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THE 'SIX'

In the Lyons *Salut Public*, Léon Vallas devotes an article to a group of young French composers whose activities, creative and other, have of late attracted some notice. They are Darius Milhaud, George Auric, Francis Poulenc, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, and Mlle. Germaine Tailleferre. The youthful reformers, we are told, believe in self-advertisement. One of their 'stunts' was to organize, in a bar, a jazz-band in which George Auric and Francis Poulenc stood prominent. Their chief object is to provoke a reaction against Debussy's impressionistic methods and ideals. Apart from that, they have few features in common, although Poulenc and Milhaud are similar in one respect, viz., their fondness for clear-cut melody and brutal superimpositions of unrelated tonalities. Milhaud is particularly active, both as a composer and propagandist, appearing as singer, pianist, violinist, conductor, and impresario.

In the February issue of the *Revue Musicale*, M. Paul Landormy describes the 'Six' as aiming at a wholesale renovation of the vocabulary of music. Erik Satie is their ideal, we are told, and it is his example they wish to follow. Curiously enough, their alleged tenets are that music should be purely realistic (anything less realistic than Satie's music can hardly be imagined) and essentially melodic, harmony counting for little or nothing. Polyphony should be reduced to very simple forms. Working-out, and combination of motives, are banned.

M. Landormy proceeds to note that their latest innovation is to use 'chords consisting of chords in superimposition, exactly as the usual chords consist of superimposed notes.' He considers that the young artists in question do not appear to have discovered the rules of the new art-forms which they are trying to create. But he seems to admit that they may eventually discover these rules.

M.-D. CALVOCORESSI.

A BEETHOVEN BIOGRAPHY

It is an odd circumstance that the best biography of Beethoven, though written in English, has so far been obtainable only in a German version. This book was the work of Alexander Wheelock Thayer, born at Boston, U.S.A., in 1817. Its publication in English was held to be impracticable, so it was translated into German, and published in three volumes by Weber, of Berlin, in 1866-79. Two more volumes appeared later, compiled respectively by Drs. Deiters and Riemann from a mass of notes left by Thayer at his death in 1897. A revised edition of the whole appeared a few years ago, Riemann being responsible.

From the article on Thayer in 'Grove,' we quote the following :

The quantity of new letters and facts, and of rectifications of dates, contained in the book is very great. For the first time Beethoven's life is placed on a solid basis of fact. At the same time Mr. Thayer was no slavish biographer. He viewed his hero from a perfectly independent point of view, and often criticised his caprice or harshness (as in the cases of Mälzel and Johann Beethoven) very sharply. When the work is completed it will be a mine of accurate information, indispensable for all future students. With some condensations an English edition would be very welcome.

It will be good news to musicians that such an edition will shortly be available.

Under the auspices of the Beethoven Association of New York, Thayer's biography is now to be published in English, in an edition revised and corrected by Henry Edward Krehbiel, the well-known critic and musical scholar of New York, from the original manuscript and other material entrusted to him by Mr. Thayer's heirs, and used in the spirit and with the purpose indicated by the author before his death. The English edition will be in three volumes of about four hundred pages each, many appendices and reproduced documents that encumber the German text being omitted.

The publication might have been delayed indefinitely but for the public spirit of the Beethoven Association, which in 1920—the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the composer's birth—decided to devote the proceeds of their concerts to this object. The work will be issued in December of the present year, and the supply for this country and the Colonies (other than Canada) will be obtainable from Messrs. Novello. The price of the work will be £5 5s. but a limited number of copies will be sold at the subscription rate of £3 13s. 6d.

FESTIVAL WEEK AT BATH

BY ERIC BLOM

Unfortunately for the Glastonbury Players, their Festival at Bath coincided with the week that threatened to bring us a railway strike. Bath was, in consequence, unusually empty of visitors, and the performances were attended by rather scanty audiences, composed mainly, it seemed, of local inhabitants. The city's delightful atmosphere of maintaining unspoiled the aspects of the watering-place of Queen Anne and the early Georges, gave way to a somewhat parochial feeling as soon as one entered the Pump Room. But those who, like myself, strove to attune their minds to the performances by a walk through the old-fashioned and charmingly pseudo-classical streets and squares just before entering the little improvised theatre, must have felt how the ideal surroundings in which they took place enhanced the pleasure they would have been capable of giving in any case. There is no doubt that such associations did much to make one receptive, more particularly for the old music that was to be performed, and they are perhaps mainly responsible for the fact that I derived the greatest amount of pleasure from some old chamber music (I regret to have missed an excellently-arranged concert of old songs, madrigals, and virginal music), and from Purcell's 'Dido and Æneas.' The latter is quite the best thing that the Glastonbury Players do, and it was delightful to imagine oneself to be witnessing a performance in the days of Beau Nash. Not that it was very easy to do this, for the production is rather too modern and too obviously inspired by the Russian ballet and Miss Margaret Morris. In spite of this, the performance of this wonderful work did not fall very short of perfection. Music, dance, and costumes, (there was no scenery) were admirably blended into one artistic whole, and the parts were excellently cast. The Dido of Miss Dorothy d'Orsay, a singer with a beautiful voice and the restrained grand manner of the true tragedienne, was a piece of work of sheer beauty, and she contrived to make the Death Scene almost unbearably poignant without any sort of hysterical display. She was,

of course, helped by the marvellous song, 'When I am laid in earth,' surely one of the noblest and most beautiful expressions of grief ever written. Miss d'Orsay was admirably seconded by Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Belinda. Mr. Sheerman Hand as Æneas was not quite so successful, although he managed to keep within the picture. The Sorceress of Mr. Frederick Woodhouse, and the first Witch of Miss Irene Child—and, for that matter, the whole of the Witches' chorus—were a sheer delight in their comic malignity. And what music they are given to sing! Those bold modulations in 'Destruction's our delight,' the extraordinary laughing ensemble and the lovely chorus with an echo effect, still delight us as they must have done those for whom they were unheard-of novelties, and the 'Echo Dance of the Furies,' described in the libretto as 'horrid music,' still makes us feel how extremely modern it must have sounded once. As we listen to such things, which are thrown into relief now by a plaintive song, now by a graceful or a stately chorus, and again by a rollicking sailor's song and dance, our wonder grows apace as we realise that a young man of twenty-two, with a little chamber opera written for a girls' school, and with nothing but a string quintet and a harpsichord for accompaniment, should have found the means for writing one of the most truly dramatic and human operas the world has ever seen. And all this without any very material divergence from the lapidary style of his time, and in spite of the impediment of Nahum Tate's often very pedestrian verses. Purcell's secret lies in the marvellous way in which he welds recitative, aria, chorus, and dance into one continuous whole, and in his unflinching instinct for making the greatest dramatic moments coincide with the finest flow of his inspiration. His recitative, instead of being merely a bridge from one climax to another, is always an organic factor, and never lacks a distinct dramatic significance. Add to this a power of invention that is fertile in happy and original turns, and (for his time) extraordinary harmonic audacities, together with a sense of character and situation that is always transmuted into what seems the exact musical equivalent, and the work of one of the most consummate masters stands revealed.

The second important stage work in the scheme was Mr. Rutland Boughton's 'The Immortal Hour,' which, one regrets to say, did not quite come over the footlights. Perhaps the primitive stage was partly responsible, and certainly the fact that the work was given with pianoforte accompaniment—surely an unnecessary makeshift in a city that has an excellent orchestra! This dreamy Celtic music is so lovely that one would like to be able to enjoy it to the full in performance; but the poetry of Fiona Macleod to which it is set is too elusive for the stage, and the music that fits it so well seems to evaporate before the material things of a theatrical production. Its ethereally delicate beauty seems to be continually marred by the dramatic necessities. Many of the things that seem so lovely in one's study have a way of becoming merely dull and watery in performance. Throughout the evening the dramatic interest is either absent for almost unendurably long periods, or where it emerges in patches it becomes artificial and forced. And all this in spite of an excellent performance. Miss Ffrangcon-Davies as Etain revealed herself as a great, sensitive artist, a true child of her father, and Mr. Arthur Jordan as Midir and Mr. Frederick Woodhouse as Dalua

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were both good. Mr. Sheerman Hand was much more at his ease in the part of Eschaidh than in that of Æneas, but even here his acting, though very sound, seemed to be acquired rather than spontaneously felt. All the small parts were more than adequately filled, and a special word of praise must go to the admirable choir, who not only sing splendidly, but act exceedingly well, individually and in concert. The chorus of jeering spirits in the first Act is one of the best things one can imagine a chorus doing, both musically and histrionically. The dancing—an important factor, as it seems to be in all the Glastonbury productions—is very competently directed by Miss Penelope Spencer.

Mr. Boughton's little Choral Ballet, 'The Moon Maiden,' rather suffers from the same defects as 'The Immortal Hour,' but having the advantage of being quite short, it is saved from making a similar impression. Another work of the Choral Ballet type, 'Music comes,' by Mr. P. Napier Miles, struck me as being superficially charming in an amateurish sort of way. The music ambles amiably from one idea to another without attaining to unity, and its lack of real individuality leaves no definite impression behind, save that of having been vaguely pleasing.

A concert of English chamber music, described as ranging from the 17th to the 20th century, was not in reality representative of the whole period, unless one took the gap in the programme to illustrate a corresponding hiatus in the musical history of this country. The first part contained Purcell's 'Golden Sonata' and a Violin Sonata by Eccles, while in the second the modern school came off none too well with Parry's 'Lady Radnor's' Suite for string quintet and Frank Bridge's String Quintet in E minor. There is no reason why Parry should not be given as a specimen of 19th century English music, but why perform a work that is deliberately imitative of Bach, Rameau, and Couperin? That all but one living composer had to be neglected was perhaps inevitable in a programme necessarily consisting of long works, but I noticed that many of the most important contemporary English composers were equally conspicuous by their absence from a programme entirely devoted to modern British music, which I was unable to hear.

New Music

CHURCH MUSIC

Organists who have not so far made the acquaintance of John E. West's setting in E flat of the Office for the Holy Communion should note that this work is now included in Novello's Short Settings for parochial and general use. Without being over elaborate or difficult, it is admirably designed to afford full scope for a well-trained choir, and to display the resources of a large organ. The highly interesting organ part is of an independent character, always engaged in the consistent development of some definite musical idea. Thus, in the Creed, much is made of the intonation phrase of three notes—B flat, C, and the G below—and a strong chordal passage of two bars given out at the commencement by the organ. The former provides more than one opportunity for effective use of the tuba. The vocal writing in the Creed, though providing for some big effects, is not difficult. The trebles are taken to the top B flat near the end, but optional notes are given.