

# THE Musical Times

ESTABLISHED IN 1844

---

Sir Hubert Parry on Seventeenth-Century Music

The Oxford History of Music, Vol. III. The Music of the Seventeenth Century by C. Hubert H. Parry

Review by: Cecie Stainer

*The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 43, No. 718 (Dec. 1, 1902), pp. 807-808

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3369496>

Accessed: 19/01/2015 00:18

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Musical Times Publications Ltd.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

SIR HUBERT PARRY ON  
SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MUSIC.\*

Anyone who passes directly from the first volume of the Oxford History of Music (The Polyphonic Period, by Professor Wooldridge) to the third, which has just appeared, will probably feel rather a shock at the abrupt change of atmosphere. One springs from the domain of purely ecclesiastical choral work into a breezy sphere of youthful attempts to bring a vivid, throbbing interest into music, to express song and laughter, tears and misery, in such a way that even music without words should convey to its hearer a sense of what it meant.

Although the opening remark of the Preface that 'the seventeenth century is, musically, almost a blank, even to those who take more than the average interest in the Art,' seems at first sight discouraging to the intending reader, one finds that there is no lack of material in these delightfully-written and closely-printed pages. For the historian it proves to be a most suggestive century; it shows the slow growth of secular music; of instrumental music shaking itself free from the fettering principles of choral writing. Things temporal, as opposed to things spiritual, had been so rigorously excluded from church choral compositions that even rhythm was avoided, because it represented the idea of physical action, of dancing, light-hearted movement, and was therefore on the wrong side of the hard and fast line drawn between that which was sacred and that which was secular or profane. Music wished to become more worldly, but found it impossible if sixteenth-century methods of choral writing were to be closely adhered to; a secular style was required, and it originated naturally enough in the music of the people, essentially rhythmic. For the accompaniment of rhythmical songs simple harmonies were wanted; dance music for stringed instruments gave an impulse in the same direction; and finally the popular use of the lute proved a most powerful factor in the introduction of chords as a means of accompanying a melody.

A certain amount of preliminary work had been done before the beginning of the seventeenth century, but a definite attempt at dramatic music was made in the year 1600, when Giacompo Peri's 'Euridice' was performed in Florence. The music, following the action of the play, was very simple in construction, and its interest to its hearers must have been largely due to their instinctive feeling of what it might lead to. Composers of all nationalities eagerly threw themselves into the new opening, but one stands out pre-eminent, Claudio Monteverde. A professional viol-player, he realised that intervals which had always been considered too abrupt and difficult for voices to take were easily played on a stringed instrument, no difficulty in making sure of an augmented fourth there!—and he proceeded to use discords in what was for his time a peculiarly daring manner: to use them as a means of representing keen emotion. Of the one fragment extant of his opera 'Arianna,' it is said that 'it moved all who heard it to tears,' while his 'Orfeo' contains the most dramatic music of his time.

The manuscripts which have been preserved of Cavalli's operas show how closely he followed in Monteverde's footsteps, although his music tended more towards simplicity of design and clearness of construction than dramatic colouring. In his opera 'Giasone' (1649), he established the principle of an introductory symphony in movements which, though

quite distinct, are related to each other in character; a principle which was afterwards to evolve on the one hand into the French overture, in which a serious slow movement was succeeded by a fugue, and on the other into the Italian introductory sinfonia, generally consisting of an allegro, a slow movement, and a finale.

Later on the music of Carissimi shows clearly the steady progress that the new ideas had made, for he brought them to bear on sacred music, and did much towards its secularization. French opera is generally supposed to have been influenced by the Italians through Cavalli, who was in Paris in 1660, but it always kept essentially national characteristics in its dance-tunes and chansons. It reached its high-water mark in the time of Lulli. All of his works present the same definite type—the opening overture, the prologue, with its alternate chorus and ballet, followed by the play, distinguished by its fine declamatory recitative.

Organ music also made rapid strides in development in this century. The realisation of the fact that, if there were no words to give listeners a definite idea, the music must do it, led to a musical 'subject' being systematically introduced and continued throughout a composition. There is a long and famous roll of Italian organist-composers, while Sweelinck, of Amsterdam, is a familiar name, and the Danish composer Buxtehude wrote fine music of a genuinely instrumental character; but it was in Germany that the most extraordinary activity was shown:—

Organ music may indeed be said to be the first branch of art in which Germany asserted herself as an independent musical nation; and even the great achievements of her composers in the lines of choral music, which were among the greatest glories of the eighteenth century, were arrived at through the adaptation for vocal purposes of the style they had evolved for contrapuntal organ music.

Johann Pachelbel especially, whose work must have been well known to J. S. Bach, wrote some of the finest Choral-Vorspiele of the time.

Meanwhile, in England, composers had been writing music for the virginals; there are wonderful collections preserved in our old libraries of dance-tunes, pavans, galliards, and allemandes, of fantasias, and elaborate sets of variations on popular tunes, which are full of intricate and ingenious devices. The description given by Sir Hubert Parry of characteristic compositions by Orlando Gibbons, Byrd, Bull, and Farnaby is full of interest, and is illustrated by many musical passages. It is worth while to compare the variations (p. 87, ex. 68, p. 88, ex. 70) taken from Benjamin Cosyns's Virginal Book in the Royal Music Library at Buckingham Palace with the music as given in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book (pp. 6, 16) which was published in full by J. A. Fuller Maitland and W. Barclay Squire in 1899, for the two books differ in a remarkable degree.

English church music was also showing signs of new life; anthems containing solo music, technically known as 'verse' anthems, are heard of as early as 1610; a very fine one was composed by Orlando Gibbons in 1618, and Barnard's great collection of sacred music, published in 1641, contains anthems by William Byrd in which solo passages alternate with chorus; but although this important step in advance had been made, the devotional contrapuntal style remained essentially the same. A long interval of enforced silence during the Puritans' sway, due to their pronounced aversion to church music, produced a great change, for it led to a marked development of secular music. Numbers of collections of 'ayres'

\* The Oxford History of Music, Vol. III. The Music of the Seventeenth Century. By C. Hubert H. Parry. Oxford, at the Clarendon Press. 1902. 15s. net.

for solo voices with tablature for the lute appeared; Robert Jones published his 'First Book' in 1600, a second in 1601, and a third in 1608 (not 1605, as stated on p. 193). Books of Consort Lessons, Fancies or Fantasias written for groups of instruments of various kinds, and especially the characteristic English masque, gave scope to the talent of such men as Morley, Gibbons, Campion, Lock, and others. When church music again came to the front at the time of the Restoration the result was shown in greater richness of harmonisation, a keener sense of rhythm, and in the definite adoption of declamatory solo music.

Pelham Humfrey, John Blow, Benjamin Rogers, and others helped to lay the foundation of the new kind of church music, but they all were overshadowed by the extraordinary genius of Henry Purcell. His anthems reach the highest point of that time. They differ largely from the old church music in the solo and ensemble pieces that they contain instead of the old massive chorus, also in the amount of instrumental scoring, for they are often preceded by symphonies written in two movements at least, which are almost equivalent to overtures. Purcell showed his variety of resource in choral work in his music for plays and operas, and especially in the numerous odes, secular and sacred, which were the forerunners of the cantatas and oratorios of a later date. The intention of making the music as apt as possible to the spirit of the words is evident both in the choral and solo writing, expressive harmonies being employed to bring out particular passages with intense vividness, while as for tunefulness—

Probably no composer except Schubert has ever had a readier fund of melody; and it always rings true and characteristic of the country to which he belonged.

Here we must pause, for in the space at our disposal it is only possible to touch on some of the results of seventeenth-century artistic activity. Sir Hubert Parry does not allow us to depend altogether on his graphic verbal descriptions, but prints a large number of musical passages to illustrate various points. It is unfortunate that in these examples so many errors have escaped detection in the proof-reading—accidentals are omitted or wrongly placed (exs. 159, 167, 179, 217, 224, 242) and wrong notes occur (exs. 140, 171b, 216, 290a, &c.)—one looks for greater accuracy in a work of this high standard. Sir Hubert Parry has obviously ransacked foreign and home libraries for manuscripts and seventeenth century publications, but he has wisely avoided any attempt to give an exhaustive list of compositions or composers, which would have unnecessarily overweighted the book, and delayed the successful completion of a great and arduous piece of work.

CECIE STAINER.

#### RICHARD STRAUSS'S 'FEUERSNOT' IN BERLIN.

The latest work of Richard Strauss—the one-act opera 'Feuersnot'—has had a career of rapid success in its own country. It will probably be successful in other countries too in time; but it is in many respects so very Teutonic, that it would be rash to predict its quick dissemination elsewhere. An important stage in its progress was its first production in Berlin on October 28, before an audience musically very representative, but socially not so brilliant as it would have been had the Court not chosen that evening for a visit to Madame Sarah Bernhardt. The production was a triumph. Those who know the ways of the Berlin public

assert that it is a long time since the composer of a new opera has been honoured by ten recalls, and that Herr Strauss's personal popularity in Berlin—where he is one of the conductors of the Opera—had little influence on the verdict of the public.

It is in many ways a work to which it is difficult to apply the ordinary canons of criticism, for it has moments of everything from opera bouffe to grand opera; and yet it leaves the hearer with a remarkable impression of homogeneity. The orchestra is treated with unparalleled freedom, and the main interest of the work centres in it; but it is hardly just to say that it is too symphonic, for Herr Strauss never allows considerations of purely musical development to hamper him in the attainment of dramatic effect. Those who know his orchestral works only will be surprised and delighted at his extraordinary mastery over choral effects; and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that some of the most important choruses come very near to the invention of a new art-form. He can create atmosphere by means of a chorus almost as deftly as by means of instruments. And as regards beauty of orchestral colour and ingenuity of scoring, 'Feuersnot' is equal to his greatest symphonic works; while in directness of utterance and beauty of melody it surpasses them. True he draws somewhat on folk-song, but to such melodies as that of the opening of *Kunrad's* address from the balcony—and to one of *Kunrad's* chief leitmotives—the epithet 'beautiful' cannot justly be denied, and moreover they are unmistakably Straussian.

The plot of Herr Ernst von Wolzogen's 'Singegedicht' is derived from an old Dutch legend, and he brings it into connection with the celebrations of Midsummer Eve and the lighting of the Johannisfeuer—the symbolical significance of which, as a glorification of the senses, is familiar in German literature. The scene is laid in Munich in the 'fabelhafte Unzeit' (the fabulous No-time—or Bad Time), and on Midsummer Eve *Kunrad der Ebner* is roused from his abstraction by the children asking for fuel for the bonfire. He suddenly realises how foolish he has been to neglect life and love for the sake of his old moth-eaten books, and bids the boys put them all into the fire. And then his eyes fall on *Diemut* the Burgomaster's daughter, and he promptly woos her and kisses her. She is enraged and plans revenge. She simulates affection for him, and promises him a midnight meeting if he will ascend to her room in a basket which she promises to draw up. But she leaves him dangling in mid-air and calls the people to scoff at him. He summons his magic power to his aid and causes all the flames to be extinguished, and tells the people that they cannot burn again till the maiden consents to be his. She quickly appears at the window and takes him in. Then all the people turn to her and urge her to yield. The two choruses—that which is sung when darkness comes, which ends in an outburst of rage against *Kunrad*; and that in which the anger of the people is turned against the too coy *Diemut*—are the two most striking moments of the opera. After the people have left the stage we come to the extremely beautiful and dramatic excerpt which was heard recently at a Queen's Hall Concert. Then, gradually, a light is seen in *Diemut's* room, and suddenly all the flames burst out, and the opera ends in a pæan of love.

So much has been said in the German criticisms of 'Feuersnot' about the topical allusions made in the speech addressed to the crowd from the balcony of *Diemut's* chamber by *Kunrad*, that it may be worth while to see what they are. *Kunrad* may be taken as typical of the new spirit as represented by the