

Widor Recitals

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## ORGANISTS OF ST. OLAVE'S, SOUTHWARK

SIR,—In his interesting article on 'The Organs and Organists of St. Olave's, Southwark,' Mr. Freeman omits two names, which are thought worthy of a place in Grove. John James was organist there early in the 18th century, and appears to have been the first organist in the new church. J. J. Harris was organist early in the 19th century, and during his tenure of the office published a selection of psalm and hymn tunes used at St. Olave's. He was afterwards organist of Blackburn Parish Church and of Manchester Cathedral, where he preceded Sir Frederick Bridge.—Yours, &c., J. ALBERT SOWERBUTTS.

4, Edgar Road,  
Winchester.

August 10, 1921.

## MODERN MUSIC

SIR,—Mr. Elkin says: 'All great composers are to some extent innovators.' This cloak, though threadbare, still covers a multitude of errors, doesn't it? Every goose is a swan, and every experiment a work of genius.

Like Mr. Pitcher, I am not a reactionary, but I have my convictions, and am not to be led by the nose by every opportunist and crank who arises. But in order to show what my aims are, permit me to throw off a few parabes taken from motoring.

Modern music is a car which is travelling too fast down hill. I am trying to apply the brakes, not necessarily to stop the car.

Another: Years ago, being inexperienced, I was cheated over an automobile. Now I have learnt about cars, and it would require a clever salesman to cheat me. The public is now in my then inexperienced condition. The salesman is the critic or composer who has his own axe to grind. I, and countless others, mostly voiceless, are in the position of more or less expert advisers.

If we were to draw a graph of the progress of music from Bach onwards, we should find that of late years the curve would not only be unsteady, but would even be taking a hairpin bend. And, to pursue our parable, hairpin bends are dangerous.

Miss Doris Brookes, in her letter, refers to my criticisms as sweeping, but in order to obtain the correct tension in a tight elastic, surely it has to be overstretched. However, she makes one remark with which I agree, namely, that there are men now who are writing music both from the heart and from the head. But (and here's the rub) they do not get a hearing. It is the empty pots which make the most noise.

But let us be patient, and remember the story of the emperor's new suit of clothes. The ultra-modern critics and composers think they are in the van. But one of these fine mornings they will wake up and find themselves in the cart.—Yours, &c.,

C. À BECKET WILLIAMS.

## A RARE INSTRUMENT

SIR,—A lady friend of mine possesses a musical instrument which is, I think, a very uncommon one—at least in England, as none of my musical acquaintances to whom I have described it has ever either seen or heard of one before. It is called a 'Nagel-Geige,' or nail violin, and it is in a perfect state of preservation. There is a specimen in South Kensington Museum, and my friend, who wishes to know what value to place upon hers, inquired from the authorities, but unfortunately they were unable to state even what their own instrument might be worth. From a commercial point of view I do not suppose it is very important, but to a collector, either of rare musical instruments or curios in general, it may be of considerable value. I should be very grateful for any information upon the subject that either you or any of your readers may be able to give me, more especially as to its value, with a view, among other considerations, to its adequate insurance.—Yours, &c.,

6, Dunster Avenue,  
Rochdale.

WALTER HASKELL.

August 14, 1921.

## A VILLAGE PERFORMANCE OF MILTON'S 'COMUS'

SIR,—It may be of interest to some of your readers to hear of the production of Milton's 'Masque of Comus' (with Henry Lawes' original music) at Little Gaddesden on July 30 last.

The new Little Gaddesden Competitive Musical Festival held on April 23 of this year had stirred the village to great enthusiasm for choral singing and for music generally, and the idea of producing 'Comus' was immensely popular.

The choir and crowd were entirely recruited from Little Gaddesden, and some of the principal actors and the orchestra were also found in the neighbourhood. In Mr. Paul Edmonds, the composer, we found an excellent conductor, and it was very largely owing to his skill and tact (this last not a minor quality in a stage manager) that the production was so successful.

The arrangement of the music followed was, in the main, that of Sir Frederick Bridge. Three folk-dances from Mr. Cecil Sharp's collection were introduced, and the incidental music included a 'Miniature' Suite of Mr. Paul Edmonds' composition, and contemporary music by Giles Farnaby and William Lawes.

Two performances (afternoon and evening) were given on July 30, and we were lucky in having perfect weather throughout the day.

We were extraordinarily fortunate in our cast, selection being no easy matter, since many of the performers are required to sing as well as to act and declaim blank verse. In Miss Elizabeth Mitchell-Innes we had an ideal Attendant Spirit, and her charming singing and speaking voice were a delight to all who heard her. Others particularly worthy of praise were Miss Christabel Liddell as the Lady and Mr. Granville Ram as Comus. As the former Miss Liddell had an especially trying task, but she made the part completely convincing. Comus showed plenty of wickedness and wizardry, and was well-supported by a group of ugly-headed and riotous monsters.

I do not think that 'Comus' has often been produced by a village, and the keenness and interest shown by the villagers themselves have been a revelation to outsiders. The audience, too, appeared much delighted, and one is glad to find that Milton is not without honour in his own country. Milton's birthplace, Chalfont St. Giles, is not far from here, and of added local interest is the fact that the Masque was originally produced for Milton and Lawes' patrons, the Bridgewater, who at one time owned the seat of Ashridge, hard by Little Gaddesden.—Yours, &c.,

Berkhamsted, August 6, 1921.

SPECTATOR.

## BRITISH MUSIC AT THE 'PROMS.'

SIR,—It would be very unsporting of me if after my letter in your August number I did not admit that the programmes for the present Promenade Concerts show an almost astonishing improvement. They are still thoroughly badly arranged in many respects, but there is no doubt that they are far more up-to-date than they have been for a long time. It really does one's soul good to see Elgar gradually coming into his own, and very nearly beating Tchaikovsky in the number of performances allotted to him. Unfortunately neither of his two Symphonies are to be played, though we are to have two very welcome performances of his 'Falstaff,' which many of us have not heard for years. May the time soon come when ten performances of an Elgar symphony will be given to crowded seat-payers for every one of a Tchaikovsky to paper dead-heads! As you see, I remain incurably optimistic.—Yours, &c.,

14, Craven Hill, W. 2.

ROBERT LORENZ.

August 5, 1921.

## WIDOR RECITALS

SIR,—May I ask how it is so few of our great organists seem to play Widor's Symphonies? Beyond the fifth and one or two movements of Nos. 2 and 4 one never hears them. Surely our recital organists whose business it is to play big masterpieces might play the whole ten from time to time. Is it not possible in London to have Widor recitals after the style of the Bach recitals at St. Anne's, Soho?—Yours, &c.,

A. M. GIFFORD.

Hunstanton.