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DELIUS, A GREAT COMPOSER.

"The Listener" of September 1st of this year contained an article by Deryck Cooke: "Delius, a great composer". This article, of course, was intended as a listener's introduction to the 'Prom' performance of 'A Man of Life' on September 8th, broadcast in the Third Programme. In Mr. Cooke we have a splendid champion in the cause of Delius's music and his magnificently fought campaign against the Philistines at the time of the Centenary will be remembered with gratitude. The article under consideration focusses attention on the central issues of the Delius problem and disposes of certain prejudices with characteristic penetration. I hope Mr. Cooke will not mind if I select short quotations and discuss them in detail, in the hope that in putting a personal point of view I might provoke others to put their thoughts and arguments in writing: this could form a very interesting and informative future issue.

The passage in question is as follows: "Delius may yet be acknowledged as what he is - a great composer whose limited but intense vision, conveyed by a technique which sometimes falters in deploying its severely restricted means of expression, makes his greatness apparent to a certain type of music-lover only".

One plain enough implication is that Delius is a composer for the few - "a certain type of music-lover only" - although Mr. Cooke goes on to say that "the enthusiastic reception of "Requiem", however, may indicate that this type of music-lover is more prevalent than has hitherto been thought, provided that everyone has a chance to hear the music, and that all misunderstandings are swept away". What differentiates the composer for the few from the "supreme masters" who "stand above the vagaries of personal taste"? Mr. Cooke says there are "two fundamental shortcomings - which are not inconsistent with greatness - limitation of range and sporadic technical weakness".

The instance given of a "supreme master" is Beethoven, a valuation which is not due to "any absolute standard, but only to a vast majority opinion". One is therefore brought up against the notion that the greatest composers have a universality (monstrous word!) of utterance which enables them to speak to the vast majority whereas those of the second rank remain 'caviar to the general'. In the middle of the Twentieth Century we are well able to speak of universality, since we have a musical lingua franca - that of pop-music - which exerts its appeal from Liverpool to Lima. The universal musicians of today are the Beatles (now, alas, exploded like poor Bunbury) and, appropriately enough, the Rolling Stones.

There is also the lingua franca of the young 'serious' composer. Using the music of Webern as a springboard, developments in technique since the last world war have led to a generally accepted anonymous type of composition which is being poured out at an appalling rate all over the world. Such music has no identity and no future; it dies as quickly as the may-fly and it would be perverse to suggest that Mr. Cooke was referring to this type of universality. However, if the two most obvious examples of the universal composer are taken - Bach and Beethoven - it can be seen that they both had the advantage of a generally accepted musical idiom in which to write. Both wrote passages which shocked and puzzled their contemporaries but their innovations remained within the boundaries of the comprehensible, Bach even becoming "old fashioned" before he died.

It is to be assumed that these two "supreme masters" would exemplify the opposite of the defects of the "disputably great composers" or, in other words, they would have a wide, not a limited range and their music would be comparatively free of "sporadic technical weakness". To take Bach first, his music undoubtedly has a very wide appeal, and because of the strong motor rhythms in late Baroque style it can be 'dished up' (as Percy Grainger would have said) in all sorts of jazz-style guises, such as the amusing - but eventually boring - arrangements of the Swingle Singers. The type of subject considered suitable for musical treatment in Bach's day was strictly limited but even so he did not choose to write for the stage, for example, and his music falls within the categories considered suitable for court and church use, as demanded by his professional appointments.

In Beethoven too, the subject matter is limited, but the limitation has been personally chosen by the composer, and here we come to the crux of the matter. With the onset of Romanticism the composer found himself no longer a servant supplying a need, but a free artist, a situation at once exhilarating and terrifying. To step into the unknown requires great courage, a quality Beethoven possessed to an exceptional degree. Throughout his life he resolutely kept to his appointed path and excluded from it all extraneous considerations and thus his work forms a homogeneous whole. In range and variety of subject, however, he is surpassed by Haydn, Mozart and Schubert, yet these are not cited by Mr. Cooke as being "indisputably great". Again, Beethoven is prone to "sporadic technical weakness" - sometimes his ideas seem to be beyond the capacity of instruments and artists - and he is also capable of disconcerting his admirers with compositions such as "The Battle of Vittoria". The disparity between ideas and expression is, for the Romantic artist, a crucial problem that he must continually attempt to solve, and failures on the way are inevitable.

Having obtained his freedom, the composer found himself in an unchartered country and with little to guide him. The other arts - particularly literature and painting - gave some support, but the accepted notions of musical force and content had lost their validity. Composition became an immense struggle and the composer a hero who overcame doubt and despair - and the critics - as in Strauss' 'Ein Heldenleben'. Now that musical language was in such a state of flux, the problems involved in the production of a work of art were immeasurably greater, and consequent failure all the more to be expected; this was particularly the case in countries that did not possess the unbroken tradition of musical supremacy of Germany and Italy.

By the end of the nineteenth century the situation had become so acute that many of the important composers were setting out to recreate the language of music in a way that might prove to be valid for themselves and perhaps for no-one else. Scriabin and Bartok seem to exemplify this, and now that the younger generation has taken all it can from Schoenberg, he appears to be left in an equally isolated position. So many Romantic composers trod the Beethoven path of singleminded dedication and I would say that "limitation of range" and "sporadic technical weakness" was common to them all - those "defects" arise from the artist's predicament.

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Mahler illustrates the nature of the problem very clearly. There must be few composers who had a finer technical grasp than he, yet he has his failures and his range is considerably more restricted than that of Delius.

Lack of range is a criticism constantly used to belabour Delius, and of course his music concentrates on certain fundamental ideas, "transience" being one of these. However, I find that even composers praised for their variety - for example Britten and Stravinsky - show a similar concentration in a few basic attitudes. Does one ever hear Britten criticised for his preoccupation with "loss of innocence" for example? In fact, there is nothing particularly admirable about the possession of a wide range or an infallible technique; many such composers are little more than history - book figures now.

There will always be certain persons for whom Delius remains a blind spot. This is inevitable with any artist; Vaughan Williams' dislike of Beethoven and Britten's dislike of Brahms are cases in point. I do not think it right, however, to assume that Delius can only be appreciated by a small minority. On what foundation is this assertion made? Bruckner and Mahler would have been considered very much a minority taste thirty years ago and now their music has taken its rightful place in the regular repertoire.

How long it will be before Delius is accepted on the same scale it is impossible to guess but his music fully merits such a position. I do not think that it helps matters to regard Delius as a special case. The search for objective standards against which the value of a work of art may be judged is the critics' dream but I think it is justifiable to regard this dream as irrelevant (and impossible). We are not music's auctioneers. We know how important this music is to us, and what it means to us it can mean to others.

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LISTENING TO DELIUS . By JULIAN BELL.

I am very grateful to Mr. Ian Walker for drawing my attention to this poem, one of a collection entitled "Winter Movement". It is reprinted here by kind permission of Professor Quentin Bell and the publishers, Messrs. Chatto and Windus Ltd.

An old man in an orchard
Gathars the kathern pears:
The curling blue of bonfire smoke,
A gypsy in a tattered cloak,
One blossom fell,
A chiming bell,
And strewed with white your braided hairs.

Then rising like a flying bird
Comes music of a sunset cloud,
In whose triumphal march is heard
Now soft, now loud,
The chiming of sky climbing ice,
Thin and watery clear,
Sun-shaft lit trickle of a wood deep spring:
The round drops sing
Their splashing song, now far, now near,
The beeches in tall colonnade
Whisper above the water shade,
And then the high wind marches out of the west
And flocks to streaming clouds along,
The clamour of the boughs down prest
Sweeps roaring through the undersong.
The gilded organs of the sky,
The moonlight's silver violin,
An arching aria, shrill and high,
Cold drift-wide starlit music thin.
Coiling and gently rippling
The midnight river flows,
The sleeping notes of Delius' dream
Past scented hayfields, down the stream,
With hedges of blue lavender,
Fall'n petals of a Danask rose
The curve of a blue swallow's wing,
Crescent as the music grows
Mounting to the sweeping pace
Of Atlanta from her race,
Whose order'd drap'ry flows,
Low in a latter victory
Of autumn's ripened apples red
She comes, the flung fruit gathered,
On Venus' altar here to lay
The trophies of Diana's day.

No prizes are offered for guessing which pieces inspired this poem. "North Country Sketches" and "The Song of the High Hills" seem to be suggested, and perhaps "Summer Night on the River". "Winter Movement" was published in 1930. I wonder if Delius knew of this charming tribute to his art?

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THE QUESTIONNAIRE - III

The remainder of the Questionnaire was an invitation to members to tell us how they wanted their Society to function :-

"Would you like to make any general comments about the Society, especially any suggestions you would like to see incorporated into our future planning"?

Members exerted admirable self-control in answering this question. The Committee is very grateful for your appreciative comments and constructive criticism alike. With the A.G.M. approaching I thought it would be helpful to get out members ideas under several main headings for each reference :-

1. Recording

A complete discography was requested and this is undoubtedly very necessary. The compilation of such a document is a difficult task and we are fortunate in having a member who engaged in this time consuming research. (The Delius Trust have a discography in preparation I believe, but I have no news as to the progress they have made with it). We are very grateful to Mr. Walker for his work.

Another member suggested a guide to the available recordings of Delius' music - a lamentably short list I should imagine - and there were requests for notification of future recordings (we do this at present where possible), and also deletions. This latter point is an important one as so many records of Delius are now unobtainable and it is impossible to predict the life of a new recording.

Arising from this, there was a request for reviews of records (I hope to make a feature of this in future newsletters) and comparisons of recorded performances. There is little likelihood of numbers of records from which to chose a 'Best Buy' on the lines of the Consumer Association, although there are at present three recordings available of "The Walk to the Paradise Garden". Would that there were three recordings of "A Village Romeo and Juliet"!

As one member put it (and I fully agree with him) "I still think it utterly deplorable that except for the Closing Scene of 'Kounga there is no Delius Opera on record". I should imagine that even the Kounga excerpts deleted by now, a circumstance that would have provoked some characteristically tart comments from Sir Thomas Beecham.

It has been suggested that the Society should have a library of recorded performances - particularly those of outstanding merit - and that these should be made available to members. The problems here are considerable - the staff, storage space and finance necessary would make disproportionate inroads on our resources. Nothing is impossible, but we really need to go into the matter in greater detail than has been possible so far.

A similar idea is that members could take duplicates from a central library of tapes, and I think it possible that those possessing rare performances might lend their tapes for duplication; those who are interested may care to write in about it to the Secretary or myself.

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Specific requests for recordings include the following :-

1. All Delius' chamber works, especially the Quartet.
2. A record album of all Delius' works so far unrecorded (this would be a vast project), and
3. Ask EMI to re-issue "A Village Romeo and Juliet" in their historical series (which includes the Furtwangler "Tristan" and Beecham's "Seraglio").

The first of these suggestions I commend to the Trust: if the amount of finance available at present is rather limited, here surely is a project which all members would welcome and which should not cause an undue strain on the Trust's resources. The many excellent chamber issues subsidised by the John Ireland Society should show how well this sort of thing can be done, and often on bargain-priced recordings.

The final request is almost the unanimous opinion of the Society, or so I believe. New productions of this opera seem so unlikely to materialise, and with all the defects of this recording, 'a bird in the hand' etc. Every member would like an ideal recording, but that there should be no recording available at all is a situation up with which we will not put.

2. Scores.

A list of scores now obtainable is requested by one member. Such a list would be of great value but it might not be possible to quote prices. Music publishers seem to increase their prices every few months; invariably when I place an order I find that I have to pay more than the amounts quoted in the catalogues. The member who asked us to request Boosey & Hawes to publish more Delius scores definitely over-estimated our powers of persuasion; it would be better to approach the Trust in the first place.

This leads to a query from another member as to the fate of Sir Thomas Beecham's scores and parts. If I remember correctly the cover to Beecham's "Delius" stated that Sir Thomas's edited scores were in course of publication, but nothing of the kind has been printed since. At present we have the Piano Concerto, 'Sea Drift' and "Appalachia" also "The Walk to the Paradise Garden" - and that is all. (For some strange reason the miniature scores of 'Sea Drift' and 'Appalachia' are not printed from the Beecham edition).

3. Books

A complete bibliography has been requested by several members; another asks for a complete list of all Delius' compositions. In fact this task has been put in hand by the Trust and may already be completed. Our member, Mr. Ernest Chapman, who is very experienced in these matters, has been in charge of the work and we are all indebted to him for undertaking it. We were also asked to circularise a book list and in this connection I should welcome particulars any members may have of books which have a bearing on Delius' life and work and which may be unknown to many of us.

We have also been asked for details of current articles in periodicals - we do endeavour to give this information as and when new articles appear - and for a list of first performances. This last I hope will be included in the Trust's bibliography and catalogue when it appears.

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Finally in this section there is a request for a new book on Delius' music. This is certainly needed very badly. None of the studies so far published attempt more than a superficial survey of the works and even as biographies they have been disappointing. What we need is a biography as detailed and expertly written as Ernest Newman's fine book on Hugo Wolf and which also surveys the artistic environment in which Delius lived with the penetration shown in Edward Lockspaiser's recent two-volume study of Debussy. There should then be a volume devoted entirely to the music. A member has suggested Deryck Cooke as the ideal person to approach, and (in spite of my critical remarks earlier in the newsletter), I completely agree with this. If Mr. Cooke could be persuaded to do it, we would have the work in the best possible hands.

Delius does indeed deserve the attention of our best scholars. I do not deny that there are good points in the Heseltine and Beecham biographies but they are too subjective in approach and they contain some extraordinary judgments on the music which are best forgotten as quickly as possible. Professor Hutchings book, on the other hand, is too brief to do the subject justice. Without any doubt Mr. Fenby's book brings us nearer to the man and to his work than anything written so far.

I hope to finish my survey of the Questionnaire in the next newsletter.

NEW MEMBERS.

Mr. & Mrs. Ronald G. Moore, 35, Fitzgerald Avenue, London, S.W. 14.	Mr. & Mrs. Moore were introduced to us by Mr. Aprahamian. (Mr. Moore is a member of the L.S.O.)
David Kershaw, Esq., King's College, Cambridge.	Introduced to the Society by our member, Mr. Christopher Palmer.
Miss E.M. Acraman, 24a, Northfalls Road, Canvey Island, Essex.	As a result of our advert. in the programme for the Prom. performance of the Mass of Life. (Miss Acraman is aged 13).
A. T. Granger, Esq., Beaumont House, Edgewell, Prudhoe on Tyne, Northumberland.	From our advertisement in the November "Gramophone" (written by our member, Mr. Parfitt)
B. Hammerton, Esq., 36, Regents Park Road, Millbrook, Southampton.	Mr. Hammerton enquired about membership, and bought his first Delius recordings after reading Mr. Fenby's re-issued book.
R. D. Marchent, Esq., 5, Ferndale Road, Gillingham, Kent.	Introduced to the Society by Mr. Peter French.
E. E. Buckhalter, Esq., 21, Marlowe Court, Lymer Avenue, Dulwich Wood Park, London, S.E. 19.	From our advertisement in The Gramophone.
D.C. Cox, Esq., British Transport Staff College, Hook Heath Road, Woking, Surrey.	Introduced to the Society by our Committee member, Mr. Rodney Meadows.

Brian Horsfall, Esq.,
Music Critic,
Telegraph & Argus,
Hallings, Bradford 1.

Introduced to the Society by our
member, Mr. J.Chaffer.

Mrs. Joan M. Roberts,
14, Richards Avenue,
Lincoln.

From our advertisement in The
Gramophone.

John G. Hall, Esq.,
Orchard Cottage,
King's Worthy,
Winchester, Hants.

Through our advertisement in
The Gramophone.

Leslie Bond, Esq.,
"Pramanok"
12, Kingsmead Avenue,
Worcester Park, Surrey.

From our advertisement (arranged by
our member, Miss Dabbs) in programme
for Albert Hall concert on 1st December.

J. G. Sparks, Esq.,
3, Highfield Road,
Lindfield, N.S.W.
Australia.

Through our advertisement in
The Gramophone (originally enquired
June 1966)

Richard T. Foose, Esq.
3416, Texas Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20020,
U.S.A.

Through our advertisement in
The Gramophone.

David Driver, Esq.,
24, Guttholme Road,
Ashgate,
Chesterfield, Derbyshire.

Through our advertisement in
The Gramophone (originally enquired in
April 1966).

John White.

EDITOR.