

DELIUS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER No. 8 - MAY 1965

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Now that another summer is upon us, members will no doubt be wondering what Delius is to be offered at this year's Proms. We should know fairly soon, but the last two years have been so disappointing that perhaps we may be excused if we leave Kensington for a time and proceed to Jacksonville, where the Delius Association of Florida presented its annual feast of Delius in a four-day festival in February. Mr. & Mrs. Emanuel of the Delius Trust wrote to say that the first concert was attended by 1,600 people, and that "it was so rewarding to see such a massive audience, but, really, the performance warranted it."

The three concerts included orchestral performances of the Second Dance Rhapsody; Late Swallows from the String Quartet (arranged by Mr. Fenby for String Orchestra); the Daybreak, Dance and By the River movements from the Florida Suite, and Appalachia (in its true, natural setting). The piano arrangements consisted of the Second Dance Rhapsody; A Song before Sunrise, and Eventyr.

Writing in the Florida-Times Union for February 7th, Mr. Hugh Alderman, the President of the Association said:-

"The Delius Festival came to a close last evening with a brilliant concert given in the Recital Hall of the Phillips Music and Fine Arts Building at Jacksonville University, with Gerson Yessin, pianist and soloist, and with William B. Hoskins at the organ.

"Yessin opened the program with a lecture touching on the high spots of composer Delius and then turned to a most astute analysis of the work of the evening, the Piano Concerto in C Minor.

"Interesting to the musician, it must have been doubly so to the layman as he illustrated thematic material and showed how the variance of rhythm could give an entirely different effect to the same theme. Yessin brought out the fact that the first sketches of this concerto were made while Delius was on his second visit to Florida.

"This festival has been fortunate in having the performances of so many major works which definitely had their origin in Florida - the 'Florida Suite', bearing Delius' own inscription, 'Dedicated to the People of Florida', and the 'Appalachia', descriptive of the mighty St. Johns River.

"The highlight of the evening, however, was the performance of the Concerto by Yessin, with Hoskins doing an admirable reduction of the orchestral score on the organ. It was exciting playing - perhaps the finest playing this reviewer has ever heard this artist do.

"It was a brilliant interpretation of the score (unfortunately a few passages were covered by the organ), but the tone was alive and exciting. The score is a demanding one, and Yessin displayed a technique which was clean, full and never at any time forced.

"All of the show elements of a popular concerto are here - prestissimo passages which leave one breathless, the cloying sweetness of arpeggios which almost melted away in a rich softness, tremendous octave passages superbly played with all of the bravura which electrifies both the performance and the audience.

/ "The Piano Concerto

"The Piano Concerto has been performed in Jacksonville before, but there has never been such an exciting performance given here as that of last evening. One can readily understand why Yessin has been engaged to give the Boston premiere of this work in May at a Boston Pops concert under the baton of Arthur Fiedler.

"So ends another festival of the music of Frederick Delius, that illustrious musician who never let the rich color and beauty of Florida leave his music even though he spent a brief two years of his life on our shores".

For the above cutting, and others which we shall be glad to pass on to interested members, we are indebted to Mr. Stanley Mayes of California (Sir Thomas Beecham Society).

Members will be glad to learn that the President of the Delius Association of Florida, whom many of us had the pleasure of meeting last September, and Mrs. Alderman, are now Honorary Members of the Delius Society.

From San Francisco

Our member, Mr. A. J. Noakes, who writes from San Francisco that he is "still hoping to reach Jacksonville some time", says

The office building where I am working, in San Francisco, has an elevator man with a portable radio always tuned to classical music. He is a gloomy Russian, called Tom, who presumably likes what he hears but never appears inspired by it, even if you react to the extent of ~~singing with the music, or enquiring what it is of which you are~~ currently receiving a 30-second extract.

Last week some familiar sounds were emerging which I couldn't place at first (the volume diminishes between floors); by the time we reached ground, I had diagnosed 'Summer Night on the River' and, to Tom's surprise, refused to budge until the buzzer summoned him to his next ascent.

And that is all the Delius I've heard on my travels. Indeed, the only enthusiast I have yet met was a friend of friends whom I contacted in Tokyo. Other English music receives a fair hearing here, and the excellent Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Josef Krips, includes Walton's 2nd Symphony and Ralph Vaughan Williams' Tuba Concerto in the current season. The best novelty I've heard yet is by the astonishingly versatile Leonard Bernstein, a Jewish Symphony with narrator, chorus and large orchestra, called "Kaddish" - a strange but effective mixture of diverse elements.

Support for musical events here seems somewhat Quixotic - when Gerard Souzay gave a recital a week ago in the Masonic Auditorium (which admittedly seats nearly 3,000), it was less than a quarter full; the small audience was enthusiastic, though, and was well rewarded -- Dichterliebe sung with such spontaneity that one seemed to be hearing it for the first time; some fine Faure songs and a magnificent aria from Handel's early Passion setting, that should be better known.

I have joined the Bach Choir here, and look forward greatly to the opportunity I've been hoping for for years, of taking part in the B Minor Mass. We are now rehearsing Brahms' Requiem, and a small Group is preparing works by Byrd and Schutz.

Best wishes to all the Delius Society of Great Britain.

/ In reply.

In reply to the Society's telegram of congratulation on his 70th birthday, Sir Malcolm Sargent has written our President:-

"Thank you so much for your kind birthday greetings and please pass my gratitude on to your secretary and members of the Society. All good wishes."

Sir Malcolm conducted two performances of "Paris" in March under the auspices of the Delius Trust - our member Mr. John East tells us that he attended both concerts - and we now look forward to the release of "Songs of Farewell" in August. Through the good offices of our member, Mr. Malcolm Walker, members who attended our Annual General Meeting were able to hear an "advance pressing" of the cello concerto played by Jacqueline du Pre. We confidently predict that this disc, as "Sea Drift/Paris" in 1956, will reach the top of the sales of classical LPs.

The Delius Trust have also announced that they are sponsoring "A performance of An Arabesque at the Royal Albert Hall by the Royal Choral Society under Sir Malcolm Sargent, and "A performance - the second ever - of the Requiem, at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir under Charles Groves (November 9)."

From the Midlands

Our stalwart Midlands society member, and branch chairman, Dick Kitching, has sent us the following report, contributed by Miss Shirley Clover:-

The fourth meeting of the Midlands Branch was held at the Branch Chairman's house on the 9th December 1964. Among those present we were pleased to welcome two visitors Peter Thorp and John Brown who had discovered the existence of the Branch and were eager to see what it was like. We were even more pleased to learn later that they enjoyed the Meeting and wished to join the Society.

A record programme of Delius 'Lollipops' had been arranged for the first half of the Meeting and included La Calinda from Koanga, the Serenade from Hassan followed by The Golden Road to Samarkand, Summer Evening, Sleigh Ride (for topicality rather than typicality) and The Walk to the Paradise Garden. Some of us began to see how indebted the composers of film music are to Delius many of whose harmonies and effects have been copied and vulgarised.

After sumptuous refreshments we heard a most illuminating talk by Mr. Jerry Rowe on Moussorgsky. This was illustrated by recorded excerpts including Richter playing Pictures at an Exhibition; the piano version of this work proved to have more dramatic power than Ravel's orchestral version. Handicapped by alcoholism and not tempted to write in the style of his contemporaries (Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev etc.), Moussorgsky wrote works which seem to spring from a later musical idiom than than current in his day. Extracts from the Songs and Dances of Death and Boris Gudounov were also played.

"Introduction to Contemporary Music"

Our Vice-Chairman, Dr. Roland Gibson, has sent us the following comments:-

Six pages are devoted to Delius, under the general heading of "Impressionism", in the American book "Introduction to Contemporary Music" by Professor Joseph Machlis (1961). Three of these pages concern Delius' life, two concern his music generally, and one is devoted to "Sea Drift".

/ Professor Machlis

Professor Machlis starts by saying

"Delius's music evokes the English landscape and its seasons: the vernal freshness of spring, the shortlived rapture of summer, the sadness of autumn. His is a gentle lyricism compounded of dreams and longing, a passionate paean to the transience of all earthly things. His countrymen justly regard him as 'the most poetic composer born in England.'"

In comparing Delius with Debussy, the author writes

"All the same he evolved his style independently of the French master. He shares certain traits with Debussy, such as a fondness for modal scales and blocklike chords in parallel motion, for poetic landscape and twilight moods. He also shared Debussy's aversion to the complicated thematic work of the German symphony. In all this he is a true impressionist. Yet one has only to listen to his music to realise how greatly he differs from Debussy, particularly in his liking for full orchestral sound, his virile handling of the brass, his frank emotionalism, and his subjective approach to nature. His music is suffused with rapture. It has the sensuous quality we associate with English poetry.

"Delius inherited the choral tradition that has been the main-spring of English music since the days of the Tudor and Elizabethan composers. Works for chorus and orchestra occupy a prominent place in his output.....

"Delius was a limited artist who cultivated a highly personal idiom of a rather narrow range. For this reason he has not the universality of a world figure. But for those who are responsive to his kind of sensibility, his music speaks eloquently of sweet, wistful things."

Of "Sea Drift" the professor writes:-

"The music evokes the surge of the sea. Yet this is not a seascape in the way, let us say, that Debussy's 'La Mer' is. Here the sea is the setting - in its wildness and vastness perhaps the symbol - for that intensity of love and longing which is the composer's real theme." The section ends with "The creator of this poetic work was one of the lyric voices of the postromantic period. His influence has lessened in the world. For his countrymen, however, Frederick Delius remains a major prophet."

"A Lifetime of Music".

We look forward to the broadcast talk which our President, Mr. Fenby, is to give under this title on Wednesday evening, 26th May, "about his musical career and the years when he worked first for Delius and then for Sir Thomas Beecham".

In accepting a Vice-Presidency of the Society, Mr. Stanford Robinson writes:-

"I look forward to being able to serve the Society in any way I can and I shall, of course, continue to include Delius's music in my programmes. You may like to mention in your notes that I recorded the Delius Violin Concerto for the BBC's Transcription Service on 15th March. The soloist is Peter Gibbs and the orchestra the Royal Philharmonic, so I think it will be very good. As you know this cannot be broadcast in England but the records are distributed all over the world and are very frequently made use of by other broadcasting organisations."

Portrait of Sir John Barbirolli

Our Secretary has sent in the following brief review of the programme televised on the 11th March:-

This television programme was unlikely to arouse such controversy as, say, the recent programme on Debussy, because what emerged was in fact a Portrait of our Vice-President. Here we were shown, not a man of biting wit for other people's discomfiture, but a man of warm humour. Of dynamic energy and forthright comment on the rostrum - off the platform interrupting a recital of the orchestra's heavy itinerary to enquire what allowance had been made for the musicians' tea-break, and what exactly were they going to be given to eat!

Sir John was asked for his thoughts on Manchester, and said that not even a Mancunian could describe it as a beautiful city, but that he has come to love it. Sir John Barbirolli pointed out that it is often the rather drab cities like Manchester, and Mi n, which are the "nerve centres" of music.

He told a story of his early days with the Halle when a soldier attending one of his concerts asked for his autograph. Sir John enquired if he could come at the end of the concert rather than the interval, but it transpired that this was difficult for the soldier who had to leave promptly to get back to his unit. So the conductor invited him in to his dressing room. Sir John Barbirolli made some remark about the concert, to which the soldier replied "yes", he had enjoyed it "so far". Sir John said he never forgot the proviso "so far".

Sir John said he was very proud to have been given the freedom of the city of which he now felt an integral part. During an illness which kept him away from the platform he had been touched to hear that any musician carrying the tools of his trade in Manchester would be asked, on the buses, "how's the Guvn'r?".

Sir John ended by saying that were he asked to nominate the last notes in his very last concert, they would be the closing bars of the Elgar second symphony.

Royal Academy Summer Exhibition

A portrait of another kind - the James Gunn portrait of Delius, is, as has been noted by our member Mr. Ronald Cook (who recently joined the Society) on exhibition this summer. This portrait was specially mentioned by Sir Charles Wheeler in his speech broadcast from this year's Royal Academy dinner. At the time of Gunn's death on 30th December, 1964, the Times correspondent wrote:-

"A drawback of Gunn's method of careful and smooth painting can be seen in his portrait of Delius exhibited in the Academy of 1933, and painted when Delius was blind and then in declining health. The formal precision of style shows the limitations of his mode of academic painting when applied to a subject of a pathetic nature and the difficulty he found in conveying feeling in conjunction with his objective accuracy of representation.

"In spite of his artistic shortcomings Gunn deserved praise for his professional competency. He faithfully supplied what is generally demanded in a portrait and he had a good sense of line as well as of tone and technical skill of a high order."

New Members

Our Treasurer advises us of the following new members since our February list:-

Mr. A. J. Frost, 34, St. Leonards Terrace, Chelsea, London, S. W. 3.	as a result of our advertisement in the "Mass of Life" programme.
Dr. G. H. Findlay, 528, Medical Centre, Pretoris Street, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa.	as a result of our advertisement in The Gramophone.
Mr. & Mrs. Hugh J. Compton, "Glyndebourne", 325, Rayleigh Road, Thundersley, Essex.	as a result of our advertisement in The Gramophone.
Mr. C. R. Cook, 363, Durnsford Road, Wimbledon Park, London, S. W. 19.	introduced to the Society by our newsletter editor.
Miss Anne Hull, 96, Grove Street, New York, N.Y. U.S.A.	introduced to the Society by our newsletter editor.
Miss Margaret Gillies, Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood, Middlesex.	as a result of our advertisement in The Gramophone.
Miss Gwen Hayward, 33, Lady Somerset Road, London, N. W. 5.	as result of notice board advert at Holborn Library.
Mr. Douglas R. Scorgie, F.R.C.S. 1224 Medical City, Eloff Street, Johannesburg, South Africa	as result of our advertisement in The Gramophone.
Mr. John B. Brown, 77, Empress Road, Loughborough, Leicester	Midlands group
Mr. Peter Thorp, 94, The Hollow, Littleover, Derby	Midlands Group

Mr. Scorgie writes from South Africa "I was also one of the few people to attend three performances of "Irmelin" in Oxford", Mr. Scorgie goes on to express the hope that it may be possible for him to form a "sub-section" of the Society in South Africa.

Finally, an alarming thought. I heard my first cuckoo on May 2nd in a Surrey wood (but not at Oxted!). Since then, silence. I hope that modern fertilizers etc., about which we hear so much, are not proving too distasteful to cuckoos, let alone killing them off. Or are they already passing the word round that Britain is too dangerous a country to return to each spring. Because, if so, "On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring" may, in years to come, be played more for its novelty value than its musical content.

Charles Barnard
Newsletter Editor