

Modern British Composers. VI.-Gustav Holst (Concluded)

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The Musical Times

AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR

DECEMBER 1, 1919.

TO OUR READERS.

The last number of a Volume is a suitable place for a few words about our future plans. The revival of musical activities and the widening of interests calls for some development on the part of the musical press, and we hope the following details of our prospective arrangements will show that we are at least alive to the needs of the hour, even if we do not succeed in fully meeting them.

First, we are glad to be able to say that the January number will find the *Musical Times* at its pre-war size—fifty pages of reading matter and music.

The new volume will, we trust, do something towards bringing about increased public appreciation of the work of living composers, especially those of our own country. Mr. Edwin Evans's articles on 'Modern British Composers' have done good work in this direction, and we are glad to be able to say that there are still more to come.

The chief London concerts of the month will be dealt with by Mr. Alfred Kalisch, and Mr. Francis E. Barrett will write on 'Opera in London.'

Owing to the success of the Russian Ballet, there is likely to be increased interest in choregraphy and its music. Mr. Edwin Evans will keep our readers fully informed on this subject.

Mr. William McNaught will contribute 'Choral Notes and News,' Mr. William Child will review new music, and in 'The Musicians' Bookshelf' 'Feste' will deal regularly with the latest volumes of interest to musicians.

Church and Organ Music will continue to receive a liberal amount of space, special consideration being given to the needs of the Parish Church. The Editor will contribute a series of articles on Bach's organ works, dealing with the subject from the point of view of the modern player.

As the Competitive Festival Movement will soon be once more in full swing, we shall resume the practice of including as a Supplement the *Competition Festival Record*.

News from the various parts of England has always been an important feature of the *Musical Times*. We feel that with the opening up of new musical centres the time is ripe for an increase in this department.

In addition to these regular features, we hope to maintain the journal's reputation for articles of general interest.

A good many readers have lately complained of the difficulty of obtaining copies. We take this opportunity of reminding them of the advantages of becoming subscribers, referring them for particulars to our advertisement on page 714.

MODERN BRITISH COMPOSERS.

By EDWIN EVANS.

(Continued from November number, page 592.)

VI.—GUSTAV HOLST (concluded).

This Sanskrit period came to a head in 'The Cloud Messenger,' an ode for chorus and orchestra founded upon a poem of Kalidasa. Although dated 1910, this work occupied the composer for several years, and is the fruit of much thought. The adaptation of the text is his own, but he acknowledges indebtedness to that of Mr. R. W. Frazer, which is contained in the latter's book 'Silent Gods and Sun-Steeped Lands.' This impressive work is one of the landmarks of Holst's development as a composer. In its pages will be found in full deployment many traits of which indications are scattered throughout his earlier compositions. Did space allow, it would not be difficult to illustrate an essay on his style with quotations from this score alone. His melodic invention, his fondness for strongly accented rhythms, and all the characteristic features of his choral writing are shown here, side by side with his penetration of the poetical subject. It is not without significance that with 'The Cloud Messenger' he has taken a farewell of his Sanskrit studies, for one feels that he has expressed his point of view so fully that there can be little to be added to what he has stated here. The following example comprises the opening bars :

'THE CLOUD MESSENGER.'

Ex. 3. *Adagio.*

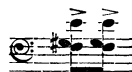
It must not be supposed that during the five years which were occupied with these studies Mr. Holst neglected other forms of music. Still less should one picture him as steeped in an artificial Orientalism. There is in fact as little of the real Oriental atmosphere in his Vedic settings as there is in the hymns themselves, which are eminently Aryan. For genuine Eastern colouring one must turn to another work of the same period, the Oriental Suite in E minor entitled 'Beni Mora,' which is founded on reminiscences of Arab tunes heard during a holiday in Algeria. It comprises two contrasted dances, and an extended *Finale*, 'In the Street of the Ouled Nails,' from which the following is a characteristic quotation:

' BENI-MORA.'

The musical score for 'Beni-Mora' is presented in three systems. The first system includes parts for Oboe (Ob.), Flute (Fl.), and Violoncello (Celli.). The Oboe part begins with a melodic line in E minor, marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The Flute part enters with a similar melody. The Violoncello part provides a harmonic foundation. The second system continues the melodic development for the Oboe and Flute, with the Violoncello part becoming more active. The third system shows the Oboe and Flute parts continuing their melodic lines, while the Violoncello part features a more complex rhythmic pattern. The score is written in E minor and 12/8 time.

In a programme note the composer asks the listener to 'imagine himself in the dry, still air of the desert at night. As he approaches the oasis he hears a flute in the distance, and sees the dim outlines of a white-robed Arab procession wending its way from street to street. Above this flute melody are heard fragments of tunes answering one another. All grows more definite until he reaches the "Rue des Ouled Nails," and pausing at different entrances he hears one dance after another, each in a different key and rhythm, amidst which the procession-music remains unaltered.'

Apart from the fact that I, too, have learned to love the music of the Arabs, 'Beni Mora' has a personal interest for me inasmuch as the frequently recurring double chord:



originated as a musical dedication. There are several ways of representing the East in terms of music. First, there is the alleged authentic method, which consists in using genuine Oriental material. As the latter loses most of its peculiar twang by transposition into the tempered scale the authenticity is usually a polite fiction. Then there is the conventional manner, in which stale theatrical devices mingle with reminiscences of exhibition side-shows to produce what the man in the street, who has never been east of Tilbury, imagines to be Eastern 'atmosphere.' Thirdly, there is the method which I would describe as objective impressionism, analogous to that by which Debussy evokes a vision of Spain in his 'Iberia.' In its general features 'Beni Mora' comes under this heading, but the complete divergence of the respective temperaments, and the employment of definite reminiscences instead of vague distillations of them, produce a result which is several degrees nearer to realism without however approaching dangerously near to that shoal on which so many musical ideas have foundered. Apart from all æsthetic classification, 'Beni Mora' gives a vivid picture of the East, and one which stimulates the listener's imagination with a force to which no conventional Eastern music can attain. To the same date approximately belongs another orchestral work, the Suite in F major entitled 'Phantastes,' and comprising four movements—Prelude, March, 'Sleep,' and Dance, of which the first is the most successful. The music is closely associated with the spirit of Lewis Carroll.

The first important works which followed upon the Sanskrit period were choral. One is a setting of 'Hecuba's Lament' from 'The Trojan Women,' for contralto solo, female chorus, and orchestra, and the other is the 'Hymn to Dionysus' from the 'Bacchæ.' The latter is published, and in perusing it one realises, first, how much the composer profited by the experience gained in setting exotic texts, and, second, how little there was of exoticism in those settings, for the method is similar, except that it has perhaps gained in fluency and consequently in effectiveness. In all these works, whether Indian or Hellenic, the basic idea maintains its supremacy, and such local colour as may be used is incidental and subordinate. In the treatment of the 'Hymn to Dionysus' there is little that is Greek from a purely musical point of view, but the feeling that animates the music is not far removed from the Greek attitude. The inspired frenzy of the Bacchæ was purely religious, and completely devoid of the licentious element with which it became infected in the days of

the Greek decadence. A certain ruggedness of harmonic colour is demanded by the subject. A frenzied exaltation cannot be expressed in neutral tints, even when it has a religious character, or perhaps then least of all. On the other hand, realistic harshness would be a palpable intrusion. To hold the balance is here the composer's problem, and with his copious experience behind him Mr. Holst was well equipped for its solution.

The present stage of his evolution is represented by two works of outstanding significance, one orchestral and one choral. The former has only once been performed in its entirety, at a private function on the eve of the composer's departure for Salonika; but five of its seven movements have been given by the Royal Philharmonic Society, and three of them are included in the scheme of the Queen's Hall Symphony Concert of November 22. This monumental suite, 'The Planets,' is to be judged solely as music. Like the theosophy of some of Scriabin's later works, Holst's astrology, whilst supplying a poetic basis, does not need to be accepted by the listener for him to appreciate the musical inspiration derived from it. I have long been of the opinion that the elaborate programme of 'Prometheus' is an obstacle to its appreciation as music. 'The Planets' is in no such danger, because the programme, instead of being elaborate, is extremely simple. The generally accepted astrological associations of the various planets are a sufficient clue in themselves to the imagination. One may be sceptical concerning horoscopes, but one will nevertheless be carried away with the aggressive rhythm of 'Mars,' the 'Bringer of War,' and any schoolboy pictures 'Mercury' as the 'Winged Messenger.' The very word joviality connotes 'Jupiter,' and the sand-glass and scythe connect 'Saturn' with old age. It may be new to some to regard 'Venus' as the 'Bringer of Peace'—as she is, astrologically speaking—for many hold her responsible for strife in worldly affairs. It is also unfamiliar to hail 'Neptune,' the sea god, as a mystic, and 'Uranus' as a magician; but once these relations are established in the titles of the movements, it is easy to fall into the mood of the respective tone-poems. That is, in fact, the way to describe this work. It has outrun the dimensions of a suite, and become a cycle of seven tone-poems.

Each has its own qualities, and preferences will depend upon the individual. Perhaps 'Mars' is the most vivid, and 'Neptune' the most imaginative; but among those which appeal most readily to the listener are 'Mercury' and 'Saturn,' from which the following examples are taken:

'MERCURY.'



'SATURN.'



Of the work as a whole, it is difficult to speak in measured terms whilst still under the spell of the impression of its first hearing. It is certainly one of the most ambitious achievements in modern British music, and it has had the effect of placing its composer, in the estimation of the musical world, on a level which only a limited circle considered to be within his reach formerly. It is possible that greater familiarity may moderate, as it so often does, our first inclination to indulge in superlatives, but allowing for the laws of perspective, these seven symphonic poems seem destined to maintain their hold on our admiration for some time to come.

The other work is the 'Hymn of Jesus,' set for two choruses, semi-chorus, orchestra, pianoforte, and organ, of which a performance is promised us by the Royal Philharmonic Society in association with the newly-formed Philharmonic Choir. The text is adapted from the Acts of the Apostles, and the composer has brought to bear upon it all the experience gained in recent years.

Of other recent works should be mentioned the 'Japanese Suite,' which was originally planned for the dances of Michio Ito at the Coliseum, but has now taken its place in the repertoire; the songs for voice and violin, from which quotations were given in the portion of this article which appeared last month; and a number of choral settings of folk-songs. In these, Mr. Holst has been remarkably successful, and despite their unpretentious scope, many of his admirers rank them with his most characteristic work. I have had occasion to bring these part-songs, and also those of Mr. W. G. Whittaker, under the notice of Continental musicians, who have invariably greeted in them the expression of the true folk instinct. In fact, only the difficulty of providing a text reflecting the spirit of the original has stood in the way of their performance in many foreign musical centres.

Mr. Holst has now arrived at a very interesting stage of his development, and one which is destined to exercise the skill of the musical prophets. Will

he join the ranks of the symphonists, as 'The Planets' would seem to suggest (not astrologically), and thus take his place in the present trend of European music, or will he turn more and more to the composition of those massive choral works which have always been a characteristic feature of the English province? There is no reason why he should not fulfil both predictions, except that experience shows that one tends to react upon the other to its detriment. However, these are speculations which may be left to the future. For the present, it is sufficient to place on record the degree of eminence to which he has reached in both spheres.

LIST OF WORKS.

- 1895—Op. 1, 'The Revoke,' opera (one Act).* †
 1896—Op. 2, *Fantasiestücke*, for oboe and strings.* †
 Op. 3, Quintet, for pianoforte and wind.* †
 Op. 4, Four Songs:
 'Margaret's slumber song,' (Laudy & Co.).
 'Soft, soft wind' (Laudy & Co.).
 'Soft and gently' *
 'Awake, my heart' (Schmidt, Boston, U.S.A.).
 1897—Op. 5, 'Clear and cool,' five-part chorus and orchestra.* †
 1898—Op. 6, 'Ornult's Drapa,' scena for baritone and orchestra.* †
 1899—Op. 7, 'Walt Whitman' Overture.* †
 1900—Five part-songs:
 'Sylvia' (Novello).
 'Love is enough' (Novello).
 'Autumn.'
 'Come away, death.'
 'Love song' (Laudy).
 'Ave Maria,' eight parts, female voices (Laudy).
 Op. 10, Suite in E flat (Patron's Fund), called 'Ballet suite' (Novello).
 Op. 8, 'Cotswolds,' Symphony* (performed at Bournemouth, 1902).
 1902—Op. 11, 'The Youth's Choice,' opera.* †
 Op. 12, Part-songs:
 'Dream Tryst' (Novello).
 'Ye little birds' (Novello).
 'Her eyes the glow-worm lend thee.'
 'Now is the month.'
 1903—Op. 13, 'Indra,' Symphonic Poem.* †
 Op. 14, Quintet for wind.* †
 1902—Op. 15, Six baritone songs:
 'Invocation to Dawn.'
 'Fain would I.'
 'Sergeant's song.'
 'In a wood.'
 'Between us now.'
 'I will not let thee go.'
 Op. 16, Six soprano songs:
 'Calm is the morn.'
 'My true love.'
 'Weep no more' (Stainer & Bell).
 'Lovely, kind.'
 'Cradle song.'
 'Peace.'
 1903—Op. 17, 'King Estmere,' ballad for chorus and orchestra (Novello).
 1904—Op. 18, 'The Mystic Trumpeter,' soprano solo and orchestra (Patron's Fund).*
 1905—Op. 19, No. 1, 'Song of the night,' violin and orchestra.* †
 1911—Op. 19, No. 2, 'Invocation,' cello and orchestra (May Mukle, Queen's Hall, 1911).*
 Op. 20, (a) Songs from 'The Princess,' for female voices (Novello).
 (b) Four Carols for mixed voices (Bayley & Ferguson).
 1906—Op. 22, Songs without Words: 'Marching Song,' 'Country Song,' for small orchestra (Novello).
 Op. 23, 'Sita,' opera in three Acts.* †
- 1907—Op. 24, 'Hymns from the Rig-Veda,' for solo voice:
 'Dawn,' 'Varura,' 'Creation,' 'Indra,' 'Maruts,' 'Frogs,' 'Faith,' 'Vac,' 'Varuna' (ii) (Chester).
 'The Heart Worships,' soprano song (Stainer & Bell).
 Op. 21, (a) 'Songs of the West,' orchestra (Selection of West Country Songs).*
 (b) 'Somerset Rhapsody,' orchestra (produced by Edward Mason).*
 1908—Op. 25, 'Savitri,' opera di camera (produced 1916).*
 Op. 26, 'Choral Hymns from the Rig-Veda' (Stainer & Bell):
 1908—Group 1, Mixed chorus and orchestra.
 1909—Group 2, Female voices and orchestra.
 1910—Group 3, Female voices and harp.
 1912—Group 4, Male voices and orchestra.
 (Produced in London by Edward Mason)
 1909—Op. 27, (a) Incidental Music to 'A Vision of Dame Christian' (a Masque at St. Paul's Girls' School).*
 (b) Incidental Music to Stepney Pageant (for children).*
 Op. 28, (a) First Suite for Military Band.*
 1911—Op. 28, (b) Second Suite for Military Band.* †
 1910—Op. 29, No. 1, Oriental Suite in E minor for orchestra, 'Beni Mora' (produced at Balfour Gardiner concerts).*
 1911—Op. 29, No. 2, Fantastic Suite for orchestra, 'Phantastes' (produced at Patron's Fund concert).*
 1910—Op. 30, 'The Cloud Messenger,' Ode for chorus and orchestra (produced at Balfour Gardiner's concerts) (Stainer & Bell).
 'Christmas Day,' chorus and orchestra (Novello).
 Four Whittier Songs, 'Part-Songs for Children' (Novello).
 1911—Two Eastern Pictures, part-songs for female voices and harp (Stainer & Bell).
 Op. 31, No. 1, 'Hecuba's lament,' from 'The Trojan women,' for alto solo, female chorus, and orchestra.* †
 1913—Op. 31, No. 2, 'Hymn to Dionysus,' for chorus and orchestra (produced at Balfour Gardiner concerts) (Stainer & Bell).
 1912—Two Psalms for chorus, strings, and organ (Augener). †
 1913—Suite in C, for string orchestra * †
 1914—'Dirge for Two Veterans,' part-song for male voices and brass (Curwen).
 1915 Op. 32, 'Mars', 'The Planets,' Suite for large
 & 'Venus' } orchestra (produced at
 1916—'Mercury', } Royal Philharmonic Con-
 'Jupiter', } cert, 1919, with the excep-
 'Saturn', } tion of 'Venus' and
 'Uranus', } Neptune'.*
 'Neptune' }
 1916—Op. 33, Japanese Suite for orchestra (produced a Coliseum, 1916, and Queen's Hall Promenades, 1919).*
 1916—Op. 34, Part-songs for mixed voices:
 'To-morrow shall be my dancing day' (Augener).
 'Bring us in good ale' (Curwen).
 'Terly Terlow' (Stainer & Bell).
 'Lullay' (Curwen).
 Op. 35, Four songs for voice and violin:
 'Jesu Sweet.'
 'I sing of a maid.'
 'My soul has nought.'
 'My leman is so true of love.' } (Chester.)
 Choruses from 'Alceste,' for female voices, harp, and flutes.* †
 Op. 36, Three hymns for chorus and orchestra (Stainer & Bell):
 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence.'
 'Turn back, O man.'
 'A festival chime.'
 Op. 36, Six Choral Folk-Songs (Curwen):
 'The seeds of love.' 'Matthew, Mark.'
 'The blacksmith.' 'Swansea Town.'
 'I love my Love.' 'There was a Tree.'

* MS. † Never performed.

- 1917—Op. 37. The 'Hymn of Jesus,' for two choruses and semi-chorus, orchestra, pianoforte, and organ (Stainer & Bell, for the Carnegie Trust).
 1917—Op. 37. Part-songs for children :
 'The corn song' (Arnold).
 'Song of the lumbermen' (Arnold).
 'A dream of Christmas' (Curwen).
 1918—Ballet for orchestra to opera, 'The Perfect Fool.'*†
 1919—Ode to Death, chorus and orchestra (words by Walt Whitman). *†

A SLOVAK MUSIC-DRAMA.

BY ROSA NEWMARCH.

In an earlier article on Czechoslovak music contributed to this journal I drew a distinction between the popular melody of western Bohemia, which has passed under foreign influences and become more regular in its rhythms and more ordinary in its tonal system, and the folk-music of Moravia and Slovakia, which still retains its relations with the old Church modes, and shows structural peculiarities and a rhythmic pliancy not to be found in the Czech songs. Not in music alone have the peasantry of these eastern provinces preserved their old-world characteristics. Their picturesque customs, their beautiful dresses, their sense of form and colour displayed in their embroideries, pottery, and peasant arts in general, vie with their songs and dances in giving expression to a strongly-marked racial temperament. It is not surprising that the national movement of the last few decades should have taken special cognisance of these districts, which have remained the sealed treasury of ancient customs and sentiments. The mountaineers (the Vallachians) are a tragic and struggling folk, but the Moravian-Slovaks, besides being æsthetically gifted, are a handsome race; hospitable, warm-hearted, passionate-tempered; fond of good wine and good horses; ardently addicted to singing, dancing, and festivity.

Some years ago a little colony of artists settled at Hodonin, not far from the Hungarian frontier. The leader of this group of painters, Joseph Uprka, has reflected in his brilliant pictures the glowing colour and energetic movement of the Slovak peasantry at work and at play. Happily—as I think—no school of music has, so far, made a similar conscious effort to exploit the local colour of Slovakia, but a good many composers have introduced touches of it into their works, while others have made complex artistic settings of some of the folk-songs in order to supply the demands of such highly organized choirs as the Society of Moravian Teachers, and others.

It was not, however, until the spring of 1916 that Leos Janacek made a more ambitious effort to interpret the soul of his race in music. An opera dealing in a realistic way with peasant life in Moravia, 'Jeji Pastorkyna' (Her Foster-daughter), although produced at the National Theatre, Prague, under war-time conditions, and at a moment of great political tension, became instantly the topic of the hour. Janacek was unknown as a composer of dramatic music, but it was no secret that he had dwelt among the folk whose

life he illustrated in his opera, and that he was intimately acquainted with their psychology, their music, and the accent and cadence of their speech. Of his success in reproducing these peculiarities in his vocal phrases I am no judge, but Slovaks have told me that with their eyes blinded they would instantly recognise the protagonists of 'Jeji Pastorkyna' as Moravian peasants.

I imagine that the first plan of the opera if it had been strictly adhered to might have proved a dramatic failure. Janacek endeavoured to pack into it the sum-total of his knowledge of the people. The result would have been an over-filled canvas—confusing in its wealth of detail, somewhat sordid in its realism. Fortunately for this work of genius in the rough, experienced advice effected a judicious selection and polishing of material, while the same experience showed how the orchestration might be artistically treated without losing its individual character. In a word, Janacek found a Kovarovic, as Moussorgsky found a Rimsky-Korsakov.

Because in a naturalistic opera dealing with everyday life, in which no atmosphere of romantic glamour or historic pageantry diverts us from the value of the plot and its literary treatment, the book is of equal importance with the music which clothes it, I make no apology for dealing with the libretto of Janacek's work in a detailed fashion. The author, Gabriella Preiss, is a woman; but her text is a strong and virile achievement. The full title of the opera is 'Jenufa: her foster-daughter; an opera from Moravian peasant-life, in three Acts.' The characters are:

Old Grannie Buryja	...	...	Contralto
Laca Klemen	{ stepbrothers, }	...	Tenor
Steva Buryja	{ her grandsons }	...	Tenor
Widow Buryja	(daughter-in-law of		
Grannie Buryja, a sacristan's widow)			Soprano
Jenufa (her foster daughter)	...	...	Soprano
An old villager	...	...	Baritone
The Mayor	...	...	Bass
The Mayor's wife	...	...	Mezzo-Soprano
Karolka (their-daughter)	...	...	Mezzo-Soprano
A maid	...	...	Mezzo-Soprano
Barena (the servant at the mill)	...	...	Soprano
Jano (a shepherd boy)	...	...	Soprano
Auntie	...	...	Contralto

Act 1 takes place on an autumn afternoon in front of a lonely mill in the mountains. Grannie Buryja, in the foreground, is busy with a big basket of potatoes. In the background Jenufa is standing beside the mill-stream watering a pot of drooping rosemary. Presently she sets this down and, shading her eyes with her hand, gazes long into the distance. On a fallen tree trunk on the left, sits black-haired Laca, whittling and peeling a switch. We soon see very clearly what is going on in the minds of this trio. Jenufa, standing apart from the others, sings a soliloquy which reveals at once the germ of the tragedy about to be developed. 'Evening is here,' she sings, 'and Steva has not returned. What if he is taken as a recruit? What if there is no wedding, and I am brought to