



## Review: Broadcast Music

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## Broadcast Music

By KAIKHOSRU SHAPURJI SORABJI

NOT since the delicious *Folies Musicales* of Betove has there been a more apt and devastating parody of contemporary musical tricksters, jig-saw puzzlers, tone-rowers and all, than Henry Reed's and Donald Swann's *Emily Butter*. The whole was carried through with immense gusto and obvious enjoyment by all concerned, particularly by Mary O'Farrell as the delightfully named 'composeress' Hilda Tablett, and the brilliant Marjorie Westbury as the absurd Austrian singer Elsa Strauss, who dissolves into sentimental ecstasies at every reference to Vienna, and also as the singer of the enchantingly preposterous title-rôle in the 'composeress's' opera *Emily Butter*.

The juxtaposition of a masterpiece of compelling logic and power such as *Till Eulenspiegel* is not too good for any 'contemporary' work; it was very bad indeed for Benjamin Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*.

Someone recently called Shostakovich the greatest living composer still in his fifties: this suggests that someone takes an even dimmer view of 'contemporary' music than myself. With his ghastly Eleventh Symphony and the vast acreage of boredom of his 24 Preludes and Fugues for piano, he remains for me that encyclopedia of clichés I have always thought him.

Deryck Cooke, in his able and interesting talk on various versions of certain Bruckner symphonies some while since, gave us some startling examples of how this very great Master allowed himself to be induced by persons artistically unfit to black his boots into altering and revising (not for the better) his works. How far this was the case with the Eighth Symphony (Radio Rundfunk under Klemperer) I do not know enough to be able to say. It was announced as the Haas edition, based, one understands, on the original version published by the Bruckner Verlag of Wiesbaden; but it seemed to be indistinguishable from that of the Vienna Bruckner Society. It was a rough and ragged performance; the woolliness of the brass-playing was especially objectionable in those magnificent apocalyptic passages which should blaze out.

*The Musical Times* has often made merry over the howlers of 'intellectuals' and other 'cultured' persons—a 'cultured' person and a 'cultured' pearl, one sometimes feels, bear much the same relation to the real thing. In a recent 'Critics' session someone referred to *Oklahoma* as a *music-drama*!

*Don Quixote* of Strauss (B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra under Schwarz) was notable for the magnificent playing and insight of Paul Tortelier as solo cellist. The rest of the performance lacked clarity, precision and bite.

Niagaras of the dirty and malodorous waters of 'modern' music have poured over us since the first London performance of Rachmaninov's Third Symphony twenty or so years ago, but nothing has effaced the impression that it is one of the greatest of the post-Mahler symphonies, to which its magnificent spaciousness and grandeur of style, its subdued and sombre richness, its superb organization, relate it. The work received a well-drilled and clean performance under Sir Malcolm Sargent.

The myth of the steady and progressive decline of Strauss's work since *Der Rosenkavalier* is still persistently propagated, in spite of such splendid things as *Arabella*, the inexpressibly moving *Metamorphosen*, and those wonderful *Four Last Songs*. Listening to the first two of these works, one was again staggered by the immense mastery, the cornucopiousness of superb melodic writing. How well it all underlined Strauss's own witty remark to a 'modern' practitioner: 'Warum dann schreiben Sie atonal? Sie haben doch Talent!'

The inability of the harpsichord to balance satisfactorily against an orchestra in modern concert-hall conditions was the subject of some pertinent remarks by the eminent critic of *The Times* recently, and point was lent thereunto by a performance of Poulenc's *Concert Champêtre*, finely played by George Malcolm, whose instrument, in the ambience of the Festival Hall, took on the aspect of a 'forpined ghost' twittering in Waterloo Station. This deficiency does not seem to afflict the magnificent Pleyel instrument used by that transcendent artist Landowska, on which, in her own wonderful phrase, *arpeggi* really do 'drip gold'.

It is possible to argue strictly according to the canons of scholastic logic from nonsensical premises, reaching conclusions that are syllogistically impeccable but just as nonsensical. The constructions of Anton von Webern are cast, it seems, in the tightest and closest shapes of traditional musical logic, but the end is *musically* nonsense. Walter Goehr told us, *à propos* of some settings of Christian Latin texts such as the *Asperges*, that Webern was 'a deeply religious man'; but the effect, to one hearer at least, was of a blasphemous parody.

Precious little of the majestic grandeur of the great Reger *100th Psalm* survived the lamentable Dutch recorded radio performance. From the gum-booted, clodhopping direction and the indifferent choral singing to the wretched feeble-toned instrument on which the magnificent organ part (which should dominate the whole) was played, it was a travesty.

### 'The Gravesano Review,' No. 9

Everybody knows Hermann Scherchen as a conductor with catholic tastes, but not everybody knows he is also intensely interested in the scientific side of music. He has his own recording studios at Gravesano, Switzerland, where he is constantly experimenting with recording techniques and organizes conferences covering the technical, scientific and artistic aspects of sound and music.

*The Gravesano Review* is a quarterly publication in English and German edited by him, containing a selection of articles, with diagrams and illustrations, covering a wide field. These range from Le Corbusier's 'Electronic Poem' for the Philips Pavilion at the Brussels Exhibition, through loud-speaker design, the tuning of oboes, an analysis of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* by the editor, to 'The Ear—a time-measuring instrument' by Fritz Winckel.

Inevitably the most interesting to us is the British

contribution, the first part of a paper by T. Somerville and R. Gilford entitled 'The Acoustics of Large Orchestral Studios and Concert Halls' originally read to the Institute of Electrical Engineers. In it the authors investigate the acoustics of six British concert halls, two old and four modern, giving plans and detailed measurements of reverberation times backed up by subjective assessments collected from musical sources over a long period. These are compared with some Continental halls of the same periods, and the problems of architects and designers are clearly shown. There is another article giving details of three prize-winning designs in the competition for a new hall for the Berlin Philharmonic.

Altogether *The Gravesano Review* is a most interesting publication. Details of subscription rates, which include demonstration records, can be had from Novellos or from Hermann Scherchen, Gravesano, Tessin, Switzerland.

RAYMOND SUFFIELD