is something far greater besides, something far more universal. In it, the quintessence of all the tragic beauty of mortality, all the pathos of chance and change and destiny seems to be concentrated and poured forth in music of overwhelming, almost intolerable poignancy. Delius is always at his greatest when he is dealing with retrospects, and epitomizing the past—as witness the 'Songs of Sunset' and the close of 'Sea-Drift.' He has the reflective temperament which transfigures all its memories and creates of them works of far deeper and more universal emotional import than the circumstances which aroused them.

From the point of view of musical psychology, this work is only equalled by the very finest of the Wagnerian dramas. How long, one wonders, will its truly amazing qualities remain unrecognized?

The next dramatic work, 'Margot la Rouge,' needs little comment, inasmuch as it has never been published or performed. A pianoforte score, by

Ravel, has been lithographed but not given out. It is a swift one-act melodrama which deals with the attempted rescue of a girl from a Paris brothel by her former lover. This causes some trouble, as might be expected, and the curtain descends upon a pile of corpses. There could be no accusing this work of being 'undramatic'! It is, however, of little importance compared with the succession of large choral works which followed it.

'Appalachia' and 'Sea-Drift,' which date from 1902-3, are both fairly familiar in this country. The former is the outcome of Delius's sojourn in Florida, and takes the form of a set of variations upon an old nigger folk-song, which, curiously enough, bears a marked resemblance to the theme of the quartet in the last Act of 'Rigoletto.' It was sung to the composer by one of the negroes on his orange plantation; there were only two of them, but both appear to have been remarkably gifted. The one in question possessed, in addition to his extensive repertoire of folk-songs, the gift of second sight, developed to a very high pitch, while the other could accomplish the astounding feat of whistling in thirds!

'Appalachia' is the first example of the peculiar style of musical landscape painting that is so entirely Delius's own. It is a little difficult to say precisely what that quality is, in his tone-painting, that enables him to suggest with such extraordinary vividness the feeling and the atmosphere of the landscape he is portraying, together with the emotions aroused by contemplation of the landscape. His methods make interesting comparison with the modern emotional landscape *painting*—in the literal sense of the word, for in both cases the results aimed at are broadly the same, though they are approached by different paths. Thus the painter has to reproduce upon the canvas a semblance of the external features of the landscape in such a way that those who regard it sympathetically will instinctively feel the emotion and atmosphere of which those external features are but symbols. The musician, on the other hand, has to do without the graphic definiteness which gives the painter a basis to start upon; his music must suggest at once the inner and the outer aspects of the picture. The extreme difficulty of achieving this will be at once apparent. Composers of nearly every period have attempted it, but few have met with any success. Either their music has been too personal and subjective to justify any one title being affixed to it rather than any other, or else, as Debussy has so often done, they provide a tone-picture which is astonishingly vivid and suggestive, but emotionally barren. Delius has a searching eye which penetrates into the very soul of things, and which nothing, however subtle or however deep, can elude. Perhaps the explanation of his strange magic is to be found in a kind of animism; for there is nothing his nature-studies suggest so much as the fusion of the soul of things contemplated with perceptive and reflective human soul.

It is worthy of note that 'Appalachia' was not written until many years after the composer had

ceased to reside in Florida. The value of a long period of reminiscence, with all the inscrutable sub-conscious processes of mind it involves, cannot be too strongly insisted upon when one is dealing with the influence of external things upon creative work. 'Sea-Drift,' and 'Songs from Sunset' (a cycle of poems by Ernest Dowson) belong to a very different mood. They both sing of passion frustrated, and are instinct with all the strength and sorrowful beauty that resignation alone can bring. One would scarcely think it necessary to add that Whitman's poem—one of the loveliest he ever wrote—must not be interpreted quite literally, but for the fact that Delius has actually been praised by at least one misguided admirer for the amazing objectivity of mind which enables him to probe the mysteries of avian psychology and express the joys and sorrows of *two birds* with such exquisite delicacy!

The 'Mass of Life' and the recently completed and still unpublished 'Requiem,' although separated by an interval of ten years, may be taken together as the expression of the composer's more philosophical side. In them are summed up all his views upon the great problems of Life and Death. Delius's outlook is characteristically frank and fearless; he accepts with both hands all that Life has to offer, and is not afraid to look Death and annihilation calmly in the face. The 'Mass of Life' is a triumphant yea-saying to Life in all its manifestations. The 'Requiem' faces the prospect of eternal darkness with the quiet dignity and assurance that one finds in certain of the Old Testament writers, but seldom elsewhere. He who has drained Life's cup to the dregs, and has no wastage of days to regret, can afford to contemplate Death with equanimity. There is no negation, no hint of wastage about Delius; he is at least positive, if nothing else. Indeed, he might well adopt for his motto the superb lines of William Blake:

Abstinence sows sand all over
The ruddy limbs and flaming hair,
But desire gratified
Plants fruits of life and beauty there.

As regards the general characteristics of Delius's work, he is pre-eminently a harmonist. That is to say, his harmonic effects are obtained vertically, and not, as in the case of Strauss and Schönberg, and the later Sibelius, horizontally, by the interweaving of several contrapuntal threads. He does not, however, limit himself to any fixed scale or system, like Debussy and Scriabin; consequently he avoids monotony and mannerism alike, and gains considerably in freedom and range of expression. One cannot pin Delius down to a fixed harmonic scheme, although his harmonic idiom is quite unmistakably his own. The most one can say is that there is a certain harmonic aroma, as it were, which one can always recognize as emanating either from Delius himself or from one of his numerous English imitators—there is scarcely a single composer in this country who has escaped his influence. The richness of the texture of such works as 'On hearing the first

cuckoo in Spring' has never been equalled by non-contrapuntal means. But there is no surfeit of richness; in fact, a very curious and interesting habit of Delius is the way in which, at a great climax, he suddenly thins out his harmony to the barest outline and obtains an effect of great massiveness by very full scoring of a mere harmonic skeleton. This is particularly noticeable towards the end of 'Life's Dance,' the Pianoforte concerto, 'Brigg Fair,' and several other works.

When the principle of vertical harmonic writing is applied to the chorus, the effect is still more novel and remarkable. The finest examples of this are to be found in the wonderful part-song 'On Craig Ddu,' and in the wordless *a cappella* section in 'The Song of the High Hills,' which is probably one of the most difficult pieces of choral writing in existence.

In his treatment of voices—solo or chorus—with orchestra the composer's chief aim is to blend the tone-colour of voices and instruments in such a manner as to secure the greatest possible unity of effect. In 'The Song of the High Hills' this principle is undoubtedly carried to a stage far beyond anything hitherto attempted, and the first performance of the work, in May next, should prove of the highest interest to all who are concerned with the development of choral technique.

The 'Songs of Sunset' contain the most characteristic examples of Delius's writing for solo voices with orchestra. The voice is used simply as an orchestral instrument—with, of course, the same regard for its peculiarities and limitations as is accorded to the other instruments. It is not given undue prominence, but is merely a contributory factor to the general atmosphere of the music. It is a significant fact that Delius is one of the few composers whose rough, preliminary sketches are always made in full score—that is to say, he thinks in terms of his medium and tone-colour. As Mr. Ernest Newman has happily phrased it: 'The melody, harmony, and orchestration are one and indivisible. The ideas are not merely orchestrated; the orchestration, that is, is not merely the clothing of the ideas, but part of their very tissue.'

It is rather difficult, therefore, to see exactly what Mr. Clutsam means when he quotes a passage from 'Appalachia,' in the *Musical Times*, in *pianoforte score*, with no indications of the very subtle and telling way in which it is orchestrated, and proceeds to point out that it 'reveals the fact that Delius has the weakest technical ability of any strong composer living.' In the first case, what constitutes technical ability in these days? It certainly does not consist merely in the avoidance of consecutive fifths, and in correct behaviour in accordance with the laws laid down by theorists. If a composer succeeds in saying exactly what he wants to say, in the way he wants to say it, he has, one would presume, complete mastery over the technique of musical expression. And in the case of Delius, one never feels that his effect misses fire. One

may totally and absolutely fail to understand him—like the gentleman whom Paris reminded of 'the gay city depicted by a Scotch elder'; but that is another matter altogether. The great fact that must be realised is that every really individual composer must necessarily create his own new technique for the expression of his own new ideas. Any one composer's technique judged by the standard of any other's, is equally 'wrong'—or, as one might more truthfully say, 'different.'

Delius is probably the most interesting composer born in this country since Henry Purcell. His position in the musical world to-day can only be determined by individual taste and opinion. He is not a composer whose works achieve an instantaneous success and widespread popularity; but this is the best possible sign for the future. His reputation is growing, slowly but surely, with that section of the musical public who estimate sincerity and intensity of feeling in music more highly than sensationalism, and the evanescent qualities of the 'popular' composer. There is an elusiveness about much of his music which perhaps renders it, for those unaccustomed to his idiom, more difficult to grasp at a first hearing than work of a far greater technical complexity. There can be no superficial view of Delius's music: either one feels it in the very depths of one's being, or not at all. This may be a part of the reason why one so seldom hears a really first-rate performance of Delius's work, save under Mr. Beecham, to whose untiring enthusiasm in the cause of his great compatriot we in this country owe an immense debt of gratitude. How Delius came to be completely and entirely neglected here for eight years after his first epoch-making concert in 1899 is inexplicable. But there are many indications at the present day that he is coming to his own, in his native land, as he has already done in Germany. And I am sure that I am not alone in my sincere conviction that there is no composer in Europe to-day of greater significance than Frederick Delius, nor any other whose work seems more likely to outlast that of his contemporaries.

LIST OF COMPOSITIONS.

- Five Songs, 1888.
- Seven Songs, 1889.
- Three Songs by Shelley, 1890.
- 'Irmelin,' 1890. Lyric-Drama in three Acts.
- Légende, 1892. Violin solo and orchestra.
- 'Over the Hills and Far Away,' 1893. Fantasia-Overture.
- 'The Magic Fountain,' 1894. Lyric-Drama in three Acts.
- A Pianoforte concerto in C minor, 1897.
- 'Koanga,' 1896-1897. Lyric-Drama. Prologue, 3 Acts and an Epilogue.
- Incidental music to a political play, 'Folkeraadet,' by Gunnar Heiberg.
- Five Songs from the Danish, 1897.
- Two Symphonic poems: 'Life's Dance' (1898), and 'Paris: the Song of a Great City' (1899-1900), produced by Dr. Haym at Elberfeld in the latter year—first performance in London under Mr. Thomas Beecham, 1908.
- Two operas: 'A Village Romeo and Juliet.' Music-Drama after Gottfried Keller's novel of the same name, 1900-01, and 'Margot la Rouge,' Opera in one Act, spring, 1902. The first produced at the Berlin Komische Oper in 1907, in a German translation, and given in English at Covent Garden, February 22, 1910. The second has not yet been performed.

- '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 "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,