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Six-Stop Organ: Unique Specification

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- Mr. Laurence M. Ager, Hellingly Parish Church—First movement (Sonata No. 1), *Mendelssohn*; March for a Church Festival, *Best*; Allegretto, *Wolstenholme*.  
 Mr. F. de G. English, Halifax Parish Church—Sonata in E flat minor, *Rheinberger*; Prelude and Fugue in B minor, *Bach*; Meditation and Finale, *Klein*.  
 Mr. Albert Orton, Parish Church, Harrow-on-the-Hill—Dithyramb, *Harwood*; Andante in F, *S. Wesley*; Prelude and Fugue in A minor, *Bach*; Air and Variations, in G, *Rheinberger*.  
 Mr. S. Maurice Popplestone, Primitive Methodist Church, Salisbury—Toccata (Symphony No. 5), *Widor*; Meditation-Elegie, *Borowski*; 'Finlandia'.  
 Mr. Alban Hamer, Bloemfontein Cathedral—Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, *Bach*; Prelude to 'Parsifal'; Pæan, *Harwood*.

## APPOINTMENTS

- Mr. G. C. Gray, organist and choirmaster, St. Martin's, Potternewton, Leeds.  
 Mr. A. G. Hazeldine, organist and choirmaster, St. Andrew's, Whitehall Park, N.

## Letters to the Editor

## 'MISDIRECTION IN ORATORIO SINGING'

SIR,—In the *Musical Times* for January, 1922 (pages 25-27), Archdeacon Gardner enters a timely protest against (among other things) 'the undue hurrying of familiar choruses [of oratorios] in order that they may sound fresh and exciting.' May I be allowed to give my humble support to this protest, and even to show that there is need for it in respect of many other performances than those of oratorio choruses?

Having sat next to Hubert Parry in a back row of second basses in the Bach Choir for the first ten years (1875-85) of its history, I may be allowed to call to mind that though our then conductor's (Otto Goldschmidt's) *tempi* may by some have been thought too slow, he did nevertheless get such tone from his instruments and such vocal quality from his singers that on three occasions he actually won encores from St. James's Hall audiences: twice (1876 and 1879) for the *Cum Sancto Spiritu* in the Mass in B minor, and again for the *Fecit Potentiam* in the Magnificat of Bach.

But in subsequent years it has been my fate to hear *Cum Sancto Spiritu* taken so fast, even under very distinguished conductorship, that all the force of the great ascending and descending sequential ladders of phrases was completely lost. Owing to forced speed, there was no breath in the singers and no tone in the strings; and all that a first hearer could get was a succession of crude patches of orchestral colour with small suggestion in them of either line or shape.

I remember too, how, when I wished to repeat the pleasing experience of a performance of *Phæbus and Pan* under Mr. Julius Harrison, I went again to Covent Garden, to find enthroned another conductor who thought he could get more vivacity into Momus's song *Patron, Patron*, and more boisterous fun into Midas's *Pan ist Meister*, by taking both at much faster *tempi*. The only result of the higher speed was that both songs became long and tedious instead of crisp and short as before. Let me try and show why there is no paradox here, and why the performance that takes the shorter time seems longer in effect. Surely all undue accelerations are achieved at the expense of instrumental tone and timbre, of the clarity of decorative figures, and of the breaths and voices of singers. Composers must be supposed to choose their instruments and write their choral parts so as to get the best tone to be had at the given pace. In other words, speed, tone, and clarity all act and react upon each other. At forced speeds graceful or brilliant string passages may well degenerate into mere unmusical scratchings. In such cases your gay movement, losing the effect of its humorous or exhilarating figures, becomes not more 'jolly' but less so, and may indeed become ineffective to the point of tedium.

Conductors are usually tempted into 'speedings-up' by one or other of the following lures:

- (1.) The desire, as in the above case of *Phæbus and Pan*, to get more joviality or humour out of the music;
- (2.) There is the delusion, in the case of established classics, that their familiarity makes audiences the more ready to get quickly to the end.

Here let me say that it is a mistake to suppose that in the case of classical compositions of past centuries it is their duration that makes for impatience in the hearers. Modern audiences may be exacting towards performances of classical works; but it is not higher speeds that they want so much as higher standards of execution. The more familiar the style and matter of a composition the more does the audience demand of the executant. Speeding-up lowers the quality of the execution without giving anything (not even seemingly shorter duration) in its place. Those who had the luck, as I did, to hear Richard Strauss, in London, somewhere about 1912, conduct a performance of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony, will bear me out in the recollection that with *tempi* far more moderate than usual he got a reading in which almost every bar was a revelation. And how much too soon it was over!

- (3.) Then there is the desire (in *Scherzos* and the like) to get record speeds and so outdo competitors. (Have not some of us heard the *Scherzo* and *Trio* of Beethoven's ninth Symphony murdered that way?) Lastly, and basest of all, there is the managerial need to sacrifice the music—as, e.g., in the case of *Parsifal* in London two or three years ago—to the catching of late 'buses and suburban trains.

So far I have dealt only with objective considerations: let me mention others. Music, most jealous of mistresses, brooks neither competitors nor distractions. You cannot listen, certainly you cannot listen with appreciation, to fine music amid the babel of a social gathering crowded with acquaintances. Nor can a hungry man listen, nor a man who is anxious about a train to be caught. Good music must be supreme, or it is nothing. The moment that music ceases to be the one preoccupation of the hour, its magic vanishes with its lost supremacy. Conductors who aim at excessive speeds are doing the very thing that must deprive music of its ascendancy over our attention. How can you listen with attention to music of which its chief executant makes it seem his one desire to get to the end? Music played thus seems presented as unimportant. The performance of what sounds unimportant soon comes to sound perfunctory, the perfunctory soon degenerates into the trivial, and the end is that we lose interest and find the piece long because it has been made dull.

So it is that conductors who force speeds beyond what the character of the music will bear are in truth defeating their own chief objects.—Yours, &c.,

7, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea.

February 15, 1922.

## SIX-STOP ORGAN: UNIQUE SPECIFICATION

SIR,—I regret troubling you with this again, but noticing discrepancies in your February number, I thought if you agree it would be as well to correct the same. It should read:

## Upper—GREAT

- |  |     |       |              |
|--|-----|-------|--------------|
| 1. Stopped flute   | ... | 4-ft. | } All Metal. |
| 2. Fifteenth   | ... | 4-ft. |              |
| 3. Mixture (two ranks, 19th and 22nd bass; 12th and 17th treble) | ... |       |              |

## Lower—CHOIR

- |                     |     |       |                   |
|---------------------|-----|-------|-------------------|
| 4. Open diapason    | ... | 8-ft. | } All Wood (Oak). |
| 5. Stopped diapason | ... | 8-ft. |                   |
| 6. Principal        | ... | 4-ft. |                   |

Yours, &c.,

R. H. GATES.

The Mindens, Paignton, S. Devon.

February 6, 1922.