

PETER TRANCHELL

in the

CAMBRIDGE REVIEW

Articles and Reviews by P.A.T. or concerning his music
1951 – 1959, & 1962

together with

P.A.T.'s review of "Britten and Brittenites"

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In this period *The Cambridge Review* (“A Journal of University Life and Thought”) was published weekly during Full Term by W. Heffer & Sons Ltd. Its regular contents included News and Notes; a miscellany of one-off articles; correspondence, regular book reviews and reviews as appropriate for the Union Society, Art, Cinema, Theatre, and University Sport; that week’s University Sermon; and a Calendar of Events.

Peter Tranchell returned to Cambridge as a University Assistant Lecturer in the Music Faculty in 1950, and from 1951 to 1959 he was a regular contributor to *The Cambridge Review* as Senior Music Critic, not only of reviews but also of occasional articles on a musical topic. The Editorship changed annually, and in the 1952-53 academic year was Harry Porter, Peter’s friend and one-time collaborator (for *Daisy Simpkins*), who subsequently continued to provide the Cinema reviews for some years.

This collection draws together all of PAT’s contributions, together with reviews by others of some of his music. Drafts of the articles by PAT can be found in the Cambridge University Library MS collection under the classmark Tranchell/9/3/5. The numbered footnotes are supplied by the editor.

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[Leppard on] *THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE*

It is almost impossible to write a completely successful opera. To speak only of the technique, it is a question of combining music, libretto, scenery and production in equal excellence. If one falls short, the whole is spoilt and no amount of excellence in one can save another part. Little wonder then that few operas succeed or that when they do their composers are old and experienced in failure. But this schooling of failure may ultimately produce a great opera—a goal that has not yet been achieved in one attempt, nor probably ever will be. The difficult task of the critic is to approach each new attempt, to appraise what is successful and to discourage what is not, remembering that *Tristan* could not have been written before *Fliegende Holländer*, nor *Othello* before *Macbeth*. In this hopeful spirit we approach Mr Peter Tranchell's opera, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which was performed for the first time at the Arts Theatre during the Cambridge Festival.

The subject, based on Hardy's novel of the same name, was a difficult choice. The story covers a period of over twenty years: a very awkward thing to convey on the operatic stage. Nevertheless the plot, as a plot and not an adaptation, was excellently devised. It stood on its own as a study in the rise and decline of one man, and with that in mind Mr Tranchell boldly cut out several important characters and altered the relationship between Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane. The libretto was not so successful. An opera libretto should be a vehicle rather for musical implication than for direct explanation. By realising implication the audience is drawn into the argument and will respond more than if it has to accept direct explanation passively. Largely due to the definite periods of time covered in between scenes and the events of these unstaged periods, explanation formed too large a part of the libretto. Most of it occurred at the beginning of scenes, resulting in too long a delay before music could take much part in the matter.

Mr Bentley's production and scenery did not often rise above a generally satisfactory level. There were well-conceived moments such as the arrival of Farfrae as Mayor, and the final scene was made moving by simple and restrained production. But on two occasions the production was bad enough to hinder the performance seriously. The opening scene, intended to represent the milling crowds at Weydon Fair, was so full of obstructing and inessential scenery that the large chorus could scarcely move; indeed, on some nights several members of the chorus seemed irrevocably wedged with their backs to the conductor, which resulted in a more complex score than the one Mr Tranchell had composed. The second bad flaw occurred during the tavern scene when Elizabeth-Jane was made to flirt unbecomingly with Farfrae. Such behaviour was inconsistent in a girl who was later to repudiate her father so self-righteously. A more modest reading of the scene with Farfrae making the first advances would have been better.

The two main impressions given by the music were of tremendous emotional drive and unflinching dramatic timing. The intense general harmonic level at times made climaxes only possible by increasing the volume of sound, but the energy was unceasing and the score was packed with striking melodic invention. A lengthier working out of some ideas would have given point to their being repeated later in the opera. As it was, Mr Tranchell too often passed on to new material, and only by studying the score or by constant hearing did the significance of the repeated ideas become evident. The dramatic timing was unflinchingly effective. It is most difficult to calculate how many notes are required to cover a movement, a moment of crisis, and all the other effects demanding careful timing on the stage. Mr Tranchell seemed never to make a mistake in this, the most intuitive part of an opera composer's technique.

The performance, being largely amateur, could not do full justice to the complicated score. Moreover, owing to the exigencies of University life, only three weeks' rehearsal was possible prior to the performance. The chorus especially suffered by this, but they sang and acted with great zest and enthusiasm which amply made up for their sins of occasional omission and confusion. Robert Rowell, as Henchard the Mayor, integrated the performance by his intelligent acting and amazingly clear singing. Throughout his long and arduous part every word was perfectly audible, and he elicited wholehearted sympathy for a character whose actions would not have been above reproach, especially towards his wife Susan, movingly played by José Stubbings. Mrs Goodenough, the firmity woman,

was sung by Isabel Faulkner. It was an enviable part, and Miss Faulkner made a delightfully vulgar character-study of it. The two lovers, Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae, played by Anne Keynes and Antony Vercoe, were naturally paler characters, and did not over-emphasise their parts. Elizabeth-Jane had some particularly awkward moments of production to contend with; but both sang with great charm, especially in the love-duet in the last scene. A last word of praise must go to the boy Abel Whittle, played by David Rye.

The financial risk involved in putting on a week of opera at a small theatre like the Arts is very great, especially when the opera is a new one, by a comparatively little-known composer, and performed by a largely amateur cast. The Cambridge Festival Planning Committee is to be congratulated on taking this risk in the spirit of artistic adventure for which Cambridge is justly famous.

R. J. L. [Raymond Leppard]

CAMBRIDGE FESTIVAL MUSIC

Quietly, cosily, we in Cambridge, while everyone else went abroad to Edinburgh or Perugia, we had our usual Summer Festival with its usual summer festival fare: some Marlowe or Shakespeare, some Purcell, a visiting symphony orchestra, and some poetry read in the Senate House by our favourite voice.

But this year the activities of the so-called amateurs reached an unwonted peak, and while the incursions into our courts of hired artistes may be welcome as a magic talisman or china egg to give our ventures an air of impending success, this article will rightly focus on amateur achievements, for it was these this year that stole the thunder, and maintained the tradition that has given Cambridge its artistic reputation.

A person wishing to hear, say, Brahms' First Symphony, which was played at us in the Guildhall, might do so practically anywhere in the world, but in Cambridge, works are performed and entertainments staged that could not even be contemplated save in Cambridge. It would be well if committees for purveying culture in Cambridge remember this. When we have local talent which can reach such high standards of performance with such paucity of preparation, there is no need to import our art. The Festival began on a Saturday with Madrigals under the bridge at King's. The Society sang as never before, the weather held fine, and visitors were presented with one of the ten loveliest experiences that Cambridge can provide, at its best; a fair opening to the orgy of intellectualism that followed.

Meanwhile the Sadler's Wells Ballet at the end of a week's sojourn in the Arts Theatre were doubtless surprised to find that suddenly their last performance was labelled "Festival." But as they had sold out weeks in advance, this probably made little difference, except that the bourgeoisie of the town spent all their pocket money here, and had nothing left to support the things that were to come.

On Sunday we heard the Monteverdi Vespers in King's Chapel. Thereafter things went with a swing—in the Arts Theatre, the first performances of Mr Peter Tranchell's opera, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and in New Court, St John's, the Historical Pageant of British Music produced by Mrs Camille Prior. It is incredible to think that these two monster productions both opened in the same week, but more is said of them elsewhere.

The Chapels of St John's and King's vied with each other in friendly rivalry, each giving programmes of sacred music and organ recitals. Mr. David Willcocks in King's and Mr. George Guest in St John's, while Dr Sidney Campbell came over from Ely to join battle on the organ at Trinity. Yet another belligerent, Gonville and Caius College Music Society, furthered the fray conducted by Professor Patrick Hadley in the College Hall.

For those who like their silences between musical items to be filled with the sound of other people reciting, there were afternoons of "poetry and music" in the Senate House, the first of which was honoured by the attendance of H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester. It was a pity that more of the crowd

assembled in the road outside to catch a glimpse of royalty did not seize the opportunity to enter and get a glimpse of eternity as well.

On Sunday, August 5, in Nevile's Court, Trinity, there was a "serenade concert," the first of two. Sir Adrian Boult conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra. One is tempted to wonder whether the idea of using Nevile's Court is to take advantage of the acoustics of the cloister, or to provide a dead open-air concert-hall which is not devoid of shelter in case of rain, or in fact to give the audience (sitting with its back to the library) distractingly beautiful surroundings. If the cloistered echo was desired, the orchestra should play in the cloister and not on the open grass. If the open-air effect was sought, then music suitable to such a setting should be chosen. Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, which was one of the items, certainly does not gain anything by the admixture of oxygen.

However, the elements wisely frowned upon the second serenade, and some 45 minutes behind schedule a bewildered mob representing only a portion of the original audience was admitted to a hitherto barred and bolted Guildhall to witness a disgruntled London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Dr Josef Krips. Never before can Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony* have sounded more pluvial. It seemed we were at a funeral. However, with Vaughan Williams' *Tallis Fantasia* the orchestra rallied and we were treated to indescribably exquisite playing, and the Brahms *First Symphony* which followed was so exciting that thunderous applause broke out almost before the last note had died away.

It is a continual mystery to me how the orchestra followed the conductor, for his language of signs was extraordinary. I got the impression that the players took his upbeat as the preceding downbeat, but not consistently. At any rate their attack was perfect, and once steam was raised, they certainly gave of their best.

The Guildhall was the scene of two further occasions. First the Choral and Orchestral Concert of the Philharmonic Society. Mr Frederick Rimmer took the rostrum for two pieces of Handel and Parry, while Dr Herbert Howells guided the chorus and orchestra through his *Hymnus Paradisi*, a moving work, charged with an atmosphere of subaqueous luminosity, now and then breaking surface in sudden outbursts of savagery, or diving into cool dark depths of other-worldly beauty. It is most creditable that the Society coped not only with this difficult programme, but also performed Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* in King's Chapel some days later. No mean feat, considering the little spare time at everyone's disposal.

The second concert in the Guildhall was that given by the combined bands of the Royal Horse Guards and the Scots Guards. The sight of some four or five dozen assorted guardsmen playing with incredible precision was a spectacle not to be missed, and the sound was thrilling. The concert had been billed for King's Great Lawn, but *Jupiter Pluvius* (nay, *Fluvius*) again had intervened. In the open the sound would have been merely stirring; indoors, in a confined space (at a distance of a few feet from us of the front row)—it was electrifying. So great indeed was the impact that after the first number, Bliss's short *Fanfare for a Dignified Occasion*, the whole house remained spellbound in silence.

The special work of the evening was Dr Gordon Jacob's *Festival Suite*. A brilliant piece of writing brilliantly played, but here and there just deficient in interest for those who have already suffered an hour of continual auricular bombardment. When the eleventh movement was done, the composer came and bowed in answer to a well-merited ovation. The Lady Margaret Singers gave a Choral Recital in St John's Chapel conducted by Mr George Guest. This was perhaps the most remarkable concert of choral singing in the whole festival. The programme included the *Missa O Bone Jesu* by Robert Fayrfax, Britten's *Hymn to Saint Cecilia*, and a Festival *Te Deum* specially composed by Mr Robin Orr.

The Fayrfax is not only hard work for a listener unsteeped in the music of the fifteenth century, but presents considerable difficulties to the singers; each of the five voices being so rhythmically independent as almost to defy concert. Under Mr Guest's guidance the result was little short of a miracle. The conductor's deft touch was again felt in the Britten where amongst many delicious

moments one was left completely breathless by the speed and aery suppleness of the section “I cannot grow; I have no shadow. . . .”

Mr Orr’s *Te Deum* was most stirring. It had its marked lyrical quality not abundant in the composer’s other works. The beginning and end were quiet, which is a change for a *Te Deum*, and the concluding notes were something of a surprise, forming a common chord. One would scarcely believe that a common chord could be made to convey so much of mystery, questioning, and perhaps even hell-fire, as it did here.

The final week of the Festival was graced by a production of the Dryden-Davenant version of *The Tempest* with Purcell’s music, about which more is to be said below. [In *The Anatomy of Musicology*]

All in all, the Arts Theatre Trust is to be congratulated on bearing the burden of all that took place, and on providing the driving force behind the industry and enterprise which has made this year’s season a most outstanding artistic success, and this in spite of inclement weather and manifold obstacles of time and money.

PETER TRANCHELL.

THE HISTORICAL PAGEANT OF BRITISH MUSIC

The Historical Pageant of British Music performed by the C.U.M.S., using St. John’s New Court as a background, only received one performance in the open air, the other two being given indoors owing to rain.

Out of doors, the effect alone of torchlight and horses, of groups and processions, made the evening a memorable one. But when the production had to be compressed in the cramping and somewhat disillusioning daylight conditions of St. John’s Hall, the pageant seemed shorn of its most important attribute—pageantry. Nevertheless the conception as a whole was grandiose, and a real laurel must be awarded to the ladies in the back room who so admirably clothed such a large cast.

Amongst much excellent devising and excellent singing the only major blemish was the dialogue. A timely cut would have been welcome in nearly every scene, for conversation had been allowed to outgrow its place, and one kept wanting to hurry on to some music. When the music did ultimately arrive the show came to life in no uncertain manner.

Each scene was preceded by a prologue, and here, as in many other places, the stage was dignified by the presence of senior members of our intellectuocracy. In the first scene we learned how the rota “Sumer is icumen in” came to be written, and how it should be sung. Next we were treated to a procession of Chaucerian Canterbury Pilgrims, and heard, amongst other things, one of those vital monodic estampies played on a recorder (with Handelian accompaniment on the harpsichord) at a dainty pace that was wholly charming. The next scene appeared to take place in a castle in Troyes, but I was unable to gather what was going on, and such of the dialogue as came my way gave no clue. Still, there was music, and the following scene was ample consolation, with Mrs Beatrice Oldfield as a highly colourful Queen Elizabeth, and Thomas Morley’s “Sing we and chant it,” amongst other favourites. Then we passed from pageant to pantomime, and were diverted by the incursion of some very primitive Puritans, complete with metrical psalm, who came not a moment too early in the midst of what appeared to be an abandoned cavalier debauch. It was one of the highspots of the evening.

But the final scene, showing Charles II’s return from Newmarket in 1682 (and a much happier return he had than ours some days ago) was undoubtedly the most pleasing of all. Mr Tickell as the restored monarch carried an engaging little puppy of royal breed, while Miss Jenny Burnaby carried us all into raptures with her saucy little dance as Nell Gwynn.

Mrs Prior and Mr Ord are to be greatly thanked for their happy choice of music and their admirable drawing of human patterns to set it off. I have deliberately refrained from singing the praises of individual soloists of whom there were many and talented, for with a cast of several hundred persons the line of backs requiring a pat is something to boggle at. The Society, however, as a whole, deserves hearty congratulations on its policy and its achievement. P. T.

3 November 1951

THE ANATOMY OF MUSICOLOGY

Musicologists! Ugh! It is a grave sign of the degeneracy of our civilisation that there is such a word, let alone such an occupation as musicology. When the hero lays down the sword and the historian takes up the pen, one immediately diagnoses a Silver Age. But when an art becomes the subject of disinterested rummaging and ruminating, and when men stop being expert at some form of artistry and are merely “experts” about it, then there is little to do save await the arrival of the Goths and Huns; the end is near.

Whether music is a vehicle of beauty, or gives some higher spiritual communion in a divine language too profound for the human tongue, or whether it is just a downright source of sensuous pleasure, it is incredible that anyone born with the slightest musical sympathies should be able to detach himself from the desire to make it or hear it. Yet the musicologist appears to hold aloof—an alien growth like the mistletoe—and derives his nourishment without making any contribution.

Just as an archaeologist, shovelling about in some poor Celt’s barrow, unearths a few paltry trinkets precious to the hero of long ago, so the musicologist pores amongst the arid crackling manuscripts and digs out the long forgotten work of some long forgotten worthy.

The archaeologist is not intrinsically delighted by his discoveries. Their workmanship is crude, and the arrangement of beads is in deplorable taste, in fact the only thing to be said for them—(and it is nothing to do with artistic merit)—is that the finds are “interesting,” they are further clues in some problem, yes, they are “interesting,” they “shed light.” But they are not beautiful, and no archaeologist claims this for them.

The musicologist differs in just that. *His* treasure-trove is no more beautiful by present day standards than the archaeologist’s, and may even be (by virtue of the very nature of our current aural tradition and heritage) beyond or beneath our comprehension: But,—and here the musicologist bubbles over with self-deception—we are assured that the new-found fossil sheds not only light, but sweetness. We must like it, it must move us. If we are superficial, if we are snobs and want to appear in an intellectual *avant-garde*, we must pretend to appreciate it.

But you and I, dear reader, are not taken in by that, are we? We have a developed sense of tonality more kaleidoscopic than Handel’s; we are used to the tempered scale and even the twelve-note octave; we are not steeped enough in plainchant, in the erstwhile rhythmic and melodic modes to get even the second-best out of Perotinus or Di Lasso; our feeling for Arabic music is extremely tenuous; we are not sympathetic to mediaeval singing through the nose; we experience none of the revelation and physical aesthetic thrill at tonal relationships that were undoubtedly felt by those who perceived them for the first time in the seventeenth century. In fact, we are so constituted that we cannot honestly pretend we derive any pleasure or beatification from the music (and the manner of making it) that several decades ago pleased our differently constituted ancestors,—especially if we have to suffer it for more than a few moments.

Admittedly there is the antiquarian in all of us, but after the first minute of curiosity and temporary fascination, our faculties seal up like a cut and our blood holds no further parley with the open air. It is useless (and dishonest) to deny it. Personal taste should be the arbiter, not historical erudition. Alas, it is not always so.

How glad then is the heart to consider the major defeat of the musicologists and their gospel of authenticity this summer in Cambridge. The *Tempest*!

Had the pedants been at work, we should not have had the welcome re-interpolation of Shakespeare’s lines where Dryden’s were insufficient; the masque would have been dressed in period costumes,—gaudy french hose, coloured ribbons, feathered hats and all that—instead of the charming pale isabella negligés which were in fact used and which reminded us of the ghosts in *The Haunted Ballroom Ballet*, though many of the inmates were obviously all too solid flesh; yes, the pedants would have forbidden the violinists their vibrato, because this was a vulgar circus trick in Purcell’s day; and the harpsichord would have been tuned in some authentic temperament; and we should not

have had the refreshing addition of music from another of Purcell's works, the *Indian Queen*. This addition was an inspiration, providing as it did some extremely poignant bars at one of the most moving points in the drama. To the pundits this must have been a most frownworthy "fraud."

But in truth the show was guided by the exercise of taste and the wish to entertain, and not by the desire to parade knowledge or point a lesson. The appeal was to you and me, dear reader, not to intellectual climbers.

However, we are a "research"-ridden nation now, and as it takes an expert to catch out an expert, we are mostly at a disadvantage. Still, in music the audience is just as important as composer or performer, so we listeners must put our best ear forward, have our own opinions, in spite of Deller or Dolmetsch fashions, and not allow our natural diffidences to be preyed upon by a gang of book-knowledgeable spivs.

PETER TRANCHELL.

17 November 1951

JESUS COLLEGE ORGAN RECITAL

I have always had a suspicion that Bach was not such a monument of Teutonic stolidity as he is sometimes made out to have been. I have always felt, for instance, that the very opening phrases of the Toccata in C are a sign that the old boy liked a joke as well as any of us. But the joke must be allowed to tell itself.

Peter Hurford's organ recital of Bach in Jesus College Chapel¹ on November 7 made me quite sure. He began with the said Toccata (followed by its Adagio and Fugue), and those first phrases left no doubt as to his understanding. This welcome level of intelligent artistry was sustained throughout the performance, the more sombre moments receiving their due respect without over-emphasis, and the gayer ones their just vitality without being underplayed.

But the quality of an organ recital is not entirely in the hands of the organist; and though Peter Hurford did all in his power to convey light and shade and contrasts of time and timbre, the Jesus organ (I could not help noticing) seems a somewhat limited contraption.

Some of its stops are delectable, some of them probably almost heirlooms, but the ear will not be titillated indefinitely by any one unvaried delectation. The nuns were doubtless satisfied, but life moves faster now; and the senses, like the Athenians, require novelty in ever-increasing stream. That is the penalty of living in the twentieth century.

But there it is, the Jesus organ, whilst being in many ways a charming instrument, has not enough variety.

Still, the programme was nicely balanced, with the Fugue alla Gigue, the 4th Trio-Sonata, and a number of Chorale Preludes: in fact the evening was an enjoyable one.

But we are to hear more. Boris Ord and Ralph Downes (organist of the Brompton Oratory) are to give further Bach recitals on the 21st and 28th of November respectively. It will be interesting to see how these two master-musicians cope with the rather constricted medium that awaits them.

PETER TRANCHELL.

2 February 1952

THE GOLDEN AGE SINGERS

The Golden Age Singers at the Guildhall last Sunday afternoon gave a delightfully mellifluous recital of madrigals, balletts and canzonets, in a programme which also included numbers in Italian and French.

¹ Hurford was Organ Scholar of Jesus, 1949-1953.

The five singers were beautifully blended and contrasted, and even in passages of temporary dubiety, their difference of opinion did not really serve to impair their delicious concert[*sic*]. As they sat round a table looking for all the world like an Elizabethan family at a game of Canasta, we of the audience derived an additional authenticity in our cosy enjoyment of their songs.

Thanks indeed must be given for this opportunity to hear exquisitely such works as Weelkes' "O Care, thou wilt despatch me," "Hark, all ye lovely saints above" (not to mention the amusing canzonet "The Nightingale, the organ of delight"), or again, Monteverdi's "Ah dolente partita!" and "Tra Mule Fiamme," followed in due course by Morley's "Fire, fire!" and "Ho, who comes here"; while the gem of the afternoon was undoubtedly Orlando di Lasso's "Bonjour, mon coeur."

PETER TRANCHELL.

16 February 1952

[Philharmonic Society – The Seasons]

On Thursday, February 7, the Philharmonic Society performed Haydn's so-called Oratorio, "The Seasons," in the Guildhall. It was a solemn occasion, and with a preliminary two minutes' silence followed by the singing of God Save the Queen, the genre of the music made us feel almost as if we had been transported in time to the accession of Victoria.

The performance was most pleasing, with the solos in the excellent mouths of April Cantelo, Eric Greene and Gordon Clinton, and the baton in the very capable hands of Raymond Leppard. Gordon Clinton navigated his way through some tricky pieces of coloratura with a genial robust clarity (I cannot think why Haydn has concentrated his snags in the bass part), but it is to the chorus that I unhesitatingly take off my hat, and especially to the Philharmonic ladies. Their compass, firmness and one-ness of voice is quite amazing, and I was sad that one or two of the choral numbers were omitted for time's sake. A particular loss was the fine key-change at the beginning of the last chorus of Spring.

The orchestra had bitten off quite enough to be going on with, I would guess, but were chewing away valiantly. Haydn has written at times a cloud of fine little notes requiring that skilful, not to say skittish, performance that avoids any appearance of effort. Well, there were, of course, moments of apprehension, but in the main we must cry "well done."

However, there is one complaint to be made—about balance. Here I may have been the victim of the Guildhall's acoustics, but I fancy that the majority of the audience generally is. I had not a little difficulty in hearing any words, and it would not seem to be through the failure of soloists or chorus to articulate them. The room is a treacherous place, and the orchestra often manages to drown the voices unless kept in check. Usually this is an advantage, but in "The Seasons" Haydn has written many orchestral illustrations, more than in "The Creation," and to be appreciated their vocal explanation must be heard. The swarming of bees, the spouting of mountain torrents, dogs snuffing the scent, and so on, are not in themselves ideas communicable by music alone. Words must assist, and this is true throughout.

I was particularly struck by Haydn's economy and sureness of effect in the hush preceding the storm. The detached string chords were simply electric, and in comparison with Beethoven's similar preparation for a storm in the fourth movement of his Pastoral Symphony, I find Haydn's suspense somewhat superior to Beethoven's messy shower of second violin raindrops. Again, one is as impressed by the Prelude to Winter for its almost Wagnerian chromaticism as one is by the Chaos prelude to "The Creation."

All in all this is a very refreshing work, not out to shock or to edify—thank goodness—but to delight and amuse. I was sorry not to have heard more laughter in the audience at the many points of humour and wit, but some people are easily over-awed by the word Oratorio, and others do not think they have had their money's worth unless treated to a strong dose of hysteria alternating with neurasthenic sentimentality. Nevertheless, I was certainly satisfied, and consider that the

Philharmonic Society and their guests are to be loudly congratulated on giving us a charming and absorbing evening.

PETER TRANCHELL.

23 February 1952

JAN SMETERLIN AT THE GUILDHALL

Last Sunday the pianist Jan Smeterlin gave a Romantic recital in the Guildhall. An Albert Hall agoraphobia seemed to seize him, and for much of the time we were thundered and blasted by his fine disregard for the structural limitations not only of our ears but of the piano. However, Smeterlin's technique is very fine, and in many respects of interpretation his artistry superb—indeed there were passages in which the pianissimo was extremely exciting. His facial mannerisms, his tendency to burst into song at moments of crisis, and his over-fluidity of pedal did not really serve to detract from his performance, as they would have with a lesser man; and at the end he was able to take his due meed of bows and encores with no appearance of having snatched them.

The programme started with Schumann's Phantasie in C, opus 17, a grateful example of the Teutonic meringue, after which came, somewhat lamely, works by Granados and Dukas. Of the latter composer I have no hesitation in saying that he ought to have written more film music than he did, but that as he did not, he was most wise to destroy, as he did, the greater part of his output. Even Smeterlin could not conceal from us the absence of message in what was otherwise a nicely phrased but long-winded telegram.

The peak of the afternoon was at about five to four—Chopin's Preludes in their entirety. It was here that Smeterlin seemed to be more at home, playing almost as if only for his own personal diversion, though indeed it was greatly to ours as well. Considering that these pieces are probably amongst the meat and two veg. of all concert pianists, it was something of an artistic feat to give each one that fresh tenderness or boisterous insight that many repetitions so easily could have dulled.

PETER TRANCHELL.

1 March 1952

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA AT THE REGAL CINEMA

Last Sunday in the Regal Cinema there was a concert of Beethoven given by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. The works performed were the Leonora Overture No. 1 (for a change) and Symphonies No. 3 and No. 8. It is interesting to note that the Authenticists had not had their say. The "Eroica" came last in spite of Beethoven's preface (in Italian, which might account for its being ignored) requesting that this Symphony, purposely written at greater length than usual, may be performed nearer the beginning than the end of the concert, in case, with the audience fatigued by preceding pieces, the Symphony may fail to make its intended effect. However, in these days, when everyone is fatigued merely by the responsibility of being alive, such a minor inconvenience as a delay in the delivery of a symphony is taken easily in one's stride. But not many of us could vie in intellectual stamina with the Prince von Lobkowitz and Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia who insisted on hearing the symphony played three times over in one evening—an interval being made only because the orchestra demanded some supper before settling down to the third session.

No; somehow, one is always on the lookout for that little bit extra, spurious though it may be, that turns the act of interpretation into one of creation, that is, the excitement and distractions of actual performance. So it gave rather an old-world feeling to see Sir Adrian Boult adopt an almost studied pose of indifference or *laissez-faire*, and appear to let the orchestra severely alone. I visualised a scroll in his grasp, not a baton. But, in fact, both conductor and players had evidently conspired together beforehand to give the closest attention to the works in hand; fortepianos and off-the-beat sforzandos were all duly registered; Beethoven was allowed, nay encouraged, to speak for himself. So although

one's craving for a sauce piquante was not indulged, the concert was, to be sure, in all other respects highly satisfactory.

PETER TRANCHELL.

8 March 1952

THE MARJORIE HAYWARD SEXTET

Bearing in mind Brahms' misogynistic proclivities, it is only to be expected that he should deliberately pack his sextets ops. 18 and 36 with ungracious octave passages (which would be sure to sound out of tune), well knowing that they would in due course be performed by a sturdy little string band of ladies called the Marjorie Hayward Sextet. However, in some mysterious way this difficulty was surmounted by the said band, and the composer in his ugly little foible was left perhaps not exactly grunted.

There were some beautiful moments of individual playing, and in general we were treated to quite as much oasis as desert. But I regret to record that in a whole evening's music there was not one pianissimo worth the name from the ensemble—and this in spite of Brahms. It may be thought that extremes of expression are in bad taste—cheap and sensational: but there is no doubt about it that even a single *faux-pas* of this sort lends tone and distinction to the rest of the performance.

PETER TRANCHELL.

10 May 1952

THURSDAY CONCERT

Winifred Copperwheat (viola) and Hans Redlich (piano) gave last Thursday's concert. The programme paid a delicate, nay, robust compliment to our stamina, and Hans Redlich paid several to that of the piano.

Beginning (and continuing) with Brahms's Sonata in F minor, Op. 120, No. 1—a work whose architecture is as passionately undulating, as full of sudden jewels of artifice, and as concise as the main platform of Cambridge station—many of us were regaled with Britten's "Lachrymae," then some Wilfrid Mellers, and Schubert's "Arpeggione" Sonata—but not, alas, on an arpeggione.

Miss Copperwheat's tone and agility were a pleasure to perceive; and why would she come to Cambridge if they were not? The pair are to be congratulated on the lovely barrage of sound they put up.

Britten's "Lachrymae" in two hundred years' time will be one of those focuses of argument such as the Haydn Cello Concerto. Who, people will ask, could have written it? It is so full of extremes. But, in fact, it is a delicious joke (if you ignore the noncommittal fidgetting that passes for harmony). For sheer ingenuity of noise the work is hard to beat. There are many delectable high-spots: the passages where (pizzicatissimo) the player simulates a Lancashire loom—fingers shuttling in and out of the strings in a dither of devilish dexterity, or again where pathetic harmonics are elicited, reminiscent of a eunuch dying from laryngitis—or, in what should have been the finale (if Mr Britten had not tacked on a piece of Dowland at the end which was quite irrelevant)—the uprising *agitato* of a myriad angry bees swarming out to Grantchester at ten to three.

Mr Mellers's sonata was a different kettle of fish. In the main a moody but interesting work. Restraint the keynote, but restraint perhaps taken to excess. The whole was oddly shaped. Generations have found out that a sonata is most satisfactory with a quick finale; to put the finale in the middle, sandwiched between two dirges, is flying in the face of one's ancestors. But I admit this intermezzine finale is most adroit, for I have never till now heard a rondo so constructed that the main theme was indistinguishable from any of the episodes. This is cohesion with a vengeance. Harmonically, Mr Mellers is fascinating, and will soon overtake Hugo Wolf, unless the latter gets a move-on.

Miss Copperwheat was wise not to attempt to play the Schubert on the instrument for which it was written, namely, the arpeggione. The last time I heard this hybrid monster (fretted and bowed) some years ago near Dresden, it was said to be the only one in existence. During the concert the bottom fell out, the bridge collapsed, and the Allegretto was a fiasco. By now, I imagine the Anobium Punctatum has put a full stop to the movement.

SOLOMON

Last Sunday, in the Guildhall, we heard Solomon at the piano. He gave us two out of the Forty-Eight. In the C minor Fugue of Book II it was refreshing to hear the entries coming out! Discretion, but not pedagogic insistence. An interesting programme note told of a hitherto unknown episode in Bach's life—his appointment in 1701 as organist at *Darmstadt*. But in the subsequent list of his posts, that of organist (from 1703) at *Arnstadt* was omitted.

Mozart's Sonata in D major (K.576) gave opportunity for beautiful limpid tone, especially in the adagio. Solomon took it. Brahms's Op. 5 Sonata in F minor followed. This odd work came out rather like a Victorian penny that has been left on a railway line and run over. Flat, blurred, but glorious.

The final group of Debussy and Ravel was exquisite. The sustaining pedal was maintained from start to finish. This had superb effect in "La Cathedrale Engloutie." One wondered in Ravel's "Une Barque sur L'Océan." But then, clarity is scarcely a quality authentic to Impressionism.

Four gay encores wound up the proceedings. Chopin's Nocturne in F sharp major, and Waltz in E minor, Brahms's Intermezzo in C major (from Op. 119) and a Scarlatti Sonata in F. An extra scale here and there added lustre to an already surcharged chandelier of brilliance. An excellent evening's listening.

PETER TRANCHELL.

7 May 1952

[C.U. Composers' Club]

A few weeks ago, new works of some seven contemporary composers were performed in the Music School. The C.U. Composers' Club was holding its Open Concert. Let me record my impressions.

First came a Sonata for Two Pianos by Nigel Glendinning, not a member of the Music Faculty, by the way, but perhaps the most cogent and exuberant, though not the most mature composer of the evening. The medium of two pianos is a treacherous one. The temptation is to take the opportunity offered and hang on to it. For, after all, if one writes in a simple scanty style, one might almost dispense with one of the pianos. But the noise, the opacity given by two individual sustaining pedals, the physical percussiveness of four hands, however gentle, and the ease with which two players separated by 10 feet of reverberation can lose each other's place or tempo when concentrating on their own, all conspire against the eventual effect of the music.

I was a little overpowered. The fault, I think, was the composer's. But his invention of patterns and his modernistic-cum-romantic harmony consoled me for the lack of contrasts and for the absence of anything outstanding in the way of a melody.

Songs followed by Kenneth Elliot, Ian Kemp and Robin Watt. With the first group "Over the hills and far away" (an arrangement) and "Song at sunrise" I have no quarrel: in every way simple and unpretentious. Ian Kemp's "A ship, an isle, a sickle moon" was set in the most curious way. One does not ask for anything so naive as a direct attempt in music to describe an object mentioned, but somehow one does look for a catching of the mood of the words. Ian Kemp's vocal line was for the most part almost deliberately off-hand and contradictory; meanwhile the piano accompaniment was a marvel of delicate feeling and insight.

The opposite applied to Robin Watt's two songs, "Under the greenwood tree" and "Blow, blow thou winter wind." In spite of the ubiquity of these words with music of one sort or another, the composer had achieved a slightly fantastic but somehow natural, fresh and interesting vocal line,

against which the accompaniment seemed at times to jar by making too much effort to strike a *recherché* note.

I am diffident of expatiating on Albert Marshall's Two Songs (from his *Cantata of the Hours*), which came next, since the string quartet to a great extent obliterated the voices of the chorus of kind young ladies who obliged by singing, while the teeth of the same young ladies obliterated their words. However, the composer whilst producing music of much suavety, charm, and perhaps introspection, somehow failed to convey the real savour of those qualities, by serving them undiluted. It may be that the omitted portions of the cantata would have provided just the highlights of contrast required. I hate to harp on this matter of contrasts, but one does well to remember that Elijah's "still small voice" was effective because there had been wind, earthquake and fire to offset it.

Raymond Warren's Suite from Film Music to *Hadrian's Wall*, for flute, cor anglais, dulcitone and string trio, an accomplished piece, had a very much better chance than it got as an accompaniment to the film. Forgetting the Hadrian's Wall aspect—a subject, which, though tense with an undercurrent of martial and stirring memories, was treated by the film (and consequently by the music for it) with nothing more than a pastoral melancholy—the music as music was delicious. There were so many felicitous sonorities—especially those enhanced by the dulcitone. And the composer's skill in judging when to call a halt was such that one did not mind the pretty nostalgia of the first movement being maintained in the other two.

The concert finished with Three Miniatures for two pianos by Gordon Lawson, a warm work consisting of Introduction, Nocturne and Jig. The Jig was notable for its amusing syncopations, and the two-piano texture was well-controlled throughout.

It is perhaps rash to utter opinions from a single hearing, especially when the performance may be somewhat under-rehearsed, but the evening's programme was most interesting and diverting, and I am sure we have not heard the last of the matter.

PETER TRANCHELL.

31 May 1952

A May-Week Concert

An account of a concert given last May-Week will serve, I hope, as an incentive to those organising or attending May Week concerts this year to make these occasions ever more enterprising. The programme was audaciously planned and triumphantly executed, adding yet another petal of justification to the flower of undergraduate effort. The concert started after a mysterious delay of twenty minutes with a group of Madrigals by Possler, Coloncini, and Brown, of whom the first-named is too little known. As a composer of descriptive pieces he should rank a firm equal with, say, Antberger, on the score of his "Beehive" Madrigal alone.

Two Harpsichord Lessons of Padre Maroni followed on the piano. I congratulate the pianist on turning what might have been sawdust to our palates into something as gaily nutritive as damp sack-cloth.

A welcome change was Handel's celebrated "Hallelujah" Chorus, in an arrangement for two flutes. The imagination boggles at the idea of a couple of gallons forced into a half-pint pot, but it was a revelation how successful the limited medium proved. The total effect was perhaps a shade unsatisfactory, for the second flautist, fearing no doubt that the audience might suffer a surfeit of sifflage, hurried ahead, omitting a couple of bars in the first ten seconds, and pressing on with courageous disregard. He completed the course an easy winner by several lengths—having bumped the audience all along the line.

The second half of the concert began with a fine rendering of an aria by Petruzzio. Someone chose this moment to start a change-ringing practice in a neighbouring belfry, so we did not hear a note, but I am sure that every single one was delicious. It was a joy to perceive the singer's blushes of surprise and pleasure when, as he paused for breath during the second *ritornello* (which was no more audible

than the first), the audience broke into spontaneous applause, thinking this perplexing dumb show had spent itself.

Of the violin solo that followed, my lips are sealed more in pain than in anger, but I would render thanks to the committee that chose the work. A daring choice for May Week, for though not exactly contemporary, the work might still be called modern by many of us. The *Sonata da Camera* in D minor of Ughellini is a good instance of the macabre funereal gaiety of the 17th century. The movements were: Maestoso, Adagio, and Lentissimo. All of this and more was driven home to us.

The concert ended with some choruses of Handel performed by the College Chorus and "Orchestra." Lighting in College Halls is always arranged to be discreetly inadequate for soloists, but glaringly non-existent for a large body of players, and just so on this occasion. There was a pause in proceedings while a tumult of instrumentalists fought their way in and out of a tangle of wires and stands, and after darkness had been satisfactorily apportioned, and everyone had an excuse to play wrong notes, we began.

It is often hard to realise that such orchestras are formed principally by players from every other College but the one giving the concert, and that there has been little if any rehearsal. Tonight such a realisation was all too easy.

But all might have been well, had not a fire broken out in the piano—occasioned by a cigar-butt carelessly thrown away in the interval. In the ensuing eagerness to extinguish the flames, the platform bearing some of the basses (precarious at the best of times) collapsed, hurtling half a dozen lusty youths into the woodwind. No bones were broken.

Incidentally, worse damage had already been sustained by several persons in the interval, during a panic of empty stomachs towards the buffet.

But generally speaking, it is not often that the ideal concert is achieved, and if this account has shown what to aim for, my pains will have been rewarded. Someone has rightly said, a thing worth doing badly is worth doing extremely badly.

PETER TRANCHELL.

7 June 1952

C.U.M.S. MAY WEEK CONCERT

On Sunday, June 1, the May Week Concert of the C.U.M.S. was given in the Guildhall. Instead of writing my own opinion, I have consulted a number of people, and this short article is the distillation of listener research—another step towards the democratisation of discernment. I would add, that as indisposition prevented me from attending, this hearsay will not be discoloured by my own prejudices.

For Stanford's arrangement of God Save the Queen no comments were forthcoming, and this is praise indeed. Brahms's *Noenia* was pronounced charming, easy listening. *Saint Patrick's Breastplate* by Sir Arnold Bax lacked lustre, apparently—in fact it was really tedious. Bizet's Symphony in C was disappointing. Something more exciting could have been elicited from the material, perhaps. Much enthusiasm was expressed for the *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff. An intensely gripping work, obviously, with its forthright simplicity and impelling surge. One person labelled it lovely and loud. Another admired the trenchant fingerwork on the two pianos, and was impressed by the brilliant percussion being constantly detonated in the kitchen department. On the whole one gathers there was enough delicious noise to go round. No one went short.

Of the soloists, Adrienne Cole (soprano) was remarked on as very good, and Redvers Llewellyn (baritone) as not at all bad—with a special mention for his singing the part of a jovial abbot in the *Carmina Burana*. Peter Boggis also received a pat on the back. Meanwhile Boris Ord, the mainstay (not to say main sail, capstan, prow, keel and tiller) of C.U.M.S., was evidently in best of form, conducting with vigour and vitality.

PETER TRANCHELL.

11 October 1952 Volume LXXIV

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

We have often wondered why there is each year a Cambridge Summer Festival. Who goes to it? Most of the senior members of the University go away for the Long Vacation, the undergraduates cannot afford to come up, and in fact the city would at this time be considerably emptier than at any other time of year were it not for the hordes of foreigners who invade it. Even then, it cannot be said to be a metropolis crowded with potential Festival-goers. I was amused to see that a London paper recently told of the visit to our Arts Theatre of a repertory company from Guildford for what was optimistically called "the height of the Summer season"—that was, for the month of September. By then, of course, even the foreigners have gone away.

The foreigners seem to be the key to our Festival. We want their money. Very well then, let us make them truly enjoy our programmes. British folksongs, for instance, or old airs of that ilk, do not necessarily interest people of an alien background. I do not say sugar the pill, but at least make the pill smaller and more easily swallowed.

Bearing all this in mind, it was a pity to put on *The Beggar's Opera* in Professor Dent's version and in its entirety. Authenticity is a poor substitute for entertainment. It made a long evening seem even longer, on account of the endless succession of snippets. One hearing of every tune and then we rushed on to the next. No time to get acquainted with a happy phrase, no recapitulations, no high-spots—in fact one felt like a traveller passing picturesque country stations in an express train.

Of the production, one would say, "Charming, charming, charming." Not one breath of sordidity or squalor. If there is honour amongst thieves, we also saw refinement amongst whores. The costumes (Marianne Hill) were extremely fresh and pretty. One was surprised to find everyone so well got up, even in prison. The sets too (Quentin Lawrence) gave the same pleasing fully-fed atmosphere of spaciousness and gentility. I did not see a sign of the pox anywhere during the whole evening.

Of the singers, one would say David King was miscast as Macheath. This he evidently knew and it undermined his confidence (and ours) to a grave extent. Antony Severn as Filch was extraordinarily enigmatic. Perhaps the performance of the evening was given by Barbara Carter as Mrs. Diana Trapes. She brought a breeze of welcome unfresh air to what was otherwise a desert of respectability. I was particularly charmed to observe her canny handling of decanters in a bargaining scene with Mr Peachum (Robert Rowell) and Mr Lockit (William Armitstead). There were two decanters full of coloured liquid. One liquid was obviously precious, for on the entrance of Mrs Trapes, Robert Rowell deliberately pushed away this decanter (from which he and Lockit had filled their own glasses) and helped the lady to the evidently less interesting fluid from a fresh decanter. However, the lady very soon got her claws on to the right decanter, while the gentlemen were busy warbling their first verse, and poured herself a liberal helping in a new glass.

Apart from this little incident, the whole show lacked *élan*. The trollops' drinking party was by no means brazen, though there was some nice dancing (arranged by Iris Armstrong)—and the highwaymen's night out in the inn was desultory and unconvincing.

The music was played, as was to be expected, with great competence, except for a gong somewhere in the last scene—supposed to simulate a bell. This was played with so charmingly erratic an attack, that one felt the supposed belfry could not make up its mind whether it was very near or far away in the distance, and its vacillations were sudden and surprising.

The lines of the play are of course the most amusing part, and I fear without them much of the evening's entertainment would have been lost, as no doubt it was for those foreigners who came to sample our mysterious Cambridge theatrical taste.

PETER TRANCHELL.

1 November 1952

SOLOMON

The concert platform is a lonely place—and though some four score people were sharing it with the pianist last Sunday night—the rôle of soloist at a recital is still perforce a solitary one. It is hard to think of any great performer who does not (or did not) while away these hours of loneliness by holding conversation with himself or by some similar quirk of self-absorption. So it was with Solomon. Those vociferations of ecstasy, those explosions of melismatic fecundity, were (to us) inspirational signposts in an in any case exceptional evening. There, we could tell, was the pianist on a lonely peak of genius: We, meanwhile, were sitting in the Arts Theatre, wedged between two professional coughers, and faced by several dozen of glum faces, all slightly tilted like expectant cockatoos. Luckily your critic escaped without psittacosis.

The musical education of the British Public is climbing slowly but surely up to its nadir, so surely in fact that after Mr Norman Higgins had announced Solomon's first piece to be the Waldstein Sonata (and not the work named in the programme), the pianist had only to play the first bar for the second and third bars to be drowned in a plethora of whispered affirmations that this was indeed the Waldstein.

This sonata was played brilliantly with smoothness, clarity and tone-control, Solomon being obviously on the alert to give a piece so often played just that touch of freshness. The tactful emphasis on an inner part, even if it was not leading anywhere. the lingering on a pause, the delicately graduated *accelerando*, and the refusal to hurry at the moment when mere muscular virtuosity so often gets the better of good taste: These things bespoke his care and mastery. And not only in the first item.

In the Beethoven, one was charmed by the delicacy and rightness of things, by the significance given to the *Adagio*, and by the sumptuously exquisite trills of the *prestissimo*. But in the Chopin (all four Ballades), one was enthralled by a sense of overall grace, a revelation of entirety, of wider purport. Solomon's hands may have been hitting any old note in any old place (and these Ballades were performed by no means immaculately), but the drama, the inner voice, the poet in the music was revealed, even if the detail was dissipated.

Given the shabby old heap of iron bedsteads that he was playing on, most people would have made merely a woodpile. By magical alchemy, Solomon not only gives us the woodpile, but puts in it the proverbial nigger, that germ of otherworldly vitality, which each of us is inwardly seeking. This all goes to show that really great players do not need to practise. However they play, it is still music.

The last work of the programme was Schumann's *Carnaval*—again, as with the Beethoven, wonderfully performed. Perhaps the vulgarity of "Promenade" was underplayed, and the "Valse Noble" was deprived of its hauteur. But otherwise all was excellent.

I think it is not generally perceived how deeply sensitive these little pieces are. Of course, they are not just pictures, as is so often said, of people and things, but pictures of Schumann's own reaction to these things, and to various aspects of himself. Thus "Pierrot" and "Arlequin" seem to comment on the futility of versatility. One always catches oneself making the same old joke in the end. "Florestan" is Schumann's own vacillations and exasperations concerning his tyrannical father-in-law. "Coquette" is not a coquette as such, but Schumann's sneer at old Wieck's misconstruction of the composer's attachment to Clara. "Replique" merely shows how useless it is to try to remonstrate with such pig-headed prejudice. "Papillons" may well be more directly reminiscent. Perhaps Schumann is chuckling at the dresses worn at Carnival Time. (That is, the inconvenient clown in a man that lasts his whole life-time.) Imagine some of the revellers figged out as butterflies. At first all is well, save for a catastrophic rain of small pearl buttons in the second section. Then trouble! Everyone's wings start getting entangled. Angry cries of buffeted beauties! "Chiarina," with its divergence of the inner part, is not Clara, but Schumann himself—his passionate inquietude as to whether or not he is fit to marry her. "Estrella" is his own disturbing sense of being dogged by an inferior intellect. See how she is always tagging along, half a pace behind. A perfect little yes-woman. "Reconnaissance" is the surging of blood in the veins when one sees someone for the first time and knows immediately that one has

known them all one's life. "Pantolon and Colombine" is the cautious sparring when two as yet unacknowledged lovers meet. A secret understanding is reached in the last four bars, sealed perhaps by the lingering of a hand, the dwelling of an eye. "Aveu" is the gradual approximity of two mouths, which are planted firmly on one another at the double bar, withdrawn and then re-applied. This is clear from the part-writing.

However, suffice it to say, whether I am right or not, as mere abstract music Solomon made this work a remarkably satisfying close to his recital. Naturally there were encores. Chopin's F sharp major Nocturne, Debussy's "General Lavine—eccentric," from the Preludes, and a Scarlatti sonata. The Debussy was so crisp and appetising, one might have wished for more of it in the main programme and less Chopin. But maybe then, the expensive seats would not have been sold.

PETER TRANCHELL.

29 November 1952

THEATRE

Trial by Jury and *H.M.S. Pinafore* at the ARTS THEATRE

Last Tuesday the Cambridge Amateur Operatic Society began a fortnight's run. The double bill makes a very pleasant evening, and though *Trial by Jury* might on this occasion almost be called "Ordeal by Music," the performance of *H.M.S. Pinafore* sets a very high standard indeed. The *Trial* manages to be extremely amusing, with much delicious business, and the cast evidently enjoy it, and no one in particular is to blame for its musical raggedness. But ragged, I fear, it was.

Pinafore was highly praiseworthy. The orchestral thinking-caps had been tied on firmly, and deputies sent home, and even though the brass seemed from time to time to have taken a swig from a bottle of "Bubblo," all went reasonably well. The chorus still need to watch the conductor—it is all too easy during passages of business to drag the music without realising. And I consider it a mistake to switch all the lights on in the middle of the night (Act II).

However, the better points of the show are almost too numerous to mention. Vera Halcrow made a fine figure of a little Buttercup. Roy Wilkinson, as the Captain, gave an outstanding performance. I heard his every word, wherever he was, and he seemed to be invariably in tune.

Dennis Millmore, as the First Lord of the Admiralty, carried off a part somewhat above his years with astonishing aplomb. The only thing that betrayed his youth was his voice and his incredible agility in the bell-ringing trio of Act II. Here three encores were navigated with considerable dexterity.

Zillah Lean was an entrancing Josephine, and sang for the most part delightfully. I would prefer to hear her high B flats and Cs sung at fuller force, in spite of the temptation there is for a singer to show she can do them pianissimo.

Harry Pogson's Ralph Rackstraw was in every way excellent till he started singing softly and sentimentally. Then, on each occasion, his words became indistinguishable and his tone woolly. His opening lines would be more telling if enunciated clearly and sung louder, for when using full voice, his singing could be most enjoyable.

There were of course moments of anxiety. The unhappiest was perhaps the unaccompanied trio of Rackstraw, Bobstay and Becket (the song specially composed by the First Sea Lord), where Rackstraw and Becket managed in their fourth or fifth phrase to pull the pitch down. When the orchestra and chorus joined in, there were some ugly seconds of re-adjustment.

The two young men playing Marines seemed to be wearing more lipstick than all the female chorus put together, but had laudably chosen a shade to match their red jackets. The lesser soloists were very satisfactory, and the chorus of sailors, aunts and cousins sang and acted with admirable verve. The evening was in fact greatly entertaining and the Company is to be congratulated.

PETER TRANCHELL.

7 February 1953

THE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY CONCERT [Fauré Requiem]
January 29

In music, as in life and literature, it is the evil principle that most often attracts us, while the meditations of poet or composer about eschatological mysteries leave us cold; drama moves us.

But drama is only drama when we believe there to be an evil principle in conflict with something else. Consequently I confess without shame to a disappointment with the Philharmonic Society's rendering of the Fauré Requiem on this score, but only on this score.

The programme described the work as "une berceuse de la Mort," and so was the performance. The conductor, Mr Leppard, took every movement at a very just and dignified pace, the orchestra played sumptuously, and the chorus sang excellently. No better picture could have been given of the blessed state after death, rocked for everlasting certainty in the Everlasting Arms. Sometimes one would think the Everlasting Arms the name of some vivacious public hotel, but not from this rendering. Still, there is the other side of the question, for, whether we believe in hell-fire or not, our future in the after life is by no means settled, and Fauré makes this clear in at least two points in his score. Though he does not employ the actual words "Dies Irae," I suggest that the passage in the Agnus Dei where an orchestral *ff* leads to a great pause and then the words "requiem aeternam" are heard (with the music that opens the whole work)—indicates just this possibility of hell-fire. But somehow the four bars of orchestra sounded dull, and the pause was nothing more than a casual cessation of sound.

Again, in the Libera Me, the beginning of the middle section ought obviously to give a sinister suggestion that things may not be so idyllic after all.

But apart from my quarrel on these grounds, I have nothing but praise. The soloists did their small and unrewarding parts extremely well. In fact one noticed how small and unrewarding these parts were, and would have wished for more of this solo singing. Mr Robert Rowell's best occasion was the Libera Me, where he could get on in fine style with the tune, and not overindulge in the expressive nuances necessitated by the monotonous melodic line of the Offertoire. Miss Stella Hitchins, singing at short notice instead of Miss April Cantelo, enraptured me with the boyish purity of her voice in the Pie Jesu.

The rest of the concert afforded a mounting wave of excitement. The Verdi Stabat Mater was thrilling, and the Te Deum was downright stupendous. Nothing is so breath-taking as being physically bombarded by a battery of sound waves large and small. If we lived in a better climate and in a less prudish society we could have enjoyed this item to the full by listening to it naked.

PETER TRANCHELL.

21 February 1953

HOMERTON COLLEGE MUSICAL SOCIETY [This Sorry Scheme of Things]
February 13

The most notable feature of this concert was the first performance of Peter Tranchell's new Cantata, "This Sorry Scheme of Things." The title is misleading, as it suggests a picture of unrelieved gloom and bitterness; this, however, is certainly not the impression left by the work itself. A powerful setting of "Insanae et vanae curae" is followed by Emily Bronte's "Last lines." The poems set include things as dissimilar as Lowell's "Once to every man and nation," Hood's "Our Village" and the lines from "Macbeth" beginning "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow." Finally the Cantata is rounded off by some lines of "Omar Khayyam" that quote musically from an earlier section. "Our village" is a brilliant and wholly delightful scherzo; there is some delicate and imaginative colouring in the setting of Henley's "The shadow of dawn," and a sombre dignity in the lines from "Macbeth." But the outstanding quality of the work is an unashamed delight in broad melodic phrases and rich harmonic colour that is as refreshing as it is unfashionable. The texture of the music is sometimes over-thick,

but the main melody of “No coward soul is mine” has an Elgarian warmth and richness without seeming anachronistic. The soloist, Norman Platt, and the Homerton Choir and Madrigal Society, conducted by Allen Percival, sang admirably; the orchestral accompaniment, which had been arranged for the surprising combination of piano and harpsichord, was played by the composer and Thurston Dart, and was remarkably effective.

P. F. RADCLIFFE.

7 March 1953

LARRY ADLER

The mouth-organ (or harmonica) does not look as if it will ever become a serious favourite of the musical amateur, any more than the zither or the wine-glasses, in spite of the refreshing appearance of a virtuoso from time to time. Such virtuosos are of necessity rare, for they must be musicians as well as technical magicians. The skill and effort required to become a first-class mouth-organist is probably greater than for a first-class violinist, and the results by comparison much less rewarding.

It was an interesting and at times beautiful experience to hear Mr Adler in the Arts Theatre last Sunday. He contrived to sound like an oboe in the so-called concerto by “Cimaroza-Benjamin,” and almost like a violin in some Bach. But he was best in the more modern items. The technique of the instrument is such that it is more aesthetic to hear than to watch. However, there were times when Mr Adler’s playing of part-writing made one glance to see if there might not be a little man hidden inside the mouth-organ blowing in duet. There was not. Meanwhile Antony Hopkins performed marvels as accompanist. A good concert.

PETER TRANCHELL.

18 April 1953

A LONG RECITAL

In an age of breathless haste, where the hurrying herd seeks to be regaled by a kaleidoscopic continuum of momentary divertissements, unable to concentrate for more than two minutes at a time, it is refreshing to find someone breaking with fashion. Substantial concerts are, alas, so few nowadays.

The piano recital of which I write was billed to last one hundred and thirty two hours; a nonstop improvisation on an infinite number of themes. I visited it twice. The pianist continued all night, but the public were only admitted between 9 a.m. and 11 p.m. *Ars est celare artem*.

Outside the noble edifice (or shack) were photographs of the recitalist drinking tea or shaving during past recitals. But what becomes of tea and buns? To have nature debarred from dawn till dusk is a privation seldom suffered save by royalty.

I entered, and, except for two old ladies, was alone in the presence. His wrists were bandaged for greater resilience, his legs crossed for balance, and he sat at a tinny grand piano on a stage, with a cigarette drooping from his mouth, as he tinkled out an unceasing medley of melody.

Unceasing? Well . . . , Mr Strickland played what I took to be “Come back to Sorrento” (the tune in the right hand) and a fox-trot which escaped my recognition. In between these bursts of ambidexterity, he rested one hand at a time, with the other playing odd triads and scraps of five-finger exercise. Any note seemed to please the great man,—he meandered over the keys like one groping in a drawer for a handful of mothballs.

A notice said: “Please keep moving. This is a marathon, not an entertainment.” Similar notices might well be displayed at Promenade Concerts.

Mr Strickland’s right hand sustained the melody, and his left sustained the rhythm. It moved to and fro like the piston of “The Comet” on the gradient into Darlington, laborious but regular. Its choice of landing-ground, however, had the nonchalance of an umpire’s hoverplane which can descend in

military manoeuvres where it likes—and does. But then, the mythical monkeys on hypothetical typewriters were Swans of Avon in their own way. So let us not complain.

Two days later I heard “Sobre las Olas” and a very garbled “Because.” The right hand was beginning to gain its emancipation now. I came away nauseated by some seventy sullen gentlemen gaping at a man who was by then in the last throes of physical exhaustion. A large person came on stage, patted the recitalist, and said “keep going, kid!” How one would like to say that to Sir T. or Sir M. during their more magnificent pauses! It seems that a pianist in the arena has a retinue of trainers, masseurs, doctors and typists comparable to a boxer. But sleep must be an ugly sparring-partner.

Suddenly the pianist leant a very weary head in one hand. The other hand continued precariously. For a moment everyone thought that the man, evidently in deep anguish, might collapse. Those about to leave stayed just in case. The moment passed.

One must pay a tribute to the courage of such an artist in the cause of Art. O Pioneers! Soon, perhaps, the day (or week) will dawn when pianists laugh at mere hundreds of hours, and grapple with thousands and tens of thousands. For this I am inventing a special piano complete with outboard-engine, snack-bar, radio-television, massage-table, main-drainage, mirrors, view of Sussex Downs, wash-basin in every key, with hot and cold running water, monkey on every type-writer.

PETER TRANCHELL.

2 May 1953

ELISABETH SCHWARZKOPF

Of all the requisites that go to make a successful singer the voice is the least important. Many vocalists manage entirely without it. Personality, private connections, stage presence, a propensity for mimish mannerisms (called acting), musical erudition, and a faithful regard for the enunciation of consonants—these form the anatomy of the singer. But the voice itself, the very soul of this anatomy, is often far to seek.

Consequently, to hear last Sunday at the Arts Theatre a recital in which this soul was present in full measure made one realise what a shortage we suffer in our language of words able to express really high admiration, really enthusiastic bouleversement. Songs of Praise are copious; praise of songs is scarce; which is surprising in a country where singing is an accepted cure for the more pathological cases of stuttering.

Miss Schwarzkopf combines in very high degree the dramatic presence and the vocal ability I have just mentioned. Her singing was, on the whole, a miracle of control, of nice placing of notes, of exquisite musical phrasing—and of golden melody in an unceasingly grateful stream that would have put to shame even the most sophisticated West End nightingale.

The programme included “An die Musik” and “An Sylvia,” with four other Schubert songs, and the delicious “Marienwurmchen” in the Schumann group. We heard songs of Martini, Bizet and Brahms; and in addition we were reminded that Dvorak’s mother had taught *him* a song or two—(alas!); and the concert ended with groups of Wolf and Strauss.

Of the voice I have spoken: Concerning the freshness, the variety, and the intelligence of this singer in expressing the music, I can only add yet another gasp of astonished delight.

I would guess, however, that Miss Schwarzkopf was not entirely at her most rested and relaxed. She is undoubtedly a busy woman, and fatigue (I take it to be fatigue) made her just a teeny bit sharp in several of the songs requiring pianissimo. But there again, having (for instance) started Schubert’s “Litanei” in E half-flat instead of E flat, her intonation was so pure that she remained in that same key for the whole of a phrase at a time. But the rest of her performance so outweighed this very minor blemish, that I would not mention the matter, except perhaps to blame the acoustics and ventilation of the theatre. The acoustics are deathly quiet and the ventilation distinctly noisy. Even with the vents turned off it is an unrewarding process to make music there. Considering all this, Miss Schwarzkopf was really remarkable.

I was glad to see that the stage had been decorated with suitably blank-looking human beings. Potted *Aspidistra* would have been as good, but these plants do not usually pay to come in. They have, however, an endearing dissimilarity from the human flora; their reproductive cycle (or incidence of oestrus, if you like) only comes round once in a dozen years. On the other hand, human beings count as “open windows,” according to some old scientist’s tale—and this may be a hygienic advantage.

Ernest Lush was at the piano and displayed great skill and sensitivity. The piano (whose reproductive cycle is on its last wheels) did not seem to be serving him quite fairly in the matter of pedals. I think the chain needs adjusting.

PETER TRANCHELL.

16 May 1953

THEATRE

Bulbul and his Oriental Ballet at the ARTS

Enjoyment comes mainly through understanding. Jokes that are incomprehensible are not funny. Copies of the *Decameron* in basic Ostiak sent recently to a Pigmy settlement in Brazil (in error, of course) were turned quickly into the gayest of paper skirts. An art does not warm our cockles unless we are au fait with its conventions. Even in England contemporary music is labelled “modern” and regarded as an abomination by those who do not understand it. To enjoy one must understand.

Consequently, to present a foreign art-form, in which there are many symbolic or traditional movements, to people ignorant of them, without any attempt at an explanation, no more educates or entertains than does a recital of Siamese pornography to a deaf Welshman; it is frustration all round. In Oriental ballet, is there a distinction between classical and modern, religious and secular? And which was *Bulbul*’s? Surely there are sophisticated forms and folk-forms of ballet, and perhaps a form equivalent to Ballet Jooss? As to this we were told nothing.

So I shall describe my impressions as one confronted by a somewhat perplexing punch-and-judy show—and if I use the words “monotonous” or “graceful” I may have been annoyed or charmed by the wrong things—that is, I may have been barking my shins up the wrong gumtree. But there it is, and goes to show that to put a product of Oriental Art on the European stage (for consumption by the general public), with no more explanation than a few indistinguishable mews of pigeon-English on a wheezy loudspeaker reduces the show to the level of a circus—a mere parade of bearded ladies.

My most aggravating impression was one of *longueur*. The performance lasted two hours, but consisted of only six or seven items. Each of these seemed to be spun out interminably upon some very tenuous idea that would have been charming if treated with brevity.

The music was extremely square and repetitive, and had probably been somewhat Westernised for the occasion. There were none of the exciting cross-rhythms one has come to expect in Oriental music. Melodically the variations played on various themes were by no means arresting. At two points in the programme dancing was halted, usually by drawing a curtain, and we were regaled with an instrumental solo. One man played a bamboo flute or piccolo, and later another vied with him in virtuosity upon a sitar (a very large stringed instrument played with the fingers, several strings being left to set up a constant drone) ... in each case the piece ended suddenly, as much a surprise to the player as to the now benumbed audience.

The orchestra was composed of seven men seated crossleg in a line across the back of the stage. They had a nice variety of Eastern instruments, and when bored with these chanted in a rich nasal yowl.

Of the dancers, *Bulbul* and his partner *Afroza* stood out a mile for their grace and dignity. I was particularly taken with the scene of *Hafix* visiting the tomb of his beloved and dancing with her spirit, though I continually expected the lighted candles on stage to set fire to the Chorus girls’ long white frillies. In a subsequent scene *Bulbul*’s representation of riding on horse-back was superb—the determined *hauteur* of a Jesuit out to convert a drag-hunt.

The chorus was disappointing. The ladies were admittedly young and beautiful, but their wide-eyed coyness was of the sort found in the young women on Edwardian drawing-room song-covers, and they spent an appreciable time looking at the audience, or should I say *for* the audience. Still, their youth and beauty was completely eclipsed by the brashness of the chorus men. These seemed incongruous, not only in their gauche ape-like motions (from which one gathered they had imbibed culture and cocacola from our gallant septic tank across the Atlantic), but in their apparent preference for hugging or tickling each other (and not the girls), and for any sort of tom-fool knockabout “Façade”-like mime. But perhaps I should blame the choreographer, if there was one.

Out of place also were the falsetto squeaks and squeals emitted by these creatures from time to time. One was forcibly reminded of the similar vociferations that skirted-people from the north of England seem to make (regardless of their appropriateness) during their ungainly eightsomes.

However, Bulbul and Afroza carried the show, and made the deepest impression. Their work is really excellent, and the theatre was worth a visit for their sakes alone. Afroza has the most fascinating little hands—the palms of which seemed to be red, whether from betel nut or cochineal, I could not say. Here again she and Bulbul used their hands to an enormous extent. Actions were obviously speaking louder than words—but oh to know what those actions meant!

In general I would say the dresses are charming, the principals most engaging, and the ideas entirely pleasing. If individual items can be shortened, and the chorus perhaps refined, then we have here a potentially excellent entertainment. I say potentially, and refer you back to my opening paragraphs.

PETER TRANCHELL.

16 May 1953

TWO CONCERTS

Last Thursday week we had the pleasure of hearing Antonia Butler (‘cello), Norman Greenwood (piano) and Frederick Thurston (clarinet) playing trios by Beethoven and Benjamin Fraenkel, and duos by Brahms and Fauré. The Fraenkel came last on the programme, which was not fair to it, especially as a large chunk of extremely strong Brahms immediately preceded it I refrain therefore from saying it was banal—I merely say comparisons are malodorous.

It is a delight to hear players so constantly productive of sweet sound and apt intonation as Butler and Thurston. I am almost convinced that one or two odd sounding high cello notes in the Fauré (op. 117 in G minor) were deliberately misplayed in order to draw attention to the faultless and exquisite playing of the rest. One forgives anything in the name of eloquence.

There was an exciting moment in the Brahms (op. 99 in F), when it seemed Butler’s whole cello would be shattered to bits, so forcibly did she pizzicate. Her fingers were like the beak of some irascible parrot tussling with the bars of its cage. However, all passed off without mishap.

Last Sunday afternoon, in the Guildhall, we heard a concert performance of Mozart’s Don Giovanni by the Chelsea Opera Group. It was delicious. The orchestra was lively, and Thomas Hemsley as the Don, Elizabeth Crook as Donna Anna, Doreen Murray as Donna Elvira, and Gladys Whitrid as Zerlina sang admirably. Space precludes mention of all the names. Suffice it to say, we would very much prefer the Group to come again and do the thing properly one day, with stage and costume, because there is nothing so exhausting as having to listen to the music all the time.

PETER TRANCHELL.

30 May 1953 (May Week Number)

A NEST OF SINGING BIRDS

Where will it end? Not content with digging up mere music of the past, the Musicologist is turned Archaeologist and must dig up actual instruments of the past—and then even play them. We are all awaiting the next sensational discovery. The Neanderthal Concerto to be played on an authentic Descant-Cromagnon. We have every reason to ask, “where will it end?” Now that a few dreary bits of stone (discovered deep in some paleolithic cave, each stone happening to give off, when struck, a note different from its fellows)—now that this assortment of stones has been dignified with the title of Lithophone, what is holding us back from acclaiming as a new musical instrument (or an old one) anything and everything in the whole of creation that can emit a noise? We shall soon have to add the name of Dame Nature to that of Dame Ethel Smyth in the list of honourable lady composers. A thousand and one fortuitous sounds there are, any of which if ranged in some order so as to approximate to a scale (even a pentatonic scale!) can be called a nice long name (derived from the Greek, of course), and used for a lecture-recital on the Third Programme.

We have had a row of wineglasses with differing content of water—that is simple. But why stop there? A row of dustbins would be quite as exciting—and if played by a skilled performer, would undoubtedly attract a capacity audience of cats and cockroaches. Each dustbin would have to be filled to a different level to obtain the required pitch, and here a problem of “medium” is immediately encountered. What goes in the bins? A similar case was the Morgianaphone, described in the Arabian Nights, constructed of resonating pots, tuned by the addition of appropriate quantities of robber and boiling oil. The sound emitted during tuning, however, was said to have surpassed (and even precluded) subsequent performance. Still, with the less sensitive wineglasses the same result is obtained whether you use water, wine or camomile tea. But with dustbins, what is inside them is of vital importance.

In America, in a very short time, I foresee an epoch when the *contents* of the resonating object will be of such prime significance that people will not be satisfied till every conceivable substance has been tried. We shall have the cynephone (or korythophone)—a line of resonating hats, tuned perhaps with a filling of rice pudding. Maybe we shall hear the sweet strains of the torynephone, made of varying tablespoonsful of jellied eel. Even Demosthenes recommended a mouthful of pebbles. Yes, Sir! Media will be simply fascinating, not to say nutritious. I look forward to a May Week concert programme that has the following note: “The instruments played in the first half of the concert will be served as the buffet during the interval.”

But in the meantime there are many natural resources nearer home which could be successfully tapped. A row of old men snoring in a clubroom—if only the old men are filled up to different levels—might be made to emit a delicious ostinato decorated with most intriguing cross-rhythms.

A more intimate instrument would be a set of seashells of varying size. The sound of the sea inside would be heard at different pitches. A quick player might hear “Full fathom five,” or some such tune, all through quite satisfactorily, by using alternate ears. Two-part music, say a Morley Canzonet, would of necessity require a very skilful manipulation of the shells or of one’s ears, and the listener would have to put up with the somewhat disjointed effect of the music inevitably arising from the technique of the instrument. The name of the instrument would be the Ostracophone, and composers might write Conchertos for it.

But there are yet more convenient fields of experiment, which have (incredibly enough) only been exploited to a small extent. One hears of a Consort of Recorders, why not a Nest of Singing Birds? Rooks, for instance, though clumsy, ugly, and in every other ornithological respect unsuited for the life of the tree-top, have very fine voices (and a deal of conversation). The larger birds produce deep bass notes on such syllables as “Dark!” “O’Rourke!” or “Gawk!” Mezzo-Rooks are heard to utter sounds like “Work!” and “Murk!” in the middle register, while smaller birds whose voice has not yet broken cover the upper notes with shrieks of “Fire!” or “Liar!”

Now if a couple of octaves of birds were placed in a line, each bird electrically wired-up to a keyboard, so that the depression of a key would send a small electric shock into the desired bird, thus

making it “speak” (the intensity of the shock controlling the volume)—we should have a fine addition to our musical palette, the Coracophone.

An actual instance of a Coracophone is recorded in an old song. It seemed to be a large hybrid instrument, and at the time of the song was evidently in ruins after a disaster to one of the three performers. A sixpence, a pocketful of rye (obviously a soprano pocket, since empty pockets emit a bass note), and a pie of blackbirds constituted this particular instrument.

At first the song does not make it clear whether or not the pie is the resonating object with the blackbird-content determining its pitch. But later it becomes apparent the pie is in the nature of an enclosed “Swell,” as on an organ. When the swell-box was opened the birds (very properly) began to sing. I assume someone was “playing” them. Their specification is not specified. Were the twenty-four birds arranged in a single rank of a semitone scale of two octaves, or in two ranks, each covering one octave? Or perhaps they were tuned in pairs like some rudimentary “mutation” stop? Or was each bird part of a hexachord, the hard, soft, natural and unnatural?

More details of this fascinating construction are given in the next verse. For King, Queen and Maid, one should obviously read Organ-builder and his two mates, who were in all probability themselves the performers.

Just as in many cathedrals the organ is in several sections—part in the apse, part in triforium or transept—so here, the Coracophone was in three sections, one in a garden and the other two indoors. The King was dealing with the brass section in the “Counting House.” Obviously a rank of sixpences would have sixpence as only its highest note. The lower degrees of the scale would be provided by larger coins, annas, roubles, cents, farthings, and so on. If there was as much counting of coins to do as is inferred by the song, one must presume that this section of the Coracophone was in several ranks and formed a substantial part of the whole—almost worthy of a separate denomination—the “Numismatophone”!

The Queen was in the Parlour (or loudspeaker section) seeing to the feeding of the blackbird section of the instrument. The Maid was in the garden attending to the pocket-of-rye section. She was hanging out the clothes in which, of course, these resonating pockets were. It sounds as if there might have been a whole octave of pockets, a varying amount of rye in each. This portion of the Coracophone was naturally in the garden to keep the dust and chaff made by the clothes and the rye from getting into the other parts of the mechanism.

It would be a very inspiring and worth-while work of musicological reconstruction, if some of our friends could drop their harpsichord manufacturing, and provide us with a really first-class (authentic) Coracophone.

Meanwhile a new instrument is appearing daily in the sky. A line of jet-planes. The fact that performances are given so often over King’s College Chapel does not necessarily mean that they are deliberately sponsored by rival college choirs. I hope not, for we are all in this together. The lithophone is a thing of the past. The cracking of the sound-barrier is our next instrument of percussion. As we shall all be by then congenitally half deaf, I advise everyone to order their deaf-aid in good time, so that they can make sure of destroying it.

PETER TRANCHELL.

[Chronologically, the review “Britten and Brittenites” [see Appendix] occurs at this point in P.A.T.’s career.]

17 October 1953 Volume LXXV

A PAGEANT FOR CORONATION YEAR

Old fogies reminiscing of past times seem always to remember even the most miserable failures in a haze of golden glory. Hence it was something of a comfort to hear several old fogies remark that the pageant performed this summer on the backs of St John's was the best to be staged in Cambridge within living memory. That it managed to eclipse so many past efforts by C.U.M.S., together with their spurious halo of excellence accumulated with the years, speaks highly of the production. One recalls the odd representation of Dioclesian in 1947, a happy farce for friends of the performers, but three hours of unremitted ennui for the ordinary theatre-goer—and one recalls Purcell's King Arthur murdered in the following year, a tremendous error of artistic taste.

To do better than these poor affairs would scarcely require much effort. Effort if conserved and directed is so effective. In most Cambridge ventures it is frittered away in cross-currents of individual antipathies, ambitions and vanities. On the occasion of which I now speak the committee was a strong body with one purpose. It included three hard-headed business-men and a number of exceptional artists, whose aim was not personal aggrandisement or pecuniary gain, but the presentation of really artistic whole suitable to Coronation Year and to a city Cambridge's traditions.

Some £200 profit was netted (by guarding against needless expenditure) for the Cambridge Fund for Old People's Homes. Deep gratitude is due to the Master and Fellows of St John's college for their making available so exquisite a site for the performances, and to those patient members of the College whose rooms in New Court were daily jangled and thundered with the noise of rehearsing alarums and excursions. A choir, a piano and a Hammond organ in the cloisters were something to contend with.

This Pageant was perhaps a novelty. The basic script of six episodes was specially written by Mr John Saltmarsh of King's. Upon this "urtext," six undergraduate poets imposed the fruits of their own peculiar genius. They were: Thom Gunn, Hugh Thomas, Norman Buller, John Arden, Julian Cooper and John Mander. And the pegs they thus provided were hung with music by: Nigel Glendinning, Paul Burbridge, Allen Percival, Hugh Baillie, Peter Tranchell, David Gwilt, Raymond Leppard, John Exton, Gordon Lawson, Ian Kemp, Philip Radcliffe and Angus Watson.

One might think that a show made of contributions from a dozen different musicians would be an ill-assorted patch-work of botches, but in this case, somehow, we musicians might be called "The Cambridge School." There was in our music a very remarkably apparent common factor.

So, in the event, the Pageant though home-grown from very diverse sources had a unity about it that greatly enhanced its impetus, and elicited very many enthusiastic comments both on script and on music.

The six scenes had as their guiding text a quotation from Shakespeare: "Nothing shall we rue if England to herself do rest but true." Each one was preceded by a convenient prologue written by Peter Green and spoken by Mr Donald Beves in the guise of Merlin.

The theme was of the chances of a nation's history and the part played by the monarchy. The passing of Arthur after civil war with Mordred; the disputes at the death of King John and the accession of the boy-King Henry III; Queen Elizabeth's speech at Tilbury; the unrest in London when the Dutch fleet sailed up the Medway unopposed, while Pepys arranged with his wife to bury their golden guineas in a garden in Huntingdonshire; the effect of war on a country village, and the news of the victory at Waterloo; and finally the accession of Victoria, a young woman undertaking at an unexpected moment, after a major war and a financial disaster, the grave responsibilities of queenship. Mrs Oldfield as Elizabeth and Mr Tickell as a messenger rode horses valiantly. Apart from Mr Hedley Briggs as Pepys, there was a cast drawn from Colleges and Town alike. There were trumpeters, pikemen, sluts, harridans and every conceivable person characteristic of British History. There were many magical moments. Those who do not respond to pageantry cannot appreciate such moments. The handing of Arthur's crown to Queen Victoria meant more than a mere script or a mere fanfare could ever express.

Our congratulations are due to the production-team headed by Mrs Camille Prior, to the ladies in charge of the wardrobe and to all those who took part.

P.A.T.

24 October 1953

THE CYCLOPS IN LYONS

Towards the end of July, England was represented by two dozen assorted stalwarts of King's College at the international festival of ancient drama. This festival, or "Delphiade," held this year at Lyons, gives an opportunity for every nationality to contribute dramatic groups, mainly composed of students, to meet, to fraternise, and to entertain one another on the common ground of a Greek and Roman heritage. Plays are usually performed in the mother tongue of the performing group, and sometimes other ancient dramas than the Greek or Roman are bidden to the feast.

This year the programme included Aeschylus' "Persae" by the Sorbonne group, "Le Chariot de Terre Cuite" (an Indian drama better known in England as the "Golden Toy"), by the Belgians, Euripides' "Suppliques" by the Italians, de Gryphius' "Emile Papinian" by the Swiss from Zürich, and some Greek chanting and dancing by a troupe of damozels from Athens. These and other performances took place at night by flood-light in the old Roman open air theatre, of which the remains are substantial, the heat of the sun on the stone precluding the use of the theatre in the daytime.

These plays were for the most part tragedies, but on the tenth and last night of the festival a performance was given by the King's College players in much lighter vein. It pleased the audience and was received with tumultuous applause. It was indeed something of a triumph. This contribution was the Provost's English version of the "Cyclops," with the musical score provided by Dr Mann for a Cambridge performance in 1923. Dr Mann was then organist of King's College.

The Provost's translation is extremely bright and gay, and under his production was really most amusing, whether one understood the words or not. It easily outshines, for instance, Shelley's translation of the play, but then the latter was an Oxford man.

It was an interesting quirk of fate that caused Dr Mann to be called upon to write the original score at very short notice. He wrote it one morning, I gather, and it was copied the same afternoon by choral scholars, and learnt between then and the performance the following afternoon. Dr Mann was necessarily obliged to write easy melodic music with not too much part-writing or counterpoint, so that it might be speedily and properly memorised. The accompaniment was for a piano solo, but seems never to have been completely written out, since the good doctor himself was at the keyboard and made it up as he went along. The general impression of this score is that it is a mixture of those things dearest to the composer—Hymns Ancient and Modern, and Gilbert and Sullivan. Now these factors made the score extremely appropriate in Lyons. Firstly the mixture of hymns with musical comedy does in fact represent British musical taste and experience. Even our best music appeals to us because of these elements. And it was right, therefore, that a British venture should combine them. Secondly, we discovered in rehearsal that the theatre was so built that while speech was admirably reproduced, unison singing in particular was absolutely ravishing. Any harmonic complication sounded fussy and irrelevant. If a musicologist were seeking proof that the music of the ancients was largely comprised of unison melody, he needs no clearer indication than that afforded by the acoustics of their theatres. The most delicate nuances of expression became evident, and the minutest deviation of expression pitch or interval became interesting. Even the blending of voices was such that one could appreciate the individual timbres as well as enjoying the concerted effect.

We travelled out in one party with a basket of costumes which included horns and ivy, which we were sure would interest the French customs. It did not. The expedition was something like a choir outing, except that we were going *via* Paris. The Provost, evidently fearing that some of the dear boys might get themselves "lost" in the interval between arriving at the Gare St Lazare and leaving from the Gare de Lyons, arranged a corporate bus-ride to show us all to the sights of the great city. At any

rate, the party arrived intact at Lyons about 6 a.m. the next day, and was met and conducted to quarters in a Lycée. For the rest of our stay we were the guests of the University of Lyons; no effort was spared to entertain us: afternoon trips were provided to places of interest or speculation; we coincided with a Tour de France; and to crown all were taken to a special "Cocktail d'Adieu" at a nearby Casino. The Provost added to the favourable impression that we hoped we were making by uttering a speech in French so brief and to the point, that it earned as much applause at its end as before it started.

As to the performance itself—from the modest size of the Provost's drawing room where rehearsals had been held, it was something of a change to a stage some hundred and twenty feet wide and twenty feet deep, not to speak of a substantial "orchestra" area. But somehow we adapted ourselves, and those whom nature had endowed with amplitude were able to spread themselves freely.

Christopher Cory was a very convincing Cyclops, with Mr Donald Beves as a suitable Silenus, and Anthony Newell as Odysseus. Other parts were Satyrs (whose only claim to propriety was their wearing suntan on their bodies),—Sailors (Greek sailors, of course) and the Sheep. Alan Hancox played as the old ram, under whose belly Odysseus escaped to safety, while a number of more lightly built persons were cast as lambs.

When we started rehearsing in England, it seemed probable that all save the principals were taking part merely because they happened to have no prior engagement during the long vacation. When we arrived, we discovered that the Swiss party for one had been told by their professor to make a special point of seeing the British production since it would be the work of a group of experts not only expert in drama but in Greek drama. When we left we did not seem to have disillusioned anyone. Somehow one's affection for the play as one got to know it better, the actual wearing of costumes, the suavity of the atmosphere in that part of France, together with a copious admixture of beaujolais with one's meals,—all this perhaps served to turn one into an expert for the occasion.

I have no doubt that the expedition was an experience which none of the cast could help but enjoy, and that if occasion arose all would offer themselves for a second helping. Certainly all the cast have happy memories of Lyons and are deeply grateful for the unfailing kindness of their hosts.

PETER TRANCHELL.

31 October 1953

MUSIC

[Leppard Chamber Orchestra]

An extremely fine concert was given last Wednesday week in the Guildhall by the Leppard Chamber Orchestra, conductor Raymond Leppard. One has heard of the warm reception of the Prodigal Son occasioned by his return from prodigality, but the warm welcome Cambridge gave Mr Leppard was occasioned both by his return and by his prodigality—there and then, a very present prodigality of musical talents. We were treated to exquisite playing, and a general liveliness and sensibility in interpretation, which made one forget all one's usual prejudices against the phrase "chamber orchestra"—prejudices ingrained from previous suffering at countless chamber concerts. The word music is so often a mere courtesy-title for the ungainly scrabbling of string-players and for the grotesque popping, bubbling, frothing, squeaking, bawling and brattling of wind-players.

But on the day of which I write, we heard the music in its clarity. There was Handel's Overture to "II Pastor Fido," Vivaldi's Concerto in B minor for four violins (Vivaldi doubtless included to appease the snobs who just at present believe him to be superior to Bach for social rather than musical reasons), Haydn's 47th Symphony (of which the slow movement came out a little bit too long all the way through), Robin Orr's Italian Overture (an interesting, luminous, flexible, agile music, acrimonious from time to lime, but never enraged to the point of cruelty, and comparable for its dry sweetness to shortbread), Walter Leigh's Concertino for Harpsichord and Strings (in which Thurston Dart played the solo with positive éclat) and, finally, Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 (taken at

just the right speed to stress its delicious dumpiness, with the wind blowing—I noted—in the right direction).

I went to this concert tired, and in spite of its substantial dimensions, I was kept awake and taking notice all through, though I do admit the Brandenburg Concerto's eternal minuet gave me misgivings. So the musicians certainly deserve congratulation. When I say the concert was wholly delightful, I mean wholly, for I would also congratulate those concerned on one of the best intervals we have had in Cambridge for several years. Its length was superb, and it was a change to be at leisure. People go to concerts largely for their pleasure, but the servitors seldom think of this. The interval is a part of the concert, like the rests in a bar, and it greatly lessens one's enjoyment to be brow-beaten and harried into a herdish regularity like babies on pots. A wholly delightful concert.

P.A.T.

14 November 1953

ENTERTAINING STRATEGIES

The composer in love, the musician enraged, and all that! It is often said that creative inspiration or artistic genius is tempered in the fire of adversity or emotion. Beethoven was deaf, Delius was paralysed (and none too soon), Schumann was mad, and Chopin failed in his love affair with George Sand. Ah, those miserable love affairs! Every composer is credited sooner or later with a symphony written during a grand passion and another symphony born of subsequent disappointment. Well, it's nonsense. The important things of life are the minutiae—what the butcher said to Mrs. Bach-Busoni, cat-flu in Ravel's ménage, how Mozart was to deceive his father for the umpteenth time, how Scriabin came to have a tumour on his lip—in fact the little adventures, the little foibles, the pet aversions.

It always seems to me too good to be true that Beethoven was really deaf. Perhaps he was shamming. At any rate, in spite of his deafness he seemed to grow in musical stature with a more reverent public. He was always a business man, and to be talked about for whatever reason may have been a good proposition. It was a cunning plan—for in order to convince people he really was deaf, Beethoven had to pretend he was concealing his deafness. Every time someone spoke he had first to ignore them and then act as if he did not want them to think he had not heard them. Nothing intrigues society more than concealment, so the secret was all round Vienna in a twinkling. Soon the act became habitual and polished. Later the deaf man imported such stage properties as ear-trumpets and conversation-pads. But was he going to all this trouble merely for publicity? Well, I think there was a deeper cause. The likelihood of the deafness being a sham looms larger when one considers the medical aspect of it. Even at his death Beethoven was found to have nothing more than a pustular condition of the eustachian tubes. In his life-time the course of his deafness was by no means level. Many men become deaf by gradual movement of bones due to age, or to a similar structural defect which grows slowly and is irrevocable. Beethoven's deafness seems to have been like hay-fever—he got it now and then. Sometimes his hearing was better, sometimes it was worse, according to the “deaf” man's mood. There are the stories of exasperated persons shouting their heads off at the composer, there are others of musicians such as Weber or the young Liszt visiting him and playing the piano to him, and apparently entertaining him thereby. The records are not consistent with a genuine deafness. He retired from the conductorship of his own opera, but told Weber he would attend the first performance of *Euryanthe*. And it was a wonderful piece of hamming when the composer had to be turned round at the end of first performance of the Choral Symphony, since he was unaware that the audience were applauding him! Unaware, my foot!

But the deeper cause, the situation that precipitated Beethoven's first decision to feign gradual deafness is quite clear. He was getting more and more involved in romantic adventures, the threads of which were becoming so entangled that it would need something sharper than a sword of Damocles to cut his Gordian painter. His letters to the beloved Teresa probably committed him to marry her. There was only one way out; he must prove his unworthiness. Syphilis! And he must pretend to wish the matter kept confidential. Ah, syphilitic deafness—what a boon! what an artifice! It would be useful in dealing with the servants, with recalcitrant publishers or pupils. One would always have the last word!

Conversations ordinarily held behind one's back would now be incautiously spoken within one's hearing, in the false security of one's apparent deafness. What a world of secret information was now opened—both in business disputes and in society intrigues! Deafness for Beethoven must surely have been a social pose, indulged in for its convenience and probably enjoyed.

Other cases come to mind of composers' fondness for hoaxes or amateur theatricals. Was Schumann really mad? Or did he merely sustain an act to discourage Brahms from making love to Clara? That he landed himself in an asylum was due to mismanagement. And who is to say if Brahms did not wear a false beard?

Tchaikowsky's offensive pose of misogyny was undoubtedly a move to endear him to Diaghileff. He was all the time secretly married to Madame von Meck and Debussy was very likely one of their children. That would explain why when the adolescent Debussy asked to marry one of Madame von Meck's daughters he was very properly refused and sent away.

There are many interesting speculations to be made in musical history, and it is only too evident that the stodgier musical historians can be taken in by a solemn likelihood or a bold front. Adversity and love write a symphony? Give me wine, women and song!

PETER TRANCHELL.

28 November 1953

THEATRE

PRINCESS IDA

A very lively and enjoyable production of *Princess Ida* started last Tuesday at the Arts Theatre for two weeks. The dresses are bright and colourful, the sets are what one expects (I recognised one flat painted with purple rhododendrons from *Patience* in 1950), and the music is as delicious as ever.

I can never understand how people manage to turn up their noses at Gilbert and Sullivan. I once heard the dialogue described as flat and humourless, and the music as a series of hotted-up hymn-tunes. But if the truth be known, the dialogue is almost cruel in its smiling satire of the people speaking it. When a man says to a girl "Is your name Phoebe?", she is sure to say not "Yes," but (prevaricatingly) "Exactly." Now her name is *not* exactly "Phoebe,"—she often has a surname and several other Christian names. Trust a woman to evade the issue. Perhaps she hopes to change her surname.

As for Sullivan's music, it may have something of Purcell, of Handel, of Mozart, perhaps of Weber and Balfe, and it may sound like a hymn-tune but then a hymn-tune is not necessarily a thing to be snobbish about—for the fault of a hymn-tune is so often not in the tune itself but the people singing it and their manner of doing so. Again, a large amount of classical music is equally liturgical. I can call to mind no single slow movement not capable of being distilled into a hymn-tune or psalm-chant. Now in the Arts Theatre this week, the people singing are much more expert than, and the manner of singing is a great deal more hotted-up than one finds in most places where hymn-tunes usually reside. Even bible-punching revivalists on Brighton beach would find it hard to compete.

The Chorus sings well and sweetly, though it goes through its paces without smiling very much. A tune such as "Now hearken to my strict command" with its hip-hurrahing refrain, needs no end of a chuckle over the duplicate preparations of hospitality. Shall King Hildebrand welcome King Gama to the best bedroom or the best dungeon? Anyhow, let the best of both be prepared. And while they were not busy not-smiling, the ladies and gentlemen of the chorus were equally busy not-enunciating. This was unforgivable and very inconvenient. It is no hardship for singers to articulate clearly, but it is a nuisance for the audience to have to strain to follow the plot or catch a witty rhyme. This incoherence was general among soloists as well. Possibly some of the tempi were rushed, but still . . .

In general the production needed more definiteness at moments of drama. Reactions were poor not to say bedraggled. When the three ugly brothers were defeated in mortal combat nobody seemed to worry. Even their sister was unmoved, and the brothers received three cursory bandages on their

heads, no matter where they had actually been wounded. Then when the Princess fell into the river, the stampede of anguished screaming maidens to the water's edge was more like a lot of arthritic dowagers queuing for cake at a wedding reception. The whole business of Ida's immersion is a bit unconvincing in any case. It needs care. In Tennyson's "Princess," she falls into a glamorous raging torrent with a craggy cataract. On stage the backdrop reminds one of those stagnant lilyponds in country-house gardens, where drowning is a feat of skill, for one is more likely to be asphyxiated face downwards in stinking mud, or be choked to death by chickweed. However, when Ida and Hilarion return from their cavorting in the stream, neither he nor she is wet. Her hair is a little disarranged and he has lost his fancy dress. They might even have just been sitting out at a dance in some house-party, —and not a trace of chickweed. Nevertheless, the battle itself in Act III is better; —care had obviously been taken.

In spite of all faults the spirit of the company is infectiously gay, and the show is vastly entertaining. Josephine Newman was a melodious though often inarticulate Princess Ida. Her top notes were a joy. Vera Halcrow was a beautiful battleship as Lady Blanche—though I could have wished for a little more malice (shall we say *odium scholasticum*) in her duet with Melissa "Now wouldn't you like to rule the roost." This duet lost much by being sung into the wings. Iris Wilson was a delightfully indeterminate Lady Psyche, just right in fact; and Barbara Hicks was as pert a minx as one could desire in the part of Melissa. Tom Woolley was an imposing King Hildebrand, while Austin Chapple made a sumptuously grotesque King Gama,—though a little too nimble, I thought, for one so monstrously crippled. Hilarion's friends, Cyril (Derek Perry) and Florian (Roy Wilkinson) were excellent in voice and person, though Cyril got drunk a little abruptly in Act II and became a bit out of character. John Ford, as Hilarion himself, was head and shoulders above the rest of the cast in voice, clarity, smiling, and keeping still on stage. Soloists so often fidget. He did not. The three brothers of Ida, —and a more barbarous moronic crew I never saw—were delightfully portrayed by Messrs W. Armitstead, F. Brown and H. Heppenstall. Their strip-tease with armour in Act III was most exciting, and actually earned an encore (though one was not given).

All in all this is an excellent show, and (except for the finale of Act II which will doubtless be improved in the course of the week) I recommend it unreservedly, and congratulate the orchestra and conductor.

PETER TRANCHELL.

27 February 1954

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS—C.U.M.S.

Perhaps the most stirring and entertaining musical experience of these post-war years has been provided this week at the Guildhall by C.U.M.S. I am sure Cambridge has never seen the like of it before, and I doubt if even the deftness or expense of Glyndebourne could have bettered it.

Vaughan Williams calls his "Pilgrim's Progress" a "Morality." This means, in fact, an oratorio aptly pointed by incidental staging—and a staging in this instance so understanding, so dignified and restrained where restraint was needed, so joyous in moments of exuberance, that it is impossible to imagine any improvement upon it. The producer, Dennis Arundell, and the stage management have worked wonders.

The forces taking part were not unduly enormous, but their deployment gave the impression that they were. Even the orchestra (leader, John Exton), apart from the usual horn troubles, gave an eloquent and grandiose performance. Considering that the show went on almost entirely through the efforts of residents and students past and present of Cambridge, the achievement of such a spiritual and artistic success is a matter for unstinted praise. One trembles to think of the bathos we may endure this time next year. The only major contributor to the occasion who could not be called a Cambridge man is Bunyan himself, but as he was born near Bedford Mr Ord claims him as a "near-local" resident.

There are nine Scenes to this Morality representing the progress of the pilgrim, together with a prologue and epilogue in which John Bunyan starts and finishes reading to us from his book.

John Walker started off a little dubiously, not to say inaudibly, but his later appearance as the Herald was excellent, and as Bunyan again at the end he gave a most moving rendering. Gordon Clyde as the Evangelist, and later a Delectable Shepherd, managed to get an elderly suavity into his voice and bearing that was wholly convincing. It is the first time I have seen a youth pottering about a stage in a false beard without saying "This is an undergraduate acting as an old man." Anne Keynes, Kathleen Hoff and Alicia Austin sang as the Three Shining Ones who relieve the pilgrim of his burden and accoutre him in his armour. Martyn Hughes as the Interpreter admitted the pilgrim through the wicket-gate, but in spite of his looking and sounding very satisfactory, his words did not seem to get beyond the orchestra.

Act II contains the meeting of Pilgrim with Apollyon. This was at first admirable, with Apollyon's menials got up in the weirdest and most bestial masks. Perhaps Apollyon should have been a little less of a fidget. His voice coming through loudspeaker from some abyss could have been better managed. It had the plum-in-the-mouth quality typical of train-announcements on railway platforms. The fight between Pilgrim and Apollyon has the most exhilarating music. Though the percussion were having a whale of a time—the drums emulating a cannonade of Napoleonic artillery—this energy was not equalled on stage. Nor need it have been, if the fight had been stylised. But it was neither that nor realistic. Apollyon was soon despatched by a gentle prod dangerously low in his stomach, the which he could have seen coming a mile off (and avoided) if he had been a devil worth half his salt. It is curious that all Pilgrim's escapes had a facile quality that bereft them of interest.

Act III contains the wonderful scene at Vanity Fair. This was a miracle of colour and imaginative crowd movement. Quentin Lawrence's décor now came into its own. His delectable mountains were to be a bit dank, and his door to the Celestial City was by no means as celestial as evidently envisaged by the composer, but his Vanity Fair caught the atmosphere to perfection. and together with the costumes borrowed from Covent Garden made a most exciting scene.

Apart from a multitude of singers that space precludes from mention, praise is due to Peter Beale as the Usher, Humphrey Trevelyan as Lord Hate-good, Elster Kay as Mr By-Ends, and Margaret Orr as his wife. But the heroes of the evening were John Noble as the pilgrim, whose voice, diction and bearing were beyond criticism throughout, and Boris Ord, whose evident care and labour in preparation of the performance and actual command of it from the conductor's rostrum was, to put it mildly, miraculous.

It is an interesting sign of the times that the composer states in a programme-note, "the name Pilgrim is used throughout the libretto, as being of more universal significance than Bunyan's title"—Christian. This is food for thought.

PETER TRANCHELL.

15 May 1954

SANCTA CIVITAS IN KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL

The concert opened with *The Glories of our Blood and State* by Parry. It would have been more profitable to run a buffet instead, and then get down to the real concert later. The performance of this work was marred by the tolerant forbearance of the chorus, and a certain amount of irresponsibility in the orchestra. It sounded like a hum-drum stop-gap, done without conviction, significance, or thought. This was a pity. I am sure many people came away saying to themselves, "We have always heard Parry decried, and this shows why." Poor old Parry! Such music needs loving care and imagination. It must be *made* to speak, for then it speaks eloquently—but only then.

The real concert started thereafter with a happy Handel organ concerto (the fourth), nicely played by Hugh Mclean with the orchestra adroitly synchronised. And at last we came to the feast of the evening: "Sancta Civitas." by Vaughan Williams.

It is a weighty and complex work, describing the celestial city more or less as seen by Saint John in his Revelation. It is full of music and drama till the very end. When even Vaughan Williams was hard put to find adequate musical expression for the glorious impression of the heavenly host (plus guests) singing radiant praises to their Maker. If in fact the celestial city is going to echo with a common augmented triad inverted and inverted again throughout eternity, then I for one feel like declining my invitation.

But the performance was absolutely wonderful—ably and clearly conducted by John Walker. When I say “wonderful,” I mean that the spirit, the enthusiasm, the *music* in the music came across unadulterated, and heart-stirring words of praise fail me.

But oddly enough, judged from a merely technical standpoint, one could find fault incessantly. Much of the orchestral playing was dreadful; the distant trumpeter was by no means satisfactory; nor were the boys’ voices (supplied by Christ’s Hospital) free from harshness: there were ugly moments of doubt even in the chorus work, with words slurred continually (and no light to follow the printed programme); and the percussion was puny. All this and more was completely obliterated in the sum effect by the wholehearted and sincere way that all concerned seemed to attack the work. The music lived. The distant trumpet, the hidden boys, the suspicious wind-playing, despite all, seemed to have a fitness, a rightness of spirit which overcame mere blemishes of performance; and with the fine contribution of the soloists (baritone, Cecil Cochrane; tenor, Nigel Rogers), we were given an impressively moving, exciting and enjoyable evening. Professionals might have done it with greater polish, but not with half such a deep vitality. There is an object-lesson in this: Neither accuracy of notes nor authenticity have any important part in making music—*quâ* music.

PETER TRANCHELL.

5 June 1954

THE CAMBRIDGE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY

The concert given in King’s College Chapel on Thursday, May 20, was good, bad and indifferent. As the first fifty bars of Schubert’s Unfinished Symphony welled up into the vaults, I found myself extremely impressed. Here was a vitality and urgency that would well repay having to listen to only half a Symphony before having to listen to only half a Requiem. There are numerous completions to the Schubert, and one at least by Frank Merrick and now that it is generally agreed that Schubert actually did finish the work and that the last folios were lost by the carelessness of one Hüttenbrenner, considerations of the composer’s intention are superfluous. Let us have the whole thing somehow. However, as the performance proceeded the wood-wind became progressively more irresponsible, and it was clear that the symphony lacked finish in both senses of the word.

The Mozart Requiem which followed had moments of great excellence, and on the whole the minor defects of the performance were not brought home to one any more than they are during Tosti’s Farewell played over one’s “Brunch” at a Maison Lyons. The chorus sang delightfully and their words were (laudably) somewhat more distinct than those of the soloists. Doris Eaves (soprano) seemed to be out of sorts in her first entry, but she gathered momentum in due course. The Kyrie eleison was superb.

Mozart’s cynicism reaches its height in the *Tuba Mirum*, and this was effectively reflected by all concerned. But the tea-time feeling was well and truly obliterated by the fine rendering of the *Rex Tremendae*. The latin names of these two sections sound like school-boy howlers, but of course the continuation of the sentences clarifies the distribution of cases.

The soloists seemed slightly remote in the *Recordare*, as if diffident of being remembered too closely by their Maker, and I must say I agreed with them. So did the orchestra, and the stodginess of the later part of the quartet was suitably overwhelmed.

Some ragged choral singing in the *Domine Jesu* was offset by supreme tranquillity achieved in the *Hostias*, but the *Sanctus* did not begin loud enough and so misfired.

The soloists came into their own once and for all in the *Benedictus* with the Tenor (Daniel McCoshan) nicely incisive. King's Chapel is such that if you sing in it with an edge on your voice, the edge must be clean. The other soloists were contralto, Catherine Brosnahan and bass, Kenneth Jones.

The orchestra (leader, John Grunau) was remarkably well behaved, except during the introduction to the *Agnus Dei*, and the organ was throughout tactfully and effectively used. Denis Fielder seemed to be conducting with dignity and aplomb. It was in fact a fine evening.

The grand fugue in the *Agnus Dei* was the crowning glory of the achievement. It has a chugging quality that was admirably caught and held. I should not have been surprised, as it moved off, to hear a guard's whistle blown, and the slamming of carriage doors—and to find we had been transported like freight even so far as Shelford.

PETER TRANCHELL.

13 November 1954 Volume LXXVI

[John Lowe on] ZULEIKA—HER MUSIC

[As was suggested last week in *News and Notes*, the first-night critics did less than justice to the music of Zuleika. In this article the Director of Music for the B.B.C.'s Midland Region discusses it in greater detail.]

An agile composer setting out to write a Musical Comedy soon after 1900 addressed himself to a straightforward and uncomplicated task, provided the gift of nostalgic melody, catchy rhythm, and lively orchestration was his. For in Lionel Monckton, Sidney Jones and the rest he had excellent models, and the Musical Comedy genre was stuff and marrow of the popular culture of the day. Since then, came again the Americans, and "Oklahoma" took the place of "The Geisha" or "The Arcadians."

Mr Tranchell's task has been neither straightforward nor uncomplicated. For three solutions are open to the librettist and composer who dare the ironic pleasures of Max Beerbohm's novel. They can either use the text as a peg on which to hang a witty, satiric, trenchantly contemporary "Musical" of the type staged by the A.D.C. in the nineteen twenties. Or they can clothe Edwardian vocal conventions in the smart Instrumental and rhythmic dresses and techniques of to-day. Or they can create Edwardian pastiche, limiting themselves, at any rate in form and instrumentation, to the musical horizon of those days. The third method appears to have been chosen, and both the strengths and the weaknesses of the music arise partly from that choice.

Good tunes, agile tunes, abound. So do tempting and catchy rhythms. Yet I was more conscious of this abundance when I read over the score after the performance, than I was in the theatre. "City of Repose," with its saucy cadential refrain, "Zuleika's Travels," with its nostalgic twists and turns, the delightful Trio for Katie, Mrs Batch, and Noaks, in which a nice contrapuntal marriage appears to have been arranged between Jeppesen and Hindemith (Britten not *absit*)—these as I rehearsed them in my mind after the show with the help of a score, recalled favourites like "Freud and the Bedmakers," "Seaweed," or "Liberty Hall." Why were they less successful "on location?" The answer seems to lie partly in the thorny business of musical comedy orchestration—which is essentially pit orchestration—as support for the voice, and partly in this century's widening rhythmic horizon.

Puccini's vocal line rests on surging string tone. "The Geisha," musically the most successful, because the best scored, of all the classics of Musical Comedy, rests on expansive and telling theatre orchestration. That is where Peter Tranchell has been less successful in realising for us the expansive days of George Edwardes, Daly's, and the rest.

We had handy singers in plenty, especially in John Pardoe and Gordon Clyde, but they needed a more luxurious instrumental cushion to support their voices. The musical comedy style of orchestral playing is difficult for the new generation of orchestral players, for they graduate through Sherborne and the National Youth Orchestra where the older player graduated through the café trio and the silent films. No wonder that many a good symphonic player is defeated by the style of "San Toy." Much of

the scoring in *Zuleika* is “straight,” which invites “straight” playing: and the straight, or concert orchestra, style of orchestral playing is scarcely the key to theatre music. And as to rhythmic resources (here the second half of *Zuleika* was more interesting than the first): if you confine yourself to those of 1910 out of purism, your main vehicle for nostalgic evocation is the Waltz. Nowadays we have grown to expect more than a good waltz or two, for the Tango, the Blues, and so on, are second nature.

Perhaps, then, the second of the three methods propounded for the composition of a Musical Comedy, is a more attractive one, especially for the composer who must write for a theatre where the orchestra pit is only partially sunk. Composers in the eighteenth century used the tools, technique, and occasions of their own day—Mozart wrote one of his finest *pieces d’occasion* for the obsequies of two Masonic worthies, and Bach used, or did without, instrumental or keyboard accompaniment to his Motets as occasion and local talent suggested. Does not *Zuleika* offer a delightful opportunity for the combination of Edwardian vocal ways with the instrumental sounds of to-day? The theatre orchestra of to-day, with its chorus of saxophones and versatile “kitchen” department, might be more specialised and more expensive than the occasion makes possible. But with a foundation of two pianos, with an accomplished pair of percussionists, perhaps a squeeze box and a harmonica, and for good measure if you like an electronic organ as well—so we might bedeck the Edwardians’ vocal line with new, gay, intriguing, instrumental clothes.

A pleasant thought, and along that way the road may lie. But for the present: Messrs Ferman and Tranchell and their talented company have given us a thoroughly enjoyable evening’s entertainment, rightly designed for their own audience at home. The vivacious charm of Patricia Stark, the forthright singing of Mr Pardoe and his excellent chorus, and the perfectly timed clowning of Messrs Woodthorpe and Smurthwaite—these remain for your visiting reviewer, Sir, a memorable part of Cambridge, City of Repose, 1954.

JOHN LOWE.

27 November 1954

PROGRAMME NOTES

After his “Folk-song of the Paralytics,” the young composer-pianist played the “*Pas* of the Barefooted Nuns” to a bevy of billowing beldames. “Whilst listening to music Lady Listless would allow her aspirations to pass unrestrainedly across her face. They passed now, like a flight of birds.” She compared the music to the Sugar-Plum Fairies’ Dance from *Casse-Noisette*. Mrs Asp exclaimed “The finale was distinctly curious, just like the falling of a silver tray.” Firbank’s description catches nicely the typical irrelevant nonsense uttered by persons wishing to seem intelligent. Lady Listless could not hear music without daydreams; when she spoke of it, she made cross-reference to other music.

How often we hear such phrases as “That chord is reminiscent of the opening of *Tristan*” or “It puts me in mind of ‘Here comes Tootsy,’ in ’05, you remember”! It is a method of distracting the senses from the task of actually listening—a dilution of pleasure. There are some people who cannot eat tepid cabbage without recalling all the previous occasions when served with the same delicacy by Aunt Maud, Aunt Enidina, and poor Cousin Begonia (before she went into a home). Such recollections dull the palate and the diner feasts meanwhile on the sound of his own voice.

Such, to my mind, is the purpose and effect of all programme-notes at concerts, and of the intriguing little chats in, say, the *Radio Times*. And perhaps very wisely done, too! Often it is preferable indeed to have some preoccupation to while away the boredom between the tunes—if there *are* tunes, in these days of “contemporary music.”

I sometimes wonder how much less effect a striking modulation has upon an audience when they have been instructed to look out for it. Every time the simplest modulation occurs, someone is bound to ask himself “was *that* it?” and finally to decide on a particular one, missing *en passant* the real moment pointed out by the commentator. Looking through some old programmes, I discover many

interesting items of information, which can hardly be said to add to the genuine enjoyment of the music *quâ* music (any more than a biography of a painter adds to the visual enjoyment of his paintings). Perhaps such notes are designed to make the programme *seem* worth sixpence.

In one instance we learn “moments of chromatic colour stand out very strongly in their context.” (And where else could they?) Such moments are either obvious and consequently unnecessary to stress, or else they do *not* stand out, in which case the programme-note is mendacious.

Again we may find that a “simple modal tonality is used—of the kind associated with Strompfburger.” Well, who wants to be distracted by thinking we might equally well be listening to Strompfburger? Who was he, anyhow?

A charming condescension is shown in “All these pieces are on a small scale, but they are wonderfully subtle and polished; and it is clear from them that their composer must soon find their form too small and cramped to accommodate his restless genius.” Soon, indeed! The composer in question died a good three hundred years ago. And why, if the pieces are subtle and polished, should it be clear that the composer would be dissatisfied with that genre? People usually like doing what they are good at, again and again. (Vide Scarlatti and the Sonata, Couperin and the Suite, Schubert and the Song.)

Occasionally an acid comment appears like a delicious desert amid a jungle of oases. “The committee wish to express grateful thanks to Miss Bloggs for interest, advice and encouragement—also to all who have *helped* with the production” (my italics). Evidently Miss Bloggs was not a help. I remember that in spite of all interest, advice and encouragement, the chorus stubbornly managed to look like a parade of parboiled dumplings.

A historical note will often get one through the first three arias without recourse to dozing. “This was Pewicz’s seventh oratorio on this subject, written after a visit to the Rotunda at Basingstoke in May, 1732. The libretto, like that of “Gomorrhah,” is taken from a play by Racine, who supplied the model, based deliberately on Greek Tragedy.” Such a paragraph excuses any undramatic or stilted quality in the work or the production. We must respect it, of course, because it is based on “Greek Tragedy.” Awe-inspiring!

“The words are treated with great sensitiveness,” we may read. Luckily we have them printed in full in the programme, for otherwise the singers will have rendered them inaudible.

Sometimes the audience can be greatly soothed by being informed of an ordeal from which they are to be narrowly saved. “Canzonets were one of the most popular kinds of vocal music in Italy in the last third of the sixteenth century. During this period nearly two thousand of them were published.” Reassuringly enough, the programme tells us only five are to be performed.

Self-evident truths seem to be a stock-in-trade, and musical landmarks are pointed out with paternal insistence. We soon become familiar with “the vigorous central section” (like hard-centred chocolates), with the “great rhythmic excitement” (which in the event, we missed—principally because the orchestra missed it too), “the voices singing for the most part in block harmony” (different from a tenement symphony) and “the finale bringing the work to a close in a blaze of D major” (somehow we never expected a work to be brought to a close by a finale!—especially in D major, the key of the whole piece. What a thrilling surprise!).

Humour is generally sneezed at in a programme-note, but very rarely it shines through to make a change from the more ponderous affirmations of the “wit,” “genius,” “polish,” the “antiquity,” and a dozen idle attributes of the work. For instance, we are always told that the Wasps Overture begins with a “stinging” pizzicato. We remain ignorant, however, of the antiseptic balm of the subsequent bars. There is no such sting in the Flight of the Bumble-bee, because naturally the composer knew that bumble-bees cannot sting, and especially not on a marriage-flight.

The “splicing” of the strings is a *sine qua non* of the Wedding March. There is no “salt” to be found in the Nutcracker Suite—only saccharine. There is bound to be “braying” brass in the Donkey’s Serenade. While the Wand of Youth is mysteriously unspecified. Is it a maypole—or an umbrella?

The interesting names of works are a goldmine for the note-writer. He can dismiss them, explain them, or play upon them to his heart's content, like an organist on his favourite Baroque Tremulant. The results are about as appealing.

The "Moonlight" Sonata is, of course, a favourite, and almost qualifies by now to advertise a sunlit soap. We should not be surprised to find that Nielsen's "Inextinguishable" Symphony is to be played by the band of the local Fire Brigade—in asbestos overalls, and that Davies equipment is on sale with each programme. What would be more natural?

Nevertheless, there are some names that are not satisfactorily accounted for. In the Carnival of Animals, there is no indication of what beasts are intended to be playing during the item entitled "Pianistes." At Bach organ recitals we are not told the true origin of the Dorian Toccata—really the Dorian Gray Toccata since it comes to a bad end after irritating everybody.

Again, there is that apocryphal story we should like to be more widely known: After the first performance, the Rector of the Thomasschule asked Bach which was the thin end of the "Wedge Fugue." And we also would like to know.

I remember vividly two concerts at which a misprint in the programme was all for the good. Haydn's "Cock" Symphony was announced, and a mystified audience waited with bated breath for the oboe to raise even a tiny crow—but alas, in vain. There was the usual clucking and bubbling among the horns, which seem invariably broody, but nothing more explicit. The audience went home very properly puzzled. More satisfactory was the performance of the Cantata "A safe stronghold our Cod is still." Nearly all those present agreed how suitable the work was for that Friday, and enjoyed the music with reverential fervour and perhaps a distant inkling of thick white sauce.

It will be clear from the foregoing remarks that programme-notes in their pestilential variety, their pestilential condescension and pestilential distraction can only be regarded as pestilential. In future let us be more discriminating. Let us by all means keep the programme note as a valuable source of intellectual cocktail-party conversation (for nobody can resist the pleasures of one-up-ness)—but let us have the programmes (and the notes) sold not at the beginning of a concert, but at the end as the audience is leaving. In this way, perhaps, we shall be free to listen to music genuinely and undisturbed.

PETER TRANCHELL.

THE CHILDHOOD OF CHRIST

It spoke well for the C.U.M.S. under new management that the performance of Berlioz' "Childhood of Christ" was as good as it was. To present the work so early in the year (with so little time to rehearse) was in itself an ambitious act. The soloists (principally Kathleen Hoff, Kenneth Bowen, John Noble and John Walker) were impeccable, and the chorus, on the whole, confident. Allen Percival, conducting, managed to elicit—in spite of orchestral skids on one or two dangerous corners—a lilt and freshness from the work that made the evening delightful.

I was glad to find the music treated as a whole with the tempi adopted in relation to their context and not from pre-conceived interpretations of individual sections. In particular, the chorus of shepherds, which follows a longish and easy-going orchestral ramble, was taken faster than I remember hearing it before, and I was extremely glad. A dramatic composer can only be fairly interpreted by a dramatically-sensitive artist.

PETER TRANCHELL.

5 February 1955

MUSIC

[Dvorak's Stabat Mater]

Dvorak's Stabat Mater was performed on January 27 in St John's College Chapel by the Cambridge Philharmonic Society. It is a fine work, beautifully proportioned in its alternations of lyric

tenderness and dramatic storm, and the climax towards the end was extremely exciting. The overall success of the performance was as usual due largely to the chorus. I say "as usual," for it seems that on all occasions the chorus of the Philharmonic Society sings with firmness, fervour and sensibility, while the exigencies of concert-promotion does not provide for adequate rehearsal of the orchestra. Dvorak was not to know this, and so perhaps his orchestration is slightly at fault. The demands he makes of the woodwind in particular cannot be respected merely in sight-reading. The players themselves could with advantage have observed this fact in advance, and thus shown in the event more consideration for their composer and their audience. The irregularities amongst oboes and bassoons were especially [*sic*] distracting.

The soloists sang impeccably. It was a pity that a fair proportion of their work was drowned by the orchestra. Here again more rehearsal would have been to the good. Doreen Murray (soprano) and David Galliver (tenor) were especially delightful in their duet "Fac, ut portem Christi mortem," etc. Miss Murray's high notes were a joy. Her high B in the opening number, and her soaring passages in the finale were most exciting. John Noble (bass) was excellent in his solo 'Fac, ut ardeat cor meum.' Barbara Gill (contralto), who was rendering her services at short notice, did not get a full opportunity to display her quality, since she was incessantly swamped by the wind—as in her number "Inflammatum." This was infuriating, because what one could hear of her was most amiable. A surprising thing was the ensemble singing of the quartet—for a change, beyond reproach.

Even though Philip Miggins led the orchestra, there were moments when the violins could have played with more poetic desperation. Alan Hemmings at the organ had not taken the precaution of tuning it to the orchestra. Luckily his interpolations were not frequent.

On the whole, it was an auspicious evening, and the conductor, Denis Fielder, is to be congratulated.

PETER TRANCHELL.

26 February 1955

INFLATION EVERYWHERE

Last week comment was made in these columns upon the appalling popularity of music in Cambridge. It seems that we must believe that the various clubs whose initials begin with C.U. have the exclusive right of major music-making within five miles of Great St Mary's. Any unfortunate music-lover stranded in a college with only a piccolo and two counter-tenors must content himself with these resources. The reason why he must not collect friends from all over the place to perform an ambitious work is that he *may* give a bad performance and meanwhile queer the pitch of some University society by taking their players.

Facts must be faced, however—and one fact is that if the various music clubs did really provide an outlet for individual enterprise there would not be the continual spate of private ventures that Mr Baillie grumbled at last week. The University is much larger than it was. There are more music-makers. There is not room for them all in the music clubs. Are they to keep silence? Music is much larger than it was. Most people would rather hear a mediocre orchestra than an excellent soloist (unless the soloist has a famous name). If Chamber music were more popular than it is, the C.U.M.C., which deals in this exclusively, would be solvent. It is *not* true that the performances of C.U.M.S., C.U.M.C., etc., are invariably of a high standard. Nor are the works chosen by closeted committees always what appeals to the general membership of their clubs.

It is difficult to distinguish between the claims to preference of various successful private enterprises. These and the clubs tend to militate against each other. The performances of Monteverdi at Girton were seriously incommoded by C.U.M.S. several years ago. The production of a new opera by the Arts Theatre in 1951 reached the stage in spite of attempts by a club to squash it in favour of a Purcell revival. King's Chapel has witnessed at least two large individual ventures of merit—St Nicholas, Sancta Civitas—in the last few years.

If music is regarded as a part of University life it must not be discouraged at any point whatsoever. Trouble only arises from failure to co-ordinate activities. Sponsors or would-be conductors work in their own little vacuum without consulting any of the other bodies that may be affected. But so do the various club committees. The fault lies in the increased size of the University and the state of society. We must seriously ask ourselves whether such clubs as C.U.M.S. have not outlived their purpose.

Another consideration is that, however much we may deny it, University life does provide a certain amount of vocational training. Undergraduate journalism *is* a door to the outside world of journalism. The A.D.C. *is* a preparation for a stage career. The administration, training and conducting involved in getting up a concert *does*, in fact, stand a man in good stead in the search for employment. It is immoral to try to prevent a man from exercising individuality and enterprise.

And when Mr Baillie reminds us of all the ventures that have gone astray he tactfully omits to mention the greater proportion that have, in fact, been well attended and that have, in fact, delighted their audience.

PETER TRANCHELL.

5 March 1955

POUSHNOFF

Pouishnoff's recital on February 27 was a masterpiece of interpretation and pianism. The programme included Bach's Italian Concerto, Beethoven's "Appassionata," a group of Chopin, Grieg's Ballade in G minor, and Liszt's Polonaise in E. Apart from a certain mechanical impression in the first movement of the Bach, and a lack of desperation or viciousness in the Beethoven, Pouishnoff was on the top of his form, with the most touching expression and incredible finger-work. His *leggiero prestissimo* is absolutely ravishing. Many young pianists could learn a lesson from this.

PETER TRANCHELL.

23 April 1955

FAREWELL TO THE "78"

More and more music is becoming no more than a background noise; less and less is anyone prepared to make the effort required to listen to it. One more milestone on this road to the loss of our ears will shortly be passed. We are to lose the 78 r.p.m. record. Its manufacture is to be discontinued—we shall be told—in the name of progress. But one wonders if this is the whole of the story. Have there not been cases in the past when manufacturers with a similar plea have either suppressed inventions or deliberately lessened the quality or durability of their goods for their own ends? On this score one hears of this latest proposal with some fears. Does the end of the "78" mean that enthusiasts will now have no choice but long-playing records, and that later—at the manufacturers' convenience, and to their profit—we shall all be told that they, in turn, have been superceded [*sic*] by tape recordings?

Certainly at present the 33 has serious drawbacks. It has an astonishing rate of deterioration; the initial quality at purchase is by no means assured, and a single accidental scratch may ruin 20 minutes of playing. And there are other considerations which its monopoly of the market makes it undesirable. What, for example, of the convenience of the gramophile? If he can buy no other, gone will be the days of charming excerpts, of jazz numbers, and of countless musical works which fit so conveniently on "78" records. Gone will be that four minutes of entertainment or pleasure which is so psychologically satisfying and right. A person wanting one operatic number will now have to buy a whole opera. Those little gems of Gigli or Marlene Dietrich will no longer be available. We must all toe the mass-production line.

I am not being merely sentimental or conservative. Schools are also affected. In classes of musical appreciation, illustrations are most efficiently supplied from "78" records, where short excerpts are easily found, and a greater variety of performance is available. If, as we fear, the next two years

witness the eclipse of the “78,” the teaching of music will be seriously prejudiced. Representations have been made on the subject, but appeals to the head are of no avail where the pocket weighs heavier. Soon a school wishing to demonstrate a single Chopin Nocturne will have to purchase the whole works of Chopin, recorded by one arbitrarily chosen pianist. Selection and variety will be denied.

But the disadvantages of the “33” record are nothing to those of the tape-machine. With this egregious engine it is not only possible to delete by accident whole sections of a recording, but the tape is very easily torn. The magnetism of tape does not appear to last very long and, in storage, the magnetism may imprint itself into adjacent strands of tape, thus ruining the whole.

But most boring of all is the time it takes to find the place on the tape. I have witnessed many performances with tape-machines and the time spent in recording and playing was a mere nothing compared with the hours of searching for the required piece, winding the tape back and forth. The exhaustion and irritation occasioned by this operation nullified any enjoyment there might have been.

PETER TRANCHELL.

28 May 1955

THE CAMBRIDGE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY – Fidelity

“Fidelity!” Persons busy in the race to appear more cultured or knowledgeable than they are will find this “O.K.” word a handy addition to their stock of meaningless (but modist) jargon. A brief consideration of the word may assist in its improper use. Those who know the truth are the best liars.

“Fidelity,” as amongst machines, is undoubtedly a legitimate notion, with deep import for the machine-minders. But applied to the reproduction of music, the word is immediately suspect for the following reasons.

Sound is what one hears. Presumably a sound ceases to be a sound when it is inaudible. The propagation of the sound is an unspectacular part of the affair, however, compared with the almost creative act of hearing it. This is especially so with music, for the appreciation of which, three processes are necessary: the focussing of attention, the physical reaction in the ear, and the intellectual interpretation in the brain. If there should be a fault in any one department, the listener will not be well served.

Alas, human being are very variously endowed by nature and, on the whole, sparingly. Men with a really “good ear” are not plentiful. For the majority, the perception of the logic in music, the discrimination that distinguishes music from noise, is probably precarious enough; and the fidelity of a machine in reproducing music is a small matter in comparison with the fidelity required of every listener’s “ear.”

The focus of attention may be another factor militating against this fidelity of the ear. One hears what one attends to. Sounds un-noticed are unheard. Hence if one attends to the music itself one may be able to ignore asperities of performance. But the general notion of fidelity as applied to gramophone records tends to encourage the concert-goer to listen more for needle-hiss in the concert hall than for the music.

So when I say that the Cambridge Philharmonic Society last Thursday-week gave an interesting and varied concert, I am not denying the admixture of much needle-hiss (more in fact than I care to remember), but affirming that there was also an element of sporadic exhilaration. It was best to look out for this.

Fürgen Hess’s performance in Bach’s Violin Concerto in E major was the outstanding feature of the evening. Other notably touching incidents were Anne Keynes’s soprano solo in Britten’s Hymn to Saint Cecilia, and Philip Higgins’s violin solo (a few exquisite bars) in Patrick Hadley’s symphonic Ballad “The Trees so high.”

This work was an ambitious thing to do. The chorus came off better than the orchestra—excepting the percussionists. Robert Rowell as baritone solo had but few bars to sing compared with his bars of rest. Not a rewarding part, but he did what he could with what he had.

In general this concert was like the Curate's egg—parts of it were good; but the sad thing was everybody's aunt had stayed away, so the Guildhall was severely underpopulated. The difference between a gramophone record and a live concert is that *some* music is best appreciated when listened to amongst a multitude. We missed our madding crowd.

PETER TRANCHELL.

4 June 1955

THE TRUTH ABOUT TUNES

By PETER TRANCHELL

A composer sits at the piano and plays a pretty tune,—“why don't you publish it,” say all his friends,—“why don't you, and live in luxury for the rest of your life?” A composer's world is thought to be as simple as that: publish a tune and rest on perpetual laurels.

Perhaps it would be edifying to consider this apparent bed of roses (or laurels) and see how vigorous is the growth of attendant thorns.

In writing a good popular tune, I imagine, inspiration takes a back seat. Calculation is at the helm with Banality at the prow. This is inevitable. A good popular tune must be easily assimilated, easily remembered—by people who are not wholly listening. The only way to catch their attention is to use something they have often heard before. Hence the most popular tunes are those which are most reminiscent of previous successes—even if those successes are not consciously remembered.

It would make a fascinating subject for a thesis, to trace the distillation or seepage of a cliché from one popular tune to another. A contemporary instance can be found in one of the most successful West End shows. Its hit theme is (for the first musical phrase) note for note the same (and in the same rhythm though a bit slower) as one of the very popular tunes from *Oklahoma* in 1947. Familiarity breeds contentment.

But in his calculation of how to spell-bind his public, a composer has other considerations. There are national tastes in tunes. To succeed on Broadway, an element of impotence and jewry has apparently been necessary in a tune. Such an element is conveyed by the banal use of certain intervals, in which one note is flattened.

Some sections of society prefer their tunes lavishly orchestrated. Some prefer the tune to be subordinate in interest to its accompanying rhythm. A composer must find the lowest common factor, to succeed in every direction.

But though plagiarism is a neat way of taking advantage of bygone plugging, there is a copyright law which forbids, I believe, the unauthorised quotation of more than four bars at a time. Consequently a little rudimentary musical knowledge is required, to alter a few notes here and there in the quoted bars to avoid their being “legally” recognised. Composers who cannot read music are advised to insist on their amanuensis being up to at least grade 2 (Associated Board). It is interesting to note that some composers (serious ones) have not used bar-lines. Each piece lasts in effect one bar. But it is easy to talk of the composer and his public in a facile way. In actual life there is between them an abyss of agents, impresarios, bandleaders, arrangers and publishers. All of these have to be ingratiated, but not trusted.

The agent is the man who claims to negotiate all the composer's business (for a commission of 10 per cent.). But since the same agent is agent for all the people with whom the composer may negotiate, it matters little to him who gets what money, for he (the agent) takes his 10 per cent. from both sides, and is not interested in its distribution among his various clients.

The impresario is the man who promises the composer “reasonable” or even “complete” artistic control of his show—but who is well enough off to be able to afford a law suit, should the composer sue him for not doing so in the event. The impresario is a man who talks about gentlemen’s agreements, after promises of tasteful production in a suitable theatre, may (with many specious excuses, of course) present that show in the Albert Hall—on ice, making much money, of which the composer is lucky to get 2½ per cent.

The bandleader is the man who is “persuaded” to “plug” the tune in his various dance-hall appointments and on the B.B.C.

The arranger is the man to whom the copyright of the “arrangement” belongs. Should the composer allow an arrangement to be made without a specific agreement as to the sharing of proceeds—the arranger will naturally take all, and the tune will have benefited the composer nothing.

Now every bandleader has his own arranger, whose work he uses exclusively. These are in liaison with the publisher, who prints band parts from the “arrangement,” and in general encourages the dissemination of written versions of the tune.

But the publisher is usually on a financial string. He is under contract to an American publisher, to the effect that should an American tune wish for “plugging” in England, it shall receive priority over all English material that might interfere with its popularity—that is, the English publisher is under contract to suppress the English composer’s tune.

So when friends say to me “Why don’t you publish that tune?” I reply “One has to have a special talent for this sort of thing!”

[This article clearly reflects the difficulties he was having at the time with Donald Albery and the colossus of agents, Music Corporation of America (England) Ltd., over the commercial production of Zuleika. See the letters of the period and the subsequent Zuleika Saga. Ed.]

8 October 1955 Volume LXXVII

MUSIC IN THE LONG VACATION

Amateur theatricals since the time of Nero have been an infallible means of losing face without making money; and where, by some oversight, money has been made, charity, as usual homeless, has popped in and prigged it. The “Pageant of Cambridge” staged outside the New Court of St John’s College during August Bank Holiday was an exception. Faces were made and money was not lost; charity indeed popped in, but no-one will grudge the bestowal of the proceeds upon such an illuminating cause as the restoration of the Lantern at Ely Cathedral.

The entertainment itself was the usual *mêlée* of men and beasts cavorting through a number of episodes attributed to the history of Cambridge by John Saltmarsh. The production was in the able hands of Camille Prior assisted by Michael Marland.

Pageants are an acquired taste. It always seems to me that foreigners and outsiders must gain little pleasure other than perplexity from such diversions. The humour of casting is lost to them. For a person in the know, however, it is refreshing to observe fellow-citizens dolled up in not always appropriate motley—to see notable high-table *bon-viveurs* acting as Puritans, to see your bank-manager burnt at the stake, to see choral scholars turned pagan, or a local carthorse caparisoned as a snorting charger. An outsider perforce misses half the fun, and the general inaudibility of open-air performance (so often embellished by our solicitously low-flying Allies) must make it resemble a mystifying parade of mute inglorious Miltons. And yet, witnesses came in clouds.

But to us it was highly enjoyable. There would be many congratulations to record did space allow: and as many *gaucheries* to deride (gently), did indiscretion permit.

Perhaps the most striking moment of the affair was Simon Phipps's excellent rendering of Latimer's sermon before the Bishop of Ely; and the most endearing feature was the apparent inability of any adult to control the younger children in the cast, whose behaviour, far from relevant to any scene in which they appeared, was a delightful distraction.

Mrs Prior has sworn that this pageant is her last, but I am sure we may yet look forward to many entertaining Masques or Divertissements on any likely plot of open ground. So here's to the next time! A rose by any other name . . .!

Now people will go to a pageant in their thousands, as they did—the locals to sit on grass ordinarily forbidden to their feet, and foreigners out of curiosity at a quaint British custom. But nobody in their senses imagines that anyone will attend a commonplace opera during the very season that is Cambridge's intellectual ebb-tide. An English opera or similar rarity might conceivably have drawn a quorum, but not an opera in the current continental repertoire, especially when the usual modicum of publicity is omitted. Bravery in taking bad risks is laudable and so is enthusiasm;—but not if it is at the expense of unfortunate guarantors, as I do not doubt this was.

So I felt rather sorry for the comparatively young C.U. Opera Group repeating their production of Cimarosa's "Secret Marriage" previously staged in March. No notice then appeared in these columns as the Easter Vacation intervened. I now record my impression of both occasions.

The earlier production gained much by being in the Y.M.C.A. Hall, where the small space and obviously *ad-hoc* stage give an atmosphere of intimacy and friendliness, and any blemish of performance will be forgiven by a house packed with well-wishers. The more recent production had to battle against the coolth, the professional pretension and the emptiness of the A.D.C. Theatre.

The singing of the ladies, Pat Tempest, Doreen O'Donohue and Margaret Shenfield was very reasonable, but not a patch on that of the men, Christopher Bishop, Kenneth Bowen and John Fitches, which was excellent. Words were audible, and one never had that embarrassing sensation that one was being *sung at*.

Not much acting was done, save by Christopher Bishop in the part of the crotchety (not to say fidgety) old merchant. The producer did well, perhaps, not to try to make his cast attempt too much, although I wished that John Fitches as Lord Robinson had been more of a fop, which would have made sense of some of his lines.

Leon Lovett conducted the orchestra adroitly and with not unpleasing results. In the A.D.C., however, the orchestra was reduced not only in numbers but evidently in talent.

In the matter of production, what can one say? The first effort of a newly formed group and the first effort of a young producer, Brian Trowell, cannot perhaps be expected to fly too high. Inexperience can be forgiven: lack of imagination cannot.

It seemed to me that too little forethought had been given to the general effect, the integration, and the general *mise-en-scène*. Certain passages were crammed with very suitable business. The ensembles, by contrast (where the cataract of voices obscured the words) were static shouting matches, and no attempt had been made to prevent them from being as boring as the sight of a straggly line of supporters cheering on a sodden touch-line. This would not have mattered, had the rest of the work been equally boring. The producer has yet to learn how to make new entries of characters eventful and convincing; and must also busy himself about the contributory factors to his production—scenery and costume.

The men's costumes and wigs, hired from professional sources, had a period flavour which the ladies' costumes (designed and made by Judith Baker) did not. I do not criticise the ladies' garments as garments, save that it is questionable whether it is in keeping with the comedy of Opera Buffa to emphasise indiscriminately the dumpiness or lankiness of all the characters. My complaint is that these costumes harmonised neither in colour with the scenery nor in genre with the costumes hired. Forethought had been absent.

Then the scenery (also designed by Judith Baker) was severely utilitarian—a canvas box with a few shabby doors, which would have served better as the garret in *Manon* or the bathroom in *Neues vom Tage*. We all know scenery is inessential, but if it is to be used at all, it might as well be appropriate to the play. In this case we hankered after the impression of *nouveau-riche* ostentation, or of genuine good taste, of grandeur—or at least of comfort. Doubtless in the Y.M.C.A. there was not room. I may seem hard on the designer, but these matters are primarily the responsibility of the producer.

The lapse of several months between the two productions might have given time for some reconsiderations. On the larger stage at the A.D.C., an upper level—some apology for a staircase or balcony—might have been feasible. The eaves-dropping episode, the strolls of Lord Robinson, and the ladies' altercation cried out for it. The only change I observed in the production, however, was the introduction of an eclipse of the sun during the ensemble at the close of Act 1. The lighting inexplicably dimmed to a deep crimson (oblivious of the music), and, after a short obscurity of everyone's faces, came up again with a trenchant blue moonlight, in the manner of colour-changes on cinema-organs or advertisements. A short sharp thunderstorm brought this somewhat variegated afternoon to a close.

But we must not cavil at minutiae. It was brave of the group to stage an opera at all, even if the choice of work was misguided. "Sir John in Love" is to be performed next term—a step in the right direction—to which we look forward with interest and pleasure.

PETER TRANCHELL.

15 October 1955

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

"It was a challenge", says the Governess when she learns that the children have all along been enjoying in secret that very liaison with evil spirits from which she has tried to protect them. This might equally apply to the whole opera.

Confronted with a story which unfolds in a series of suggestions so delicate that the reader cannot tell whether the manifestations are actual or the Governess's hallucination: confronted with a libretto that naturally fails to catch the intangible sense of evil that should infuse the story; confronted with a plot that requires two children as protagonists; the composer is certainly faced with a challenge.

It seems to be Britten's hobby to accept challenges. One can call to mind so many daring experiments that have been successful, so many ill-suited words or phrases that he has set so discreetly that neither singer nor listener are embarrassed. And now he has again surpassed himself with music that (though unmelodious) redeems most of the infelicities of the opera. Long may he continue! For, all being well, he has another forty years to emulate in age the grand old men of our musical horizon whom he has already out-shone in talent.

The production this week at the Arts Theatre was beautifully contrived, and the singing and characterisation excellent. Miles and Flora, the two children (David Hemmings and Olive Dyer) were entirely convincing even in their agonised moments of evil possession struggling with conscience. The boy was particularly expressive. Jennifer Vyvyan as the Governess, the mainstay of the opera, held our sympathy throughout. Her part was so sensitively rendered, that it never occurred to one to think she was unfit to be in charge of children, as might have been the case. Her agitations never seemed excessive, and her repose was impeccable. Joan Cross as the Housekeeper managed in some subtle way to suggest the requisite muddled beneficence. Arda Mandikian as the dead Miss Jessel looked ghostly enough, but her words were evanescent, as if her teeth and lips had somehow passed prematurely beyond Purgatory, leaving their owner past communication save by table-tapping.

The vocal honours of the evening must go to Peter Pears as the dead Peter Quint, and also the Prologue. As Peter Quint, his vocalisation was a *tour de force* in beauty of tone, clarity of words, and excellence of control.

If there were any faults in this opera, they lay in the libretto. There were indeed moments when I did not feel at home, and the fact that they were only sporadic moments means that at other times the action was realistic and credible. For the most part it was an extremely exciting evening.

My particular dissatisfaction was with the ghosts; not that they were unghostly or too lovable in appearance. In everything they were adequately evil save in their utterances.

The trouble with representing evil on stage, is that the more clearly it is detailed the less horrifying it becomes. An unknown evil is more ghastly. So when one learnt that Miles was expelled from school for something specified no more exactly than an “injury” to his fellows, one accepted the ambiguity. It was clear that the boy on stage could not have been engaged in the rough mis-diversions of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*—his long hair would have made him vulnerable for a start. Obviously it was some appalling moral offence. In this the influence of this relationship with Quint was manifest and disturbing, as long as we did not get a close-up of Quint actually seducing the child. Alas, we did.

Quint became very exact; he told bed-time stories, and offered adventures and rewards, and was no worse an influence than any governess or baby-sitter. The *Boyhood of Raleigh* is more vigorous.

Even when we came to Miles’s theft of the letter and his refusal to confess, it was presented as the first peccadillo of a boy hitherto innocent. One began to doubt the enormity that had caused his expulsion from school.

But the final blow was to learn in their “Colloquy” that Quint and Miss Jessel in their loneliness in the abyss were merely seeking friendship. What could be more natural and unmalicious?

Now we all know that there are Demons and Beings that haunt the earth hankering after they know not what. And that is the horror of it. Nobody knows what these spirits desire. Nor is it a pleasant experience to suffer or witness a demonic possession. It does not necessarily consist in bedtime stories or manifestations of a ghost’s life-time image, but the insidious infiltration of personality upon a victim usually only half aware of it. Between living persons we can see this and it is subject to control. We call it education, upbringing, or conversion.

Britten’s music makes it clear that he is experienced enough to know about this and to express the terror of the mystery. But Myfanwy Piper’s libretto is here as innocent as a dove, and as ineffective. We are to believe the children subtly undermined, but we hear and see no such thing, and the children (ridiculously enough) seem uncontaminated in the absence of the ghosts.

Apart from snatches of ballad, the music avoids anything like an extended melody, though I several times expected one. Britten’s mastery of continuity prevented me from being as infuriated as Jehovah was at Onan. The turning of the screw was represented by a theme or figure comprised of rising fourths, first heard at the end of the Prologue. This received multifarious variation in a series of interludes, embellished by orchestration as ravishing as ever.

PETER TRANCHELL.

29 October 1955

MUSICAL CLEANLINESS

Our civilisation has reached a very fine peak of hygiene in many ways—bread is wrapped, cigarettes are tipped, throats swabbed, noses blown, milk pasteurised, and flowers kept under cellophane. In the arts, however, we are lagging behind. This is an appeal, therefore, to all music-lovers, for cleaner music. We are too casual in our concerts, and risk the perils of epidemic.

Let our singers and instrumentalists wear clinical masks of acoustic lint; let our flutes and oboes be boiled before each performance; and let our music paper be impregnated with germicide. The drains of the orchestra need attention also—horns and trombones should have built in soak-aways, regularly inspected by an official, and wettened with aromatic detergent. All wind instruments require iodised mutes to prevent the spreading of disease.

For the strings, perhaps a rosin of D.D.T. will suffice. Of course, all players must have their hands declared clean before a concert, and the conductor must sign a certificate, declaring that all possible steps have been taken to protect the audience, before each movement.

On entering the concert-room each individual should receive a precautionary inoculation, together with a programme printed on hygienic tissues. In the interval an electronic nurse will take everyone's temperature, and persons found to be feverish can be removed to hospital. A special scale of temperatures will be published for music-lovers, not exceeding 102° F. after Wagner or Kabalevsky, and not less than 32° F. after Vivaldi or Dunstable.

Organists will have to manipulate their stops with their elbows, and play in specially treated rubber gloves. Performances of opera must take place behind a screen of plate-glass, lest the dust and dirt raised by dramatic movement be communicated to the house.

We look forward to the abandonment of such familiar names as Royal Philharmonic or London Symphony, and the adoption of more reassuring terms: The Royal Philhygienic or the London Sterilised. Music-making should be as delicate an operation as surgery.

It remains for the musical repertoire to be rendered beyond clinical reproach. Some fine fellow is sure to do it and earn his Ph.D. (*Sanitatis causa*). Glancing through his thesis we might observe such "safe" favourites as—

The Chlorinated Water Music	<i>Handel</i>
The Conditioned Air on the G. String	<i>J. S. Bach</i>
The Medical Offering	"
The Well-laundered Klavier	"
Sheep may safely sneeze	"
Sonata Appassionata ma Profilattica	<i>Beethoven</i>
The Chloral Symphony	"
The Pasteural	"
Concerto for clean left hand	<i>Ravel</i>
Impregnated letter-song (Hygiene Onegin)	<i>Tchaikowsky</i>
Blest pair of Syringes	<i>Parry</i>
Land of Soap and Glory	<i>Elgar</i>
Die Reine Müllerin	<i>Schubert</i>
Wash me thoroughly	<i>S. S. Wesley</i>

An appendix might give a list of works and composers regarded as unhealthy. The tone-poem "Influenza," by McLoughlin (1932) is obviously offensive, as might be the work of such composers as Blow, Koffing and Sniffl. And an undoubted ban would fall on Walford Davies' "Solemn Malady" as a danger to even the most medicated music-lover.

PETER TRANCHELL.

12 November 1955

MOISEIWITSCH

I was sitting rather near. Moiseiwitsch is such a wonderful salesman, but his sales-talk can be overwhelmingly forceful. Sometimes there were odd noises from the piano—the sounds of reverberating bed-springs—as if someone inside it was having a very restless night. I pitied them. After the interval I moved to a seat behind the piano-lid and was able in comparative shelter to watch the body of the house sway in the high wind of Moiseiwitsch's artistry. He is undoubtedly a very great artist.

We were regaled with Prokofieff's third sonata, far less percussively rendered than I feared; Schumann's *Etudes Symphoniques* a little blurred, but noble on the whole; and the whole gamut of

Preludes by Chopin with one extra, posthumous, inserted about three-quarters of the way through. I have always wondered what these preludes are preludes to. Perhaps there are a couple of dozen figures [*sic.* ?*sc.* fugues] as yet undiscovered. Or is each a prelude to a concert, for a pianist to begin his recital with a short *aperitif* in the appropriate key? I am tempted to write a set of suitable “Encores” and see if the whole series get played as a single item. We live in an age of bundles. No-one can tolerate an individual item from a series or a single song from a cycle. No, we must have all the symphonies of Beethoven or Sibelius, all the nocturnes of Field, all the concertos of Rachmaninoff; and we are confirmed in this preference by long-playing records.

Moiseiwitsch managed to impart a freshness to these often-played Preludes by many excellent tricks of interpretation. However much one may disapprove of a thunderous crash where the composer indicated a whisper, there is no denying its effectiveness, and the whisper when reached is by contrast the more susurrous.

The second half of the concert consisted of Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*, some smaller pieces of Rachmaninoff and Brahms, and finally Brahms's *Paganini Variations*. These were not played in the order in which they are published, and in skipping to and fro from book to book several of them were omitted. I think I detected some improvisation after the third or fourth variation, and it may be that the player's memory was not serving him as well as his fingers. But this was a good idea, lending variety to variations so time-honoured as to need it.

I was especially pleased in this delightful evening to hear some of those filthy roulades (which amused Chopin) properly treated. So many pianists are abstemious in their use of the sustaining pedal. Moiseiwitsch was not. One heard a line, the tail of a comet, and not pinpoints on a graph. After all, one can get very tired of having to count the grains in a rice-pudding, so this was a welcome relief.

PETER TRANCHELL.

26 November 1955

ANOTHER TRIUMPH OF RESEARCH

By PETER TRANCHELL

Cuneiform music has long been a topic on everybody's lips. A Babylonian clay tablet dating from about 800 B.C. has been variously interpreted by C. Sachs and F. W. Galpin—a landmark in human history. The Ziggurat at Ur has attracted a stream of enthusiastic souvenir-hunters far exceeding expectations. And at last we must extol the crowning triumph of modern musicology.

Dr Tungsten Gross has announced, in a strikingly original publication (drawing as it does on the work of every previous Assyriologist),* his successful decipherment of a number of tablets not only in non-semitic Sumerian but in Semitic Akkadian embolograms. He has, he claims, established, to a degree of certainty hitherto doubted, a basis for further progress on the corpus of musical texts of ancient Assyria.

One of the main texts transcribed by Dr Gross purports to be a choral song from Abû Habbah, and contains several wonderful musical flourishes in what Dr Gross assures us must be the 16th and 17th Assyrian Modes. Especially enchanting, perhaps, is the setting of the phrase “te-ir ki-ishtum gi-ig marsu na-am na-ammu shi-imtu.” The elevation of poetic thought not only in the verse but in the music, (which is indicated by a series of ancillary symbols on a separate tablet—as in the case of our psalms and psalm-chants), makes us wonder if the Assyrians of about 900 B.C. were not of a higher culture than we have hitherto believed:—(a thought surely refreshing to a man in the street full of diesel fumes).

We may poo-poo the ancients' malleable glass, their astronomy, their dehydration of wine, or their craftsmanship in ivory-work and inlay, but faced with melismas like these, and the shadow of Dr Tungsten Gross's scholarship, we must silently take off our hats, and tie on our thinking-caps.

* *Cuneiform Music*. (Dabchick and Flea). 97s.

According to Dr Gross, there are abundant indications of orchestral requirements on the tablets—or at least there were, until his assistant Miss Simpaji Singh (Mus. B. (therapeutic) Broadmoor) “accidentally” erased them. Seven tablets rescued from the acid solution in which they were being washed had no trace left on them whatsoever; fifty-two other tablets inadvertently left soaking overnight are now in the museum at Sippar, where archaeologists may inspect their Venerable remains, though this consists only of four carboys of slate-coloured sludge. Luckily three tablets and a fragment escaped the ministrations of Miss Singh, and it is upon these mainly that Dr Gross has been able to base his work, which in the musical field appears to supersede Boissier, Dumon, Küchler, Öfele, Virolleaud, Zehnpfund, Ebeling, Woolley, Wallis Budge, Hall, Gadd, and Smith.

Among the instruments called for in the text are 15-stringed harps without fore-pillar, to be played largely with both hands, reed-flutes single and double, and the natural trumpet. Percussion indications require not only drums, bells, cymbals, tambourines and sistra, but a large body of children employed musically in the temples (when their religious duties of prostitution permitted) clapping their hands in a poly-rhythmic refinement with the ensemble already envisaged.

It would have been interesting to compare these findings with the transcription of some contemporary Egyptian papyri undergoing investigation on the Continent. Unfortunately the electronic brain employed in transcribing them, while laudably working at the speed of light, became overheated, and reduced the papyri to ashes.

We owe it, nevertheless, to Dr Gross’s enterprise and learning that we now possess a watertight theory, of cuneiform musical notation against which no evidence can be found to militate. If conflicting evidence did turn up, we should certainly consign it to an acid grave after the best traditions of respectable musicology.

Let such scholarship lead us forward, that is backward. We have been pottering too long this side of the Annus Domini when we should have been seeking the solution of the musical scripts of the Minoan, Mycenaean, Etruscan or Hittite civilizations. Let us then avidly await the publication of scholarly editions of such fine old musical sources as “The Golden Treasury of Atreus,” “Tunes Tarquinius taught me” or “Musica Hyperboreana,” which Everyman, wherever he may be, is longing to hear and think beautiful.

This book should be of wide appeal, printed as it is in delightful three-point klopstock. It should not even hurt children, unless dropped on them. My one regret is that the index, for which Miss Singh gets credit, should somehow have been omitted. It might have been interesting.

21 January 1956

MEANING IN MUSIC

Music is an international language; or so we are told. Harmony in the ears makes harmony in the heart and obliterates the passport; savage breasts may be soothed and love may be fed, and the apposite choice of music for strings might even unravel the disquieting knots of Cyprus and Jordan. Walford Davies once said that a single “perfect cadence” rightly beamed into space would establish friendly relations with the inhabitants of Mars. For some time the B.B.C. tried this, sending out “BBC” as an interval signal. The Martians remained singularly unresponsive.

Nevertheless, composers (and others) have frequently tried to express more than mere friendliness in music. It is as if they were dissatisfied with the vocabulary, and found it too vague, too inexpressive of actual meaning.

For a start, there are too few letters. Bach signed himself in the “Art of Fugue”, but unluckily he could not add both his initials, as there were no notes labelled with the appropriate letter. Sooner or later this will lead to delightful confusion, and some tomfool musicologist will attribute the whole work to one of his sons or orchestrators.

Schumann did his best in “Carnaval” to tell us that Asch was the town where he longed to be. But he could not spell out his lady-love in full, nor sign himself more clearly than as “Scha.”

Elgar evaded the issue by putting initials or pseudonyms at the head of his Enigma Variations, rather than incorporate the words in the actual notation. In fact the language of music seems to be in its infancy. Heaven may lie about it, but it remains obstinately inaccessible.

The Tonic Sol-fa provides something of an alphabet, but it is as crude as Hittite Cursive, and only suitable for domestic messages in pidgeon parlance. “Me fah te” (come to tea with me) may be answered by “Soh-re ma-ma fe-le se-de me soh-soh” (sorry, mother feels seedy and I feel so-so), but this jargon is clumsy for communicating profounder ideas such as we are to believe surge up in every composer’s heart.

A long time ago I saw a spy film in which the heroine was sent during the first world war on a secret mission to a hospital in a part of France then occupied by the Germans. Her task was to play the piano in the evenings to the other nurses, poor things. The piano was wired up so that a certain note operated a fullerphone² which communicated with the Allies. Thus, by dexterous playing (improvising and transposing) she was able to thumb out the morse code while rattling through a Mazurka. The nurses did not seem to notice the inevitable liberties she took with the music—or was it that the music had already the seeds of her messages? Was not Chopin’s “Raindrops” Prelude, with its repeated note, in reality (when performed with proper rubato) a disquisition on troop strengths, ammunition dumps and civilian morale? Very possibly.

In the last war customs officials became curious about the export of certain musical scores to a neutral country. It was very modern music evidently, for an expert had to be called in to judge whether it was really music or a novel mode of smuggling illicit information. The expert deemed the scores to contain not music but cipher. To-day, these scores might well be performed on the Third Programme. The pity is that the key to the cipher has not been published: therein may lie the secret for which all composers are yearning, the real key to musical communication.

Still, there may be some that know the secret. Beethoven and Mozart are found to have used tones from time to time, which may have been a rudimentary cipher. Was there a freemasonry that passed the precious knowledge from initiate to initiate? Did Schönberg and Webern learn the clue? Such questions must spring to mind as we listen to any contemporary music. What is it really trying to say?

It is possible that foolish critics inadvertently tell the truth when they claim that this or that opus is crammed with “significance”; there may indeed be in it a vital “inner meaning”. Some of us, however, think otherwise. When we peel a banana, we are content to find banana, not cotton wool.

PETER TRANCHELL.

25 February 1956

COMPOSERS AS CRITICS

It is often said that a composer cannot be a good critic of music, and that even a performer is debarred by proximity to the art from perceiving its qualities or defects. In which case one must presume the ideal critic to be a person so inexperienced in every branch of musical practice that he can utter views detached and objective. The folly of such notions is self-evident, but nevertheless they persist.

The truth is, we (the whole human race) are all composers. It would be difficult to find one human being incapable of inventing a simple melody. Babies hum, street boys whistle, men croon, old ladies twitter. It matters not that they cannot write their creations down (what a relief!) or that these would be unoriginal if they did: the point is that everyone is basically a potential composer, and a fully-fledged composer is merely a man whom the inward Divine Disquiet has impelled to acquire the technique of writing a composition down.

The act of listening to music is itself a mode of composing. All along the line, the listener is subconsciously foreseeing the next move, almost as if there were a score of the music unfolding itself

² a sophisticated type of Morse telegraph set suitable for clandestine use

in his mind. If his forecasts of the next notes is continually wrong, he will doubtless find the music incoherent or distasteful. If his forecasts are too infallibly correct, he will think it trite.

The more experience a man gets in writing music (that is, in providing the “next notes”, with the requisite elements of surprise and suitability), the more sensitive he is likely to become in forecasting the movements of another composer. In fact his criticism of music will be more valuable than the opinions of the ideally inexperienced critical “expert” who probably does not exist.

At any rate, there has been in Cambridge for almost ten years a club where young composers get their works performed and thereupon receive criticism from one-another. As critics they have to attune their minds to many different genres of expression. We have witnessed works for chromatic tom-tom, works with no accidentals, works to be performed “*senza espressione*”. We have heard general remarks varying from “Your manipulation of sonorities [*sic*] is most adroit” or “He should take a lesson from Sousa” to an angry “That gives me physical pain”. We have also heard observations of a more technical type, relating to form, harmony, placing of climax, use of medium and so on.

One year our meetings were attended by a young composer from Bohemia, who had studied under Palmgren. He brought a large bound volume of music manuscript and proceeded to play from the beginning. When at last he could be brought to a pause, we told him various home-truths. (His music would indeed have been thought old-fashioned by Grieg). He smilingly agreed with us, but pointed out that these works were juvenilia written eight years previously. We asked to hear a more recent opus. None was forthcoming, and at the next meeting he arrived with the same volume again, and played a further half-hour of juvenilia.

Other young composers, however, sometimes disdain to expose themselves to an audience which can answer back—perhaps in fear that a young rival whom they personally dislike may assail them with all too apposite disparagement.

But whether a composer can be a critic or not, the club still thrives, and is doubtless of value, even if its members end up not as composers or critics but just as human beings.

PETER TRANCHELL.

THE MUSIC FOR THE “BACCHAE”.

The music for this production, composed by Peter Tranchell, presented one entirely new feature; the instrumental part had been recorded by the C.U.M.S. orchestra, conducted by Allen Percival. It might well have been feared that, in addition to the problems of synchronizing live singing with recorded playing, the contrast of the two types of sound would be disconcerting. But so great is the vitality of Mr Tranchell’s music that the ear very quickly accommodated itself to the unusual conditions; it is picturesque and full-blooded, skilfully combining an elaborate harmonic background with broad and singable vocal lines, and never afraid of big, dramatic gestures. To name one instance only, the great moment of Dionysus’ escape from prison is underlined with thrilling effect by the return of a broad, almost Puccinian phrase that had appeared several times in the first chorus.

Sometimes the words are rhythmically declaimed against the orchestra; the transitions from this to singing are timed with a sure sense of drama, and sometimes the two are combined very effectively. In contrast to the gathering rhythmic excitement of the more barbaric passages, there is a sensitive lyrical pathos in the second chorus, very appropriately recalled during the final dialogue, and also in the fourth, with its simple and curiously touching accompaniment. All through the play the ensemble was most successfully balanced, and the two solo parts were admirably sung by Margaret Orr and Ann Keynes.

P. R. [Philip Radcliffe]

3 March 1956

[Tranchell's *Decalogue*: C.U.M.S in St John's College Chapel]

In spite of many minor blemishes, the concert given in St John's College Chapel by the C.U.M.S. chorus, brass and percussion was highly enjoyable. Not all the works were equally successful in performance, and not all the choral works seemed suitable for such a large choir. The interest of the music itself, however, ranging from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, and the opportunity to hear it at all, outweighed these considerations

Of the works that opened the programme *Thou Mighty God* by Dowland, though expressive, could have been more so, *O Praise the Lord* by Tomkins, though complex, might have been clearer, and the Purcell March for brass and timpani might have less perfunctory and more dramatic. The Canzona which followed went so quickly that the trumpets only had time to give an undignified peck at each note as it raced off to join the others in the roof. The difficulties of *Jehova, quam multi sunt hostes mei* were admirably surmounted, but the determination of the choir on several occasions put the organ out of tune.

The first performance of Peter Tranchell's *Decalogue* for brass, percussion and organ confirmed my distaste for the Ten Commandments. No doubt the Israelites would have been just as awed by this music as by Moses, but they might have preferred his mute inglorious tablets to these vibrant variations. The concise programme note was an excellent musical Baedeker but got some of the facts wrong; 'the plain octave' cited was definitely not an octave even by Old Testament Temperament. Subtleties of orchestration (such as a coin spun on a drum-head) were most effective from where I was, but other people told me they felt cheated by not being able to hear them. Early in the work the music disintegrated and achieved the disjointedness of *musique concrète* without the concomitant embarrassment of a tape recorder, though later the music did join up again. At least the performers deserve our congratulations for tackling this difficult work and bringing it off so well.

Edward Dent's motets started with the lower parts so indistinct that one was unable to make harmonic sense of the first one at all until *O spare me a little*, a very touching section. The second motet, in spite of some vocally ungrateful phrases, was pleasingly pastoral. *O praise God*, vigorously and, at times, vulgarly sung, was most agreeable.

Robin Orr's beautiful anthem *They that put their trust in the Lord* was sensitively rendered, and was one of the highlights of the evening. Vaughan Williams's *O clap your hands* followed and was almost as exciting as one would have wished and of course very effective. In Matthew Locke's brass music the C.U.M.S. instrumentalists redeemed themselves and, with the exception of a few snorts, gave an excellent performance.

Bach's motet *Be not afraid* proved a rather pedestrian end to the concert. A smaller, virtuoso choir is surely needed to perform these motets adequately; pace and precision are so necessary. I should also have preferred a fast ending to the extended allargando; this seems to be what the music demands. Ironically this was the only moment in the work when the choir was at its best.

The general standard of the concert was most creditable, and the C.U.M.S. and Allen Percival deserve high praise for this venture.

DAVID EPPS.

26 May 1956

ROBERT SHAW CHORALE AND ORCHESTRA

(ST JOHN'S COLLEGE CHAPEL, MAY 17)

There was howling in the vestry as we took our seats. An orgy was evidently in progress. The audience sat there in St John's Chapel expecting at 8 p.m. to hear the Robert Shaw Chorale and Orchestra perform, amongst other things, Schubert's Mass in G. But till 8.15 we patiently stared into an empty apse whilst from near at hand there emitted the skirling of sopranos, the trumpeting of tenors and the brattling of basses. Then a gentleman came through our ranks and, in a low, pious

voice, asked us to refrain from talking during the performance—or (was it?) from smoking. Of course, St John's Chapel is as yet unprovided with ash-trays.

Suddenly a door opened. The outer revelry ceased, and some two dozen singers (all undoubtedly soloists in their own right, save the one young man in the centre who scarcely opened his mouth once, and was only there to complete the pattern) filed in order to their seats. Not a hair was ruffled, not a dress awry. No signs remained of the Bacchanalia. Then the orchestra, looking as if butter would not melt in their violins. When all were assembled, all sat down as one. This show of regimentation was but an outward sign of the distressing discipline we were to witness.

It is a principle I recommend to every conductor: Give your choir their "celebration" before the concert, then, all steam let off, they will be as good as gold, supple in your hands, the very slaves of your musical will, if you have any. Again, I recommend the lay-out of the choir so as to avoid all the ladies sitting in one bloc and all the gentlemen in another. Such antique discrimination smacks of the days before women started wearing the trousers. No, let the sexes be mixed, let each singer be his own guide to entries and to pitch, and though an individual, make him learn to blend more nearly with his complementary neighbours.

So it was. The Shaw Chorale was impeccable in pitch, in firmness, in precision, in tone quality, in ease of high notes and sonority of low; and the soloists, drawn from the chorus, were beyond criticism. And yet something was lacking.

It used to be a custom at meals to leave a little of every dish on one's plate for the Goddess or Muse of Social Etiquette, a Miss Manners, who supposedly arrived after each meal and went round the table eating up the scraps. But the Robert Shaw Chorale and Orchestra in their greed for precision and "nice" musicianship gobbled every morsel of their banquet, and left nothing, absolutely nothing for Miss Music.

We heard *O vos omnes* of Victoria, then works of Byrd and Schütz, and thus far the deficiencies on the palette did not unduly irk us. But when it came to Bach's cantata *Christus lag in Todesbanden*, a deep sense of dissatisfaction began to steal over me, starting in the ankles. The work sounded arid, perfunctory, but admirably drilled. One should not, I suppose, expect a romantic lyricism or dramatic excitement in all music culled from ancient sources. But even in Bach's day his music must have been performed with some kind of characteristic expressiveness, some human feeling, if not religious fervour—of which one is to-day entitled to expect a counterpart. Of course, a shouting match may well be fervent, but in time it grows monotonous. I cannot think our forefathers were devotees of monotony even if they lacked conventions of dynamic contrast that have in time grown up.

The Army lays down regulations for the performance by its bands of the National Anthem. Each note, each mark of expression is clearly decreed in military law for every instrument. An offender who plays one false diminuendo may be put on a charge and punished with potato-peeling (as to which the regulations are less rigid). But music amongst civilians should not savour of the drill-parade.

Nevertheless, we were prepared for better things in the Schubert Mass. Alas! we were defrauded of this pleasure also. The performers took one deep breath and plunged us into Mozart's Requiem. It was a long concert, and no Schubert.

There was one relief, the rendering of Samuel Barber's two prayers of Kierkegaard, from a recent choral work. Though the orchestral score had been reduced to suit the ensemble required by Mozart's Requiem, this music of Barber's was by far the most satisfying item in the programme and received by far the most sympathetic performance. I cannot conceive why the whole work was not given. It would have shown that these players and singers for all their discipline and control had not allowed such pedantry to constrict their hearts, that in fact they still could musically care, and make us (which this evening they did not) care as well.

PETER TRANCHELL.

2 June 1956

THE CAMBRIDGE PHILHARMONIC

The soul of wit? Brevity! The pith of opinion? Brevity! The sweetness of music? Brevity! Nowadays it is such a relief to attend a short concert. The preface to Beethoven's *Eroica* (requiring the symphony to be performed in the first flush of a programme, that is, after perhaps two arias and a concerto) makes one realise how seriously the early nineteenth century took its pleasures. Wagner's *Rienzi* lasted six hours on the first night, a riotous success; and the cuts Wagner made on the following morning were disallowed by the singers in the evening. It had to be rendered in entirety. Everyone enjoyed their money's worth. To-day, the pace of life is quicker, our patience is shorter, and money is not worth what it was.

The performance in King's Chapel last Thursday by the Cambridge Philharmonic Society was a model. We came to hear the Brahms Requiem. We heard it, and were able to go away to cap the night with a welcome pre-dormitory refreshment. Provincial sponsors please copy! If the audience misses its bus, then so does the concert!

The Philharmonic Society is heartily to be congratulated. The Chorus sang well, the orchestra was in most praiseworthy form (save for the usual unruly horn or two), and Denis Fielder steered the company through the work with skill and musicianship. I would have liked a bit more noise here and there, but I suppose one must not expect in the same mouthful to rouse the living and to pray repose for the dead. Nevertheless, the concert was not primarily intended for the dead, so while lowering the coffin, one might have hoped for more raising of rafters.

The soloists were excellent. William Parsons (bass) sailed through his part with every pleasing quality. Sheila McShee (soprano) brought to the somewhat inadequate rôle allotted by Brahms to the lady soloist a delectable timbre reminiscent of a breathlessly enthusiastic choirboy. Her phrasing was as unruffled as a swan negotiating a familiar weir. Did the oboes get a bar ahead? She ignored them, and in due course they came to heel like Cocker Spaniels. It was most satisfying. And the nicest thing of all was that the end of the concert came almost as a disappointment. The advantage this evening had in a darkened chapel against a darkened cinema should be a lesson to all concert-givers: the programme in the cinema inflicts us with hours of "supporting" trash, trailers, advertisements and the processions of usherettes and peanut-sellers, so that when the main item is eventually reached we receive it almost as a further vexatious bore.

PETER TRANCHELL.

24 November 1956 Volume LXXVII

THE RAKE'S PROGRESS

The bay tree is not especially noted for withering. Nor is the miserableness of sinners any measure of their sinfulness. Only the naïvest and ineptest devil would tempt his victim with ruin and disappointment—in this world: the agonies are reserved for Act II. I imagine it is self-satisfaction, wealth, power, success and even conjugal felicity that most effectively tempt a man to his ultimate destruction.

Many American space-films miss this point and consequently stimulate one's strongest disbelief. Mysterious (always malevolent) invaders from another planet seek to conquer our population by surreptitious subversion. Vegetable-pods vampirise human souls from the nearest sleeping bodies (Jack *becomes* his beanstalk); miraculous automata (impelled by a master-mind sitting in a saucer) kidnap people and with incredibly bloodless surgery insert a diminutive radio-set in the base of their skull, so that they may henceforth act, like taxis, by remote control. But the common symptom of persons thus subverted—the symptom which of course arouses everyone-else's suspicion—is the sudden absence of human qualities such as compassion (especially for domestic animals), amorousness and humour. Jolly men become glum, and randy men lose interest.

With but a moment's thought these super-intelligent invaders would perceive the incomparable advantages of leaving no trace, of working like a cancer unsuspected and unnoticed till it is too late. The victim, Uncle Tom, instead of appearing at breakfast with staring eyes and haggard face, should be jollier and gayer than ever before.

For Nick Shadow to tempt Tom Rakewell to his eternal damnation through a series of very ordinary wenchings and drinkings, none of which Tom appears to enjoy—followed by a number of financial indiscretions and their quite unenjoyable consequences—this sort of temptation is as ridiculous as Martian subversion.

The Rake's Progress is in conception a Morality of the same otiosity and effeteness as *Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian has a first-class berth ready-booked through to the Celestial City, and we know from the start that no harm will come to him, be there never so many devils in his road. He lacks weakness (Cardboard ass!). The Rake dogged by a series of failures and hangovers merely blubbers his way to the grave. He lacks strength (Dummy of Straw!). For sheer joie-de-vivre without the continual doubts of a frightened child, or the bible-punching of a religious maniac, give me Don Juan! He at least is fully alive, however reprehensibly.

It seemed to me therefore that with a basis so far past credence, Messrs Auden, Kallman and Stravinsky have attempted a dramatic impasse, and the pleasure of witnessing a performance will derive not from any quality latent in their plot, verbiage or music, but from those visual appurtenances of staging which make the ear deaf to such things, and from the vocal performances which, if good, may do the same. A lovely voice like Kenneth Bowen's (in the part of Tom Rakewell) may act like a golden carrier-wave and obliterate the pedestrianism of the leaden signals which it carries. And leaden I fear they are. The deft touch with which the two poets have contrived to nullify every poetic moment with solecism or slang would flatten an anvil. Two ladies behind me agreed between them that the libretto must be a translation from the French.

And as to the staging—of whatever standard—it is but gilding a cowpad, which remains essentially a cowpad.

So it is with some reason that I award a whole bush of laurels to the Cambridge University Opera Group for their production. To me it was astounding that the piece should be chosen at all, that the principal singers should be singing every night of the week, apparently without understudies, and that a performance should go from beginning to end, without a major disaster, maintaining the while such a high standard.

Of points of production, of tempi, of lighting, and of characterization, many minor criticisms might be made. Two larger points of complaint do arise: Firstly, when the music is a constant fidget of syncopation, those on stage should try to avoid conducting themselves as they sing. The twitching of hands wherever one looked made it no surprise to find that in the last scene the whole chorus had landed up in Bedlam—wearing ill-fitting bald-head wigs in the manner of casually-donned bathing-caps. Secondly, the insanification of Tom in the graveyard is deprived of all its eeriness by the excessive balletics of Nick Shadow (excellently sung by Raymond Hayter). The subsequent "black-out" was no substitute for good old-fashioned darkness. A curtain should be dropped to prevent the audience at this critical moment from having to *pretend* they have *not* seen Nick creep out of the grave into which he has just sunk, and Tom re-arranging himself all over the stage.

The setting designed by Lionel March is absolutely first-class, and the producer Brian Trowell makes excellent use of it. To call the character of Ann Truelove milk-and-water would be well nigh gluttonous, but Anne Abbott gives a deal of life to the part, with some radiant singing. Barbara Hicks wears a most convincing beard. She managed to break quite a lot of crockery in the breakfast scene without doing any other damage, and gave a masterly performance of her hideously difficult aria. Nancy Talbot as Mother Goose and Alan Mayall as the Auctioneer were vocally beyond criticism. I was enthralled to hear so much good enunciation. Lists and lists of persons deserve praise for this show. Perhaps most deserving of all is Leon Lovett, the conductor, for steering the cast and orchestra through one of the most miasmatic scores in existence, and making such good sense out of it.

PETER TRANCHELL.

[In a letter to his parents of 23 August 1957:

I don't think I shall be writing for the Music dept. of the Cambridge Review this year. I have been rather busy, & have lost touch with the editors. It was quite fun to do it while there was a little time. Some people were not so kindly disposed to the humorous acerbity of my articles, & wished for the sort of wishy-washy semi-informative chit-chat that is often found in programme-notes at a concert.]

30 November 1957 Volume LXXVIII

THEATRE

THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD

Arts Theatre

I once heard *The Yeomen of the Guard* described as Gilbert and Sullivan's nearest approach to Grand Opera. I have ever since wondered why. On the one hand there is less coloratura than in *The Pirates of Penzance*, the plot is less irrational and fantastic than *Ruddigore* or *Iolanthe*, and the music is not more substantial than in other Savoy Operas. On the other hand, it might appear that *The Yeomen of the Guard* is less satirical of contemporary Victorian life, and certainly a quasi-tragic ending distinguishes it from most operettas. Perhaps the answer is that many of the Savoy Operas poke fun at current ideas, foibles, movements or institutions: *Iolanthe* at the House of Lords, *Patience* at the Aesthetic Movement, *Ruddigore* at the Melodrama, *The Mikado* at the Japanese craze, *Princess Ida* at the Emancipation of Women, *The Pirates of Penzance* at the police force, and *Utopia Limited* (amongst other things) at the royal Drawing Room (which was to be staged so as to begin as a reminiscence of a Christy Nigger-minstrel show). But *The Yeomen* pokes fun not so much at institutions as at other operas. *Parsifal* had appeared at Bayreuth in 1882, and, with its pompous processions of Knights in their Grail Castle, is possibly hinted at by Gilbert's Beefeaters (though this would have been as private a joke at the time as the jibe at Balfe's *Keolanthe*, an indiscreet Nile-sprite, contained in *Iolanthe*). *Rigoletto* and *Faust* were firm favourites: the discomfiture of the jester and the vision of a maiden at her spinning wheel find their counterparts in *The Yeomen*. The embryo trial-of-chastity scene (between Fairfax and Elsie) has always been a dramatist's stock-in-trade ever since Beaumont and Fletcher, as have Dame Carruthers, the predatory matron, and Phoebe, the coquettish maiden. Perhaps the wiles of women here receive more caustic comment from Gilbert than usual. Suffice it to say *The Yeomen* seems to have a spirit quite distinct from the other Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Still, this spirit must be caught from the moment the curtain goes up.

On Tuesday last at the Arts Theatre, the Cambridge Amateur Operatic Society only got into their stride in due course, and then it was a very good stride. Perhaps the disorganization of flu amongst the cast had undermined their confidence on the first night, and during their fortnight's run matters will improve. The scenery certainly cannot be any more lugubrious; and as this (and Phoebe) is our first glimpse of the stage, it is a serious disadvantage. A second disadvantage is the D'Oyley Carte policy of trying rigidly to preserve a traditional production, which fails to give the flavour of a period piece, and fails to stimulate a contemporary audience. Bernard Shaw wrote of Bayreuth in 1889—only six years after Wagner's death, “. . . the evil of deliberately making the Bayreuth Festival Playhouse a temple of dead traditions, instead of an arena for live impulses, has begun already.” The similar treatment of the Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire may well persuade sensible people to discountenance the current petition to extend the protection so far afforded by copyright.

But though Phoebe (Beryl Wickham) and Wilfrid (Antony Bristow) failed initially to establish their character of coquette and oaf (and win our interest), the show fairly soon had all our attention and sympathy, and these two actors were among the most sparkling and characteristic.

Sir Richard (Roy Wilkinson), Sergeant Meryll (William Armitstead), Leonard Meryll (Peter Fecher), and Dame Carruthers (Freda Cook) were very satisfactory indeed—looked, acted and sang their parts well; though Leonard needed a suspicion of make-up to cure his pallor, and I could have wished for more of the booming-voiced battleship from the Dame, who was charming rather than quelling. But perhaps it is as well that Cambridge is not able to supply us with elderly viragos. Kate

(Peggy Auton) was a dainty niece, with a nice voice, but she tended to lead the quartet sharp in “Strange adventure! Maiden wedded.”

The part of Colonel Fairfax was taken on at the last minute by Percy Beales (owing to Donald McLeod’s illness), and was played most adroitly on the whole. His delivery of dialogue was somewhat deliberate for a dashing hero, and the timbre of his voice—a pleasant light quality—was not of the stentorian and swash-buckling type one attributes to a Tudor hero. However, it is said that the great cricketer, Grace, had, in contrast to his burly bearded frame, more of a bat-like squeak than a voice; and contemporary British operas have certainly encouraged a vogue for the light-tenor species, especially when written by a composer celebrated as much in opera as in symposium. So, considering the circumstances Percy Beales was extremely praiseworthy and we were lucky to have him.

Elsie Maynard (Josephine Newman) was charmingly played and most excellently sung. It is typical of Gilbert that he should arrange to give the songs eliciting Sullivan’s more sophisticated vein to the most rude and uncultured personages in the story. It is ever thus.

For the most exacting role of the work, Jack Point (Roy Braybrooke), I must confess to superlative admiration. His diction was impeccable, his voice not unpleasing, his personality delightful and his acting whether in joy or sorrow utterly sympathetic and convincing. First-rate!

The chorus and orchestra were in good form, as was Eric Wedd the conductor (save when he was holding Jack Point back in his patter-song “Oh! a private buffoon is a light-hearted loon”), the Beefeaters’ costumes gave just the right splash of colour, and, once the show was under way, everything went spinningly along. The musical highlights, apart from the Act finales and the opening of Act II, were the two duets involving Point and Wilfrid, “Like a ghost his vigil keeping” and “Hereupon we’re both agreed,” Elsie’s solo, and above all the superbly done quartet “When a wooer goes a-wooing.” The company is indeed to be congratulated on a most entertaining evening.

PETER TRANCHELL.

1 February 1958

HAYDN’S CREATION

Clare College Musical Society; Guildhall, January 26

Crimes and contretemps are the stock-in-trade of newspapers. Similarly, the disasters of a College Society concert are its most memorable and entertaining features. The thoughtful conductor will arrange for a goodly assortment of ruses for heightening the audience’s attention and for putting the players on the *qui vive*.

A liberal supply of squashed flies pressed to the pages of the band parts is a *sine qua non*; while two pages carefully gummed together will bring a player to a stunned silence long before his fellows have ceased their strummings, and his reactions may be as fascinating to perceive as the notes he has omitted. A double ration of “Bubblo” for the horns is to be recommended, and other minor forms of surreptitious sabotage carried out between dress-rehearsal and performance are very valuable: a well-placed cipher in the organ or the total removal of a vital pipe, the privy purloining of the trumpeter’s spectacles, one glass of wine too many for the leader, a specially collapsible music-stand for the first cellists, a deft chisel-stroke administered to woodwind-reeds, and sneezing-powder adroitly dusted into and onto all unwary violins. These are excellent gambits and not to be missed. And much fun may be had if the Secretary re-arranges the order of the programme without telling the Conductor. Many works only become tolerable when staged in this imaginative way, and there is not a piano concerto that cannot be enhanced by the collapse of the soloist’s stool or the opportune falling of the piano lid.

The rendering of Haydn’s *Creation* by the Clare College Musical Society last Sunday afternoon in the Guildhall was most sparing in its sideshows. Admittedly some of the audience had been put under the impression that striking-up time was 2.45 rather than 2.30, and thus arrived in the middle of one of

the many recitatives that were drowned by the organ. But the trivial defects of the performance itself could be traced to improvidence, and not (alas) to a happy and wilful sense of humour.

If rehearsal time could not provide for attention to minutiae, it would have been wise to concentrate at least on the points where untidiness would most show—beginnings, changes of tempo, chorus entries, final consonants, and the like. The back bedroom may have been thoroughly dusted, but the front doorstep, if unscrubbed, will become a stumbling-block, and the neighbours turn into would-be sanitary inspectors. There were moments when the heart was jerked mouthward or bootward by a too obvious *faux pas*, and a muddle seemed resolved more by the timely prompting of the Almighty (albeit on a day of Divine rest) than by human vigilance.

Nevertheless it was a pleasant afternoon. The orchestra played pretty well (even if sforzandos and pianissimos tended to merge in an equal mezzoforte), and, what is most impressive, remained in tune with the organ from start to finish, an unusual feat. The chorus sang with spirit, though the spirit waned a little in mid-work. The soloists, Christian Hunter, Timothy Lewis Lloyd and Wilfred Brown were excellent, their timbre and diction most pleasing, and no sign given that they were inconvenienced by the many tempi to which they must have been unaccustomed. Miss Hunter tended to prefer the underside of a note, while Mr Lloyd seemed diffident in his lowest register; but then a Cambridge Sunday afternoon is well-known for its melancholic effects. Mr Brown showed himself far and away the star of the occasion, and his sensitive musicianship was in a full measure proved by the effortless and artistic way in which he could skip half a bar to re-establish unanimity with an erring accompaniment, as if it were all in the day's work.

It is the malaise of our age to applaud ambitious efforts whether they be crowned with success or not. We say a thing worth doing well is worth doing badly. Clare College Musical Society did well, but they certainly can do better. Without doubt the honours of the afternoon went to Haydn. One would conclude that canaries must beware of becoming peacocks which please men best not by their song but by showing their tails.

PETER TRANCHELL.

1 March 1958

RECITAL by PHYLLIS PALMER

(*University Music School*)

Thursday, February 20

The discomfort of Sisyphus is legendary, but at least his trouble with an uncongenial stone was in private. Miss Phyllis Palmer's uphill battle with her own memory was inflicted upon the public.

Beethoven's 32 *Variations in C Minor* were rendered first. Here Miss Palmer was at home with the more delicate and gentle variations, but evidently at sea in those involving passage-work scales or a sense of dramatic urgency. Beethoven's own playing is said to have been at times rough and inaccurate but it was imbued with an inspiring fire. Miss Palmer's fire was out, but the roughness was there (doubtless in reverence for the composer), though I suspect that with more practice this also would have been absent.

After Beethoven's variations upon a theme, we heard Palmer's variations upon a sonata, Schubert's *Sonata in G Major*. A horrifying exhibition.

Were Miss Palmer to revise the work for Publication, instructions to the printer might run thus:

"First Movement. Delete Schubert's instruction *cantabile*. Change all *pp* to *mf*. Where phrase marks appear, as in bar 2, delete, and insert instruction *non grazioso* or *perfunctory*. Delete all subsidiary accents. Insert *rallentando* at suitable junctures with *quasi improvvisando* (to give impression that performer is racking brains for what comes next, if anything). Remove downward scales and insert wavy line diagonally downwards, but different in upper stave from lower (to indicate that some sort of rushing descent is required, preferably not the same in both hands, with accidentals omitted to taste). Mark passage *non glissando*.

Second Movement. Omit ornaments and accents throughout first section. Delete *pp* wherever it occurs. Omit the 48 bars in the minor key. Insert one completely empty bar marked *tentative improvisation, preferably inharmonious and out of style*. Repeat at this point two complete preceding sections foolishly not repeated by Schubert. Then skip to ending as per Schubert.

Menuetto. Alter left-hand chords to reduce number of different harmonies.

Final Movement. Mark *senza allegrezza* to denote that gaiety is to be avoided. Remove Schubert's irritating variants so that the rondo-theme returns identical each time. Remove bar-lines during sections of passage-work, and mark *senza misura*, to ensure that rhythm is lost. Remove two or three bars at a time wherever the whim takes you. Sprinkle whole sonata liberally with misprints."

During the interval after this sonata, I heard some members of the audience decide it was not a good work. They were not to know that Miss Palmer had with her travesty done a disservice not only to Schubert but to her listeners.

The second half of the recital was a great improvement. Miss Palmer played Bartok's *14 Bagatelles* from a copy. She was obviously far more in her element with this sort of music. There was nuance and clarity. Refinement and brusqueness were in nice proportion. Apart from No. 3 where the murmuring background was too bumpy, these Bagatelles were delightful. I am not sure that it is a good idea to play a complete set of anything all at once. Some people seem to enjoy hearing all the Bach 48 at a sitting, or all the Chopin *Preludes*, or all the Haydn *Masses*, which is rather like insisting on all the soups offered on a menu, or all the sweets. To me a Bagatelle is a solitary item leavening a programme of other things, the single drop of Cologne behind a woman's ear, the one star at the top of a Christmas tree. To relish fourteen, savours of gluttony.

Two pieces of Debussy followed: *La Soirée dans Grenade* from *Estampes* and *La Puerta del Vino* from the second book of *Préludes*. These were ravishing. Miss Palmer's delicate pianissimo was in her Debussy established beyond doubt, as it had not been in her Schubert. *La Soirée dans Grenade* was the second most impressive performance of the evening. Granados' *Quejas ó la Maya y el Ruisenor* and Ravel's *Alborado del Gracioso* concluded the recital. They were a poor choice coming after the Debussy, still Miss Palmer made them as telling as could be.

But the best piece of playing both in technical control and sensitive expression was displayed in the two encores awarded us, a Chopin *Mazurka* and a Scarlatti *Sonata*. I would have been content if Miss Palmer had offered nothing else in her programme but these, so perfectly were they performed. Miss Palmer can be a first-rate artist when she pleases.

PETER TRANCHELL.

11 October 1958 Volume LXXIX

A QUESTION OF EXPRESSION

Integrity, awareness and a sense of values, as Saint Beachcomber says, are nowadays to be looked for in all branches of art. Only a fool would ask how to detect the awareness of a posthumous Chopin Etude, or how to assess whether there is a greater sense of values in *Mood Indigo* or *Carolina Moon*; while the fine integrity of our national anthem is so self-evident that we feel ample justice is still done when only half of the anthem is played. Of course, things may be different for posterity.

Every generation lives with its own fashionable clichés and catch-words. Every age hops on and off its own band-waggon. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when towards the end of the Easter Term last, I observed in these pages some very hoary old jargon, which had, I thought, died in the thirties—but here it was, adduced to heighten the praises of so-called Twelve-note Music.

Catch-phrases derive their name from their catchiness, and, as infections, should be scotched in any age lest they grow into epidemics. The particular example that stimulated my interest was the use of the word "to express", thus:—"Art must express the significant", "Music is the expression of emotion", "Twelve-note Music expresses the vital feelings of our time". And, amazingly enough, the

Concise Oxford Dictionary tells us that a melody is an “arrangement of single notes in musically expressive succession”.

One wishes to ask Who expresses What, and to Whom, and When, and Do they really?

A baby lies howling in a pram outside a shop. Is it lonely? Has it been frightened by some passing shadow or sudden noise, or by an unpleasant inner imagining? Does it seek love and succour? Or does it cry from physical discomfort, cramp, wind, cold, heat, hunger, or self-soil? Or is it for malice, to aggravate a nursemaid? Or is the baby merely exercising itself in nature’s best way, not meaning to communicate in the slightest?

Whatever the truth, each person passing the pram will assign a meaning to the cry. The interpretation rests with them. The mother, after close association with the infant, may delude herself into thinking that she can divine the tenor of its caterwauls, that she discerns a perceptible difference between, say, fear and hunger. She, too, will assign an interpretation to its cries, though she may be wrong in every instance.

But neither she nor the passers-by will ordinarily say to themselves, “Now, let me assign a meaning to this baby’s cry”; they will assign it spontaneously, if at all.

I dreamed last night that I met a lady who had just had her house exorcised. “The gas-fire sparkled and went out,” she said, “and the lighter would not work. So we knew the house was haunted”.

Such is the mind of man. We automatically seek for organization in everything in the wide world. Every effect must be coupled with a cause. If we observe an effect plausibly attributed to its cause, we call the observation Science; but if in our opinion wrongly attributed, we call it Superstition. It is not so many thousands of years ago that man discovered that copulation may be remotely connected with pregnancy. Before that, pregnancy was derived from exposure to the North Wind or some similar cause. There is no study, no human occupation that does not presuppose a sense of the orderliness of things, a pattern. Even the few philosophers who believe the Universe and all therein to be a chaotic jumble of fortuities, have presumably sought for some preconceived pattern before deciding there is none. Consider what difficulty the mathematicians have found in building a random-number machine whose numbers will be truly random. Randomness is alien to the human mind.

This instinctive desire to see organization in things gives us without doubt our artistic faculty; so that we attribute beauty to a face, an animal, a landscape, the sea, the sky, or a single rose, because we spontaneously perceive *in what we see* a felicitous juxtaposition of shapes, a happy arrangement of colours, some pattern of movement, either well-done in itself or nicely framed in time and place—at all events evidence of the operation of an intelligence. I say “in what we see”, for the mind seems most adept in ignoring what cannot be embraced in the preconceived plan.

And the preconceived plan appears to be gradually formulated through our years of life, tinted or tainted by our mental associations and experience, whether these be consciously remembered or not. It is possible that works of art provide not the reflection of a *zeitgeist* or even of their creator, but the reflection of ourselves, different for every one of us as we differ one from another.

Music in any place or at any time has (and has ever had) a convention, an accepted usage, which young folk learn by listening to the sounds in which their elders detect an organized pattern. The convention may alter like a language by the incorporation of novel turns of phrase or of slang, which will be taken as intelligent by virtue of their conventional context. But the digestion is slow, and men normally acquire an eventually instinctive knowledge of the convention only by a continuing experience of it. After some time they will have a basic set of fixed ideas as to what constitutes the proper organization of sounds, a yardstick against which all sounds will be measured. But this appreciation will be made automatically, spontaneously, subconsciously. Yet the sounds may not *mean* to communicate anything, may not be deliberate in their occurrence.

I have lain in a bath, and, hearing the drip of water, have diagnosed a rhythm and varying pitch—indeed, I thought I heard a quite reasonable version of *Auld Lang Syne*. The performer was a haphazardly leaking tap. I cannot believe that it was acquainted with the Scottish repertoire; yet I heard music.

Experiments have been made with a machine that would emit regular equidistant sounds all of the same pitch, timbre and intensity; and it was found that on hearing it, quite ordinary, not particularly musical persons, mentally divided the sounds into rhythmic groups of two, three, or four notes, each group repeated and having its first note apparently accented.

In fact, music seems to be a series of sounds which a hearer conversant with a convention perceives to be intelligently organized within that convention; and a composer is one who, imagining in his mind some arrangement of sounds delightful to himself within some convention, causes his imaginings to be physically realized, so that other men of *similar* experience, *similar* conversance with that convention, may perceive the pattern and after their own sort share his delight.

I cannot see that music expresses anything; and even if it did, Twelve-note Music could not equal conventional music in expressiveness, for its avowed aim is radically to flout current musical conventions. It is amusing to recall that a research student once embarked on a study of "Atonality"; later he applied to change the title of his dissertation to "Some Aspects of Tonality". Could it be that he found atonality non-existent? There are certainly good reasons for believing that a man who employs the twelve-note technique for writing music is either a humbug or an ass.

PETER TRANCHELL.

29 November 1958

A QUESTION OF FOCUS

The Italians are quite right when they call opera a *spettacolo*. We go to see it rather than to hear it, and the visual spectacle is supposed to be wedded to the music so that the one enhances and illuminates the other. Any inadvertent or irrelevant event will divert attention, and a man with his attention elsewhere might as well be deaf and blind. Everyone is familiar with the disruption caused by late-comers at a theatre, or by one's neighbour twitching at a concert. And on stage, how often does an important soliloquy go for nothing because the lovers in the background are miming their unheard whispers. The slightest fidget can ruffle the quicksilver of our focus.

In America some years ago, a conductor lifted his arms in mighty gesticulation to elicit a *sforzando* from his players, when his braces snapped, and amid orchestral thunders his trousers fell about his ankles. In the G.P. (general plaudits) that ensued he could retrieve his modesty, but the composer had lost his all.

I recall a performance of *Rigoletto* in Lugano at which the party in our box could see into the orchestra pit. After a while we were astonished to observe that the two clarinetists sitting side by side spread a large dark handkerchief, or square, so that it covered both their laps, beneath which they appeared to hold hands during their rests. This delicate behaviour mystified us so much that Verdi could not entirely keep grip of our attention.

On the whole, composers have always known that their music would be up against certain natural difficulties in transmission from the conceiving mind to the listener's ear. But the hazards of the medium are increased beyond all bounds when a concert is filmed or televised. In addition to such factors as the acoustical properties of the place of performance, the idiosyncrasies of the performers, the inaccuracies of copies, the varieties of interpretation, the infelicities of context and of programme-planning, we now have to contend with the vagaries of the producer and camera-man, who can with one false flicker obliterate an apotheosis, emphasize an insignificance, and generally contravert all our hopes or intentions.

It is difficult to concentrate on two things at once, and visual stimuli seem to gain our first attention, hence film-music is seldom noticed during a film, unless it is thrust at the audience by repetition (*La Ronde*, or *Round the World in 80 Days*) or by device (*Bridge Across the River Kwai* [*sic*]) or by publicity (*Henry V*).

But because of the very attention that a film visually receives, our concentration must be refreshed by continual change and novelty. Filming and televising appear to be an endless fidget of cutting,

dissolving, close-up and long-shot. Such a fever of changing viewpoint is at odds with the what the concert music of yesterday and today requires of its listeners, repose.

Still, there is hope. The composer of tomorrow will write his music with a film-script of it at the same time.

His work will be conceived as specially to be watched by remote-control on a screen. So that when you see the horn voiding its condensation you will know this was in the score, timed to the second; the trombone-oil applied in bar 504 was for getting the player as oiled as the instrument for his *glissandissimi* to come in bar 704; and the close-up of the first viola's neck, with a spider dancing its way over a bumpkin, will remind you that both viola and spider were chosen at auditions by the composer or conductor, and their concatenation carefully rehearsed according to the score and script.

It is this element which ensures that we shall never have robots instead of instrumentalists. Machines, however electronic, are always less interesting to watch than human-beings.

But while concert music is at present unsuitable for visual listening, opera (if the time and money were spent that is needed in the preparation of any artistic venture) might well gain by it. The human face is not of great beauty while it is singing, which is the best reason for approving of "dubbing" in films and television. But many songs and operas have a quantity of narrative. Sometimes this narrative is very important; sometimes it is less important, but we miss much when we fail to grasp it. I can imagine the most thrilling "realizations" of narratives in such cases as the opening of *Il Trovatore*, many long sections of *Tristan*, the Lord Chancellor's nightmare in *Iolanthe*, the Mikado's song about crimes and punishments, and so on. During these passages, a "flashback" would be shown depicting the events or items mentioned by the singers, so that the song becomes not a vista of different aspects of an actress pretending to sing, but a flow of visual illustrations with the song as a delectable commentary. The first scene of *Götterdämmerung* is musically very exciting, but on stage it suffers from that very *longeur* which film or television technique might relieve.

There has been much talk of "Television Opera", but its future must surely be along these lines.

PETER TRANCHELL.

24 January 1959

MUSIC AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR EXERCISE

It is not generally realized how physically taxing are the demands of musical performance. In certain duller colleges where the fellows prefer the greater proportion of students to be scientists but choose them for athletic promise (with a result in both fields as undistinguished as their taste for architecture), a man who confesses so much as a temptation (let alone a desire) to practise some form of music-making rather than a so-called athletic sport, is stamped as a long-haired eccentric, and if not made to feel a pariah, is certainly denied amenities comparable to those lavished on the various forms of organized barbarism favoured by the lowest common factor of his college.

Surely a reform is to be hoped for. Who does not nowadays know that "taking exercise" is by no means a royal road to good health when the exercise is (as is usual) taken in violent and sporadic spasms? One is reminded of those happy "christians" who practise their faith only on Sundays for fifty minutes at a time. And we are aware that physical exercise which schoolmasters extol as a bromide does in fact excite those appetites they hope to lull—gluttony and lust. Were this not so, I fancy we should feel less cautious about admitting women to bump suppers.

Nor are we deceived by the legend that the playing of "games" induces a "team spirit"; for rather it perpetuates that fear of individuality which is the malaise of our time. If the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, then certainly the playing fields there and all over England have lost us the British Empire. It is nothing to do with the bull-dog spirit when a man does an energetic act not for the pure joy of skill and control, but out of a hankering for the approbation of his confreres or a fear of their disdain. The practice of athletics in teams inculcates quite demonstrably a cowardly

preference for drab uniformity, the apotheosis of the faint-heart, and is the opposite of what is implied by the word Education.

But the practice of music exceeds in physical benefits all common athletics, and surpasses even Ballet, for which such a soul-destroying training is necessary.

It is all very well to leap about on a field after a ball, or to stand stock still for two hours in front of a wicket (in what is, I believe, called a “defensive stand”). These things require but a rudimentary skill. We buy and sell our professional athletes and our stadiums and concourses are not devoid of intrigue and corruption; and this is a pointer to the true evaluation of sport by the public.

But there is little rivalry between cities or counties for the acquisition of flautists. It could not be countenanced, any more than bidding for bishops. For the occupation of flute-playing (like being a bishop, only in another way) occupies the whole man. A considerable mobilization of force and poise, of alertness and taste must be summoned for the demurest toot.

And consider how exacting it is to sit absolutely still and quiet in some limbs, at the same time performing a piano concerto with others. The spinal control, the supreme tension coupled with repose, the allocation of energy only to the parts that need it, and the mental effort of controlling all these nuances with a critical watchfulness, ever changing with the changing context. A masterpiece of cybernetic synthesis. Why, even Yoga is pale by comparison.

But ask a hockey player (as he hurtles gauchely into the tackle) to modify his flight, to swing with perhaps a divine hesitation, to put an elegance into his footfall, and to remember the formula for calculating the behaviour of a flying spheroid, all at once. Has he the control? Can he do it? Pooh! He is but a galloping robot, armed with a cudgel.

Yet, a physical and mental control of this kind is but a tithe of what is expected of the musician during a musical performance, whether pianist, instrumentalist, or vocalist. And though it may be said that the miles walked by an organist during the pedal part of a Trio-Sonata often outweigh the musical content of his rendering, and though there are grounds for believing that singers on the whole are a race of anthropoid apes which have not yet acquired the trait of keeping their mouths shut, still the act of organ-playing and the act of singing, if properly practised, are no less exacting than other forms of music.

Is it too much to hope that College Councils will see the light, so that eventually music will supersede our present barbarous and insufficient athletics, and in the end the boat-race be happily replaced by a double-concerto?

PETER TRANCHELL.

21 February 1959

MUSIC

[Opera-production course]

I have just seen a notice advertising a course of instruction in opera-production. It is one of many offered in this subject all over this country. Is it not a wonderful rash of optimism? Opera is as foreign to this country as ski-ing, and acting is as unnatural to our singers as wearing figleaves is to hedgehogs. Our opera companies have been in perpetual straits from lack of public support for decade after decade, so it seems a little misguided to start making roller-skates for opera's shoes before the thing is even on its feet. One might as well build a house downwards from the roof. It is as fruitless as training someone to groom unicorns before there is a single unicorn in existence. It was from his operatic ventures in this country that Handel went bankrupt; and he was not the last.

If our national character has failed to acquire a taste for opera over two hundred solid years, one might suppose it unlikely that our attitude will change in the next hundred. Indeed there is every evidence that we are a less musical race than in the times when Britain was referred to (as it still is, quite justifiably) as the Land without Music.

The reason is not far to seek. Our heritage of Puritanism or Evangelical narrow-mindedness, with its ever-increasing stultification of all that a liberal education stands for, has ever more and more inhibited the nation from becoming even musical in a general sense. One could not say that Englishmen are more godly than their great-great-grandfathers, but one may easily see that their bigoted religious prejudices have made them more selfishly envious of their fellows, more arrogantly ignorant, more self-righteously prudish than ever before. This is not the spirit that enjoys music, let alone opera.

We teach music-appreciation in our schools, oh yes, but in a way no different from our tuition of Latin. The pupils have their interest sapped by study of the cold core of grammar, are told what ready-made opinions to hold, and never learn to delight in the Literature for themselves.

Music needs more than a detached analytical approach assisted by glib wisdoms from programme-notes and disc-sleeves; it needs the ability for mental surrender to the divine sensation of perceiving supreme beauty, a complete self-abandonment, which no Englishman could dream of giving who has been brought up to regard all the joys of beauty as sinful, and who only finds pleasure in saving his neighbour's soul or at any rate preventing the poor fellow from living a full and rewarding life through the exercise of God-given faculties.

The sad truth is that Puritanism (with its wolf-pack of varying degrees of Nonconformity) is a way of life that destroys that largeness of soul which is necessary to perceive the similarity of music with Divine speech and to hear through aesthetic sensation God's Word. And Puritanism if not as a rite, certainly as an attitude, is unhappily on the increase.

So I permit myself to be surprised at this outcrop of instruction in opera-production. If the instructors were any good, and there were any opera going on, they would be too busy producing to instruct. So I fear it must be the usual sad story, of out-of-work artists earning a few shillings by teaching gullible fools to follow in their own unemployable footsteps. A sad story, as it shows that we are not only a narrow-minded nation, but gullible to boot!

PETER TRANCHELL.

7 February 1959

Arts Theatre

"THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE"

To anyone who remembers the performance of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in 1951 the prospect of hearing it again was particularly interesting and exciting; it can be said at once that the original impression of its remarkable dramatic power and beauty was not only recaptured but heightened. There have been some changes, of which the most important is the addition of a song for Henchard in the first act, which introduces for the first time the longest and finest tune of the whole work: in the original version this did not appear until the interlude between the first and second scenes of the third act, and hardly seemed to have the chance of making its full effect. The big ensemble in Act 3 in which this tune is sung by the chorus against a counter-melody for the soloists is perhaps the most impressive passage in the opera; the duet for Susan and Henchard in Act 2, the recollection of this in the scene between Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane in the last are deeply moving and in all the crowd scenes the energy of the music is unflagging. Peter Tranchell has caught some of the grand operatic manner of Richard Strauss and Puccini, but the style is very individual, and is able without any inconsistency to maintain a decidedly English character, especially in the haunting lament for Susan, and several other themes.

The production of so massive a work in a small theatre inevitably sets problems both musical and dramatic; in some of the big crowd scenes David Byram Wigfield seemed hampered by the smallness of the stage. The very full orchestration called for great care in maintaining the balance; there were moments when the voices did not penetrate entirely, but they were not frequent, and for this great credit is due to the very vital and sensitive conducting of Guy Woolfenden. The heaviest burdens of the performance undoubtedly fell upon him and upon Bruce Critchinson, who in the long and exacting

part of Henchard sang with great power, and conveyed most vividly and successfully the different phases of the character. Of the other parts, Christopher Davies as Farfrae was thoroughly competent, though a little lacking in lyrical fervour. Anne Abbott gave a charming performance as Elizabeth-Jane; Nancy Talbot both sang and acted well as Susan though she should surely have looked older in Act 2: Brenda Wilkinson was a very spirited Mrs Goodenough. The Cambridge University Opera Group showed both enterprise and discrimination in reviving this opera, and it is much to be hoped that it will soon be as widely known as it deserves.

PHILIP RADCLIFFE.

6 June 1959

THE PRESERVATION OF THE LINGUA FRANCA

We all remember the success of Kreisler, not only as a fiddler, but as a diddler. Many a time and oft the critics praised his performance of some ancient piece which he said he had copied direct from a little-known manuscript in some remote archive. No-one spotted, till he blandly blew the gaff, that these pieces were fakes composed by himself. While a rash of pink faces spread angrily across two continents, the Cambridge Faculty of Music laudibly [*sic*] redoubled its efforts to instruct its students to emulate his masterly penetration of musical styles.

We are glad to say that hoaxes nowadays elicit but little reaction. Who did not take the Piltdown Man in his stride? No-one even bothers to suspect foul play, when would-be pundits stream in and out of the British Museum, to reap a harvest of photostats, authoritative editions allegedly based on urtexts, condescending prefaces to vindicated scholarship, material for innumerable talks to “learned” societies, and the sobriquet of “expert”. Are we naïve enough to think they actually consulted a manuscript and it actually exists? Of course they are obliged to say as much. But what is more important is that they are helping to preserve the Lingua Franca of music, though only a few of them discern this in their preoccupation with climbing and crowing on their own particular dung-hill.

These few are banded together in a society whose name I forbear to mention, lest I prejudice their activities. And their patriotism and musical zeal has recently received a fillip from the announcement to the whole thinking world (that is, to readers of *The Times*) that in a museum in Prague there has been collected such a quantity of hitherto unknown manuscripts as will keep the cataloguers busy for a decade and musicologists for three quarters of a century. The material has come to light through state-confiscations from monasteries and castles.

But England is not to be outdone in providing a counterblast of “study-material”, of which incidentally, the Americans, for instance, may be running short, now that more of their people are engaged in research than are literate.

Thus at Little Tolbraham in East Anglia we can confidently expect in the future a “discovery” of a similar and epoch-making mass of overlooked treasures. The three nissen huts in which the happy few are at work, will shortly be found to contain enough musicological pabulum to keep recording-companies at full volume for at least a month. The material will be announced as having been confiscated from various libraries of the University as a result of the next Royal Commission.

The sheer antique-value of the collection will be considerably enhanced by a special team of “denovators”, whose expertise is to simulate fragility, worm-holes, and the effects of damp. While for the more detective-minded researcher, certain manuscripts will be carefully ripped across and used to pad the binding of ledgers and bibles distributed by local presses, as it is known with what pleasure this type of scholar tears open venerable volumes, especially if found on ecclesiastical premises. Other manuscripts will be treated with the substance called Wisterium Inchoate, which is effective in its initial resistance to the infra-red scrutiny hitherto so successful in determining that certain works of Handel were actually written by Handel though in the handwriting of a certain Mr Smith. Research, obviously, should not be too easy, or it will be finished too quickly.

The East Anglian discoveries will embrace a wider field than the work of mere eighteenth-century musicians. A literary note will be struck. The agenda is to include a very plausible fugue for crwth by

Wordsworth (to go with his Prelude), the original melody (or psalm-chant) to Brooke's "Grantchester", a Serenade to the Fellows of Trinity by Byron, an Evening Service—"Tennyson in D minor", Housman's own orchestral tone-poem on the Shropshire Lad, originally withdrawn in deference to Butterworth, together with Oscar Browning's "Mudlark" Variations on a theme of the Prince Consort, the Twopenny Opera by Maynard Keynes on a libretto by Lloyd George, and "Chambre des Nuages" by George Thompson³.

The reasons why such antiquarian revivals should be applauded are numerous. The more time spent in clogging our radio broadcasts with this good old stuff, the less time spent in disseminating the mediocre and pretentious effusions of contemporary composers. After all, life is short, and if art is made long enough, only a small proportion of it can be encountered in one life-time: A healthy privation; for it may be argued that the confused and self-consciously perverted musical experimentation of the twentieth century is spiritually undermining. Bread may be dangerous until a proper recipe for dough is reached; and it was reached; but our contemporaries have wantonly discarded it. Atonal music, for instance, (since music is a thing only heard) implies the atonality not of the music but of the listener. In the same way, an illegible book is appreciated most by an unlettered reader; and the more illegible books there are, the less need we be able to read. With "Atonal" music, our fear is for the corruption of the Public's ear.

Antiquarianism also gives rise to gentle intellectual snobberies. It is best so; lest other trends induce snobberies more harmful.

The more *recherché* the history of a piece of music, the more ample can be its disc-sleeve disquisition; and we should hate to be deprived of this source of solace.

But most significant of all: The more a man hears and enjoys the music of the seventeenth-, eighteenth, and nineteenth-century styles (whether it be genuine or fake), the more firmly does he accustom himself to the wholesome and traditional conventions of our music; which is right and proper. The meanderings of a Palestrina or the incoherence of a Webern are equally to be resisted. Let us not pollute our palate with these primitive essays of rude forefathers or extravagant deviations of prodigal Sons. Let us be content with our Golden Age and proud of its glorious Vocabulary, neither too early or too late.

So, we should well-wish our happy band of archivists. May their pastiche prosper! For every Briton may justly ask: If in Prague, why not in Little Tolbraham?

PETER TRANCHELL.

13 June 1959

THE PLEASURES OF INFORMALITY

Exciting, exceptional and exhilarating are the only words to describe the concert in the S.D.M. Chambers last Tuesday. The public were admitted, and shame on them, only several came. We were to witness an object-lesson in plumbing the heights.

The first item (not on the programme) was a mysterious but splendid delay of twenty minutes.

The group of seventeenth-century madrigals by such celebrated names as Chippett, Madding and Brown were an excellent choice. The conductor was gaily waving his arms, but the singers gracefully declined to take any notice either of him or of each other. Perhaps even, with laudable individuality, they were not singing the same pieces, though the programme announced that they were. The second tenor had quite a number of bold gratuitous *falsettos*, especially one after all the rest had stopped singing, which he allowed to peter out in a masterly if unpremeditated *diminuendo*. Perhaps we should have enjoyed this excellent touch more often, had not the singer seized-up with hay-fever, thus providing a delightful *ostinato* throughout the remaining madrigals. They sounded quite modern.

³ the inventor of the cloud chamber was actually Charles Thomson Rees Wilson

A lady pianist followed with a Suite for Harpsichord by Ebenezer Cogden. The substance and performance of this work were much enhanced by the soloist's simpers, which were constant and delectable. It was as if she were but newly making shy acquaintance with the instrument. The work sounded surprisingly modern. It was soon over, for the page-turner turned two pages at once, and we were spared the *corante* and two *minuetts*. It was a pity that the lady's heel, after much good work at the loud pedal, got stuck in an open knot-hole in the floor-boards, so that on rising to acknowledge our plaudits, she lost shoe and balance, and fell fiat on her face in a pot of raddled marguerites.

We were then regaled by apparently fine rendering of a dramatic aria of Coglione. Someone chose this moment, however, to start a change-ringing practice in a near-by belfry, so we did not hear a note. Doubtless every single one was delicious, even if the total effect of the work may have been quite modern. It was a joy to perceive the singer's blushes of surprise and pleasure when, as he paused for breath during the second *ritornello* (which was no more audible than the first), the audience broke into spontaneous applause, thinking this perplexing dumb-show had spent itself.[†]

The concert's highlight was an "orchestra" rendering the Symphonic Variations by Amterbilt. It could not start at first as there was a shortage of chairs on the stage. The first cellist gallantly offered his seat to a lady flautist, and joined the troupe of players ransacking the audience. Our thin attendance permitted the band to find eventual accommodation. Unfortunately the percussion had not arrived, as someone (it was explained to us) had inadvertently lent it to two other societies for this same evening. A common Cambridge hazard. But the composer was well served. The glockenspielist and sidedrummer shared the top of a desk which was there, standing on their chairs to do so. Meanwhile the timpanist was quite happy with an inverted tub, a dwarf rhododendron being evicted for the occasion.

Apart from the first cellist getting cramp during a beautiful solo, and the trumpeter burning his fingers on a cigarette stub during his many bars of rest, all went ludicrously well till the climax of the second movement. The conductor raised his baton vigorously. It flew over his shoulder, executing a neat parabola, and came to rest in the capacious hat of a lady sleeping in the stalls. As she did not wake, a neighbour retrieved the baton and returned it to the conductor with a profuse exchange of courtesies. The orchestra had in the meantime proceeded. But the conductor halted them and called for letter C. This caused another delay, as letter C did not appear to be in everybody's copy. So the second movement was dropped, and we went on to the last, finishing the work more or less together. A marvellous feat, considering many of the players were sight-reading in a bad light. Though written in 1857, this piece sounded quite modern. When it ended, the sleeping lady still slept on. It was then discovered that she had died peacefully, probably (out of courtesy) during the interval. A charming death. And a most satisfactory concert.

PETER TRANCHELL.

[†]Attentive readers will have spotted that this paragraph is essentially identical to one in the similar article on 'A May-Week Concert' published on 31 May 1952; and that the opening has the same 'twenty-minute delay'. Ed.

7 November 1959

A PIANO COULD BE A LOVESOME THING, GOD WOT.

Is the piano dying out, and if not, why not? These questions reverberate about the occiput of any thinking person.

Is there an imperceptible economic factor, such as the shortage of hard wood? We know that the oak is losing ground in Europe. There is more remuneration in planting fir-trees. The fir reaches maturity sooner than the oak, and can be chopped into matches. Twenty matches can be sold in a box marked "average contents forty" for the price of fifty, thus ensuring a very reasonable profit. But does a wood-shortage matter? Can we not have plastic pianos with aluminium frames (if we want pianos at all)?

Or are there domestic factors? There are! Nowadays most of us live in flats, which makes it hard to love one's neighbour. If the neighbour has a noisy baby, it makes it harder; but babies are not a

popular *casus belli*. That is why some blocks of flats prohibit progeny. Dogs and cats, though protected by public sentimentality, are more easily the subject of neighbourly complaint, for it is slightly less trouble to dispose of them. One merely has them “put down,” saying they had a cold, or were too expensive to keep, or had almost bitten someone. And with dogs one can speedily lose them, for their noses are so clogged with diesel fumes that they can scarcely recognise the scents of their own doggy acquaintance, let alone find their way home should you give them the slip in Fortnum’s. But pianos! They take up so much room, they may not fit up the stairs when you move to a new flat, they are too heavy to lug about when you suspect them of harbouring the worm, they are too loud if you play them, and you are too unskilled, for in a servantless world you have no time from the petty chores of existence for regular practice.

In the nineteenth century, with the din of carriage-wheels on cobbles, of flatulent horses, of men raising their hats to women, of birds singing, of street-vendors’ cries, German bands, prayer-meetings, hurdy-gurdies, monochords, church bells and dinner gongs, the sound of a mere domestic piano was lost in the counterpoint of daily life. Nowadays it is an outrage to our more sequestered souls, it is the prime basis of a neighbour’s complaint. The piano has always been at a disadvantage to the harpsichord for being a better instrument. Thus it cruelly reveals your wooden-ness of touch, your incapacity for co-ordination of the hands, your feckless pedalling, in fact your general lack of musicality. But if you are musical, it rewards you a hundred times more than any other instrument. The poor dear harpsichord is only suitable to those whose appetite is for manual exercise rather than sensuous pleasure and whose audience has some historical rather than musical preoccupation. The piano is the king of instruments, but in these days of republicanism looks like being unseated.

Another disadvantage of the piano is that it provides a gateway to knowledge of a great variety of music. Sooner or later great symphonies, cantatas, operas and quartets are transcribed for piano solo or duet; and it is a shame how well a good player can simulate the instruments of a band. Schumann said of Brahms that he could make it piano sound like a full orchestra,—though he omitted to say of what the orchestra was full. But a wide general knowledge (even of music) is reprehensible, as we all know, for we stigmatise the taste for such knowledge as “eclectic” or “dilettantistic”!

In bygone days the piano duet gave the opportunity for many a gentle flirtation on the double-stool. The touching of hands during passage-work, and the mutual kneeling for control of the pedals was an important ingredient for musicians amorously inclined. But this sort of thing has come to be frowned on. The Puritan spirit which gradually burgeoned throughout the nineteenth century now bids us regard any kind of sensuous pleasure as sinful. A whole-hearted enjoyment of music is as disgusting as is a genuine enjoyment of food or sex. Such things are wrong and nasty. Art can only do us any good if it is long, boring, and painfully depressing. And if Art does not do us any good, we must utterly reject it.

Hence the popular demand for a limitation of the repertoire, and for a mode of making music either unsensuous or downright unpleasing. The limitation is very successfully achieved by gramophone record companies from whom emanate recordings of relatively few works performed by simply innumerable different artistes. In case one should be tempted to strike up an acquaintance with a work, a long disquisition on mainly irrelevant matter is supplied on the disc-sleeve. One must read this during the playing of the record to avoid any direct attention to the music, and ruminate upon it during subsequent playings for the same purpose.

The unpleasing qualities of musical reproduction derive mainly from exaggerated softness, when one would need it louder for a proper appreciation of the music (this is for flat-dwellers), or from excessive loudness when loudness is unnecessary and may dull the ear (this is for non-flat-dwellers). The latter class might prefer to hire at reasonable expense a symphony orchestra to play in their drawing room. But no orchestra avails itself of such a gainful opportunity, for fear they might be expected to cook their own supper on arrival, or worse, to rehearse before arriving, a privation orchestral players will seldom countenance, in case they in turn should be in danger of getting to know a work too well. However, for a much larger expense, a man can get the next best thing,—stereo equipment. He can then mortify himself (and his family and guests) with the discomfort of

having to sit all the while in some draughty central place in a room so that the different “speakers” may adequately “beam” on him their deafening fanfaronade.

The LP record is also a boon to the non-puritan and still amorous music-lover, who can relax on a sofa with his maiden during the music, and can forget about it, absolved from the refinements of piano-duet playing. Thus with its pseudo-educational sleeve of chitchat and its invitation to the misdemeanours of idleness, the gramophone-record has advantages over the piano both of snobbery and snoggery.

So far we have considered reasons why the piano should disappear from the home. The next question is its retreat from the concert platform, a more difficult matter, for we are dealing with not music but mystique.

The public value of the piano is in itself negligible, but the player (or sometimes the composer) is all-important. We see cows congregated at a gateway regularly at the same hour each day: they have been trained to expect a regular milking time. In the same way there are human beings who expect a regular recital of all the works of Chopin once a month. They will moo until they get it. They seem not to care who is playing or how. The password “Chopin” stirs their appetite infallibly.

Alternatively it is the personality of the player that attracts, and in these days more so if he be familiar through TV appearances. Borge and Liberace attract as much as were they Paderewski or Pachmann. One asks oneself if the piano is here much more than a stage property.

But one must not underestimate the ill-effects of TV upon musical education, for it must pander to the common axiom which permits us to like what we know, as long as we do not know too much.

However, the real call to the concert comes from the magic word “concerto.” Everyone likes to see a man battling with the piano as if he were some dauntless St George bearding a monstrous dragon. But they are even better pleased to witness the throwing of a virgin to an arena full of a ravening orchestra. There she sits, treating the piano like some great defensive mechanism, amid the turbulent onslaughts of the band; and we are as delighted to see her come out of her ordeal radiant and unscathed, as if she were a Christian that had tamed a wild lion. The music and the performance are irrelevant. So (actually) is the piano, but until some other more suitable instrument turns up, the piano will have to do.

But let the same radiant virgin try a recital on her own, and she may spend her whole life failing to graduate beyond the Wigmore Hall.

Still, even if the piano eventually succumbs to progress in music-making, which it doubtless will, it may yet serve to enhance our gardens. Nothing looks better than a good big “grand” on the terrace, with the lid up, full of luscious soil, and sprouting with fragrant blooms. I have such a one in my own garden, but am not green-fingered enough to get anything to grow in it. Nevertheless I recommend the piano as an *al fresco* ornament infinitely superior to the garden gnome.

PETER TRANCHELL.

[Although he finished his stint as regular music critic for the Cambridge Review at the end of 1959, as his responsibilities at Caius become much more demanding, PAT wrote one last article in 1962 – perhaps to promote a cause dear to his heart. Ed.]

24 February 1962

A NEW OPERA IN CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE MUSICAL SOCIETIES can boast a fine record of achievement over the years, including such highlights as the first performance in England of Mozart's *Magic Flute* and of Honegger's *King David* by C.U.M.S. In 1956 the C.U. Opera Group staged Stravinsky's *Rake's Progress* before it had percolated into this country beyond Glyndebourne, and after other presentations such as Vaughan Williams' *Sir John in Love*, Carl Orff's *Catulli Carmina*, Liebermann's *School for Wives* and Bizet's *Don Procopio*, their enterprise is evidently unabated; for they open on February 26 for a week at the Arts Theatre with the first performance in Europe of Aaron Copland's opera *The Tender Land*.

This is a fascinating work for both musical and other reasons. It has a splendid score and that forthright dramatic quality which renders unnecessary those confusing synopses in the programme which are occasioned by obscure or ill-constructed works. It was first performed in America in 1954, the year of its composition. Copland and his librettist, Horace Everett, had been much struck by a sociological book published in 1939, "Let us now praise famous men," a study of all sorts and conditions of men by James Agee, a writer, and Walter Evans, a photographer. Two photographs had particularly interested Everett: of a mother and her daughter. He and Copland fell to considering the impact on these people of the intrusion into their life of two men from a very different social stratum. The opera derived from this inspiration, and shows the effect of two strange men entering the life of a rural family out west. But it avoids all the monotony of a "documentary." A rumoured rape by wandering harvesters in a near-by farmstead sets the parish by its ears. Naturally, on the arrival of two such harvesters, suspicion is rife, and, of course, the heroine must go and fall in love with one of them, and, of course, he's the tenor. But his buddy, a good-for-nothing cynic disguised as an amateur philosopher, doesn't want to lose a comrade, which would happen were the tenor to settle down, marry and become an honest farmer. Alas, this is a story where (as so often in life) love does not find a way. Rather poignant.

The heroine is to be played by Mary Wells, who has been at Covent Garden for some years and has sung Nedda in *Pagliacci* and Micaela in *Carmen* there. The hero is to be John Ford, whom televisioners will have seen as Tobias in Bliss's T.V. opera *Tobias and the Angel* and as Cassio in *Othello*. The remainder of the cast is "local talent." Joan Westwood as the mother (her excellent previous work with the Opera Group will be recalled); Tom Blodgett (Emma) as the hero's buddy—he was soloist of the Harvard Glee Club while at that University, though he has other more athletic prowesses; and Derek Morphy (St John's) as Grand-pa. Charles Ellis is producer, and Philip Ledger conductor.

Incidentally, Copland himself, by good fortune, is to give an open lecture in the University Music School at 5 p.m. on Monday, February 26, so I understand he will be able to put in an appearance at some rehearsals and (I hope) give the production his blessing. Meanwhile I gather the first night will be a dress occasion, so I must evict the moth from my D.J. and sew on some buttons.

PETER TRANCHELL.

BRITTEN AND BRITTENITES

BY PETER TRANCHELL

Cambridge University Library MS: Tranchell/9/3/12

BENJAMIN BRITTEN is still under forty years of age. Is this the right time in his life for the publication of a biography and a study of his works? The question is raised by the appearance of a stout book of 410 pages: 'Benjamin Britten: a commentary on his works by a group of specialists, edited by Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller' (London, Rockliff, 1952, 30s.). With interpretative talent the position is different: the most valuable accounts are those of eye-witnesses, those who actually saw the manner of the great actor or heard the style of the great violinist and recorded their impressions, forthwith. But the composer's significance to the world is something different. The reaction of a man to music composed in his own time is merely a question of taste, no matter how erudite he may be. The most reasonable and scholarly procedure with such music is an analysis and description of its structure and content, without any opinion on its ultimate value. The serious appraisal of a creative artist's work must be left to posterity.

Yes, but that does not altogether rule out an interim judgement. The ultimate evaluation of Britten's music is our grandchildren's concern; but this music was, after all, written to appeal to our ears. Posterity's verdict is of no use to us; and while our opinion of Britten is, in the nature of things, only provisional, it is, after all, that of the people for whom his music was written. In 1840 Spohr was a great composer, and the reaction of his living audience was the real critique, not the sneers of generations to follow. A composer who writes for any ears other than those of his contemporaries is a romantical egoist and a foolish visionary as well. On this basis the spirit of the new Mitchell-Keller book must be approved. It is not final—it does not set out to be. Britten, so in effect the book says, is a great composer—now. It is now that matters to us.

Another thing to be said before holes are picked in it is a word of congratulation to the publishers on its production, as regards both the type of the letterpress and the exquisite clarity of the many musical examples which adorn nearly every page.

Now to consider the contributions individually. The Earl of Harewood starts the ball rolling with a biographical sketch. At once we are aware of a dilemma. Lord Harewood's being a close friend is a factor not altogether favourable to his qualifications for giving us a faithful picture of the composer.

The appreciation of a man's music is often aided by information outside purely musical considerations. The appeal of Berlioz's music, for instance, may gain from what we have been told of his stormy adolescence with its bizarre adventures. Lord Harewood's article informs us that his composer was born in 1913; became musical very early; then took in his stride a preparatory school, Frank Bridge, Gresham's and the R.C.M. We read that he was a Communist during the Spanish civil war and a pacifist during the second World War; that he went to America, came back and now lives according to the following daily routine: Rises at 6 a.m., composes until lunch-time with only a short pause for breakfast; goes sea-fishing or bird-watching in the afternoon, or plays lawn-tennis or entertains his neighbours. But these are mere milestones on a road obviously crowded with other and more important experiences of which we are not told. What of the most important things in a man's life? To have gone into more detail might have embarrassed the subject; but we leave this carefully uninformative article with a sense of disappointment that good breeding and discretion should have got the better of candour.

One of Lord Harewood's paragraphs invites discussion. It is that which refers to Britten's "intensely professional attitude to music", which is said to account for his "acute impatience of hostile criticism". The paragraph goes on to rationalize this impatience. Britten, we read, hates his own—or anyone else's—motives to be misunderstood and his music, therefore, to be criticized from a false point of view. Is this a scholarly or a sensible attitude? Everyone is impatient of hostile criticism—some people because they despise the critic or know him to be wrong, others because they have a sense of inferiority and fear him to be right. But to suggest that a profound, logical, idealistical process is gone through to arrive at this impatience is an exaggeration. In music

what is important is the effect—the effect upon a listener during performance. The composer's intention is irrelevant. If he intended a certain result and gained it, then well and good; but if he failed to gain that result then he has made a mistake or his technique is at fault. The listener cannot be expected to hear a work otherwise than how he actually does hear it, merely because the composer intended something different. In point of fact, no properly written music can be criticized from a wrong point of view, for it has in it its own inescapable clue to the correct standpoint. Lord Harewood fails to make clear that Britten resents criticism not of his own actual music but of other matters.

If a composer calls his piece a *passacaglia* and it bears no relation to what in current parlance a *passacaglia* is, then he must expect comment on that score. Now Britten's "realizations" of the accompaniments to Purcell's songs, his re-hashing of 'The Beggar's Opera' and of 'Dido and Æneas'—these are the subjects, I suggest, which have aroused most of the hostile criticism so annoying to the composer. But is it not Britten's fault—or his publisher's—in using a word in a sense which is not that commonly accorded it? Again, to talk of a composer's motives in writing the music of an opera is meaningless. Either an opera is dramatic and moving, whether sad or gay, or it is not. No amount of Shavian prolegomena will alter that. The fact that symbolism lies behind the plot, or that experiments in form or style are contained in the music—such things are of no dramatic concern unless they definitely contribute to the dramatic effect.

The rest of the substantial book consists of some twenty chapters about the different categories of Britten's work, sandwiched between two surprising articles by the editors, Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller. Peter Pears writes ably on the vocal music, giving a pleasantly annotated catalogue of the songs and song-sequences. He inclines to attribute absolute virtue to economy, irrespective of context or purpose. It is as well to remember that economy is not always the same thing as beauty, and may be necessitated merely by bankruptcy. George Malcolm writes next on the Purcell realizations—an angry little article which says, in effect, that Britten's realizations are not realizations in the ordinary sense of the word, and that anyone who does not immediately take to the new meaning of the word is a dullard. But is not the very idea that it is correct to write out (and print) a realization, instead of spontaneously improvising it at the keyboard, misleading? And is it serious to say, as Mr. Malcolm does, that "a continuo should be worked out at the keyboard and in terms of keyboard technique"? Worked out! As if one should sit down before the performance poring over the music and working it out! What an approach to the self-respecting musician's art of improvisation! And consider the second phrase: "in terms of keyboard technique". Has anyone ever suggested that a keyboard continuo should be realized in terms of, say, violin technique? or of any other than keyboard technique? Britten's arrangements of Purcell are re-compositions, and should be so entitled. "Realization" is a word that means something else and, since it is tending to become a jargon word, it is hardly candid to use it when it simply is inappropriate.

Hans Redlich writes next on Britten's choral music. Here is an example of his verbiage: "The cycle 'Five Flower Songs' is the work of a consummate virtuoso of composition, less genuinely inspired than 'A Boy was Born', but of unsurpassed mastery in the use of every possible formal device towards the greatest variety of structure and colour within narrow madrigalian limits." What apparently Dr. Redlich really means is that the work with less musical inspiration in it has more technical tricks. It is, he means, a nice piece of note-knitting. But by the end of the sentence he has conveyed the suggestion that the more musical work is only just passable, while the less musical one is preferable by reason of its cleverness. This is accomplished by the use of jargon phrases, "formal device", "variety of structure", "colour" and "narrow limits". In another connection Dr. Redlich cites an example which, he says, "proves that the eighteen-year-old composer had a remarkably clear conception of a new piano style, in that it avoids cloying post-romantic clusters of harmonies and excels in the athletic simultaneity of a motif of piled-up fifths and its augmentation". The example follows, as nice a piece of note-knitting as one could wish. But, passing over the suspect character of such phrases as "clear conception", "new style" and "athletic simultaneity", let us consider the words, "a remarkably clear conception of a new piano style". Does this imply that Britten deliberately adopted a style of composition that was in reality not basically natural to him (or to the piano), following in the wake of Hindemith's equally spare "contrapuntal contours"? I suspect that Dr. Redlich did not mean it so. The phrase "cloying post-romantic clusters of harmonies" is interesting. People who have defective ears, or who are

defective in that portion of the brain which analyses and comprehends musical sounds, are naturally averse to music that makes complicated demands on the capacity they do not possess. But I do not believe Dr. Redlich is in the least tone-deaf. He is here obviously attempting to pay a compliment to Britten by disparaging so-called post-romantic music; and his use of derogatory jargon is only too evident. "Cloying..." he says, forgetting that this remarkably unstable word requires to be used in a particular context and is applicable as an expression of personal taste rather than as a scholastic pronouncement, while, in his aversion to "clusters of harmonies", he fails to observe that a cluster of contrary rhythms or a cluster of any subtleties after the Britten model may be quite as reprehensible. In this connection I would remark that Britten is just as prone to lay it on with a trowel (though I do not say this is a bad thing) as the Romantics. If they had their harmony, he, for his part, will not leave well alone with device. If he can he will have a conflicting counter-subject, or a far-fetched harmonization of a melody; and this sort of prodigality of clever ideas in composition invites censure just as does any other form of excess.

The best articles now follow: Arthur Oldham's and Erwin Stein's on 'Peter Grimes', Norman del Mar's on 'The Rape of Lucretia', 'Albert Herring' and 'The Beggar's Opera'. They are sensible, interesting and easy to read. I recommend musicians to omit the previous pages and start with these. Mr. Stein's article on 'Billy Budd' is the apogee of the book. It attempts to prove nothing, nor does it employ that illegitimate form of musical comparison which seeks to elevate one composer by airily traducing another. It simply points out in a nobly dispassioned way the items of interest in the opera, leaving the summing-up to the reader. Excellent!

Paul Hamburger writes next on the chamber music. He starts quite fairly with general remarks such as this about sonata form: "To the classical demand for strict *integration* in this form has been added a demand for formal, tonal, if not indeed motivic *progression* in the course of a work, of such refined, and quite unprogrammatic, sensitivity that the composer must needs consider each new 'sonata' a special case whose form has to be re-created according to the requirements of the material". But after this truism—which, anyway, applies to all modern music—he goes in for being pseudo-musicological. Themes are labelled, and he revels in formulae which are fatiguing if not inscrutable. He tells us, for instance, that "the complete (*a*) in section A and in the coda is a clearing station between the almost impersonal molecules of the work and the themes that are derived from (*a*) itself. This clears section A of any duplicity: all later developments of it can be definitely, though perhaps unconsciously, heard as either pre- or post-principal subject". Fascinating! And there is more to learn. On p. 218 appears a modulation map. It looks like a design for central heating or a diagram of the human blood-stream, and is as beautifully contrived as the Hampton Court maze.

Boyd Neel writes on the works for string orchestra, and there are chapters on the symphonies, the concertos and the piano music. An article by Georges Auric on Britten's piano works reads like a publisher's dust-cover announcement. The really critical survey of the music in this category is contributed by A. E. F. Dickinson. A rather comical turn follows. Imogen Holst expatiates on Britten and the Young in a manner she must have learnt from Walford Davies. "... the fluttering grace-notes of the two flutes chase each other up to the sudden piercing trill of the piccolo, the oboes' expressive *pp* alternates with a passionate *ff*, and the clarinets' agile arpeggios blossom into a mellow *rallentando*". I am tempted to try my hand at this sort of thing. "But see! Lurking behind yonder bush of autumnal semiquavers, and wearing a dark tritone with a yellow feather in it, we perceive the sinister bassoon. Ah, what does this fierce growling foretell? But with a strident *rubato* he bursts forth, scattering the timid double-basses to left and to right, and plunges into an icy melisma that finishes up at the extreme edge of a perilous *sforzando*." But Miss Holst forestalls parody. Here she writes "The xylophone's chromatic contribution encourages the strings to play *col legno*." Really? Was not the indication marked in the violin parts? I hasten on to Lennox Berkeley's chapter on the light music, a short but interesting piece of writing, and to William Mann's on the incidental music, which, too, is a cut above some of the contributions to the book. The volume ends with a list of gramophone records, their qualities described by Desmond Shawe-Taylor.

Now I must say something that has been troubling me all along. To what part of the public is the book addressed? I come to the conclusion it is addressed to no one: it is simply a labour of love. On the one hand it is hardly up to the standard of a text-book; on the other hand, the elaborate style of the contributions and the price may preclude it from the favour of the average layman,

while the intelligentsia will probably prefer to spend its money on actual scores rather than the ruminations of the composer's friends. As a readable appreciation for the benefit of Tom, Dick and Harry it fails by trying to be too scholarly and technical. Many of the contributors have spoiled their efforts by fallacious methods of criticism, and in the attempt to be profound have fallen into incoherent verbiage. The two editors, in particular, have failed both to make clear their motives and to attain the ends the average reader would hope they had in mind.

Mr. Mitchell's chapter, 'The Musical Atmosphere', is an oppressive piece of writing. Let us look into one element of this essay. Mr. Mitchell says: "Britten's Englishry is of the profoundest significance for the musical culture of Europe and ourselves." What does he mean? Is not Britten's music of significance as music, apart from his being an Englishman? Or does the writer imply that foreign cultures are loth (or eager) to assimilate Britten's music because it is redolent of a character alien to them? It seems to me that this is just a noble empty phrase to justify Mr. Mitchell's unprofitable occupation of tracing nationality in an art which nowadays derives from such a hotchpotch of sources that it is incapable of such analysis. The whole chapter is largely concerned with saying that Britten is an Englishman or, at times, an European. In trying to define Britten's peculiarly English quality Mr. Mitchell tells us it has not the same English quality as "the modality of Vaughan Williams; the occasionally rhapsodic folk-song style of Holst or Bax; the bluff geniality of Elgar; the pantheistic impressionism of Delius". Well, we all know that folk-song has a pretty cosmopolitan character, and the modes were by no means a national monopoly; and while we know that Elgar and Delius were Englishmen, we still acknowledge their debt to Franck and Grieg.

When Mr. Mitchell comes to the point of defining Britten's "Englishry" he apologizes for being unable to think of the right words. He, however, settles for this: "Britten's Englishry may be ascribed to two creative tendencies. First, the exploration and exploitation of a whole emotional territory which has otherwise been undiscovered; and secondly a gift for the musical *vernacular*." What wonderful jargon! "Emotional territory"! Surely the only emotions evoked by music are those experienced by the listener. Does this discovery of "new territory" mean that Britten evokes in a listener emotions never previously evoked by music? Is it a new emotion, or a set of virgin listeners? Or is it a new method of evoking an old emotion? Whatever it is, how can we be sure? Then: "a gift for the musical vernacular". Does this mean that Britten's music, though composed by him, sounds like a traditional English folk-song or hymn-tune? Or does it imply that he has a democratic knack of appealing to the man in the street?

The next paragraphs tell us, in connection with the new emotional territory, that Britten's childlike quality, his special "innocence of spirit", appeals to "the child in the child and the child in the adult". "Britten", says our author, swapping horses in mid-stream, "has created a unique department of feeling which, in its turn, has created new textures and new musical ideas. For example, in the Spring Symphony's 'The Driving Boy' the newness of the *sound* alone is startling". But surely, to startle a listener by "newness of sound" is an age-old trick. To startle the listener in the traditional way can scarcely be called exploring a new emotional territory, nor incidentally has it very much to do with "the child in the adult". The old are just as susceptible to shock as the young. Why not say that Britten appeals to the senility in people?

Mr. Mitchell wishes to praise Britten for his "harmonic poise—refusal to be harried by a 'modern' conscience into nervous rhythms or a debilitating chromaticism". He goes on: "One of the main problems of the contemporary composer has been the inhibited attitude towards or downright fear of a largely diatonic idiom. Walton is a good example of a composer who almost aggressively attempts to suppress or, at least, disguise his diatonic tendencies—hence his often self-destructive rhythms and his frequently cloying chromaticisms." Is Mr. Mitchell here suggesting that music is an abstract, that it has a value quite apart from its impression on a listener? Well, it is not and it has not. Music is a sequence of sounds intelligible to a listener. The listener makes the sense out of it, according to his own experience; and as to whether the music is diatonic or not, the listener decides for himself. To us Europeans of this century all music is of necessity basically diatonic, because of our musical upbringing and environment. Even so-called atonal music is written by and intended to be heard by men habituated to apply the classical formula of tonality to all music. For Mr. Mitchell to suggest that Walton or anyone else attempts to "disguise" the diatonic element in his music simply will not do. The element is there quite plainly, and is all-important for our enjoyment. Walton's music is—as is anyone's, for that matter—merely

an elaboration and extension of the formula that existed previously (not a concealment of it), and it would be meaningless to the listener were he not able to apply the classical formula while listening. As much goes for Schönberg's music, too.

Before I leave this curious chapter let me quote from it some examples of its musicological jargon:

Britten's perfectly stable Europeanism resulted in a creative freedom which enabled him to make full and uninhibited use of all he had learned from 17th-century English Rhetoric.

It is of prime importance to understand *the extra-chronological relationship of Mahler to Stravinsky in so far as they stand in relation to a common unifying factor—Britten*, even if it is the attraction and common features of opposites.

Britten's proportions and projected chromaticism is evidence of the truly classical spirit which informs so much of his music and underlies his aristocratic attitude to style.

The concluding chapter is written by Hans Keller. For some psychological reason he reaches the conclusion that Purcell is Britten's father, one of the two having a superego identification with the other. We are then told that Britten somehow is Mozart, their obvious common characteristic being youthful maturity.

Mr. Keller continues:

And if it be objected that Britten is actually cold and empty and superficial, we who find a warmth and a rich deep content in his music have, at least, this to be said in our favour: while one does not usually find things that are not there, one often does not find things that are. I would suggest that both composers [Mozart and Britten] sublimate not only their depths but also their heights, i.e., they even sublimate their sublimity.

For those who like this sort of thing Mr. Keller deals it out in profusion.

One saddening thing about the more pretentious of these Britten essays is the use of jargon-words, not for their preciseness of expression, but for their modishness, their smartness. And similarly with many of the preferences and the admirations. Britten is likened, on very slender points of similarity, to Purcell and Mozart, and is said to be in the line of descent from Mahler, Berg, Schönberg and Milhaud. Is it pure coincidence that these names should be in fashion this season?

It would be easy to name quite a different set of composers with whom Britten has just as much affinity—Verdi and Puccini, and then Stravinsky, Holst and Walton. But these, at the moment, are not so fashionable. Supposing I were to write that the "Investigation" fugue in 'Albert Herring' is—not only on account of its portrayal of bumbledom and self-important busybodies, but also because of its musical shape—obviously derived directly from the bogus counterpoint of the Scribes and Pharisees in Massenet's 'Marie Magdeleine', I should be frowned on. It would be perfectly valid criticism, but it is not the smart thing just now to mention Massenet.

I suspect, in a similar spirit, the way in which the Lydian fourth and the Æolian seventh are dragged in to describe certain quirks of Britten's. But if you remember that Britten got the Lydian fourth from Rutland Boughton, who had got it from Debussy, who had got it from Gounod and Tchaikovsky, who had probably got it from Berlioz, then the Lydian fourth loses some of its lustre—it becomes, after all, not so very modish. Why, even Beethoven uses the Lydian fourth in the Pastoral Symphony!

It remains for me to offer to the subject of this hero-worship my condolences that the book should not have been better written and that he should have been the victim of so inopportune an outburst of noble intentions.

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