

DELIUS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

EDITORIAL -

Newsletter No. 19

It will be recalled that the last newsletter began with the following sentence: 'One of the most exciting prospects of the new year is the release of new recordings; the first recording of the 'Requiem' and fresh performances of 'Songs of Sunset' and 'An Arabesque'. By using the word 'prospects' I had hoped to convey that although these recordings were not as yet in existence - and, indeed, might never appear at all - I looked forward to the possibility that they might be issued during the forthcoming year.

Under the impression that these recordings were already available, members contacted the Delius Trust for particulars, and in consequence I have been held responsible for misleading the membership in this matter. For this I sincerely apologise. To avoid any future repetition of this incident, I must ask all members with a query, no matter what its nature, to refer the question to the Secretary, or to the appropriate member of the Committee of the Society, as follows:-

Miss Palmley	General matters.
Miss Todd	Finance.
Mr. Meadows	Recordings.
Mr. Barnard	Radio broadcasts.
Mr. Walker	Programme Secretary.
Mr. White	Scores.

The A.G.M. Dinner

There have been a number of complaints about the A.G.M. Dinner - not about the social event which was, as always, a success, but about the meal, which was not. I heartily agree with those who complained; in my opinion the food was - but I must not say it, for whom might I offend? But was this the establishment that attracted such men as Oscar Wilde and Augustus John? Were they ever served mutton chops and tasteless vegetables? - I beg your pardon: 'Carre d'Agneau roti au Romarin, Haricots verts au Beurre et Pommes nouvelles'! It is truly astonishing how much better everything sounds in another language; no wonder they prefer opera in the original at Glyndebourne. This year we even have 'Eugene Onegin' sung in Russian by a truly international cast - Elizabeth Soderstrom, Wieslaw Ochman, Kim Borg, Hugues Cuenod, Pamela Bowden - all with impeccable Russian pronunciation and comprehension of course. It is impossible to guess whether Tchaikovsky would have smiled or winced at the result.

The advantage of the original language is that on the one hand one can appear to be an infallible linguist (understanding mangled French, etc.) whilst on the other, one is not embarrassed by the nonsense that is being sung. How else could an audience stand all those pages of secco recitative, punctuated by harpsichord plinks and plonks? These passages seem to worry every music director, for they invariably rush the cast through them - it never occurs to anyone that the characters should declaim at different speeds and with differing style, according to the character - and the result is a high-pitched gabble that becomes unendurable before long.

In spite of this, I think that all songs should be sung in the original language. A true lieder-singer will have made a deep study of the text and will appreciate the beauties of the language, and the audience should have, printed in the programme, parallel texts in the correct language and in translation. Certainly, something should be done to clear up the indescribable muddle in which we find the texts of the Delius songs: French songs printed with German translations only; Danish songs (composed to a German text) and printed without either, so that one cannot check whether the printed English version approximates to the true meaning or not. Is there no-one with a sufficient concern for the future of these beautiful songs to want to take the matter up and have it rectified?

However: to return to food. One can imagine - or to be truthful, one can't - what Delius, that most fastidious of men, would have thought of the 'Carre d'Agneau... etc.' He would have much preferred the cabmen's shelters

in which Ernest Dowson used to eat, I imagine, to our opulent surroundings - the food would be the important thing.

The Committee would be extremely grateful if members would send in alternative suggestions so that these can be investigated prior to the next A.G.M. We should also like to know the cost members consider appropriate to the occasion; it will be remembered that this year the charge was 32/6d. per person, plus 10% service charge.

The Delius Society Chamber Concert - 22nd March, 1968.

This informal concert was much enjoyed and it has been suggested that, in view of the rarity of some of the pieces performed, it might be possible to have these put on record for the benefit of members. Quite how this would be done, whether on disc or tape, is a matter for conjecture at the moment, although the Committee have spent some considerable time discussing the idea. The artists are certainly willing to play and sing again, and the aim would be to produce a recording of high standard.

However, there is little point in carrying the matter further until we know whether members are interested in the idea, and if so, whether they would be prepared to meet the costs involved. How much would they want to pay for a recording and would they prefer a tape to a disc? Are there any other items they would like to see included? Please write to the Secretary with your views on these questions so that we have a sufficient basis upon which to proceed, or to shelve the idea, according to the response.

I list below the music we had considered including in this venture:-

Songs: Cynara (Dowson)
Chanson d'Automne (Verlaine)
Glyn Davenport (baritone), Alan Rowlands (piano).
The Homeward Journey (Vinje)
The Nightingale has a lyre of gold (Henley)
Shirley Warrington (mezzo-soprano)
Charles Barnard (piano)

Piano Solo:

In a Summer Garden (piano arrangement by Alan Rowlands)
Alan Rowlands (piano)

Piano Duet:

A Song before Sunrise } arr. Philip
Winter Landscape (North Country Sketches) } Heseltine.
Alan Rowlands }
Charles Barnard } (piano)

Your comments, whether for or against, will be carefully considered by the Committee.

MR. BRITTEN, HIS FESTIVAL AND MR. DELIUS.

Many members will have been fortunate enough to hear the inaugural concert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank, on Thursday 2nd March 1967 (it was broadcast). The conductor was Benjamin Britten, and in the course of a very varied programme he gave a most sensitive and individual performance of 'On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring'. The members of the Committee were enthusiastic over Mr. Britten's interpretation and we were delighted when Charles Barnard told us that he had written on our behalf, expressing our pleasure in, and gratitude for, the performance. We were very happy to receive this charming reply:-

THE RED HOUSE, ALDEBURGH, SUFFOLK.

15th March, 1967.

Dear Mr. Barnard,

Thank you for your kind letter on behalf of the Delius Society

Committee. I was delighted that you approved of my recent conducting of the work of this composer.

It may interest you to know that I hope to include another work of Delius' (Summer Night on the River) at the opening of our new Aldeburgh Festival concert hall this June.

There are many of the works of this composer that I admire greatly.

Yours sincerely,

Benjamin Britten.

'Summer Night on the River' was duly given in the opening concert at The Maltings, Snape, on June 4th. If anything, this performance was even more impressive, nor did Mr. Britten's tribute to Delius finish there. On the 8th June, after a performance at the Guildhall, Cambridge, the previous day, the Cambridge University Musical Society Chorus and Orchestra conducted by David Willcocks, with John Shirley-Quirk (bass-baritone), gave 'Sea Drift' at The Maltings and received the plaudits of the critics.

One would have thought that these significant and important events were bound to make their mark on what would now be called the British musical 'scene'. In the world of amateur and semi-amateur music making there are indeed signs of an awakening interest (Appalachia and Songs of Farewell at Dorking; Fenimore and Gerda at Fulham; Paris at Birmingham - strange juxtaposition!) but Delius has completely dropped out of the London professional concert world.

Of course, we had 'Appalachia' at the 'Proms' (Mr. Glock resolutely remembers us and for this we must be grateful) and then we were given the long awaited 'Requiem' in a Royal Choral Society concert in February. These were the only two professional concerts to include a work of Delius that I can recall during the whole of the past year, and it is worth noting that neither was a part of a concert series given by one of the 'big five' London orchestras. By this I mean that the 'Proms' are entirely separate from the main London concert season and the R.C.S. plan and arrange their concerts themselves, even though they invariably ask one of our principal orchestras to take part. Evidently, Delius is not to be allowed into the Royal Festival Hall.

None of us can afford to be complacent about this situation. The initiative shown by Mr. Britten must be followed up and I would ask members, whenever they see a concert prospectus for a forthcoming season from which Delius has been omitted, to write and complain about it and in no uncertain terms! Mr. Britten has seen to it that his regard for Delius' art has been put to practical purpose and we should do likewise: our commitment to Delius demands it and we should not exact others to carry our responsibilities.

Postscript: The closing concert of the 1968 Aldeburgh Festival included a performance of 'On hearing the first cuckoo in Spring' by the English Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Britten.

After this homily (tedious moralising discourse - Oxford Dictionary) there is one other matter concerning Mr. Britten that I should like to mention. At a concert including his 'Spring Symphony', he conducted also a work by Frank Bridge, a rhapsody for orchestra called 'Enter Spring'. Of this 'The Times' said, "Mr. Britten...paid homage to his unjustly-neglected master, Frank Bridge, with a loving performance of 'Enter Spring', (a work) of spacious proportions and teeming nature imagery. The opening section of its ternary form seemed over long, but the sometimes Scriabinesque harmonic and textural invention was unpredictably fascinating. In the rapture of its central episode, a static hypnotic Delian dream without the nostalgia, there was no mistaking the originality of conception."

"There's richness for you!" as Mr. Squeers said. All I want to say is that it is a marvellous piece and should be recorded. The old cliché about nostalgia was to be expected, I suppose. It stems from a complete

misunderstanding of Delius' philosophy of life and of the state of mind conveyed by the music. One cannot but deplore such crude generalisations.

MIDLANDS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

The following report of the first two meetings of the Midlands Branch 1967/8 season has been contributed by Mr. Peter Thorp:-

The first meeting of the season was held at the beginning of November at Dick Kitching's home, when Dick himself gave us a talk on Gustav Holst, an important contemporary of Delius. Having started with Holst's most familiar piece - "Mars" - we proceeded to hear a most interestingly presented collection of details about Holst's life, back-ground, compositions and views, which were interspersed with extracts from some of his lesser known works:- "Hymn to Dawn", "Savitri", "St. Pauls Suite", "Terzetto", "Hammersmith", "Brook Green Suite", and "Egdon Heath". It was especially interesting to hear about his views and methods of composition compared and contrasted with those of Delius.

For the second meeting held later in the year we were guests of Jerry and Jenny Rowe, who entertained us very well. The highlight of the evening was a film show (both cine and slides) and talk given by Charles Barnard, to whom we were very grateful for making the journey from London. The subject was the journey made by Mr. and Mrs. Fenby and members of the Committee to Grez sur Loing to revisit the former home of Delius. The effect of some of the slides was to evoke several of Delius' descriptive pieces, especially the scenes of the river and surrounding trees. Apart from the natural interest in the house and its setting it was especially interesting for us to see in glorious wide screen and colour the various members of the Committee who were previously just names at the bottom of newsletters. It made us all feel that we should try and make the effort to attend the next Annual General Meeting and meet them in person!

A report on the third meeting, a visit to Birmingham to hear the Birmingham Philharmonic Orchestra (an amateur body) play 'Paris', has been sent to me by Dick Kitching, Chairman of the Branch. He writes that the announcement of the concert, which was to take place on the 24th March, 'prompted the Midlands Branch to rise from their post-Christmas torpor and arrange an outing.'

Members from Nottingham, Derby and Loughborough went, a total of eight. Shirley Clover met a "Road Up" sign in Derby which caused her to lose her sense of direction with the result that she apparently went part of the way to Burton-on-Trent before eventually arriving at the pre-arranged rendezvous.

We arrived at Birmingham Town Hall and immediately met fellow member Robert Wright who informed us that it was here that Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' had its first performance.

The hall was, unfortunately, about three-parts empty, but we had splendid seats in the Upper Gallery. The Programme was all Parisian:

Mozart	-	Paris Symphony
Rachmaninov	-	Paganini Rhapsody
Delius	-	Paris
Svendsen	-	Carneval in Paris

It was soon clear that this was no amateur orchestra in the derogatory sense. The woodwind in particular were excellent and the horns were smooth and accurate. The only slight failing was a lack of body in the lower strings.

The performance of the Delius was certainly a success, the conductor, Kenneth Page, having an obvious sympathy with the music. The opening was sensitively played, and the vigorous passages were played with conviction. There was some "blare" from the trombones at times, but this was probably due as much to Delius as the performers. At one point there was a lack of liason between the glockenspiel and the strings, but the few minor blemishes did not spoil what was an excellent performance. It was a pity that such a performance did not meet with more appreciation from the audience who supplied some very lukewarm applause to this item. This contrasted strongly with the reception given to the Svendsen (a delightful, if light, piece) which was well received.

The Society members from the Midlands had an opportunity for a get-together in the interval when we adjourned for what Robert Wright described as "the usual deplorable refreshments". Mr. Harold Bates regaled us with an anecdote about a visit to a restaurant when he had been told that toasted teacakes were "out of season", and Mrs. Bates (who started back to the hall ahead of the rest) carried out an unscheduled inspection of the Lower Circle before finding us seated in the Upper Circle.

Altogether, a most enjoyable outing which we must repeat if ever any other Delius is performed in these parts.'

The only press cutting I have seen (Birmingham Post, 25.3.'68) rather reflects the poor reception given to 'Paris' by being somewhat non-committal in tone:-

"The work contains much delicate orchestration, more evocative and successful than the occasional full orchestral episodes. The performance was faithful and much of the solo work of a high standard.

Kenneth Page conducted the entire programme from memory and with great energy, a feat to which the orchestra responded with equal enthusiasm."

Mr. Phillip Suffolk, who also attended the concert, had this to add:-

'The orchestra produced a most agreeable sound in the over-resonant hall, of which only the string playing was a little less than perfect, though the orchestra's leader, Leslie Bowron, managed his part in the Delius with much beauty. Surprisingly, only one harp was used; the score calls for two and I don't believe they play the same notes as each other, so perhaps this was the most important omission.

The brass playing was exemplary, particularly the horn playing; the trombones also produced a noble sound apart from one important slip.'

Exemplary horn playing! - I can think of famous, and complacent, orchestras whose horn playing is an embarrassment; I wish they would learn from these fine Birmingham players. Mr. Suffolk is right about the harps; I hope to comment on this in a future Newsletter.

THE VIOLIN CONCERTO

To move from 'Paris' to the Violin Concerto is to move into an entirely different world; a sufficient proof, I would think, of the great range to be found in Delius' art. Our gramophone critic, Mr. Lyndon Jenkins, has been examining the interpretations of some very distinguished exponents of the Concerto:-

'I have been comparing the recordings of the Violin Concerto made by Albert Sammons with the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under "Dr." Malcolm Sargent, and by Jean Pougnet with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham.

Both were originally sets of 78's made, I believe, within a few years of each other - the Pougnet in 1946, the Sammons earlier. We now have (or had) the benefit of the Pougnet version on a long-playing record, while the three Sammons discs (Columbia DX1160/2) are a rarity. Sammons was, of course, the dedicatee of the Concerto and gave it its first performance in 1919 with Sir Adrian Boult. I should imagine he was responsible for most of the performances up to the 1939 war, and he certainly played it at the 1929 Delius Festival.

I know very little about Albert Sammons, though it is generally acknowledged that he was technically extremely accomplished and the possessor of a very beautiful tone in solo work. Certainly the sound of his violin is lovely on these records of the Concerto, and in many passages his "line" is splendid. He takes the first section of the Concerto (i.e. up to No. 12) quite steadily, only excepting the six-bar passage marked "Rather Quicker" (beginning one bar after 5) which he plays considerably more quickly. This has always struck me as not too happy an idea since the passage is so very short. While on these six bars, the fifth and sixth have important work for 'cellos and basses, of which I always feel more should be made in performance -

and I don't mean simply because they are marked "forte". The orchestra in these first pages does not come through very well, and a lot of important detail which really needs to be heard is not; the opening two bars are disappointingly flabby, even given the slow basic tempo.

The slow section fares better from the orchestral point of view, though the long passage in which all four horns are involved (three bars after 15) goes for little. Sammons adopts a moderately fast basic tempo for the whole of this slow section, although he invests much of it with an improvisatory air which I find totally in keeping with the nature of the music, and his tone is lovely. In the dance-like passage beginning at 32 Sargent's orchestra is not sufficiently pointed, and the rhythm begins to plod in places; among the "contributions" which this conductor makes to the performance I find the sforzando at the beginning of the second bar before 42 quite unnecessary; the more so when so many opportunities elsewhere are missed. Sammons manages the closing pages very beautifully, I think.

The Pougnet performance is notable, of course, for the presence in nearly every bar of Beecham's hand; a splendidly forthright opening with a spring to the rhythm sets the style. Pougnet sounds splendid and the faster basic tempo (than Sammons) gives him no qualms. The whole of this first section sounds better-co-ordinated than the Sammons and the transition to the slow section is far better contrived by Beecham than by Sargent. As regards the slow movement itself (Nos. 12-24), while I admire Sammons' tone I would on the whole go for the Pougnet because of the slightly slower speed, the undeniable beauty of his playing throughout, and the countless felicities in the orchestra. Beecham and the orchestra, at 16, and again at 19, are incomparable. Note the significance too of the horn two bars before 23 and how much more effectively the flutes are handled in the bar before 24. Beecham also "points" the playing in the dance section more successfully. Both conductors agree on abbreviating the silences between the orchestral shouts which precede this section! At the end, beautiful as Sammons' playing is, I find Pougnet more affecting from 40 onwards.

The few textual alterations are not I think all worth chronicling; perhaps the most interesting is the presence of a horn or trombone which on the Sammons records plays a low A throughout what is, according to my Augener score, the only completely unaccompanied bar in the whole work. This is the little cadenza at 20. Followers of the Augener score might also care to examine the woodwind notes in the third bar before 5 in either version.

P.S. I am very grateful to those members who have sent me contributions and have gone to a considerable amount of trouble to keep me in touch with events. I hope it will not seem carping if I ask that, where possible, future articles should be sent in duplicate - otherwise, if the original is lost, so am I! A report, and newspaper cuttings, covering the 'Fennimore and Gerda' production at Fulham (both nights) would be very much appreciated.

John White
(Editor)

19 Maple Avenue,
Maidstone,
Kent.

15.7.68.