

THE DELIUS SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

44, Forest Road,  
Kew Gardens.

MAY, 1962.

Dear Member,

Thanks to Mr. Aickman, the Wagner Society Secretary has sent us a copy of their rules to assist us in formulating the rules of our Delius Society.

The 132 original correspondents who are not at present members have now been circularised. Once more, telling them the story of what happened last year, and why some of them were not contacted, I felt like a character in one of the later operas of Wagner's "Ring" telling the story of what happened "in the beginning".

Mr. David Simmons who, literally, knows everyone in the music world will shortly take over my rôle of convener, though I shall write the next few newsletters. Mr. Simmons' extensive contacts will be invaluable to the committee.

The very fact that I started a new Delius Society makes me wonder whether it does not foreshadow a decline of my great liking for Delius' music, possibly being an expression of a fear of losing something precious. That it has been precious to me since my 'teens I regard as essentially bound up with my social - historical context. While I used to pride myself on my avant-garde position in contrast with that of my father, so I cannot appreciate, in contrast with the youngsters of today, composers like Stockhausen, and it would be easy to dismiss Stockhausen, like my father used to dismiss Delius, Debussy, Bax, Walton etc., were it not for the look on the faces of the youngsters who play Stockhausen.

However, though the avant-garde have left Delius behind, a very large part of the concert-going public are still in the last century, a half-century time-lag between two sections of music-lovers being one facet of the contemporary social situation, - and there could easily be a Delius revival. Perhaps the recent artificial stimulation, tied up with the mystical interpretation of our having ten digits, has done something. Similarly, in a smaller way, our Delius Society can play a part in keeping Delius' larger works alive, both for our benefit and that of others who have not yet "caught up".

Regarding the rôle of the B.B.C. in this Festival Year, in March the "Times" critic wrote "A signal contribution to this Delius Centenary Year was made by the B.B.C..... Anyone who has warmed to the melodic diction of "Sea Drift" and "A Village Romeo and Juliet" must find himself at home in "Fennimore and Gerda." (To be performed again on June 18th).

According to the 'Record Times', Jacksonville is holding its own festival; the Delius Trust is organising a festival in London at the end of the Summer, and there may be events in Leipzig and France.

On June 13th the B.B.C. is broadcasting "Song of the High Hills" from Birmingham. On June 1st the London Junior and Senior Orchestras include "La Calinda" in their R.F.H. programme, and the B.B.C. broadcasts Delius Songs by the Oriana Society. This month the Ernest Read Orchestras Concert for Children at the R.F.H. includes the "First Cuckoo".

Regarding the Sadlers Wells production of the "Village Romeo" (to be repeated in the autumn according to F. Aprahamian), Wilfrid Mellers remarked during the course of an article on "Tristan" in the "New Statesman" of April 27th, "Leslie Hurry's sets don't 'belong' to Tristan as his exquisite "A Village Romeo" sets belong to Delius' opera." However, one of our members who knew Delius has criticised the staging in the last scene.

One of our committee members has suggested that we have an annual dinner. Of course we mustn't forget Delius the epicure, though we must not interpret this too broadly, as, regarding certain aspects of Delius' life, accounts differ.

Mr. Fenby has spoken of Delius' fastidious nature. Others, such as Cecil Gray, have not only remarked on Delius' severity, but have even said that in his house at Grez Delius was a tyrant. However, as one of our members has remarked,

Delius was never short of friends. Bartok, for example, judging by his letters to Delius, had a very high opinion of Delius as a person.

In a recent article Mr. Simmons has remarked how Mahler and Berg were very interested in Delius' music. In the next newsletter I shall quote from Mr. Simmons' article.

Several times in our newsletters we have mentioned Delius in relation to Debussy. Not only were they contemporary, but the terms 'Impressionist' and 'Late-Romantic' have been used in reference to both. Delius thought highly of "L'Après-midi d'un Faune" and "Pelleas" for example, attracted by Debussy's harmony and recognising a kindred spirit. When we remarked in our previous newsletter that one might argue that Delius was "more advanced" than Debussy, we deliberately underlined the word "might" for, in the nature of the case, such statements as we made could only be general or average, which, of course, is always relative to individual variation, and, in fact, musicologists nowadays regard Debussy, as an individual, to be more advanced and more important historically than Delius. For example, André Hodeir calls his excellent book on modern music "Since Debussy". (An excellent book in the sense that, whether one likes modern music or agrees with Mr. Hodeir or not, it is systematic. For a musicologist, Mr. Hodeir writes from the point of view of an unusually carefully thought-out general position).

Deryck Cooke in his broadcasts on Delius early this year said: "In truth, Debussy and Delius shared a common attitude ..... it comprised faith in pure inspiration, arising largely from nature; insistence on absolute freedom to evolve a spontaneous style, based on a strongly personal harmonic palette, for expressing a sensuous hedonistic worship of beauty; hatred of all professionalism ..... How then could Debussy be a seminal force until today (even through misunderstanding) while Delius is being rejected? The explanation stems from the two composers' different personalities. Delius was essentially late-romantic in his introverted concern with the 'soul': rational atheist though he was, his hedonism was unconsciously undermined by his awareness of the tragedy of transience, and by the lingering Christian hunger for eternity, which he directed towards the mysterious infinitude of nature. And so, naturally, the unique, almost entirely fluid style which he evolved to express his nostalgia can have no significance for the composers of the concrete-steel-glass structures of today ..... But Debussy, despite his romantic self-absorption, was more modern in his indifference to the problem of man's spiritual exile: directing his hedonism purely imaginatively towards nature as a fascinating physical phenomenon.... He was seeking, he said, "an effect of reality, which some fools call impressionism". His music, offering a detached picture of the world as he saw it, consists, like the world, not only of fluid impressions, but of hard edges, vivid colours and patterns, pungent incompatibilities; thus it is more modern than Delius, containing many new rhythmic, textural and harmonic devices of an extrovert kind which appeal to twentieth-century taste from a purely formal point of view. This is not to deny what is really most important about Debussy - his peculiarly intangible poetry, .... The amusing thing is that one of the most 'ingenious' techniques of our intellectual age - the method of functional analysis - is a heaven-sent weapon for defending Delius, no less than Debussy, from charges of formlessness. What both composers railed against, of course, was the traditional formal equipment of fugue and sonata; and since, until recently, no other analytical tool existed than the identification of subjects, answers, and counter-subjects, or of first and second subjects in the tonic and related keys, there was no way of coming to grips with either composer's music at all. But the precision instrument of functional analysis, tracing the growth of each new idea out of the preceding one, however fluid the material and overall shape, allows us to find out just how the spontaneous music of 'pure creators' functions as freely evolving form. Rudolph Reti recently used this tool to dismantle Debussy's "La Cathédrale Engloutie", and found the machinery in perfect working order; applied in a more subtle way it should enable us to investigate the organism of Delius's more fragile flowers....."

This statement, of the need for a book on Delius in which the method of functional analysis is used, seems to be one of the most important remarks made by anyone in this Centenary Year. It indicates a real gap to be filled. Of course, analysis cannot replace the actual experience of listening, but they are not sharply separated and to the extent that one discusses the music, or acts as critic, functional analysis is highly relevant.

This month's "Musical Times" states that "Next month in the first of two exiting articles Deryck Cooke will present some facts about the music (Delius)." In the April issue of "Opera" D.C. writes on "Delius' Operatic Masterpiece." In his broadcast D.C. talked of Delius' "rich Wagnerian harmonic texture". Many critics have referred to influences of Wagner, Grieg and Strauss, and one can accept this in the sense that Delius was conditioned, like everyone, by his time. To the present writer there seems to be sometimes a trace of MacDowell in Delius, e.g. in "Songs of Farewell" - or would you say that I'm talking nonsense? The May "Musical Times" contains an article by Andrew Porter on the Delius Centenary Festival. In the course of this article, in which he talks of the strength of "Songs of Farewell", raising the question of the extent to which this strength was determined by Mr. Fenby's expert musicianship, and writing with enthusiasm about various Delius works, Mr. Porter remarks "It is no reflection on Delius that his idiom has been debased in a thousand film scores; but it does mean that the edge of our response can be blunted." Like many others, once again Mr. Porter remarks that Delius had a narrow emotional range.

One can accept that Delius' emotional range is narrow compared with other, different emotions, yet on the other hand in as much as Delius was "concerned with the beauty of nature and its transience" his emotional range is very wide in the sense that all emotions have transitoriness in common. Just as, for a primitive man there is such a thing as eternal love, eternal because it is momentary, but he does not know that, not being consciously aware, in the way that modern man is, of change, of the passing of time; yet on the other hand modern man knows that the transience of his loves is common to everything in the Universe. Mr. Porter wrote of Delius as "an adult dreaming in childhood's garden."

In the "Daily Telegraph" of May 5th, there is an article by David Mitchell, on Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" and Schönberg's "Erwartung", in which he is concerned with the 'Unconscious mind' in musical composition. However, one gets the impression that, in contrast with the relatively integrated outlook of Hodeir, for Mr. Mitchell an 'Unconscious mind' is some mysterious thing-in-itself and that he would regard the contrast between 'conscious mind' and 'unconscious mind' as quite distinct from the contrast implicit in Porters "childhood's garden" remark, or the contrast of Wilfrid Mellers' "with him (Delius) longing for Eden - for a return to individual consciousness...." and Delius' growing up in an industrial society, or Burnett James' "conflict" of the "pagan" who "hated the organised religion of the English middle classes into which he was born: the Bourgeois Institutionalism of Victorian Bradford" - and endless other examples.

In the May 'Musical Times' there is a review of the recent Beecham L.P.'s and the May "Musical Events" contains a review of the piano and violin concertos L.P. The May 'Music and Musicians' contains an article 'Delius Vindicated', and a number of photos of the S.W. 'Village Romeo' production. In an article in the May "Musical Opinion" on this work the writer says "The opera had the warmest possible welcome from a crowded first night audience on April 10th - warm enough even to suggest that it could well be revived from time to time in future seasons and not treated merely as a pièce d'occasion. In the April "Musical Opinion" Dr. John W. Klein gave a searching appraisal of the work.

On May 16th and 22nd Delius songs and piano pieces are featured in the Redcliffe Festival of British Music at Leighton House, 12 Holland Park.

We are pleased to announce that Mr. Stafford of Lotus, Hardwick Close, Oxshott, Surrey, who wrote to us recently for advice, has become a member.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd) ROLAND GIBSON