

DELIUS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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of the

DELIUS SOCIETY

(President: Eric Fenby, O.B.E.)

Hon. Secretary: Miss Estelle Palmley

Hon. Treasurer: Miss Ann Todd

Editor: John White

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EDITORIAL.

I am most grateful to Mr. Emanuel of the Delius Trust who wrote to me recently on a matter of special significance to all Delians and I quote from his letter of the 2nd August:-

'As you know I am always in very close contact with Jacksonville where I go each year for the Festival and the President of the Delius Association there sent me the programme and notice given out at the concert given by the London Symphony Orchestra at Daytona Beach on the 27th July:-

Notice

"Mrs. Henry Lee Richmond of Jacksonville, the lady who was most active in buying the house and land once lived in by the English composer, the late Frederick Delius, and was instrumental in preserving the house for all time on the campus of Jacksonville University, has just this week passed away.

The London Symphony Orchestra wishes to dedicate this evening's performance of Delius' "Paris" to Mrs. Richmond's memory".

Mr. Emanuel continues:-

'According to another letter which I have received from a prominent member of the Association in Jacksonville, an announcement was also made from the stage prior to the concert, regarding the dedication to Mrs. Richmond. She really founded the Festivals in Jacksonville.'

I am sure that everyone will be sorry at the news of the death of this lady, whose devotion to the music of Delius showed itself in so many practical and admirable ways. We owe a very great debt to her.

The concert consisted of the following pieces besides "Paris":-

Violin Concerto No. 5, in A.	Mozart
Horn Concerto No. 1.	Strauss
La Valse	Ravel

The orchestra was conducted by Andre Previn.

HASSAN AT THE SCALA THEATRE

by John Michael East

"Hassan" by James Elroy Flecker with music by Delius was presented at the Scala Theatre on the 28th/30th March, by the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama. The music was extracted from the Beecham recording (GL5691).

It had never seemed one of the greater Delian pleasures to listen to this recording with little idea of the text the music supported. And with only the 'Introduction and Serenade' available in score (with the 'Introduction' called 'Intermezzo') it tended to stay at the bottom of one's Delian pile. The three star sources of Delian information, the books of Heseltine, Beecham and Fenby, had been found not very helpful as none of these writers had been fortunate enough to see a production of the play.

But Beecham does tell us that in November 1920 "...The prospect of association once more with the theatre restored new life to what had seemed to be a declining state in Frederick of the will to write". It is true, however, that encouraged by Beatrice Harrison he was at this time working on the 'Cello Concerto'. This commission, together with the sale of his treasured Gauguin 'Nevermore' (never mind! We can all now see it at the Courtauld Institute Galleries) did much to relieve the financial anxieties he had at this time.

The first production of the play was postponed owing to an economic crisis, which sounds more familiar than the optimism with which it was stated that it had only been put off until brighter days...and within three years both the brighter days and the first production had duly come.

The score was the production of Frederick's failing health. Jelka corrected the score which he could still just manage to see. She wrote: "I have to help Fred composing as he cannot write the small notes which he dictates to me. Then I had to copy the whole orchestral score here, fifty-two big pages. These were additions to the music for the drama Hassan..."

They were both in London for the final rehearsals of the first production. Eugene Goossens conducted the music. The play opened on the 23rd September 1923 and ran successfully for six months in the West End and in the Provinces. Later there were productions at the Knickerbocker Theatre in New York, and in Darmstadt. And Beecham says: "This aesthetically pleasing and economically welcome event reacted favourably on Frederick both mentally and physically."

At our 1968 production Delius got short shrift. Pre-recorded sound can be kept to the merest background whisper, and so easily faded and extinguished. But there was sufficient care and imagination given to every other aspect of this production for one to be able to take its whole atmosphere straight home to one's gramophone, there to knit vivid impressions into the unfolded sound. For me, this effect was quite marvellous. Magically every note had become alive with meaning. No longer did "Hassan" seem just a few odds and ends of ordinary music. Another side of the imaginative skill of Delius was made apparent. The sounds connected exactly with the Edwardian fascination for the world of princes, slaves, executioners, resourceful beggars and dusky beauties. Doesn't the 'Introduction' just breathe the warmth of the starlit night coming alive after the languor of the too hot day? And, beneath a balcony, what more perfectly evocative than the 'Serenade'? Listen again to the 'Short Interlude' and notice how completely, with the scene in mind (and Delius knew his audience would have the scene in view), in just a few notes he adds the living dimension of sound.

In this production we did not hear the 'Beggars Song' as it was chorally spoken, losing all the excitement and vigour Delius gave to them and their rattling sabres...they're not very beggarly beggars! Similarly the succeeding chorus of women was spoken, utterly missing the beautiful seducing contrast Delius so aptly provided. (And in parenthesis, Delius was by way of dismissing Elgar's music as derived from "Parisfal", but what about these 'Flower maidens'!) 'The Procession of Protracted Death' is a march to torture and execution, and looked and sounded quite frightening: for here again Delius had imagined and written just the sound that was wholly effective, and at the cost of writing music wholly untypical of himself.

With the closing scene 'The Golden Road to Samarkand' the music was allowed to come into its own. The actors on stage joined their voices to the singing on the record to make a grand crescendo and gradual fading as they make their way off to...? We still knew nothing of the promised land of Samarkand. But we did know that the road to it was seen as an escape from this Bagdad world of moral squalor. So there they went, away into the distance, their pots and pans clanking (before this they had always reminded me of Mahler's alpine cow-bells; quite out of place) into the golden haze of the sun and promise of a better future than the sadness of this world, like the fade-out of any best period Hollywood movie, and just as touching.

Now listen to your record again.

DELIUS LETTERS AT SOTHEBY'S

by C.R. Cook

An important entry referring to Delius appeared in the catalogue of the Sotheby sale of the 8th April 1968, the lot in question being part of a series, all of letters to Sir Granville Bantock, sold by his Executors. Contained in the lot were about 48 letters from Delius to Bantock, plus about 19 postcards, 5 letters from Jelka, a card for the burial at Limpsfield and an undated press cutting about Jelka having Delius' recordings played to her when she was dying.

The letters start in 1906 from Pembroke Villas. Most of them are 1907-9 and are about the National Music League, which Delius was very active in organising, with Bantock, Newman, Beecham, Elgar and others. Beecham seems to move in and out of the picture. Obviously Delius liked Bantock, and quite a lot of the cards and letters refer to Delius's attempt to get Bantock to go to the Quatz! Arts Ball of 1908 with him. Bantock didn't, but Delius had a whale of a time. He was immersed in a row with Breitkopf & Hartel about the parts for Brigg Fair, for copying which they charged him, I believe, £7. 8. 0d., of which, after much to-do, Delius recovered £1. 14. 0d.

'...I am just finishing "Brigg Fair" and in 2 days will hand it over to Mr. Kling (who is a charming man) I hope B(reitkopf) and H(artel) will take over my things in future...' (7, Pembroke Villas, Kensington, 16.11.07).

'...Kling wrote me a very nice letter and told me that Breitkopf would publish "Brigg Fair" and give me 300 Marks. It isn't much, but I think I will do it to get Breitkopf's as publishers. Harmonie is too confoundedly slow and unenterprising. Gradually I am getting into my real way of living and no doubt shall do something decent presently...' (Grez, 15.12.07).

'...I want to make a slight alteration in the score of "Brigg Fair": 8 Bars before the 3/2 at the end. I have it only in my head, but I believe a better crescendo could be obtained by giving the Harmony half a bar rest in every bar (here follow 8 bars of music in piano score) something like the above. It could be altered in the rehearsal easy (sic) enough...' (Grez, 1.2.08).

'Since I wrote you last someone sent me the criticism of Newman on "Brigg Fair". Apart from his favourable remarks about the work - which are always pleasant to read - I find the article quite remarkable. He is the only living music critic who gets inside a work. He has enormous musical instinct. I know no one either in France or Germany who can criticise like that...' (Grez, 9.3.08).

There are many references to "Appalachia" and very tantalisingly one letter says he encloses a number of corrections and expression marks for the score. These are not included in the lot.

The letters show that Delius took the most intense interest in all performances of his work, attended all those he could, and discussed them fully

with conductors, and also knew most of the conductors. Schuricht appears in a letter of introduction from Delius to Bantock. Also, new to me, he seems to have known Mahler, and some of the letters mention a project to have a Mahler Choral Symphony lasting one hour done at a National Music League concert. Max Schillings also occurs.

'I have just arrived again in Grez. What a pity you could not come to Munich not only to hear the Mass (of Life) but I wanted so much to introduce you to the most important German composers and conductors. My "Mass" made an enormous impression - in fact much more than I ever expected - the Chorus was superb and the Tanzlied went splendidly...' (Grez, 9.6.08).

'...Schillings would be willing to come over and conduct one of his works at our Festival - I think I could also get Gustav Mahler - the finest conductor in the world - to come and conduct one of his Symphonies - or Choral Symphonies. Ravel I can get at any time...' (Grez, 21.11.08).

'...Mahler, as Conductor, is always a great draw, - he is perfectly wonderful - In the Symphony I proposed that he should conduct there are beautiful things - It is No. 2...' (Grez, 7.1.09).

These letters interest me in relation to Beecham's later stories about Delius being casual about performances and being the worst of all conductors. I doubt these stories very much.

There are a number of letters and postcards about Bantock staying at Grez. There is very little from the later years. Some of the letters contain what the catalogue refers to as 'trenchant criticisms of compositions of other composers':-

'...The day after I went to hear the "Illuminated" Symphony. I don't know what Newman's impression was, but this is mine. I believe Holbrooke to be a considerable humbug and certainly no artist. Apart from the fact that the whole affair smelt of self advertisement, both on the part of Trench and Holbrooke. The collaboration of the magic lantern and the music was an entire failure - for the one drew one's attention away from the other. So one had to choose. Now for the poem and now for the music. The music was certainly not inspired by Trench's poem. Holbrooke might never have read the poem and I am not sure that he did - in every case he has not understood it...He is a musical "commercial traveller" ... (Grez, 28.1.07).

'...I missed you in London very much - would like you to have heard my "Summer Garden". No one understood it, I believe, except a few - I had not given them any analytical notes so the critics had nothing to catch hold of - They want something which sounds like something they have heard before - As Runciman would say - they like an old friend to come smiling towards them - I heard Elgar's Symphony in London. It starts off with a theme out of the Parsifal (sic) Prelude - a little altered - The slow movement is a theme out of Verdi's Requiem - a little altered - The rest is Mendelsohn (sic) and Brahms - thick and without the slightest orchestral charm - gray - and they all shout "Masterwork!"... (Grez, 17.12.08).

'Wood wrote me that he is doing "Sea Drift" at the Birmingham Festival - On the Programme I see they have put it on the 4th day morning at the very end of a 4 hours Concert. Who is responsible for this friendly act? Sea Drift is unknown in Birmingham and requires some mental effort, and ought to be at the end of the first part or at the beginning of the 2nd Part - after the interval...' (Grez 3.6.12).

The letters certainly give one much more sense of Delius as a living person and there must be many more to come out still; I am prompted to wonder what is happening to the other Bantock material, not to mention all his unpublished music.

'LOOK BACK IN ENVY' (1)

by D. Marblacy Jones

I have from time to time preserved the reports of various Delius performances by critics of different papers. These will be quoted, either in full or in part, in this and succeeding Newsletters, and show that critics in the first and second decades of this century were on the whole favourably impressed.

Daily News, Wednesday, October ? 1907.

Frederick Delius. A New Concerto Performed
at the Queen's Hall.

Until last night eight years has passed since I had heard a note of Frederick Delius' compositions, and I will confess that I went to the Queen's Hall in some trepidation. For eight years ago some of us younger critics (as we then were, alas!) hailed Frederick Delius as a new voice in music, whereas the older writers looked on his compositions as a personal insult. Indeed, one of some prominence publicly anticipated with delight a performance of "Novena" to be given at Covent Garden on the morrow as being an occasion on which he would at least hear music. Much has happened in London since 1899. Richard Strauss has come to the front, and young British composers have taken a delight in shocking the orthodox. It might well be that I should not have so high an opinion of Delius' music. Happily no kind of recantation is necessary. The concerto in C minor for pianoforte and orchestra which we heard last night is a work of strong individuality, deep poetic feeling, and unforced originality of workmanship. The chief characteristic of the music that strikes one at a first hearing is that Delius has a style of his own. Next one is impressed by the life of the music. Except for some passages towards the end of the composition, there is not a dull, perfunctory bar in the whole work. Then the subtlety of the melody makes one wish to hear the composition again. Delius' thematic material has fascination. It is not obvious or common, or like some other melody. With this thematic invention goes an original but, to modern ears, not at all eccentric harmony. The scoring is fine in colour and interesting in its devices without being at all obtrusive. Indeed, one of the great merits of the concerto is that the composer is absolute master of his means, and has something to say, so that one is not conscious of any experiment being played. The work is in one movement, and is not in any sense a conventional concerto. The piano has several cadenza-like passages, but, for the most part, the solo instrument is used as an organic factor in the composer's instrumental resources. This is well, for the day of the conventional concerto has passed away.

It might be held, however, that the piano is not very effective when its sovereignty is disputed, and I believe that if Mr. Delius had written his work for orchestra alone it would have been even more striking. Still, the concerto is a very remarkable work, and the audience applauded the composer and his capable pianist, N. Theodor Szanto, with the utmost enthusiasm. Not the least pleasant feature of the evening was that almost all our prominent young composers were present and were by no means the least enthusiastic in their praise of their fellow-countryman's music. It should be added that the concerto was written some ten years ago, a fact which makes us look forward to the hearing of Frederick Delius' later works with the utmost interest.

E.A. Baughan.

MISCELLANY

12.7.68. We had a really very respectable performance of 'In a Summer Garden' here last Saturday. Dick Kitching came over from Derby with a friend and we all went together. It was a concert in our Annual "Prom" Season, and Hugo Rignold was conducting the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

First of all, the tempi were basically very sound, both in the main outer sections and in the central passage (though this latter was just a trifle more hurried than would have been ideal - if you study the Beecham record you will notice how he draws out the recurring two falling notes in the main theme of this passage. If you hurry it you haven't the time to give these all-important notes the expansion they need, hence the effect is not achieved properly.) Never mind, it was only fractionally too fast as I say.

Needless to say Hugo Rignold did not by any means achieve the elasticity within the bar that this piece really needs, and his woodwind, playing the little four-quick-note figure with which this score abounds, sounded very square and dull because they didn't accent - or lean on - the first note. Strangely enough, the big climax tended to sound congested - reminding me of some of the more overblown climaxes in "Paris" - which I had not expected because this passage, like everything else in this masterly work, is so beautifully scored. No doubt our cavernous Town Hall had something to do with it. So all in all, while it was not an account to make one sit up, it was very respectably played and directed and there was absolutely nothing objectionable or glaringly inadequate about it anywhere. This I think in these days, is quite a lot to be thankful for!

Bantock's Overture "The Pierrot of the Minute" opened the concert, and this and the Delius were repeated at Cheltenham Festival last Monday, same performers.

Lyndon Jenkins.

31.7.68. Antonia Butler and Angus Morrison broadcast the 'Cello Sonata' last night on Radio 4 (Music at Night) and I thought it was a fine, firm performance.

Also Brigg Fair was included in the programme that the Leicestershire Schools Orchestra performed at the Guildhall during the City of London Festival. These youngsters, under the baton of Sir Michael Tippett, did an amazing job in a hall of whose acoustics the less said about the better. It gave me a thrill to think of these musicians introduced to one of our masterpieces at such time of their lives.'

Dr. William Reid.

CONCERT NOTICES

December 7th 1968. The Canterbury Choral Society under their conductor, Allan Wicks, will give a performance of "Sea Drift" in Canterbury Cathedral. Also in the programme: Bruckner's Te Deum and the 7th Symphony of Sibelius. The concert commences at 7.30 p.m. and tickets (15/-, 10/- and 5/-) can be obtained from the Office of The Friends of Canterbury Cathedral in The Precincts; Forwoods Music Centre, 37 Palace Street, Canterbury, or at the door. (Programme 2/6.)

February 8th 1969. The Maidstone Symphony Orchestra (Leader, Lionel Bentley), under their conductor, David Cutforth, will perform "Appalachia" in a programme which also includes Dvorak's Overture, "Carnival" and Beethoven's Violin Concerto. The concert will take place at the Collage Communal Centre, Oakwood Park, Tonbridge Road, Maidstone, and will commence at 7.30 p.m. Season Ticket bookings for members of the Maidstone Orchestral Society are expected to take up a large proportion of the Hall, but if members of the Delius Society would like to attend, they are invited to write to the Newsletter Editor before the end of the year, for further information.

Postscript: No doubt arrangements could be made so that members attending the above two concerts could meet. John White would be pleased to hear from anyone who intends to be present.