

Kneller Hall

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the Hereford Festival by Mr. John Coates. They show a light touch and deftness that suggest Edward German.

Finally, here is Arthur Bliss' 'Madame Noy,' a grim piece of humour very brilliantly carried out. (Chester.) The original accompaniment for six instruments has been reduced to an effective and not over-difficult pianoforte part. The cover is a black and white picture over which all beholders will rave—some because it is so art-y, the rest because it is so ugly. The gentleman playing the flute with two right hands (or is it left? one gets quite giddy trying to decide) is a joy for ever, though far from being a thing of beauty.

H. G.

CHORAL MUSIC

Two important works by Arnold Bax have just been issued by Murdoch. 'Of a rose I sing a song' is a Christmas carol for a small choir, harp, one violoncello, and one double-bass. The words are of the 15th century. The form is practically a set of variations on a theme in the style of an old carol. There is a strong modal flavour about it, contrast being supplied later by some modern pungencies. The setting of a passage relating to hell is daring, the basses being directed to sing with 'snarling tone,' the sopranos à 3 wailing 'ah,' and the violoncello and bass sustaining a gruesome pedal. In the closing pages the chorus is in eight parts. Nevertheless, the force employed must not be large, or the three solo instruments will be outweighed. The work belongs to the chamber music family, both in texture and intimate character. With a few really good voices to each part it could be made a delightful thing.

Large and powerful choirs will find as much as they can tackle—perhaps a trifle more—in Mr. Bax's 'Mater ora filium,' which is for double choir (unaccompanied). The composer has again gone to ancient sources for his text (another Christmas carol), this time drawing on a manuscript at Baliol College. The main theme is on plainsong lines, and the music ranges from the extremely simple to the exactly complex. There are frequent subdivisions, so that the choir is called on to sing in twelve parts—even fourteen for a brief space. Variety is provided by liberal use of semi-chorus effects and passages for a few solo voices. One of these, for three sopranos, calls for a singer able to sustain a high B *pp*, the choir ceasing and leaving her and her two companions in the air, so to speak—a delightful effect if it comes off. Not the least exacting point in the work is the rhythmical independence called for. It is good to see one of our most brilliant young composers turning his attention to a type of music in which this country can still hold pride of place. 'Mater ora filium' is dedicated to Mr. C. Kennedy Scott, who, it is to be hoped, will give us an early chance of hearing it.

H. G.

The musical season at South Place Institute (Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.) opened last month, chamber concerts being arranged for October 2, 9, and 23. The programmes include Frank Bridge's Pianoforte Quintet, Ernest Walker's C minor Pianoforte Quartet, Walthew's Serenade Sonata for viola and pianoforte, and Herbert Howells' 'Lady Audrey's Suite.' The orchestra, under Mr. R. H. Walthew, gives a concert on December 4.

Dr. Vaughan Williams' 'London' Symphony received its first Australian performance on August 11 at the Conservatory Hall, Sydney, Mr. Henry Verbrugghen conducting.

KNELLER HALL

It has to be seen to be believed: a steady stream of people trekking down a winding lane, and apparently going to a Cup Tie. When you know better you have to think of the bad, old Bayreuth days. Bayreuth—Festspielhaus; Twickenham—Kneller Hall: different surroundings, same dust, same expression of holy ardour on pilgrims' faces. Well, thank heaven some folk know how to appreciate a first-rate band performance, because many of you who read this certainly don't. To you a military band probably represents a conglomeration of soldiers who play 'The Policeman's Wedding' down at the seaside. But all this is going to be changed soon, and Kneller Hall, the seat of the Royal Military Band School, has become, thanks to its untiring commandant, Col. Somerville, the refinery through which the entire Army will be ultimately

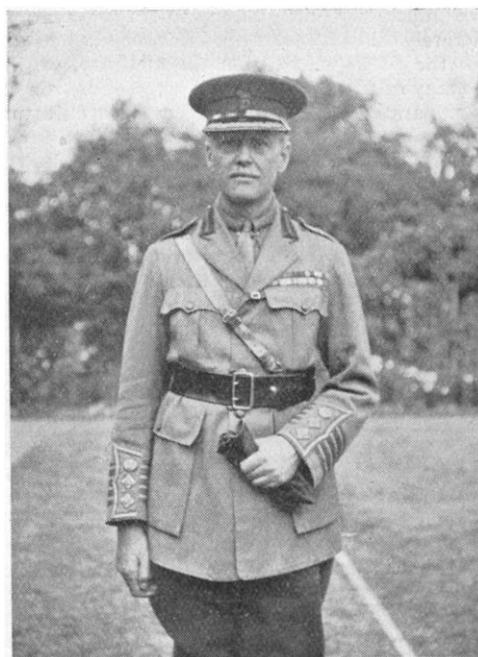


Photo by

[Sydney J. Loch.

COL. J. C. SOMERVILLE.

supplied with players who are not only technically efficient, but who are imbued with a taste for good music and a desire to propagate it.

During the season from May to September concerts are given each week by the Students' Band of about a hundred and sixty performers, which is conducted in strict rotation by aspiring bandmasters. On the first and third Wednesdays of the month the concerts are held in the afternoon, and devoted to what are (for military bands at any rate) truly creditable and ambitious programmes. The other concerts are held on Wednesday evenings, and some of these are 'grand,' the grandeur apparently consisting of a hymn and Last Post tacked on to the end. Otherwise the evening concerts are of a more or less popular kind; nevertheless jaded palates will find a performance of, say, 'Finlandia' by a band of a hundred and sixty players well worth tasting.

There is no band-stand in the accepted sense of the word, only a sloping platform on which the

players settle like hiving bees; and there are no acoustical helps, so that the actual volume of sound is not stupendous—in fact perhaps not greater than that provided by twenty-five players in a very resonant band-stand. But the body and the richness of tone are extraordinarily impressive—a marble palace as against a stucco one of similar dimensions. The behaviour of the audience is beyond praise: there is very little talking and, I imagine, the minimum of spooning, as the auditorium is planned on somewhat spartan lines, and designed strictly for music-lovers and not for ordinary ones.

No conductor is allowed to direct more than one item at a concert, and as a result they put every ounce into the business. I was rather sorry for the players recently, when they had to sustain a pretty heavy assault of baton charges from a set of enthusiasts who will ultimately have to tone down their methods considerably, as tongues can't go on wagging as fast and furiously as fingers—at any rate when they have to wag on instruments. But it's all very fresh, unconventional, and entertaining, and an afternoon or evening spent at Kneller Hall is a thing to be remembered.

Of particular interest was the concert given on September 29, when some of the new works sent in as a result of Col. Somerville's appeal (still valid, by the way) for compositions written directly for military bands were repeated. Fortunately Mr. Holst's fine though unequal Suite in B flat was included in the scheme, though it does not belong to the class of work referred to. Without it, however, I am afraid the concert would not have possessed much distinction, as the majority of the new works performed gave more evidence of the contempt which composers and public generally seem to harbour for the military band as a medium of expression than of any particular understanding for the opportunities it presents. Dr. Cuthbert Harris's 'Egyptian Scenes' touched bottom in this respect. It started with a creditable reference to the opening bars of 'Chu Chin Chow,' and displayed throughout the composer's perfect familiarity with the masterpieces of Luigini and the lesser efforts of Grieg, Tchaikovsky, and Saint-Saëns. (Small wonder that Sir Charles Stanford, who was present, was seen to advance slowly but deliberately towards an adjacent duck pond.) The last item, again, by Mr. R. Iliffe, was actually entitled 'Hungarian Rhapsody.' Does Mr. Iliffe seriously consider that anyone in this country has the faintest interest any longer in a kind of clap-trap of which even the most distinguished specimens are third-rate?

Fortunately Dr. C. B. Rootham's 'Processional' did a lot again to turn the scale in favour of music. If this work bore the magic name of Elgar or even Bantock it would already be a stock item in the concert repertoire. Being however by a lesser known composer, it may well have to wait a few decades for recognition, especially if all audiences like that at Kneller Hall make its advent coincide with a sudden desire for material nourishment. This was a pure coincidence, but an unfortunate one, especially as the audience in question included a number of people whose duty it is to draw attention to such still comparatively few good works that have been produced by British composers.

In conclusion, I must not omit to mention the efforts of the Male-Voice Choir, which gave some very creditable performances of a few part-songs. The idea of providing relief to instrumental studies by developing an interest in good vocal music is an

admirable one, and both Col. Somerville, its author, and Mr. C. T. Lofthouse, who is in charge of this branch, are to be congratulated on the results achieved. Secretaries of large London choirs who search despairingly for hefty and at the same time accurate male voices might do worse than drop a line to Kneller Hall.

R. L.

THE ART OF CHALIAPIN

BY HERMAN KLEIN

It is only fair to bestow a certain amount of sympathy upon a great singer compelled by circumstances to limit his art to the vast, uninspiring *milieu* of the Albert Hall. Sometimes we are asked to make allowances for famous artists who have never appeared either there or anywhere else in England before. That ordeal makes the case harder still. Unforgettable examples of it were provided in bygone days by Materna and Niemann, the original Brünnhilde and Siegfried, at the Wagner Festival in 1877, and by the splendid quartet (including the tenor Masini) who sang the solos in the first performance here of Verdi's 'Requiem,' under the baton of the composer. Such artists as these, like others of similar calibre who came later, could always acquit themselves well enough to satisfy. But it would be absurd to suppose that, under Albert Hall conditions, they approached within measurable distance of the exalted heights to which they attained upon the lyric stage amid their own peculiar environment.

So it came about with the gifted Chaliapin on the night of October 4. No one knew better than he that in this huge amphitheatre he was out of his element: for he is essentially a shining light—or whatever may be the masculine for *diva*—of the operatic stage; nor can he with all his talent sing in the concert-room save at a serious disadvantage. Still, there was no other course open to him if he was to appear in London at the present juncture, and successfully fulfil his self-imposed task of making money on behalf of his starving countrymen. That he should have achieved it with such brilliant results was remarkable in many ways. An audience of ten thousand would never, to begin with, have been drawn to the Albert Hall to hear a solitary singer, a stranger here for years and a celebrity in practically a different line of his art, unless the 'stunt' had been worked with unusual skill. Neither, again, would that audience have listened, silent and enraptured, to group after group of 'selected arias'—all sung in the unfamiliar Russian language, not one of them advertised or announced by name beforehand—had not the singer possessed an extraordinary personality as well as the requisite genius to conquer on the initial attack all the drawbacks and obstacles of the situation. It is this last point which is really the crux of the matter: not the question how the mere name of Chaliapin—the obscured reflex of an interrupted glory, the half-forgotten creator of a memorable experience—sufficed to draw the crowd, or the secret of the spell with which he held them enthralled during every instant that he stood before them.

His voice is by no means absolutely beautiful—in the sense, that is to say, that the voices of Edouard de Reszke and Pol Plançon were beautiful; and both belonged, like Chaliapin, to the category of the *basso cantante*. His quality resembles rather that of the Dutchman Van Rooy, who was a concert-singer some