

DELIUS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER



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of the

DELIUS SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

The amount of material in this Newsletter allows me space for a brief note only. This concerns the numbering of the Newsletters, which has become confused due to an error in the last issue; which should have been numbered No. 21 instead of No. 20 and I apologise for passing over this mistake.

May I say how grateful I am for all the excellent contributions which you have been sending me in recent months. Members have gone to infinite trouble to provide us with information of the greatest interest and value, as in the articles printed below.

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A NOTE ON DELIUS MUSIC MANUSCRIPTS IN THE U.S.A.

by Robert Threlfall.

It may fairly confidently be stated that the manuscripts of the majority of Delius's works are to be found here in London at present. Two larger collections, including that of the Delius Trust, and two smaller ones, account for most of the manuscripts known to be extant, apart from comparatively isolated items and fragments; of the manuscripts whose survival is not at present established, those of the works originally published by Harmonie-Verlag and F.E.C. Leuckart are conspicuous. Meanwhile a small but significant number of items are distributed through the United States, and a few words on their present location may not be without its interest.

First in size and importance is the manuscript full score of the opera "Koanga", which is now in Jacksonville University, Florida. This massive score of over 350 pages was given by the Delius Trust in 1962; a microfilm (from which photoprints have recently been made) remains in the archives of the Trust. In view of the adventures of this score in the past, it is perhaps not surprising that pp. 24-29 of the 2nd Act appear to be missing at present. An interesting feature is the insertion of separate sheets in Delius's hand giving the

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introduction to Act 1, Palmyra's aria in Act 2, and the rewritten prelude to Act 3 - this last transplanted from the earlier opera "The Magic Fountain". The original pages thereby substituted are cancelled but have not been removed.

Another item, and one of unique personal interest, is the Notebook used by Delius at Solano Grove in 1884, containing the studies carried out there under Thomas Ward's instruction. This manuscript was given to the Delius Association of Florida by Eric Fenby in 1962; recently a photocopy was sent by them to the Delius Trust archives in London. Though surely no admirer of the composer can turn these pages without emotion, not even the most unprejudiced eye can find any trace therein of the light that was to come.

Next, I refer to the manuscript full score of "Over the Hills and Far Away" to be found in the Memorial Library of Music, Stanford University, California. Described as long ago as 1953 by Otto E. Albrecht in his "A Census of Autograph Musical Manuscripts of European Composers in American Libraries", this manuscript proves on inspection to be a copy in the hand of Eric Fenby, prepared by him at Delius's request for Sir Thomas Beecham. Here again, a microfilm and photoprints have been made available to the Delius Trust. This may be the place to record that the first and only publication of this work was in the U.S.A. by G. Schirmer Inc., in 1950: two years later than the publication of one standard book on Delius which enters it as being issued by Universal, and two years before another similar authority states that it remains in manuscript! This phenomenon is by no means rare in the study of Delius chronology: the dates of even his birth and burial have received varied interpretation from different hands.

Readers of Warlock's book will recall the earliest composition listed therein: a song to Hans Anderson's words entitled "Zwei braune Augen". About ten years ago the manuscript of this song, together with that of the Valse later included as No. 3 of the Five Piano Pieces, crossed the Atlantic. These two manuscripts are now in a collector's archive.

A few other songs are known to exist in private hands in America; unlike the one mentioned in the previous paragraph however these are apparently similar to items also included in the Delius Trust collection.

Finally, as far as is known at this time, the manuscript of a violin sonata is understood to be in another American private collection; it has not been possible to establish any details, or even which sonata it is, at the present moment.

To round off this record, it may be of interest to speculate on the earliest work of Delius ever to be published: the polka for piano solo "Zum Carnival" issued by A.B. Campbell of Jacksonville with a copyright date of 1892, though Beecham dates its publication as early as 1885. Is the manuscript of this early effort still extant, and if so does it remain in the land where it first saw the light of day? Perhaps some of our American members may be able to add further details from their own observation or experience to this brief record, thereby increasing our overall knowledge of the ever-fascinating subject of the manuscripts and their present location.

### 'LOOK BACK IN ENVY' (2)

by D. Marlacy Jones

I continue my selection of news-cuttings of early Delius performances with an item on 'Appalachia' :-

Daily News, 1907.

#### A NEW BRITISH WORK

Delius' "Appalachia" Performed at Queen's Hall.

'It may be expected that Frederick Delius' "Appalachia" variations, performed for the first time in England last night, will be both praised and condemned. My own impression after hearing the work in bits at a rehearsal and as a whole last night are mixed. Frankly, what I heard in an empty, gloomy hall

impressed me more vividly than did the work performed as a whole. The repetition of sections enabled one to grasp the composer's subtle and individual harmony, and there was no question of the whole effect. That suffers, I think, from the form of the work not being quite suitable to the subject.

Mr. Delius has endeavoured to depict in music his early impressions of the Mississippi country; and to this end he has employed as his theme an authentic slave song, which, by the way, has a close resemblance to a well-known theme in "Rigoletto". The composer has built fourteen variations on this theme, all of them remarkable for atmospheric effect. The theme itself is but little varied, and that no doubt is part of the composer's plan. The slave song makes the connection of one variation with another, and the interest lies in the harmonic and contrapuntal treatment. In ordinary variations composers seem to do their best to present their themes in such extraordinary guises that they become practically new. Mr. Delius's plan is theoretically more artistic, but in practice it must be confessed that the constant repetition of a theme which is so simple that it really does not lend itself to elaborate treatment is monotonous. Then to produce his picture of negro pathos each variation ends in a diminuendo, which to my ears makes the composition stand still, and explains why I was more impressed in hearing it by sections than when it was played straight through.

Mr. Delius has written stronger stuff than this "Appalachia" which may be considered a "jeu d'esprit". On the other hand, I expect to see the composer blamed for not having insisted on his known mastery of scoring. That he has not is one of the merits of the work to my ears. Every effect he has planned comes off without any exhibition of obvious cleverness such as makes Strauss' "Salome" dance, which followed the Delius work, sound banal and commonplace. It is rare that such reticence is shown by modern composers. The scoring of "Appalachia" is always in the picture. It produces the effect that is required, and does not make one gasp with astonishment. The harmony, individual and extraordinary as some of it may be, is conceived in the same artistic spirit, and the composer has resisted the temptation to make an elaborate use of the chorus, which enters, pianissimo, only in the ninth variation. The choral effects of the work are very beautiful and unconventional.

Indeed, the whole work, in spite of some sense of lengthiness and of the monotonous effect of the constant repetition of the slave song, is a remarkable achievement. This is individual music that we heard last night - not only individual in its manner, but individual in its mood. The composer has painted his picture in delicate and elusive tints, and has eschewed anything like an expression of emotion out of keeping with the effect he has evidently desired to make. Certainly the voice of Mr. Delius is a new voice in music. The conductor, Herr Fritz Cassirer, and the composer were most enthusiastically applauded.

Herr Cassirer is a conductor of great gifts. He made the New Symphony Orchestra give most animated and clear performances of Delius' work and of Strauss's "Salome" dance and "Ein Heldenleben" and this was the more extraordinary in that no large number of rehearsals was held. As to the "Salome" dance, it struck me in the concert room as mere pantomime music, diabolically clever, perhaps, but laboured, obvious and theatrical. No doubt as an illustration of action in the opera itself it is impressive, for it is certainly exciting. Compared with "Ein Heldenleben" the "Salome" dance is bad Strauss.

E.A. Baughan.

Two recollections:

I heard an interpretation of 'Appalachia' by Hamilton Harty where for some unknown reason he omitted the moving variation for woodwind at bars 585 - 592 to the serious disadvantage of the work.

My friend Arnold Foster, who succeeded Holst at Morley College from 1928 to 1940 and also conducted the Whitsuntide Singers & Players, wrote to me in December 1953 to say that he is tackling 'Appalachia' and had two sets of parts - those of Delius' original scoring and a version for normal symphony orchestra by Professor E.J. Dent! There was no full score to Dent's boiling down. Arnold

founded the English Madrigal Choir in 1928 and conducted it until 1940. In those days Benjamin Britten was a member of the society as indeed of the Whitsuntide Singers and Morley College.

Daily News, April 3, 1908.

FREDERICK DELIUS' "BRIGG FAIR"

A GERMAN CRITIC AND THE MUSICAL LEAGUE.

(by E.A. Baughan)

We are a curious nation. Music is admittedly one of the most popular arts in England of to-day. Yet here we find an important paper like "The Times" practically ignoring a new work by so distinguished a composer as Frederick Delius and taking no editorial or any other notice of the manifesto of the Musical League, of which Sir Edward Elgar is President and Mr. Delius Vice-President. The memorial was published in "The Times" in full as a letter and left at that. Frederick Delius' "Brigg Fair" was performed for the first time in London at the Thomas Beecham orchestral concert of Tuesday last. On all hands it was admitted to be a work of singular fascination and dexterous accomplishment. Of these qualities there could be no doubt, whatever might be thought of certain aspects of the workmanship and of the poetic and musical construction. Yet the following is all "The Times" musical critic had to say of this striking composition: "The other work was called an "English Rhapsody", and is written by Mr. Frederick Delius on a very characteristic Lincolnshire tune 'Brigg Fair' which, though never allowed to be heard with what may be called its natural harmonies, supplies most of the thematic material, the remainder being taken from that treasure house of pastoral effects, the Waldweben from 'Siegfried'. The pastoral element at the beginning and end, whatever its source, is the most pleasing part of the composition, which seems to represent English country life as a remarkably sophisticated and decadent thing."

And that is all the critic of "The Times" had to say of a remarkable composition. I purposely do not repeat my criticism and appreciation of Delius' "Brigg Fair". Every critic has a right to his opinion and to the expression of it. The gentlemen who look on Wagner as the end of musical history of these days - just as the critics of the mid-Victorian era looked on Mendelssohn - may find fault with Delius because he is not a Wagner and expresses quite a different kind of temperament and outlook; or the gentlemen who abused Strauss when his music was first played here may, if they choose, compare him with Delius to the disadvantage of either one or the other. This comparative criticism is always foolish and tiresome, and generally points to an insensitive state of mind on the part of the critic. But whatever attitude a critic may take up he cannot afford to pass over such a composition as "Brigg Fair" in silence, or in the few lame sentences which "The Times" writer has devoted to it. Those sentences, brief and bald as they are, even contain a muddled idea. They imply that thematic material has been taken from Wagner's Waldweben. I challenge "The Times" critic to prove his contention. What he meant to say was that in the opening of the composition the flute plays an important part and that the general colouring of the scoring is vaguely reminiscent of the forest scene in "Siegfried". It is a very vague reminiscence, and Wagner had not taken out a patent for sufficiently obvious orchestral colour. The opening of Delius' work might be with more truth, likened to Debussy's "Après midi d'un faune", (sic) but the likeness is not one that any critic worth his salt would dwell upon. And, pray, what are the "natural harmonies" of "Brigg Fair".

I wonder what German critics who treat Frederick Delius to serious criticism and genuine appreciation would think of "The Times" notice if they read it? I also wonder what they would write if they knew what "The Times" had never commented upon such an important organisation as the Musical League. At any rate, they would think it strange that two big London dailies such as

"The Daily Telegraph" and "The Daily News" should have given the League a column of notice; that such important provincial organs as "The Manchester Guardian" "The Birmingham Daily Post" and "The Glasgow Herald" - to mention only a few - should have dealt with the matter at length; and yet that no adequate notice should have been taken of it by "The Times".

As a matter of fact, several writers on the German Press have noticed the Musical League with clear sighted appreciation. Among them is a most enlightened article from the pen of August Spannuth, the editor of the Leipzig "Signale". He begins by pointing out that musical matters are stirring in England, and that we are no longer content with being the largest music consuming nation, but are moving up to the ranks of the music producing countries. With truth Herr Spannuth observes that during the nineteenth century we did not possess composers who made a reputation in Germany. (Herr Spannuth should have said "until the end of the nineteenth century"). "To the twentieth century" he continues, "belong the two English composers in whose doings in our days the rest of the world is also interested - E. Elgar and F. Delius. They represent individual features, and it is, therefore, a promising sign that they are the president and vice-president at the head of the Musical League; . . . The memorial and the rules of the new association show that it is to be started in a broad and liberal manner; that no anti-agonism against the music of other nations is the moving spirit. We cordially welcome the League with a 'good luck to you, English cousins'".

From the foregoing "The Times" and its critic may understand, perhaps, the view that Germany takes of British music, and also the appreciation in which Mr. Frederick Delius himself is held. Of Sir Edward Elgar's fame in Germany even "The Times" critic is aware.

#### MIDLANDS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

by Peter Thorp.

The last meeting of the season was held in July at Brian and Jean Dunn's house in Nottingham, when most of the Midland members turned up for the long-awaited 'Musical Evening'. As the permanent audience and critic of these annual performances I was able to relax during the early summer months with eager anticipation, whilst the anxious strains and chords produced by our members practicing their party-pieces floated through the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire air.

In the event the time and patience of the performers was well rewarded and we were treated to a most pleasant collection of small pieces of music and a fine display of amateur talent. This was especially pleasing because most of the performers had made the effort to tackle something by Delius - much to be said here for Dick Kitching's powers of persuasion - and this gave the evening some unity to add to the interest in the pieces themselves.

Shirley Clover appropriately opened the evening with a small piano piece by Delius - "Mazurka for a Little Girl", which was followed by its companion piece "Waltz for a Little Girl" this time given by Brian Dunn. Brian then turned to his other instrument the bassoon (always a popular item at the 'Musical Evening') and together with Dick Kitching at the piano gave us a most attractive Delius duet - "Lullaby for a Modern Baby". Two more Delius duets were given by Mr. & Mrs. Bates (cello and piano respectively) when they performed the "Caprice" and "Elegy". The latter piece

emphasised how well the tone of the cello suits the phrasing of Delius.

Jerry Rowe's contribution to the evening was an outstanding performance of Grieg's "4 pieces for piano" (opus 17), Dick Kitching then returned to Delius for his solo spot when he treated us to the "3 Preludes". Finally Mr. & Mrs. Bates were persuaded to perform again and they introduced us to two of their own favourites - "Chant du Menestrel" by Glazunov and "Elegy" by Frank Bridge. All in all a most pleasant way to spend an evening.

#### THE REQUIEM AND THE IDYLL

by Lyndon Jenkins

The latest contribution to the Delius discography is certainly an important one. Firstly because it puts on disc a major work of the composer which has only ever had a few hearings and in a performance which does it justice; secondly, because both of its sides enshrine recordings which are technically very good indeed, a welcome feature after recent disappointments.

Listening to the Requiem a number of times for the purpose of this review has convinced me that I shall not want to hear it often. I cannot imagine, either, that there are many people in our Society, if they are really honest with themselves, who will come to love this work in the same way as we all adore, for example, "Sea Drift". It's all very well to be bowled over by a "new" work because of its novelty, but the test comes with time. No doubt we are better able to stomach the strangely arid and cheerless text in the 1960's, but who can pretend that the music is not inferior Delius?

As to the performance, it is as I suggested earlier, very good. The two soloists are excellent; John Shirley-Quirk, who has the lion's share, sings most sensitively and thoughtfully throughout while Heather Harper makes the best possible case for the fourth movement. The R.P.O. (not quite the Orchestra for playing Delius that it once was) sounds very well though a trifle reticent, no doubt due to the recording. Once or twice important details fail to register as they should (just one example is the horn in the passage beginning one bar after 4 in the first movement), and you have to listen hard for any violas. The Royal Choral Society is in much better form than it was for "Songs of Farewell" though its sopranos still seem to find a top A a strain, and their sound frequently has a veiled quality. It struck me once or twice that their numbers may be slightly reduced for this record, but they make a very full, even exciting, sound in the outburst at the beginning of the second movement. (I suspect the Beggars of Bagdad would have been glad to have this passage to augment their contribution to "Hassan"). Meredith Davies guides with a sure hand, evidently authorising the second entry of the Chorus in the first movement at considerably more volume than the mf marked on the score and observed a dozen bars earlier.

I do not think I am alone, however, in regarding the other side of this disc as the "plum". The Idyll already exists on record, but in a poor performance and recording which is certainly outclassed by this new one. The soloists are again remarkable, both for the accuracy with which they tackle a typically angular vocal line and for their understanding and sympathy, while the Orchestra has considerably more presence than on the reverse side. The Prelude to "Margot-la-Rouge" with which the Idyll begins is beautifully done (making me, for one, wish the score of this short piece could be published separately) and altogether the performance of the work hangs together splendidly. Those who, like me, are unhappy with the Whitman lines used for this work may occasionally find themselves wishing as I do that the soloists' diction were perhaps not quite so excellent!