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Review

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A Sea Song. For a Soprano or Tenor Voice. Words by W. C. Bennett. Music by W. Howell Allchin.

WE do not particularly like the progression of harmony which forms the introductory symphony to this song, but when the voice and accompaniment fairly start in A minor, the phrases are exceedingly dramatic. The theme in the tonic major, too, is extremely melodious and sympathetic with the words. We think that, had the composer been less learned in his harmonies, his music would have been more effective, for his continual chromatic and enharmonic changes will distress both the vocalist and accompanist. Take, for example, the skip from the harmony of B minor to that of C major, in the last bar but one on the 5th page, and then the progression which is produced by the enharmonic alteration of the C natural to B sharp, and the effect is most unsatisfactory—in fact, when we are eventually landed in C sharp minor it becomes a relief, remote as the key is; for “any port in a storm” is better than drifting about at sea. Mr. Allchin shows much musical feeling both in this and some other compositions which have come before us; but his harmonies are laboured, and we wish it to be understood that we object to many of them, not because they are *wrong*—for who shall arrogate to himself the power of pronouncing so decisive a verdict—but because we do not think that their effect is good.

BURNS AND OATES.

Cherubini: Memorials illustrative of his Life. By Edward Bellasis, Barrister-at-law.

THE catalogue of Cherubini's works, placed at the end of this volume, is a grave comment upon the state of the average musical knowledge in the present day. True it is that the compositions of this great master and profound thinker serve as a model for many of our most earnest students; but the general public—even those who profess to be exceptionally devoted to the art—know but comparatively few of the many immortal creations named in the list so ably compiled by the author of the work before us. And yet it may be truly said that never did a composer work more steadfastly and truthfully than Cherubini. Unmoved by the temporary successes of his rivals, he pursued his own course, with a veneration for his art which amounted almost to a religion; and that during his long career his intellectual power was ever steadily increasing may be evidenced by the fact of his having composed the second Requiem in D minor at seventy-six years of age. The task of collecting the many facts contained in the book under notice has evidently been a labour of love to Mr. Bellasis, and we sincerely hope that his efforts may be rewarded as they deserve to be. The date of Cherubini's birth, our author tells us, was the 14th of September, 1760, and it may be interesting to those who wish to recall the state of music at that time to be also informed that this was “one year and a half after Handel's death, when Mozart was a child of four years, and ten years before the birth of Beethoven.” When very young he began to compose, but we have been told that Halévy, who perused some of his juvenile works after Cherubini's death, pronounced that although everything he found announced the intelligent child, brought up in a good school, and reared on good precepts, there was nothing to indicate the genius which was afterwards to reveal itself. Luckily the young artist, who had mastered the organ and harpsichord under Castrucci, and was already pointed out as a prodigy, was proof to flattery, and resolved to travel through Italy for the purpose of becoming personally known to musicians, as well as to perfect himself in his art. Being the son of poor parents, it is not at all probable that this intention could have been carried out, had not Peter Leopold II., Grand-Duke of Tuscany, and afterwards Emperor of Austria, offered at his own expense to send him to Bologna, where he immediately placed himself under Sarti, whose valuable instruction, although somewhat pedantic, was no doubt highly beneficial to the youthful composer. His first Opera, “*Il Quinto Fabio*,” produced at Alessandria, was shortly followed by many others; and after visiting England, where he brought out two Operas, he took up his

residence in Paris, which was destined to be his future home, and where the brilliancy of his public career may be said to have commenced. The Revolution impeded his progress as a composer, for his connection had been with the aristocracy, and now they were flying in all directions, or mounting the scaffold. It is, indeed, related that the fact of his having studied the violin when a child was at this time the means of saving his life; for on one occasion having fallen into the hands of a band of *sansculottes*, who were seeking musicians to conduct their chants, Cherubini sternly refused to join them. The fatal cry, “The Royalist,” having been raised, a brother artist, who had also been kidnapped, seeing his friend's danger, thrust a violin into his unwilling hands and succeeded in persuading him to head the mob. “The whole day,” our author says, “these two musicians accompanied the hoarse and overpowering yells of that revolutionary assemblage, and when at last a halt was made in a public square, where a banquet took place, Cherubini and his friend had to mount some empty barrels and play till the feasting was over.” To recount only a few of the many triumphs achieved by Cherubini in the French capital would be here impossible; but we may say that Mr. Bellasis, who is evidently an enthusiastic admirer of this composer's music, not only gives us some able remarks of his own upon the works mentioned, but collects some highly interesting critiques by various writers contributed both to English and foreign journals. As we have already said, our knowledge either of the sacred or secular compositions of Cherubini is in this country extremely limited; and were they ever to be brought prominently into notice, as in the case of the resuscitation of Bach's works, we should be astonished to find that so rich a treasure had been so long allowed to remain uncared for. “*Medea*,” one of the grandest works ever composed for the lyric stage, has certainly been revived; but since 1870, when it was given at Covent Garden, it has ceased to be heard. “*Les Deux Journées*” was also presented to the aristocratic subscribers of the Drury Lane Opera in 1872—properly translated into Italian and with the dialogue set to recitative by Sir Michael Costa—but so little was it found to accord with the taste of the day that it was never repeated. Should the time ever arrive in this country when the frequenters of our Opera-houses shall be attracted by the music instead of the singers, or when those in authority at the musical festivals (now steadily increasing) shall select the finest, instead of the newest, specimens of sacred art, we may hope that Cherubini's works will be appreciated at their true value. Meanwhile it is good to be occasionally reminded that such noble compositions are waiting for a hearing; and we give a cordial welcome to the volume before us, not only on account of its intrinsic merit, but because we believe that it will have the effect of drawing public attention to the long neglected works of one who throughout his long life zealously upheld the highest interests of the art of which he was so bright an ornament. We have only to add that the book contains a portrait of the composer, with a fac-simile of his autograph; and that musical illustrations are freely used in the course of the many critical notices.

STANLEY LUCAS, WEBER AND CO.

Three Fairy Tales. Characteristic pieces for the Piano-forte.

No. 1, *Queen Mab.* No. 2, *The Gnome's Wedding.*

No. 3, *Undine.*

Composed by Oscar Beringer.

“CHARACTERISTIC Pieces” are dangerous compositions for any but experienced writers. Even Mendelssohn, as a rule, avoided giving titles to his smaller compositions, preferring that they should tell their own tale, or—failing to call up any definite idea—be accepted as abstract music. Mr. Beringer is more venturesome, and invites a two-fold criticism; for we have to consider not only whether he has written three good piano-forte pieces, but whether they fulfil the character suggested by their titles. No. 1 has a capital subject, the division of the opening passages between the two hands giving much lightness to the theme. The feeling, too, is well preserved where the change of key

takes place, the combination of the *legato* and *staccato* touches being extremely effective. No. 2, alternating between E minor and major, is eccentric, but the theme is bald and dry, and misses that humour at which the composer evidently aimed. No. 3 contains some clever points, the second subject, especially, being well written and melodious. We quite admit that in A minor, G sharp may be in the harmony and G natural in the melody, but we cannot like the opening phrase: it is harsh and ungainly to our ears. As for the "characteristic" quality of these compositions we are inclined to admit only No. 1 as a success. What No. 2 has to do with a "Gnome's Wedding," we cannot comprehend; and the first bar of No. 3, of which we have already spoken, is scarcely a melody which we should associate with the gentle and refined nature of "Undine."

The Merry Beggar's Song.

I sing because I love to sing.

Words from "The Afterglow," composed by Mrs. Mounsey-Bartholomew.

THESE two songs should command the attention of all vocalists who desire to produce their effects by legitimate means, for they are in no respect written down to the level of a commonplace audience. No. 1 especially, although having a highly characteristic melody, is so handled throughout with the skill of a practised musician that, unlike most songs of this class, it appeals rather to the cultivated than the uncultivated listener. The bold subject in A minor, contains some excellent modulations, one of which—into B flat major—is exceedingly telling, and the final phrases of each verse may be also mentioned as happily illustrative of the words. In No. 2 we have praise not only for the music, but for the careful manner in which the true accent of the words has been studied, a qualification in a composer which cannot be overpraised, seeing what an excellent example it sets to a singer. As an instance of this, we might cite the opening phrase, where the lengthening out of the word "sing" gives precisely the emphasis with which the whole line would be read, and this, as we have said, is observable throughout the song. Here again we have some most effective modulations, that into the tonic minor, on the words "It cheers the brightest day," being one of the most attractive. We sincerely trust that these clever songs may meet with the success they deserve.

WEEKES AND Co.

Te Deum. Composed by Nicholas Heins.

THIS is a setting for voices in unison with organ accompaniment, and, as such, it will be welcome to many a minister who wishes to promote singing among his congregation, and who righteously detests the form of the Chant, as totally inappropriate to the Canticles, and as becoming tedious through its monotonous repetition when applied to anything but the doxology and the daily psalms. As a composition, the present is a little weak in its frequent beginnings and endings in the same key of C; but it has points of interest—the charming transition from A minor into F, at the words, "O Lord, have mercy upon us," for instance, and the voice part is melodious and easy to sing. One high recommendation of this mode of treating the subject, is, that it may present a good declamation of the texts, and so help the people to feel the words while they sing them; but this, the composer seems to have over-looked, or he would not have come to a full close, which is equivalent to a full stop in punctuation, on the words, "The Holy Church doth acknowledge Thee," and so cut them from the conclusion of the sentence, without saying what the Church acknowledges. Let him and others who essay this class of writing, give careful consideration to such matters, and they may render signal service to congregational music.

ORIGINAL CORRESPONDENCE.

UNISON OR HARMONY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MUSICAL TIMES.

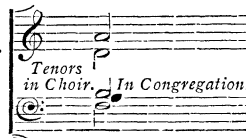
SIR,—Reviewing the recent writings on this interesting question, it appears that we have (as the statesman would say) "three courses" before us.

The musical conservative will exclaim, "None of your new-fangled notions. Sing as in the good old times. True, the double air is an evil, but let only the organist throw in plenty of double-diapason and pedal-pipes, then, out of the evil good must come."

"Not so," cries the advanced reformer. "Don't you see the disturbing elements? Part-singing must perforce be put out of church. We'll nought but unison."

Now, advocating a middle course between these extreme views, I readily admit the trite truth that the pedal (like charity) "covereth a multitude of sins;" but it must be borne in mind that not every church-organ is provided with pedals—not every organist everlastingly persists in pedalling—and not in all "places where they sing" are organs or other musical instruments to be met with. Moreover, few musicians will be persuaded that any reasonable reinforcement of the bass will convert into sweet concord the horrible dissonance their ears experience, when lusty-vocaged male worshippers in the congregation "heartily" vociferate the 6th of a key, against vigorous tenors giving vent in the choir to the 7th (see first tune, "Hymns

Ancient and Modern," 3rd line).



An occasional unison has, undoubtedly, a charm; but its constant use, week after week, year after year, unrelieved by a particle of vocal harmony would, I fear, prove extremely distasteful to many.

Driven to the conclusion then that part-singing in church is (to say the least) desirable, I cannot shut my eyes to the pressing demand for the revision of many tunes and chants commonly used in congregational worship, inasmuch as all these ought to be so harmonised as to "go" satisfactorily by themselves, with or without the aid of an instrument and in spite of the frequently inevitable *double air*. It may not be possible to map out accurately the boundaries of this happy *via media*; nor may the exact positions be pointed of all the contrapuntal rocks and quicksands whereon many a good tune has been wrecked. Suffice it to be known, that (in this, more than any other branch of the divine art) there are harmonic "breakers a-head;" and the skilful pilot, with his eyes open, will not fail to distinguish and steer clear of the danger.

Your obedient servant,

J. CONWAY BROWN.

Aldershot, April 15th, 1874.

TALLIS MEMORIAL FUND.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MUSICAL TIMES.

SIR,—A few weeks ago I sent out nearly 200 circulars to members of the musical profession and others, soliciting subscriptions to a Fund formed (under an influential Committee) for the purpose of placing a brass to the memory of Thomas Tallis in Greenwich Parish Church, where he lies buried. In reply to those circulars I have been promised subscriptions to the amount of about £6. It is obvious that nothing worth doing can be done with so small a sum.

I do not believe that it is through any unwillingness to honour the memory of one to whom English music owes so much that more subscriptions have not been received; it is probably owing to a slight misapprehension of the wish and intention of the promoters of the Fund. Our desire is that no sum may be considered as too small as a