

Déodat de Séverac

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been done with popular operas for performance in concert rooms. In their original form it is doubtful if they will ever be performed. What hope is there for Mackenzie's 'Rose of Sharon' or 'Bethlehem,' Parry's 'Judith' or 'King Saul,' or Stanford's 'Eden'? Yet all these works contain splendid ideas. The task would be a delicate one, and should be undertaken by a musician who is intimate with public requirements. After he had done his task the approval of the composers should be sought. It is too much to ask the composers to mutilate their own children, for so they would regard the shortening process. Moreover, the discretion of the most self-sacrificing might well be doubted.

An editorial note pointed out that in the case of 'The Rose of Sharon' an abbreviated edition had already been prepared by the composer.

Sometimes we come across a fine orchestral work, modern, but already needing rescue. Such a one is Elgar's 'Carillon.' Are we never to hear it again now that the war is over? Surely it should not be difficult to adapt it for performance as a piece of pure music. It is one of the composer's best works, and it will be a grievous loss if he does not give us a revised version, with a 'victory' touch at the end. Those of us who heard it in the early days of the war, with all the added poignancy of the recitation, will never be able to dissociate it from black memories. But we should enjoy it as a brilliant piece of work—one of the finest, if not the finest, examples of a ground bass in all music.

Mention of a ground-bass reminds me of the composer who was in my mind when I began this article. Perhaps of all the older writers he calls out most for judicious salvage. He was an Englishman, and therefore has a first claim on us. As he needs a whole chapter to himself, I must reserve him for next month. I will merely add now that his name is Purcell.

FESTE.

DÉODAT DE SÉVERAC.

BY LEIGH HENRY.

In the programme of orchestral interludes to be performed between the ballets during the Diaghileff Russian season at the Alhambra is included the 'Fête des Vendanges' of Déodat de Séverac—a first performance in London, and an item of particular interest, in view of the unique position which the work of de Séverac as a whole occupies among contemporary compositions.

To define the general character of the music of this French composer, one can discover nothing more exact than the word 'pastoral.' The use of this title, however, is liable to convey a false impression of the nature of de Séverac's music. A superstructure of conventional associations has grown up about the term, so that to-day it has a generally-accepted meaning which implies an artificiality and sentimentality of matter and content which is, *de facto*, entirely foreign to the naïve essential significance of the word, and to the meaning intended by its use in the present instance.

The work of de Séverac is, above all, distinguished by its spontaneity of impulse and expression. With the hyperbolic extravagance of the English Elizabethan pastoral poets, or the studied postures of Marie Antoinette and the 18th century Court of Versailles, it has nothing in common: Phyllis, Corydon, Silvius, and Phœbe, and the sentimental stock-figures of the masques—with the product of the Dresden porcelain manufacturer, the moon-obsessed, languishing dames and gallants of Watteau, and the perverse courtizans of the 'Fêtes Galantes'—have no part in it. Vital and sincere, with the candour and absorption of a child, the music of de Séverac has no need of artificial stimulus. De Séverac has the clarity and finesse of the Latin intelligence, and these save him from the hallucinations born of emotional effusion and sentiment. Susceptible to the wonder of actual natural beauties, he has the developed sensibility to appreciate them individually, and to express them in his own terms.

Yet, while free from affectations, the music of de Séverac is scarcely likely to be popular in the ordinary sense; since it can only appeal to those who, like himself, have a sensibility acutely reactive to the beauties of landscapes or undulating green vistas, shimmering foliage, sunlight, shadow, and all the diversity of form and colour pertaining to natural life; a feeling for images and places, for the *genius loci* akin to that which has imprinted itself on the poems of Francis Jammes, Paul Fort, Guy Charles Cros, and the Verlaine of 'La Bonne Chanson.'

Nevertheless, the music of de Séverac betrays no intellectual pretension, no classicism in the traditional sense, though classical in the modern French meaning, in its purity of expression, its lack of emotional effusion, it certainly is. Hence, while M.-D. Calvocoressi designates de Séverac a writer of modern musical 'georgics,' and while the composer himself has sub-titled one of his works 'Poèmes georgiques pour piano,' I prefer to use the term 'pastoral' when treating of the poetic content of his music. Both words may be equally accurate or inaccurate; I select the one with the least implied intellectual bias. The term 'georgic' turns the mind inevitably to a definite type of classical expression, and tends to confuse, by associating therewith the characteristics and spirit of de Séverac's music. To my mind the word 'georgic' implies a definite style of poetic or artistic expression; the term 'pastoral' a type of feeling emanating from rural interests and atmospheres. De Séverac, far from being a deliberate perpetuator, or developer, of any given art-form, seems to be entirely free from mental bias, or purpose, beyond experience, and the most direct statement of the same. He takes no technical models, no emotional 'stock-types' (to use Whitman's phrase) in either his choice of subject-matter or in his treatment of poetic and musical themes. He inhales life, and lives himself into actuality; he 'lives up to' nothing. Probably, after the passage of years, he will be utilised by

the academic type of mind which lacks the sensibility to distinguish anything save in the generalised terms of such a stock-type, and will find himself labelled as 'the musical Theocritus,' or 'the Virgil of sound.' But the vital content of his work will still keep it living even when hung about with the parasitic growth of pedantic terminology, and critical analysis will eventually reveal the absurdity of such designations. For while common elements exist between de Séverac and the classical bucolic poets, there is a wide divergence between the emphatically physiological and actualistic mind of the former and the inherently ethical and idealistic mentality of the Greek and Græco-Roman periods. De Séverac is too personal in consciousness, is always in too intimate and direct contact with actual life, and his intelligence is too clear, direct, and positive for him to need to revert to any pantheistic fantasy or animism, to the abstract images of fauns, dryads, nymphs, and satyrs, in order to render his conceptions comprehensible. He is a modern, one in whom the multiplication of activity and forces resultant on generations of research and invention has bred a correspondingly multiple consciousness, which informs even his perception of that pastoral life which has undergone comparatively small change. Hence, when I speak of him as a pastoral poet it must be understood that I mean that he is one who deals with that contemporary development of pastoral life and its influences which some may prefer to call modern rural existence. In so doing, despite the introspective tendency which it evinces, his music shows no trace of that 'legacy of wild philosophy' of which Tyler speaks. De Séverac's clear sense of relativity and proportion is never obscured; his refined taste enables him to eliminate everything superfluous to the direct statement of his individual impressions and conceptions; he is the antithesis of Wagner. Although his music is full of his love of nature—the attraction exercised over him by open air and country, wide vistas, rural images and incidents, and all the wonders of immediate contact with the varied phenomena of changing days, nights, and seasons—his work bears no trace of pantheism or mysticism. His own sensations, his own consequent reactions of mood and thought—in short, his own experience, the sole demonstrable basis for all personal cognisance and truth—is the material of his art. It is music emanating from the operation of the rural aspects of modern life on a remarkably sentient nature, and therein lies its psychological interest for us to-day, since it affords illuminating testimony to the truth of Mach's affirmation, 'The dualism of the physical and the psychical (in psychological research) is both artificial and unnecessary.'

THE CONTENT OF DE SÉVERAC'S MUSIC.

The obvious manifestations of an impulse to break from the cul-de-sac of abstract ideas into which human consciousness has been side-tracked during past periods, and to re-enter the broad stretches of sensory life emanating from actuality, is a marked feature of all de Séverac's work, and

demonstrated his conceptual kinship to the evolved and vital art-tendencies of to-day. The closeness of this relationship becomes more markedly apparent in the subtle features of colour and form, and the consistent mental direction which a particularised survey of his music reveals. Although de Séverac covers ground traversed by many others, both poets and musicians, he enters his poetic territory from a new point, with a different sensibility, a different capacity for psychological reaction, with the more complex sensibility created by the complex forces of contemporary existence. Hence, in his work, the most familiar facts and features attain a new aspect which gives them fresh significance. He penetrates down to the psychological fundamentals of the pastoral spirit. Few composers are more informed of the subtleties of light, and of rare and rich atmospheres; none are more sensible of the exquisite imagery, the infinite suggestive influence of the varied colours and forms of landscape; none have translated such quantities with such penetrative exactitude into their tonal equivalents. Yet de Séverac is no mere musical transcriber of photographic effects, nor does he attempt to convey the psychological significance of rural scenes and surroundings by the crude, imitative, 'realistic' devices employed in works such as Beethoven's 'Pastoral Symphony,' or that later chronicle of pretentious sentimentality, Strauss's 'Alpine Symphony.' He has more than the vulgar curiosity of the tourist; his interest goes beyond petty features and romantic landmarks. In the rich, multiple, and subtly-graded and contrasted tonal colour of his musical scene-impressions one discerns the operation of a sensibility keenly alive to all the delicately inter-operative factors producing such impressions, but his clear sense of proportion saves him from over-emphasis or exaggeration. His musical presentation has the acute, synthetic vision of Cézanne's broad colour-planes, and, like the painter, he has a faculty for eliminating all save essentials. Keenly objective in his vision of actuality, de Séverac is conscious of the reactive effect on his own being of the scenes among which he moves. But no matter how intimate and personal the mood which may grow up in the statement of his impressions, the presence of the actual physical factors producing the impression is always palpably evident in the warm vibrant tonal colour, the delicate, shifting tissues of harmony and theme, and the subtle rhythmic nuances of the music. Above all, there is no trace of sentimentality, no *nostalgie des paysages*. His exuberant temperament renders all his music joyous in the truest sense; he moves happily, like a child, in the wonderland of his sensations and impressions. Particularly is he a creature of the sunlight. The greater part of his work is immersed in radiance—sometimes passively, as an animal basks in the sun, but oftener actively, with an eager intensity which rarefies and spiritualises the music, giving it at times a texture so ethereal that, using Mockel's description of van Lerberghe's poem, it hovers

about one's senses 'comme une poussière d'or suspendue.'

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF DE SÉVERAC'S MUSICAL STYLE.

Although, like Albert Roussel, educated in the midst of French musical classicism, being a pupil of Vincent d'Indy, principal of the Schola Cantorum, the citadel of philosophical, systematised musical formalism in France, de Séverac has survived and transcended his tutelage. The musical tendencies of de Séverac are in a direction ultimately the antithesis of that taken by his master. While d'Indy is a consistent formalist, de Séverac, in all save two of his works, approaches near to the Impressionists in the fluid, malleable conception of form which distinguishes his writing. Yet de Séverac is no mere follower of a cult or movement: he has remained unsubordinated to the influence of even so fascinating a personality as Debussy. Investigation of his music convinces one that the medium which he has selected, notwithstanding its close affinity to that of the Impressionists, is the result of a real choice, not of external influence—a choice inevitable for one to whom content takes precedence of external form. The very subtlety and elusiveness of the atmospheric conditions playing so great a part in the conception of de Séverac's work naturally calls for a free treatment of tonal colour, for the successive juxtaposition of unresolved dissonances, and the restless shifting of tonalities which one notes in some of de Séverac's music, and which gives his work a certain resemblance to that of the Impressionist group. But an important point of difference between the two styles is discernible in the method by which such quantities are utilised in each. While Debussy and the Debussyites have elaborated certain features, such as the whole-tone scale, to the extent of a mannerism, and while they reiterate and revolve monotonically about a single musical phrase or motive until it is so charged with subjective feeling as occasionally to verge on sentimentality, de Séverac treats his material more objectively, arranging his tonal effects not monodically, but kaleidoscopically, so that each component operates both independently and interactively, rather than being dominated by a pervading phrase-device. In brief, de Séverac, though not so radical or consistent as Stravinsky, evinces an impulse in a similar direction as that so sanely and brilliantly taken by the Russian, namely, towards a freedom from any pre-fixed system of writing, and towards the development of a purely personal style. Otherwise the two have little in common, either conceptually or technically.

THE WORKS OF DE SÉVERAC.

In the matter of his compositions, *i.e.*, the poetic conceptions forming the basis of the music, de Séverac is consistently and specifically pastoral. He has a particular habit of writing in cyclic forms, that is, in grouping sets of pieces together

in such way that, while each has its own individual entity and interest, the group as a whole, as also in the sequence of its various successive portions, embodies some general conception in varied aspects.

This method of presentation is apparent in the set, 'Cerdana: Études pittoresques pour piano,' where each number, complete in itself, serves, when taken in conjunction with its fellows, to present a general survey of the impressions and emotions pertaining to a certain type of locality. It is also interesting in that it conveys a curious sense of personal narrative, which, from the first number, 'En Tartane,' with its intimate undercurrent of exhilaration, through the second number, 'Les Fêtes,' permeated by vibrant harmonic colouring and strong rhythms, the pastoral revelry of the third number, 'Ménétriers et Glaneuses,' to the mere objectively veristic concluding number, 'Le Retour des Muletiers,' creates a series of moods more passive than active, a sense of participation akin to that of sympathetic and interested observation, through which an element of reactive emotion goes beyond the objective matter, and, despite the movement and *elan* of the music, brings about the feeling of a certain spiritual aloofness.

The cyclic combination is even more apparent in 'Le Chant de la Terre: Poèmes georgiques pour piano,' to which I have already referred, where de Séverac treats a poetic conception of wider dimensions than those usually embodied in his works. The component numbers (Prologue; 1. 'Le Labour'; 2. 'Les Semailles'; 3. 'La Grête'; 4. 'Les Moissons'; Epilogue) form a condensed epic-cycle, in which the matter is arranged with a view to dramatic continuity with the intention of conveying one unified conception. Here de Séverac presents a remarkable series of *genre* studies as vivid, objective, and experienced as, and of kindred conceptual proportions to, the *vers libres* epic-poems of Verhaeren, 'Les Villages illusoirs' and 'Les Campagnes hallucinées,' but without the Belgian's subsidiary symbolic significances. Objective in treatment as in perception, the cycle presents, in a series of broad impressions, a particularised aspect of rural life. The whole work is a chant of energy, essentially modern in source and statement.

In the third of such cyclic groups, 'En Languedoc: Poèmes pour piano,' de Séverac deals with the impressions derived from the features of a particular locality, of a country not only teeming with elusive beauties of form and colour, or interesting in isolated features, but possessing, in its peculiar attributes, a marked general character of its own. This cycle presents the composer's impressions of Languedoc, the land of 'stirring hive-like working districts,' of which Alphonse Daudet writes, where, 'between the houses, narrow little gardens wander up the hill-side, tiny gardens of Southern climes, faded and burned up, arid and airless, full of cactus and aloes, of tall bottle-gourds, and of great sunflowers, turning their full-blown faces towards the West,

with the bent attitudes of corollas seeking the sun, and filling the atmosphere with the sickly odour of their ripening seed'; where the stony hills are 'crowned with old, deserted windmills, ancient purveyors of the towns, left standing on account of their long services, the skeletons of their sails standing out against the sky like gigantic, broken antennæ, their stones slowly loosened and scattered by the wind, the sun, and the stinging dust of the South.' Here, where the whole environment breeds intimate interests, and a meditative mood which rivals the quiet religious fervour of Brittany, and where the landscapes, despite their sun-devoured nature, have such subtlety of impression-variation and capacity for transformation that they, 'bare, sterile, grey like the dusty olive-trees, assume, in the many-coloured settings of their relentless sun, a gorgeous resplendence traversed by fairy-like shadows which seem the decomposition of a ray, the slow and gradual death of a rainbow,' de Séverac has moved with a great, gentle sympathy, opening his heart to its influence, apprehending its quiet, subtle nature as a living, rare thing. Here one has all the composer's most brilliant capacity for using vibrant, kaleidoscopic tonal-colour effects, as in the first and last numbers, 'Vers le Mas en Fête' and 'Le Jour de la Fête au Mas'; and here also one has his free atmosphere in the third number, 'À Cheval dans la Prairie,' his subjective delicacy, tenderness, and introspection in the other two numbers, 'Sur l'Étang le Soir,' where the mood is an expression of a physical state rather than of reflective thought, and 'Coin de Cimetière au Printemps,' perhaps the most intense and moving thing de Séverac has written, where the music is filled with a certain poignancy quite uneffusive in statement, the effect of a delicately poised contrast of the beauty of a southern Spring, of that warm life suffused in what Maurice de Guérin describes as the 'Larges et liberales effusions de lumière du ciel du Midi,' against the realisation of that perpetual sleep which the surroundings of the composer have evoked, something of a tenderness in which the maudlin and sentimental have no part, and which only the French term 'pitié' seems adequately to convey.

In addition to the above works, de Séverac's compositions include the 'Baigneuses ou Soleil,' a pianoforte work full of shimmering, harmonic imagery, and of a direct beauty of form and colour reminding one of that other remarkable study, so close to it in matter, the 'Bathers,' of Cezanne; 'Le Soldat de Plomb,' and other pieces for children; a 'Suite pour Orgue,' and a number of very sensitively-written songs ('Le Chevrier,' 'Les Cors,' 'Chanson de Blaisine,' 'L'Eveil des Pâques,' and 'Infidèle'), almost all written to texts of a purely pastoral nature. As well as these works, de Séverac has written an opera, 'La Cœur du Moulin,' in which all the deep sense of rustic life informing his songs and pianoforte works finds broader and more sustained expression, and which, by reason of the human element of the action, exhibits much of his penetration in direct

psychological delineation. As an operatic work it stands almost alone in the field of its expression, unless one except perhaps the 'Village Romeo and Juliet' of Delius. The whole work leaves one with a sense of intimate understanding and a clarity of vision and statement akin to that found in literature in Flaubert's 'Story of a simple heart.' Through it, however, runs persistently that bright imagery, that sense of open spaces and free air, of natural colours and forms, and, above all, that quality of light and atmosphere which always preserve a contact with actuality, and which have made de Séverac's music a powerful factor, both metaphorically and actually, in bringing modern French musical art to 'a place in the sun.'

BIRMINGHAM AND MUSIC.

BY SYDNEY GREW.

The new plans for Birmingham music are thorough, fairly comprehensive, well based financially, recognised and supported municipally, and controlled by a representative body of citizens and local musicians. They are likely to prove successful, ideas and influences which in the past ten or fifteen years have led to failure not having any longer a free hand. The new scheme is however only fairly comprehensive, not fully; and to be assured of complete and final success it should be widened as I suggest below.

A symphony orchestra of about seventy players is being established on permanent lines, with a regular training master. Twelve symphony concerts are to be given on alternate Wednesdays and about thirty Sunday orchestral concerts (these last in the new Futurist Theatre, I understand, which seats several thousand people). Light concerts, blended possibly with dancing, may be given on Wednesdays intervening between the symphony concerts. Arrangements will be made to provide Saturday concerts on all evenings when local choral Societies are not giving concerts, the desire being to use the Permanent Orchestra at least three times a week through the normal musical season. Orchestral concerts are to be given to school children on Saturday mornings. It is hoped that if the Theatre Royal Promenade Concerts are resumed, the Orchestra will be the band to play, and that the Orchestra may be engaged for all local concerts and concerts generally in the Midlands; also that eventually it may be engaged for the Beecham Opera performances. With the development of Parks music, a full twelve months' work may be found for the Orchestra, which will include the best available local performers.

A grand committee of guarantors and others interested is to be formed. From this will be elected an executive committee comprising five private guarantors, five members of the City Council, three members of the local music trade, four resident musicians (official or private), one member of the Permanent Orchestra, and one representative of the Musicians' Trade Union. From the executive committee will be formed various sub-committees as required.

The municipal yearly grant amounts to £1,250. Private guarantors at the moment number about twenty persons. Every local music firm is a guarantor, the sums guaranteed amounting to £1,660. The guarantors bind themselves to continue for five years; the municipal grant, however, is permanent. Among the guarantors are certain of the Birmingham newspaper proprietors.