

Delius's New Opera

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for the alto of the final bars is also scarcely worth the trouble. After all, we must remember that a long shake was originally little more than a device intended to produce the effect of a sustained note on instruments of the clavessin type, whereon a real *sostenuto* was impossible. Its use on the organ is purely ornamental, and it rarely makes its full effect save when it stands out at the top.

The fugue calls for bright rather than loud registration, though the full organ may well be used at the end. As the writing is mostly thin and rather high on the keyboard we should be careful to use only the less aggressive of the 4-ft. stops, except in the passage preceding the C minor entry of the subject (where the harmony is in four parts with some low pedal notes), and in the closing bars. The last episode may be played on the Swell or Choir, preferably the former, the Choir sounding rather lifeless after the stirring C minor passage. The return to the Great for ending is a bit of a problem. Dr. Hull suggests this plan:

Ex. 8.

which is excellent in its bringing out of the imitation, but decidedly risky in execution. On the whole, there is much to be said in favour of staying comfortably on the Great, reducing it to 8-ft. diapasons, and beginning to build up the tone again half-way through the episode. We may increase to full without Great reeds in the bar before the pedal entry, because thereafter we have no spare limbs for registration purposes. Everything else may be added for the final bar and a half.

Editions vary as to the text of the sixth and seventh bars from the end. The Novello version of the left-hand part is:

Ex. 9.

The more usual reading is:

Ex. 10.

which is certainly more melodious, convenient, and logical.

(To be continued.)

DELIUS'S NEW OPERA

BY PHILIP HESELTINE

'Fennimore and Gerda,'* described on the title-page of the score as 'Two Episodes in the Life of Niels Lyhne, in Eleven Pictures, set to music by Frederick Delius,' was produced for the first time on any stage at Frankfort on October 21, 1919.

All the resources of the famous opera house were lavished upon the production. There were nine full orchestral rehearsals, and performers and public alike seem to have been enthusiastic in praise of the work.

A month later the composer came to London to supervise the revival at Covent Garden of his earlier opera, 'A Village Romeo and Juliet.' Arriving one week before the date fixed for the first performance, he found that no full rehearsals had yet taken place, and that such preparations as had been made for the production were in a state of chaos unilluminated by even the customary British assurance that 'everything would be all right on the night.' He was therefore obliged, in sheer self-defence, to forbid the performance: in consequence of which the public were given two additional opportunities of acquainting themselves with the master-works of Puccini.

These two episodes in the life of Frederick Delius throw an instructive light on the present condition of music in his native country. It is also significant that the gap in the repertory caused by the withdrawal of Delius's opera was filled by further performances of Puccini. For when 'A Village Romeo and Juliet' was first produced here in 1910, it fell rather flat, owing to what the critics were pleased to call 'lack of dramatic interest.' Now supposing one of the later plays of Maeterlinck were presented to the patrons of the Lyceum Theatre, with every conceivable scenic appurtenance and 'effect,' as a thrilling melodrama, they would no doubt pass a similar verdict, couched perhaps in not quite similar terms. So it is inevitable that if a work like 'A Village Romeo and Juliet' is presented as a realistic drama (a minor detail of the 1910 production was a *real merry-go-round on the stage!*), critics previously unacquainted with the work cannot be blamed for judging it by the 'dramatic' standards established for them by Puccini.

They have of late years grown so accustomed to regard an opera as a play set to music that their sense of what is fit and proper to the form is apt to be very sadly perturbed when they are confronted with a work which is simply the overflowing of music on to the stage, the projection of emotions underlying music into visible as well as audible reality.

Opera, it should be remembered, is a *musical* form. It is not a play with music, though many such are termed operas or, more accurately, music-dramas. Opera is simply programme music with the programme enacted upon an external stage instead of in the imagination merely: and the

* Vocal score (English and German words) in the Press. Universal Edition, Vienna.

scope of its programme may range from the crudest form of melodrama to the subtlest interplay of conflicting emotions.

When a composer is said to be inspired by his subject, it is too often supposed that the subject itself suggested the work to him in the first instance, that he is adumbrating his subject as though it were a thing exterior to himself. In the same way the music of an opera is thought to have been generated by its text.

In some cases this may be true: but in the majority, the subject or programme of a musical composition is no more than a convenient framework upon which the composer may construct and elaborate a work whose emotional or psychic basis was already clearly defined in his mind before he approached his 'subject.' This explains the common phenomenon of a composer who ardently desires to write an opera but cannot find a suitable libretto.

A symphonic work based upon a tale or drama is not an 'illustration' of its subject, tacked on to the finished product like 'incidental' music, but a new presentation, in terms of another art, of the elements of which the original tale or drama was made. Thus the music and the drama are parallel expressions of the same matter. The one is not engendered by the other: their relationship is rather that of brother and sister.

The old distinction between 'operatic' and 'symphonic' music has broken down as completely as the arbitrary differentiation of 'programme' music from 'abstract' or 'absolute' music, which, in a word, is simply *music*.

Yet all music is necessarily programme music, whether the events that make up the programme are enacted in the visible world or in the innermost recesses of the soul. And even when descriptions of physical phenomena loom large in the programme, these exterior happenings can only assume a musical importance in so far as they symbolise or evoke their corresponding states of mind. Music, in short, may be described as a formula for evoking a particular state of mind or a complexity of such states in a particular relation. These relations which can be generalized and expressed by music could not be even stated in words without the invention of a kind of psychological algebra.

We cannot state an emotional crisis in words, but we can sometimes provide an example of how a particular individual will behave under the stress of such emotion, his words and actions expressing *particularly* a condition which music would necessarily *generalize*, however strong the individuality of its composer might be.

Thus in an opera the plot or story may be just an example, a visible particularization of what the music is telling us in a broader and more universal sense.

The music is not illustrative of that particular story: on the contrary, the story is one among many other possible illustrations of the emotional basis of the music which has, after all, its origin in

the experience or imagination of the composer. And the listener, being an inverted composer, recognises its truth in correlation to his own experience or imagination. Each character in the story is merely a medium into which the composer projects part of himself and in which the appreciative spectator or listener recognises a part of himself also.

All opera of this kind is either parable or pure symbolism.

In Delius's 'A Village Romeo and Juliet,' although there is an ostensible story, it is impossible to regard the characters as the ordinary individuals of Gottfried Keller's novel. They have become symbolic types that move and have their being in a vision of human life, aloof and mysterious.

In 'Fennimore and Gerda' the characters are not in the least mysterious: they speak and act like ordinary human beings, and 'naturalness' is the keynote of the dialogue. Yet the form of the work has been wholly prescribed by musical considerations, and the libretto—which has been written by the composer himself—is everywhere subordinate to the requirements of the music.

Like 'A Village Romeo and Juliet,' the work is divided, not into acts and scenes but into 'pictures.' In neither opera is the story set forth with any of that narrative detail which has so often been the bane of the lyrical composer, but in both the imagination of the spectator is called into play as an active dramatis persona.

'Fennimore and Gerda' (which was composed between 1908 and 1910) is far more definite and compact in structure than 'A Village Romeo and Juliet,' which dates from 1900-01. Not only are the individual scenes more closely knit in the later opera, but there are greater firmness and coherence in the design of the whole work. Every 'picture' is musically self-subsistent, generally built round an initial theme or rhythmic figure, and the logical development and flow of the music are never interrupted for the sake of thrusting the words into prominence. Nor do comparatively trivial remarks in the dialogue, such as 'Have a cigar, old man,' call for or receive any musical commentary; they fall into their right and natural place in the dialogue by reason of the fact that they are never obtruded by the music. The whole work lasts only an hour and a half. After the second picture and after the ninth picture three years are supposed to elapse, the passage of time being marked by a short interval in performance. After the fourth picture there is a full close but no interval. Except for these breaks the music is continuous throughout, the pictures being connected by orchestral interludes, mostly so short that the antiquated machinery of theatres like Covent Garden could never deal with the changes of scene in the time allotted.

The longest picture (the 'Gerda' episode) occupies fourteen pages of the vocal score, the shortest four, there being eighty-one pages in all.

Without any prelude the curtain rises upon a room in the house of Consul Claudi. Fennimore,

his daughter, is working at her embroidery while her cousin, Niels Lyhne, sits at her feet. They are talking about their childhood. Fennimore is impatient at the monotony of her home life and longs to go out into the world in search of new experiences. Niels on the other hand is a dreamer who is well content to remain where he is. 'Your garden window where you sit and sew'—he exclaims—'I want no wider world than this. Out in the world one feels a longing for home, and perhaps one's real home is a kindred spirit whom one loves.' He is on the point of making a passionate declaration to Fennimore when they are interrupted by the appearance of their cousin Erik Regstrup, Niels's bosom friend, in whom Fennimore is obviously more interested than in the dreamy Niels. It begins to rain. Erik calls for a song, and Fennimore unlocks her heart with a romantic ballad:

Young Svanhild sat alone and sighed,
Of freedom and joy despairing.
'Over yonder's the land of my dreams,' she cried,
'And thither I would be faring.' . . .

The curtain descends and, after an entr'acte of twenty-nine bars, rises to reveal the lower end of the Claudi's garden which reaches down to the edge of the fjord. There is a little landing-stage overshadowed by trees, and here Erik and Fennimore are discovered together in a boat. It is night, and the sound of singing is heard from over the water:

A long sustained melody without words for a tenor voice sung 'off.'

Ex. 1.

Hearing the approach of a second boat, Erik and Fennimore disappear into the garden. The other boat arrives, rowed by Niels and containing Consul Claudi, his wife and a friend. They disembark and make for the house, while Niels remains behind to moor the boat. Meanwhile Erik and Fennimore re-appear and Niels quickly conceals himself in the shadow of the trees. A swift love scene ensues (twenty-eight bars in all), built upon two themes (Exx. 2 and 3):

which recur in modified forms throughout the 'Fennimore' episode. The lovers return to the house, and Niels is left alone in despair.

Three years pass. Erik and Fennimore, now married, are living in a house on the Mariagerfjord. Disappointment has come to both of them. Fennimore is disillusioned about her husband, who has taken to drink, Erik about his talent as a painter. He stares moodily at the sea. Fennimore reproaches him for not working any more at his art. He replies that he needs new impressions and new influences. Niels has been invited for a visit, and presently arrives. While Erik is helping the porter to carry in his luggage, Fennimore implores Niels to do all he can to pull Erik out of the slough of despond into which he has fallen. 'Day after day he broods his time away, and when the day is done his horrible friends take him off and keep him drinking all night long.' Erik returns, followed by a maid bearing bottles and glasses. Fennimore leaves the two men to themselves, and there is some semblance of gaiety as they light their cigars and drink to each other's health. The curtain falls, and there is an entr'acte of four bars. The next picture shows the same scene, but late in the evening. The two friends have been talking over old times. Erik speaks of the gradual falling away of all his bright illusions and hopes. 'At times a sense of despair comes over me. I sit and work and nothing comes of it—and time is gliding by with relentless haste. Whenever I paint a picture the time it has taken is mine for ever, although it's past and gone. But think of all the years I've lived and created nothing!' Niels advises him to travel, but this seems only to increase his anxiety. He regards travel as a last resort on which he is afraid to embark for fear of proving to himself once and for all that his career as an artist is at an end.

This is perhaps the most powerful and subtly wrought scene in the whole work. The next picture shows us Erik seated at his easel, morose and listless, unable to accomplish anything. Five of his boon companions, on their way to the fair at Aalborg, invite him to join them. At first he is unwilling. Then one of them—a broken-down schoolmaster—taunts him. 'I see you are much too busy with your immortal painting.' Warily he consents to go with them. Fennimore begs him to stay at home, but it is useless. 'I must have companionship.' 'But you have Niels: a better friend you'll never find.' 'Niels! He no longer understands me.' Fennimore watches him go, then bursts into tears. Niels comes in, and she composes herself. She asks him what Erik was like as a boy. He speaks of his friend with loyalty and enthusiasm: 'He was all that a boy should be, brave and handsome, a lad of impulse, alert and active, always given to wild pranks and mad adventures.' 'How strange, then,' says Fennimore,

'that he should have wanted to become an artist!' Niels bids her think of him as he was when she first fell in love with him. She replies wearily that she has too often brooded over that time. With a sudden impulse she stretches out her hands to Niels and begs him to stand by her in her trouble. 'You'll be my friend, Niels, always . . . ?' The curtain is lowered for a few bars, and the next picture reveals the same room in the grey twilight of the following morning. Fennimore has been waiting up for Erik, who presently comes in, reeling drunk, and collapses on a sofa. A brief interlude, curiously akin to the slow middle section of 'Brigg Fair,' ushers in the seventh picture: the birch forest in autumn. It is in this scene that Niels and Fennimore first admit the passion that has been slowly springing up between them, and against which each of them has silently struggled in vain. It is a scene of swift movement and a despairing kind of intensity, with something sinister and autumnal in the background all the while, to remind the lovers of the years that are gone and of the brevity and uncertainty of their stolen hours of happiness. The two concluding pictures of the 'Fennimore' episode take place in the depth of winter. The fjord is frozen and the ground is covered with snow. Niels is now living on the other side of the fjord. Erik has gone to Aalborg for the day with his friends, and Fennimore is impatiently awaiting a promised visit from Niels. There is a feeling of tense expectancy in the air. Suddenly the maid brings in a telegram. Erik is dead. He has met with an accident and they are bringing him home. Fennimore, in a frenzy of remorse, rushes out to meet Niels, curses him for betraying his friend and her, and bids him be gone for ever. Four dark figures approach, bearing the body of Erik, and Fennimore falls insensible in the snow. Three years pass. . . . The next picture affords the greatest possible contrast to the three swift scenes preceding it. All is quiet and reposeful. We see Niels on his farm at Lönborggaard in harvest time. The labourers are singing in the fields. Niels reflects upon the past, and finds consolation in having devoted his future to the 'Earth, old and trusty mother of us all.' The happy song of the labourers rounds off this very brief picture.

The last scene of all portrays Niels Lyhne's very sentimental wooing of Gerda Skinnerup, and is enlivened by the merry banter of Gerda's three younger sisters.

Those who are acquainted with Jacobsen's essentially tragic novel* will perhaps cavil at the suggestion conveyed by this ending of the opera that Niels 'lived happily ever after,' for the novel concludes with a powerful and heartrending description of Niels's death in a military hospital after he has been wounded in action.

But Delius's work, as has been emphasised above, is a purely musical conception, and is not designed

* The original title is 'Niels Lyhne,' but for some reason or other the English translation is called 'Siren Voices.'

in any way to illustrate or set forth in detail the life of Niels Lyhne.

The concentration and swiftness of the action and the passionate directness and intensity of the music combine to create a satisfactory sense of unity and cohesion that is all too rare in modern opera. And although this work is already more than ten years old, it is undoubtedly one of the most successful experiments in a new direction that the operatic stage has yet seen.

Interludes

BY 'FESTE'

Some recent happenings in the concert room invite comment. The Editor warns me that space is at a premium this month, so I must be brief. Perhaps I shall be most likely to get in all I want to say if I follow the example of Mr. Alfred Jingle. Those of you who are aged enough to be Pickwickians will remember that volatile individual's habit of covering a great deal of ground in a short time by omitting some of the less important parts of speech. This method will, I believe, be generally adopted at some future date. It will be a very real economy all round, and should appeal to us musicians especially, because in its elision of the unessential it will bring literature into line with modern music. There we are able to dispense with such details as preparation and resolution of discords, or the complete statement and repetition of themes (in the rare event of there being any), and we have no use for cadences except at the end. Sometimes we don't use them even there. We simply leave the musical thought suspended in mid-air, draw a double-bar, and start the manuscript on its adventures among the publishers. In this matter of cadence, literature is already abreast with music. We are now as economical of the full-stop as the modern composer is of its equivalent the cadence. At the head of this page, for example, you will see the title of the journal set forth without the full-stop that a few years ago would have been considered necessary. It is now taken for granted. In due season we shall often find prepositions, conjunctions, and articles omitted on the same principle. The saving of time, paper, and printer's ink will be enormous. We shall then see that Mr. Jingle was not a mere comic character, but a literary artist born a century too soon.

Interesting event of past month début of Philharmonic Choir. General chorus of praise—excellently trained, clear enunciation, confident attack, good tone, very. Rather short on the men's side—what choir isn't? Can hardly expect new choir show perfect balance, especially in times when conditions still far from normal. Even in 1913 choral societies did not spring full-armed from sea, like what's-his-name. Comic touch provided by critics who made astute comparisons between balance and volume of four-month-old Philharmonic baby and pre-war standard of long-