

Review: Sir George Grove on Beethoven's Symphonies

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an inward bend at the knees), and Beverley. The Gye forces are similarly displayed on the other side; music by Costa (clarinet) and A. Harris (drum). Both managers address the crowd. Says Gye:

"Look here, here's our wonderful rising boy tenor, Mario—only nineteen years old—who never uttered a false note in his life. Don't crowd in too fast, ladies; the Cupid of the stage is going to sing, and he's now striking the tuning-fork. Here's the adorable Patti; we give her £50 for every note she sings, and she brings us £100 for every £50. Don't keep back. She won't be here long; she's going to enter into partnership for life with a distinguished Marquis. Here's the charming Lucca, the variable Lucca, the entrancing little Lucca, who has promised never to run away again. Besides, here's Tagliafico, the grand utility, and Lemmens-Sherrington, the great available, and a whole host of others. Walk up!"

Mr. Mapleson, not to be outdone:

"Here, listen to me. I can give you the best entertainment in Europe. I've got Kellogg, the celebrated, never to be equalled American soprano, and Nilsson, fresh from the Grand Opéra—the greatest hit ever known. And I've got Titiens, singing with twenty thousand horse-power—and Trebelli, the only contralto now known on the face of the globe. Besides this, I've got Gassier for our *Mephistopheles*, and Santley, the great unalloyed English baritone, who doesn't call himself Signor. . . . We play every opera they play next door, and always at the same time, to keep up the novelty and to give variety. No extra charge and no money returned."

Reading this in the forgotten pages of an extinct journal is something like listening to the voice of a dead man through a phonograph, or wandering about an old battlefield picking up exploded cartridge cases. And to such a pass must come the rivalries and boastings and disputations which now appear to us so important. X.

SIR GEORGE GROVE ON BEETHOVEN'S SYMPHONIES.*

It should be borne in mind that Sir George Grove, with Dr. William Pole as his coadjutor, commenced his career as an annotator of analytical programme-books early in the fifties, when the so-called New Philharmonic Society (since deceased) was first established under the conductorship of Berlioz, and that having thus served his apprenticeship, he soon afterwards transferred his services to the Crystal Palace, where, as editor of, and contributor to the programme-books of the Saturday Concerts, he has zealously officiated up to the present date, and, it is to be hoped, will long be spared to

continue the good work which he initiated there. Considering the length of his services and the enthusiasm he has displayed, it is no exaggeration to speak of him as our oldest and most experienced progaphist. Recalling the energy and enthusiasm with which, during the last forty years, he has advocated the claims of Beethoven, as well as of Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Schumann, but more especially those of Beethoven, it is no surprise that he should at length have made up his mind to collect his utterances, and, with some account of his researches, issue them in book form. The result is before us, and calls for nothing but congratulation both to the author and to his readers.

It should at once be stated that this volume of Sir George Grove's is by no means, as might be suspected, a mere reprint of his programme notices, which on each occasion of their being used he has, by means of additions and subtractions, repeatedly revised. Though it may be said to include the previously published analyses, these have been greatly extended and remodelled, especial care having been taken with the music examples, which are much more fully furnished with marks of expression and phrasing, &c., than heretofore has been the case. No attempt has been made to supply an account of Beethoven's life, except so far as it bears upon the Symphonies. That is to be found, fully set forth by the same pen, in the "Dictionary of Music and Musicians."

In an all too modest preface Sir George Grove states that his book is addressed by an amateur to amateurs. "It would be presumptuous in me," he adds, "to attempt to interest professional musicians, who naturally know already all that I have been able to put together, and much more; and in a more complete and accurate manner." We demur strongly to both these statements. There are amateurs and amateurs—the word being used in a double sense—viz., those who, like John Ruskin, Gambier Parry, and Sir George Grove, have devoted a great part of their lives to exploring and expounding art; and those who look at pictures or listen to music simply for their amusement and enjoyment. It is to these latter that this book is ostensibly addressed, but we have no hesitation in asserting that there is no professional musician who, after a careful perusal of it, will not admit that, from a musical, historical, and psychological point of view, he has learnt more about Beethoven and his works than ever he knew before. To the preface is appended a long list of books which will be found most useful to students who desire further to pursue their investigations of Beethoven and his works.

A great part of the book is taken up by musical analyses of the Symphonies. These amply serve the purpose for which they were intended—viz., the instruction and rousing the interest of amateur listeners. Excellent as

* "Beethoven and his Nine Symphonies." By George Grove, C.B. London: Novello, Ewer and Co. 1896.

they are from this point of view, young professional students of music should be warned against accepting them as models in the art of analysis. Something more far-reaching, more complete, and more technical would probably be required by examiners from students desiring to pass an examination at any of our leading academical musical institutions. The amateur occasionally peeps out in Sir George's musical phraseology; as, for instance, when he speaks of the alternation of two distinct notes as a *tremolo*. This serves the intended purpose of identifying a passage, but technically it is incorrectly expressed. Similarly (on page 114) a progression is spoken of as "chromatic," when "diatonic" is evidently intended. Such little lapses are few and far between, and will doubtless be amended in a second edition.

*Wagner wrote: "It is quite impossible to avoid falling into an ecstatic tone when speaking of the true nature of Beethoven's music." Sir George, in the highest degree, seems to have been influenced by the same feeling. His utterances about Beethoven's music form one continuous pæan. Still, he cannot be accused of indiscriminately awarding his praise. Though he greatly admires the first two Symphonies—and who does not?—he readily admits that when Beethoven wrote them he was still more or less under the influence of Haydn and Mozart, but asserts, and rightly too, that in the *Coda* of the *Finale* of the Second Symphony "we can survey at a glance the region which lies behind—the music of the eighteenth century, at once strong, orderly, elegant, humorous, if, perhaps, somewhat demure; and that more ideal region of deeper feeling, loftier imagination, and keener thrill, radiant with 'the light that never was on sea or land,' a region which was opened by Beethoven."

With the "Eroica" we enter on this new region at a bound. It is one from which Beethoven, ever afterwards holding to the "new road," never departed. The "Eroica" is avowedly a portrait of Buonaparte, but, at the same time, as Sir George remarks, it is as much a portrait of Beethoven himself. Bearing in mind Count Tolstoi's dictum that all serious music represents the composer's mood of mind at the time of its conception, the same may be said of all the Symphonies. But to this it should be added that it is only the greatest genius who, when writing to a picture, can, like a great actor, put himself into the required frame of mind. This is what Beethoven always succeeded in doing—at least in his Symphonies.

Recent researches have proved that the three love-letters which were found in Beethoven's desk after his death, and which were formerly believed to have been addressed to the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, were really intended for

the Countess Theresa of Brunswick, to whom Beethoven became engaged in 1806. While writing the Fourth Symphony his heart must have been swelling with his new happiness. Sir George therefore regards it "as the pæan which he sings over his conquest." Translations of these love-letters, as well as of Beethoven's "Testament," are included in the volume.

The Fifth Symphony, started in 1805, and laid aside in 1806 for that in B flat, was completed in 1807 or early in 1808. It thus covered the time before the engagement, the engagement itself, and a part of the period of agitation when the lovers were separated, and which ended in their final surrender. "Considering the extraordinarily imaginative and disturbed character of the Symphony," Sir George writes, "it is impossible not to believe that the work—the first movement, at any rate—is based on his relations to the Countess, and is more or less a picture of their personality and connection. . . . The first movement seems to contain actual portraits of the two chief actors in the drama." This seems to be substantiated by reference to the well-known story of the music lesson. Quoting the words which Beethoven is reported to have said of the first theme, "Fate is knocking at the door," Sir George asks: "Was it the Fate which at that early time he saw advancing to prevent his union with his Theresa?—to prevent his union with any woman?"

As a recollection of country life, the Pastoral Symphony speaks for itself. If the three preceding Symphonies have been occupied with the workings of the human mind and will, and have, as it were, kept us suspended over the memory of a hero, the rapture of an accepted lover, the conflict of his subsequent joys and sorrows, and the ultimate triumph of his spirit over all obstacles, this takes us into an entirely different field—the realms of Nature.

Speaking of the Seventh Symphony, which Sir George maintains might fairly be entitled the "Romantic Symphony," he strongly condemns Berlioz for wishing us to believe that the *Vivace* of the first movement is a *Ronde des Paysans*; Wagner, for regarding the whole Symphony as the "Apotheosis of the Dance"; and some dozen other writers who have hazarded interpretations of it, and which have been collected by M. Brenet in his "Histoire de la Symphonie." He does not, however, offer a substitute for any of them.

The Eighth Symphony, which Sir George would like to dub the "Humorous," he regards as "autobiographical," inasmuch as, perhaps more than any other of the nine, it furnishes a portrait of the master in his daily life—his boisterous merriment, his rough practical jokes, and bad puns.

To the Ninth Symphony, the greatest of all, by far the longest and most complete analysis, including no less than eighty-six

* "Beethoven." By Richard Wagner. Translated by Edward Dannreuther. London: William Reeves. 1880.

music examples, is devoted. Between the composition of this and the Eighth Symphony there was a gap of not less than eleven years, the historical particulars of which are fully accounted for. It is to be regretted, perhaps, that Sir George has not drawn upon Wagner's wondrous explanatory programme of the poetical drift of this Symphony by reference to Goethe's "Faust." To some extent the conclusion he comes to agrees with that of Wagner. Incidentally he regards the first movement as a picture of Beethoven's misery, arising from the fact that "his heart, morbid no doubt, was torn almost beyond endurance by the unseemly, squalid disorder which attended his home life, and the unavailing anxieties and privations which he endured for his nephew." With the *Scherzo* we are again brought face to face with Nature. The *Trio*, it is suggested, possibly reproduces "the feeling of some sunrise which Beethoven had 'seen through the mist' on the hills above his beloved 'Bruhl' at Mödling, or at Baden—occasions which seem to have awakened all his religion and all his poetry." The *Adagio*, which is spoken of as "a beautiful dream," Sir George maintains "is absolutely original in form; and in effect more calmly, purely, nobly beautiful than anything that ever this great master—who knows so well how to search the heart, and try the spirit, and elevate the soul—has accomplished elsewhere in his Symphonies."

We are warned that, "no connection need be looked for between the first three movements of the Choral Symphony and the 'Ode to Joy' which inspired its *Finale*. The very title of the work—Beethoven's own—is conclusive on this point. It is not a Symphony on Schiller's 'Ode to Joy,' but it is a Symphony with Final Chorus on Schiller's 'Ode to Joy'—Sinfonie mit Schluss-Chor über Schiller's Ode an die Freude." Later on, when speaking of the manner in which Beethoven has connected the instrumental movements with the vocal portion of the work, we are told that "hitherto, in the three orchestral movements, Beethoven has been depicting 'Joy' in his own proper character: first, as part of the complex life of the individual; secondly, for the world at large; thirdly, in all the ideal hues that art can throw over it." Surely there is no "joy" depicted in the first movement, unless we except the joy of resignation or of determination in overcoming all obstacles.

We have thus endeavoured, as briefly as possible and very imperfectly, to reproduce Sir George's characterisations of Beethoven's Symphonies from a poetical point of view. What he says is full of interest and thoroughly convincing. At the same time, it seems impossible to divine exactly what is the standpoint which he takes in regard to so-called "programme" music. He quotes Mendelssohn's saying that "music is far more definite than words," which, curiously enough,

seems to agree with Wagner's assertion that "where human speech ends, musical utterance begins"; he never tires of impressing upon us Beethoven's "more an expression of feeling than a painting" and that "all painting in instrumental music, if pushed too far, is a failure," as canons of art; but, at the same time, he expresses regret that Beethoven did not give the clue to the poetic meaning of all his Symphonies, as he did to the "*Eroica*" and the "*Pastoral*." Had he done so, it would have added much, he thinks, to the pleasure of listening to the Symphonies. Perhaps so, but it should not be forgotten that the artistic endowment of the man who cannot listen to a musical work for its own sake, and cannot absorb its beauty quietly and enjoy it until he has made a picture out of it or translated it into words, is likely to be literary rather than musical.

Space fails us to do more than very lightly touch upon three specially interesting points of Sir George's book. Beethoven's sketch-books are largely drawn upon, and thus we are allowed many a peep into Beethoven's workshop, where we are enabled, as it were, to follow his process of creation from its earliest beginnings. Where they are not his own, full reference is given in foot-notes to the source of his researches, so that really earnest students may have no difficulty in going to the fountain-head for confirmation of the information and abundant anecdotes related. Many examples are given of the stupidities of Beethoven's early critics, including such eminent musicians as Spohr and Weber, &c. In their behalf it may be said that, as Beethoven's scores were not published till many years after their first performances, they had nothing to go upon but a first hearing of music which introduced them to an entirely new world. Happy we of the present day, that we are not in a like position!

A LETTER OF BEETHOVEN'S.

A PART of this letter has appeared in a free translation by Lady Wallace, from "*Neue Briefe Beethoven's*," collected and given to the public by Ludwig Nohl, in 1867. The present owner of the letter, Mr. A. J. Hipkins, regards it as of sufficient value and importance to place it before musical students in a complete form, and to that end he has enlisted the sympathetic collaboration of Miss Geisler Schubert, the grand-niece of another great composer, to decipher the almost illegible text and present it in an almost literal English form. To admirers of Beethoven in England the letter is of particular interest, inasmuch as the subject-matter concerns the corrections for a London publisher of the great Pianoforte Sonata in B flat (Op. 106). But there are personal allusions, from which Sir George Grove has quoted in his biography of