

Robert Fairfax

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BRITISH MUSIC AT ZÜRICH

SIR,—I wish to write about the concert of British music recently given at Zürich under Sir Henry Wood in connection with the International Musical Festival, particulars of which have only just reached me. It is rather late in the day to call 'Fire!' but that feeble expostulation corresponds rather well with the almost sickening sense of futility which is apt to overcome those interested in British musical welfare at this further instance of downright pitiful mismanagement.

I have heard hard things said about British music as it existed or did not exist during the last century; but I doubt whether it has ever encountered a blacker day than the one on which an alleged concert of British music had to be foisted up at one end by the 'Oberon' Overture and propped up at the other—this the crowning insult—by Tchaikovsky's—*Tchaikovsky's*, mark you—'Francesca da Rimini' farrago. Art and the propagation of art is, or should be, a national matter, and as a respectable tax-payer, rate-payer, and everything-else-payer of this enlightened country, I demand firstly to know which gentleman or gentlemen may be held responsible for thus insulting our composers, and secondly that he or they should give a public explanation of their conduct. It is hardly good manners on my part to ask you, Sir, to put your journal at the disposal of the man or the men I am seeking, but bad manners are preferable to bad management, and I would suggest that you carry out a searching inquiry into this and other malignant growths that are stifling musical progress in this country. Perhaps amongst other things you might appoint a small sub-commission consisting of myself and a hefty truncheon to inquire into the responsibility for inserting Carpenter's essay in *Baby Perambulation* into a concert recently given by the British Musical Congress, this being another striking instance of the mulish kicks we have to expect from those who organize concerts in this country.

To return to the Zürich fiasco: even apart from the insults I have mentioned the concert was full of unsatisfactory features. If apparently there was only one concert available I am inclined to uphold the choice of Elgar's 'Enigma' Variations in preference to one of his Symphonies, though I must qualify this by saying that I quite fail to see how any foreigner can hope to form the faintest conception of the present state of British music without hearing one of these masterpieces. I must strongly condemn the inclusion of the Purcell Suite for strings as being entirely unnecessary, as unnecessary in fact as the Prelude to the third Act of 'Lohengrin' would be in a concert devoted to contemporary German music. Purcell needs no pushing at this time of day, whereas our present foremost composers most decidedly do. Nor can I altogether commend the choice of the Butterworth Rhapsody, as it is far too intimate for a concert of this kind, which ought to have been limited to works that were not so English in their appeal as to be almost unintelligible to foreign audiences in general and a Swiss audience in particular. But where was Delius, where Holst? The 'Song of the High Hills' would have been ideal for this occasion, and the 'Hymn of Jesus,' even if it had not been thoroughly appreciated, could hardly have failed to make a deep impression. It must be remembered that there were choral works in the other programmes, and I don't think that the various choral bodies which united for this festival would have found the study of these two works insuperable.

I hate to go back to the subject of the opening and closing items, and shall not discuss the latter at all, but it seems to me that the choice of an opening number suitable for a concert of this kind was entirely limited to the 'Cockaigne' Overture (perhaps best of all), 'In the South' (a neglected masterpiece), and either the first or fourth 'Pomp and Circumstance' Marches, which literally teem with originality in the best sense of the word, and spring from a purely British mentality.

However, constructive suggestions are held to be better than destructive criticism, so I suggest that the following programme would be eminently suitable for the next concert of this kind, whether it be held at Zürich or in Zululand:

Overture...	...	'Martha'	...	...	Flotow
Selection...	...	'The Merry Wives of Windsor'	...	...	Nicolai
Symphony	...	'The Scotch'	...	...	Mendelssohn
Mad Scene	...	'Lucia'	...	...	Donizetti
Overture...	...	'Britannia'	...	...	Wagner

A word of warning in conclusion. I have written very bluntly, but I have not, in my opinion, exaggerated. There are many others who entirely share my views but who are too well bred to state them in the manner I have done. We are not going to put up with this sort of thing very much longer. What support is given to concerts in this country comes chiefly from enthusiastic music-lovers like myself, but they and I are gradually coming to the end of our tether, and the 3s. we have so patiently paid in the past to listen to badly arranged concerts will soon be used for other and better purposes. Another Promenade season is upon us. Will Sir Henry Wood, who for some unaccountable reason allowed his reputation to be associated with that unspeakable Zürich concert, atone while there is yet time to atone, and usher in a new era of orchestral concerts in this country? Put in a nutshell, let those of us who really care for the cause of British music vow that we won't attend any concert or series of concerts which includes Suppé's 'Poet and Peasant' Overture to the neglect of the second 'Pomp and Circumstance' March. Then, at least, we shall be helping to extricate British music from the Soup.—Yours, &c.,

Westward Ho! Hotel,
Westcliffe-on-Sea.
July 14, 1921.

ROBERT LORENZ.

ROBERT FAIRFAX

SIR,—October 24, 1921, is the four-hundredth anniversary of the death of Dr. Robert Fairfax, organist of St. Albans Abbey before the Dissolution, and probably the greatest English musician before Tallis.

It is felt that the anniversary might well be observed by the restoration and re-dedication of the memorial brass in the Presbytery, which was destroyed probably during the 17th century. A drawing of the brass made in 1643 still exists, and the cost of restoration would be about £50, exclusive of incidental expenses.

If more money were received, the balance would be devoted to completing the transcript, already begun by Mr. Royle Shore, of the Fairfax music in Lambeth Palace.

Fairfax, in his generation, did great service for music, and in the hope that this attempt to revive and perpetuate his memory may appeal to some of your readers, I ask you to publish this letter in your next issue.

Contributions may be sent to E. N. Wix, Holywell House, St. Albans.—Yours, &c.,

G. W. BLENKIN
St. Albans, July, 1921. (Dean and Rector of St. Albans).

MODERN MUSIC

SIR,—May I add a small contribution to your correspondence on the merits of modern music? Not long ago I was discussing the subject with a distinguished ecclesiastic, himself no mean musician, who summed up his opinions thus: 'The greater part of it is not sweet enough for keeping purposes.' My negligence would be inexcusable, were I to leave such a delightful *bon mot* unrecorded.—Yours, &c.,

24, St. George's Square, S.W. 1. EDWARD WYATT.
July 18, 1921.

WANTED—A MUSICAL CLUB

SIR,—I am very anxious to find a musical club in London. I do not mean the ordinary club, where chamber music is eternally played, but a club where the members each contribute at times, singing, violin, violoncello, piano-forte, glees, and, of course, trios and quartets. It should have a social side, that is to say, the members, as such, could speak to each other without introductions (but this, perhaps, is too much to expect from Mrs. Grundy!). I cannot believe that in this, the largest city in the world, there is not *one* such club. There must be thousands like myself who don't meet musical people, but who always want to do so. Can you or any of your readers help me?—Yours, &c.,

Hampstead, N.W. 3. 'CLIFTONIA.'
July 3, 1921.