

AMERICAN CHORAL REVIEW

PAUL HENRY LANG

ON CHORAL MUSIC

**SELECTED ESSAYS
AND REVIEWS**

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Preface

It was indicative of the progress of American musical literacy that one of the foremost music historians was called upon to assume the post of principal music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1954. Together with Otto Kinkeldey, who had been his teacher, Paul Henry Lang virtually established the discipline of musicology in the American university curriculum, and both as a scholar and critic he set a pattern and model in American musical life.

American choral performance had arrived at a crossroads in the 1950's. Heavily indebted to British and German legacies, the cultivation of choral music began to occupy a new role on the concert stage through the work of professional groups directed by such choral conductors as Noah Greenberg, Margaret Hillis, and Robert Shaw. At the same time, the nineteenth-century ideal of large *a cappella* choruses and oratorio societies continued to dominate the choral scene in presentations of standard repertoire as well as rarely heard works. Here, as in other phases of American concert life, the contrasts proved to be striking and the new perspective provided by the historian's comments provocative and enlightening. Written before the second Vatican Council, some of his strictures obviously no longer apply. To the present-day observer, in fact, many of the complexities with which he dealt appear reduced—in considerable measure due to Lang's own influence—and his essays and reviews have in themselves become a part of documentary history.

It is for this reason that this volume, the first in a series dealing with the history of choral music in outline, varies in method and organization from the survey of operatic literature that was drawn from Lang's *Herald Tribune* reviews and published several years ago by W. W. Norton (*Critic at the Opera*, New York, 1971). The operatic repertoire, produced in thoroughly established performance situations, was easily separated from topical issues of its interpretation in selecting and editing the original reviews. Choral literature remains so closely tied to questions of rendition that its discussion requires constant reference to performance problems and traditions.

Thus the plan for this collection was guided by preserving the spontaneous spirit and quality of critical journalism (preserving also a certain amount of repetition unavoidable in columns written months or

even years apart). Editorial work was limited to design and choice, and the text of the reviews and editorials appears in a continuity that will offer the reader of this journal a fresh view of the literature and technique with which he deals day by day.

The *American Choral Review* is indebted to the author for granting permission to reissue his essays on choral music and for giving this new edition the benefit and honor of his advice.

A. M.

Choral Music of the Seasons

Christmas

Christmas is approaching and all the hidden Christian virtues, that during the rest of the year lay somnolent in people's bosoms, begin to stir. The stores remind us that the greatest of these virtues is "giving"; the magazines, swollen to double their normal size by the same zealous appeal for brotherly giving, are resplendent with pictures of happy families opening packages; while Santa Claus, preferring the warm and congenial atmosphere of the department store to the cold climate of the bleak North Pole, gravely takes suggestions from the wide-eyed young citizenry, not yet able to practice the Christian virtues unaided.

There is music in the air too, reactivated for the specific purpose of providing Christmas cheer and edification. The church choirs are dusting off the dog-eared copies of *Messiah*, and prettying up good old "King Wenceslaus," as well as *Adeste Fideles*. The organists will ready suitable transcriptions of unsuitable music and make sure that their accompaniments are properly sweet and dragging so as to create what is believed to be a religious atmosphere. The newspapers will publish the list of music to be given at the Christmas services, and a more impoverished, sad and inartistic collection of third-rate "sacred art" could not be imagined. What happened to this sacred art, for many centuries the core, main support, nay the very substance of the art of music? The great Christian denominations are infinitely rich in masterworks that sum up their creeds, aspirations and convictions, yet only an isolated church here and there is aware of that.

In Bach's time, Christmas services consisted of cantatas and oratorios with chorus, soloists and orchestra; and of the singing of those magnificent hymns, the chorales, that were born with the Reformation and express its spirit as nothing else does. Today we hear these cantatas in the concert hall, in white tie and tails. In church the chorales are replaced by Victorian ditties, most of which are pretty nearly insufferable as music, and the cantatas by anthems of equally watery consistency.

This adopted son of the Republic has vivid recollections of his bewilderment when, in the early days of his Americanization, he was thrown off his religious and musical balance when listening to the hymns. There was *Glorious things of Thee are spoken*, which turned out to

be Haydn's grand old Hapsburg anthem in praise of the Emperor. I had to stand at attention when I heard it in my youth (and still later, once again, to the words of *Stand Columbia!*). Then again the edifying words "God the omnipotent King who ordainest" were accompanied by music that used to glorify another autocratic monarchy, for this is the old Tzarist anthem. My remembrances, going back to the fateful years 1914-18, recalled the sound of artillery when the strains of this tune were heard—but now I had a hymnal in my hands.

Well, this is a curious world. Not that the use of secular tunes for sacred texts was unheard of; it was practiced in the older centuries, but today there is no excuse for it in the face of the immense store of great original church song.

The Catholic Church, older and wealthier in sacred music, is just as backward as her Protestant cousins. The backbone and foundation of her music, Gregorian chant, is performed in a perfunctory manner and often disfigured by incongruous organ accompaniments. Few are the churches that have a true appreciation of it. And where are the great choral works of the legion of hallowed composers of Masses and motets? Perhaps the "*Marcellus*" Mass of Palestrina is sung on occasion, but he composed ninety-odd other great Masses. And where are Josquin, Lasso, Victoria, Byrd, and all the others? The Church, justly proud, conferred the title "Prince of Music" on a number of them, but now they are replaced by commoners such as Refice, Yon or Carlo Rossini—all well-meaning and devout persons, no doubt, but pathetically short on talent. And what of the solemn Masses of the great Baroque and Classic composers, from Monteverdi to Mozart, Haydn and Schubert? They were composed by believers who gave their best to the Church.

This brings us to the question of the orchestra in church. In Europe even small village churches had an orchestra of sorts and the great churches and cathedrals had very substantial ones. In our Catholic churches they are banished because of a mistaken conception of "worldliness." If this is valid, several centuries of Catholic church life must be condemned as having been in error—something that is rather unlikely. Just what logic silences the scruples when Gounod's *St. Cecilia Mass*, perennial favorite with American Catholics, is performed? This music is as worldly with organ accompaniment as a Schubert Mass with trumpets and kettle drums is deeply religious.

When Handel's *Messiah* is performed without the orchestra, it is preciously close to a caricature. The wondrous orchestrally accompanied Protestant church music of the great Biblical composers, Schütz, Buxtehude, Purcell, Bach, to mention a few, is heard only in some college chapels in its true magnificence. The other churches prefer the "safe" works of F. Flaxington Harker, H. Alexander Matthews, or Harry Roe Shelley; all true and tried Christians—and wretched composers.

One of the principal reasons for our low musical literacy is the lowly quality of church music. In the days when Sunday services were carried out to the sound of glorious music by the masters, the congregations imbibed an understanding for good music that formed their tastes and made them receptive to other great music outside the church. The church composers, up to the Beethovenian era, were the great composers of the day, incredible as it may seem: the avant-gardists. Today, new church music by a master is a rarity, and then it is usually performed in the concert hall.

It does not follow that true religious feeling can be achieved only by truly great religious music, but the churches of old were the great patrons of music and believed that only true art is worthy to fill the nave with its sounds. The department store Santa Claus is the symbol of our sacred art, and we too put on his false whiskers for Christmastide, and offer manufactured gifts instead of the dedicated works of those "in whom dwelleth the gift of God"—genius.

The present celebration of Christmas may seem to be based on very ancient practices, but in reality it assumed its familiar tone and mood in very recent times. An immense store of fable invests Christmas in all northern countries. They are Biblical and liturgical, but also thoroughly mixed with a great deal of pre-Christian practice, to which our advanced age has added the glamour of commerce and advertising. Christmas presents, as well as the tree and other accretions, were totally unknown before the nineteenth century and are distinctly of Germanic origin. The poetry of Christmas, Christian and pagan, gave way to creature comforts of the season.

The Feast of the Birth of Our Lord was placed at the winter solstice, which is the date of the rebirth of the pagan sun god. Many of the fine East European folk songs, such as those that Bartók collected, actually go back to old Roman solstice celebrations danced in animal skins. At the opening of this century Bartók still saw this done, and while the melodies are equipped with suitable Christian texts, there is no mistaking their origin. Such age-old pagan elements are numerous in the Christmas music of most countries, and they are well absorbed, even though for a long time they were censured—without success—by the ecclesiastic authorities. When the first broadcast of a Christmas service was made in England on the newfangled radio, there were still grave misgivings among the more conservative that it might be listened to by someone with his hat on.

The great literature of motets, cantatas, and other highly artistic Christmas pieces is seldom heard today in our churches, though half a dozen stand-bys do reappear every year. After the middle of the last century a specific category of Christmas music, the carols and noels, be-

came very popular; unfortunately, what we hear is only a pale reflection of what they used to be.

The beginnings of the carol go back into the Middle Ages, for it descended from the hymns of the church services, as well as from dance songs, rounds, marches and folk songs, and there are unmistakable connections with the liturgic play. The dramatic instinct of the Middle Ages was responsible for the introduction of the practice of displaying the crib of Bethlehem to furnish the humble, unlettered peasants with a pictorial representation of the Nativity. Then there were the Italian shepherds who on Christmas morning came to Rome, like their Biblical ancestors, to play their bagpipes before the pictures of the Madonna. As is usually the case, this delightful custom inspired the great composers, and many fine Christmas concertos and pastorals were the result. Every one knows the gently undulating "Pastoral Symphony" from *Messiah*; Handel borrowed it from one of the old Italian pastorals.

We must beware of the romantic-popular concept that the carols stand for spontaneous folk song; the best of the genuine ones were written by gifted, if anonymous, masters, some of the tunes later becoming known as "traditional," or "folk song." There are some five hundred old English carols extant, both in English and in Latin. With their freshness, lilt, and rhythmic vigor they represent some of the finest music of the late Middle Ages, the counterpart of the Christmas-inspired paintings of the period. But who knows them?

The carols were composed for ecclesiastical use, especially for processions, and often had moral, didactic—even political—undertones. If this seems strange to us, we must remember that the Middle Ages did not know the distinction between "sacred" and "secular" we make with rather startling incongruity. Those good people, whose entire life was infused with religion, would certainly be amazed by the saccharine trivialities we declare "sacred" music.

There can be no doubt that the carol was danced to, marched to, that it was used in church for the greatest solemnities, and also as banquet music. "Wassail," which is a cry of elation, like "Nowell," proves this, for it was most certainly sung on convivial occasions and accompanied by the appropriate spirits drunk from the wassail bowl.

Many of the later carols in general use today are far less significant musically, though some, such as the well-known *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*, have very fine tunes. And, of course, some of the great ones have survived, while still others of exceptional artistic value were adapted from Continental sources. An example of the former is the famous *Good King Wenceslaus*, which descended from a beautiful old carol to serve the trite words of its present form, while among the latter we may mention *Puer natus est in Bethlehem*. Unfortunately, many of these grand tunes were mangled when set to careless English translation.

The French with their sparkling noels created a delightful body of Christmas songs, and the Germans are noted for their beautiful cradle songs and lullabies, of which Gruber's ubiquitous *Silent Night* is a late Romantic descendant.

The Reformation diverted interest from the Virgin and Child motif, putting emphasis elsewhere, and Protestant music followed suit. Even so, the Puritans frowned upon it (as upon Christmas in general), and after 1700 the carol fell into neglect in the English-speaking countries. It was the Victorians who revived its use, but the musical originality and verve of the original carol was largely lost in the sentimental products of the last hundred years.

Though still very pleasant, joyful, convivial, and often artistic, the carol no longer reflects its characteristic naïve religious spirit. If we want to capture that, we must turn to the many fine paintings of the old masters devoted to the manger, to Mary, the Child Jesus, and the adoration of the Magi, which depict the unutterable mystery of Christmas. The musician no longer knows how to sing about this mystery, and the old one, who did, is forgotten.

Easter

A year or two ago this column commented on the display of shallow and unchurchly music. In response to the article, I received several communications, a few coming from highly respected church musicians, disputing my contentions and asking for "proof." Now I am happy to acknowledge that there is an increasing number of organists and choir-masters not only well trained but literate, with a knowledge of the great masterpieces, and a progressive attitude, and that a palpable improvement is observable in the country; yet I must renew my charges, and this time with documentation.

The April 20 [1957] newspapers printed the complete musical program of the Eastern services in ninety-seven Protestant and ten Catholic churches in the metropolitan area. This does not account, of course, for all churches, but represents a fair enough cross-section for statistical purposes. Of these hundred-odd churches, only seven offered music that in its entirety honors both worship and art. We may be sure that these seven are not the only ones to be faithful to the great traditions of Christian devotional music; nevertheless, the statistics still hold.

The two New York cathedrals win the prize for inartistic hodge-podge, reflecting no credit on their trusteeship of sacred art. A number of other churches had a sprinkling of genuine church music combined with "religious" war horses, while a large group had nothing but blasphemous trash. On the other hand, among the seven uncompromisingly serious and artistic programs, I might mention St. Thomas

Chapel, Episcopal (Pachelbel, Walther, Bach, Charpentier, Viadana, Handel, and Gibbons) and St. Ignatius Loyola Church, Catholic (Palestrina, Lotti, Byrd, and a wealth of Gregorian chant) as offering an object lesson to the others.

If we look at the remaining hundred programs listed, the situation is even sadder than the figures would indicate. Let us mention the few respectable staples many churches produce for Easter: the "Hallelujah" chorus (and a few other numbers) from Handel's *Messiah*, though it is not church music, Bach's chorale prelude *Christ lay in death's dark prison*, and Vulpius's *Easter Hallelujah* are the most frequent. Now subtract these from the programs, and dozens of churches are left with nothing but pitiful fabrications. What glorious names in music! Speaks, Wacks, Banks, Holler, Pfohl, Spinney, Bogatto, etc. Then, of course, comes Gounod's notorious *Ave Maria*, and there are many other arrangements, considered the *pièces de résistance*. Among them may be mentioned Kreisler's *Chanson*, Mendelssohn's *On wings of song*, Wild's *Blow golden trumpet*, Mariott's *Lilies of the dawn*, the Easter chorus from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and, most frequently of all, something entitled "In Joseph's lovely gardens." One church recalled the Resurrection by offering Pierné's *Impromptu caprice*—for harp solo. As I said, a number of churches had a few decent numbers, but demonstrated no understanding for a balanced musical offering. They may start out with impeccable religious masterpieces—Hassler, Palestrina, Eccard, Bach—but end up with the inevitable Willan, Gaul, Refice, Yon and all the other journeymen musicians.

The basic reason for this regrettable state of affairs is the fact that society as an organization is no longer interested in sacred art, an attitude that took its inception with the French Revolution. By the second half of the nineteenth century, church music was considered "an affair of the clergy," but the clergy, in the wake of Jansenism, Josephinism, Puritanism, and Fundamentalism, turned into a conscientious and hard-working body of ecclesiastic bureaucrats serving the church and the parishioners with zeal, but showing no sense for the great and traditionally elevating role of art in religion.

What has happened since the times when the clergy itself took the leading role in fostering and developing the arts for the greater glory of God, when the inventive genius of the Abbot of Beauvais created the Gothic arch, the Renaissance, the Florentine Baptistery, when the canons at the cathedrals of Paris or Dijon or Canterbury, the cantors of Lübeck or Leipzig created the most profoundly devotional—and modern—musical movements of the day? The ambitions of the younger clergy, if they transcend the boundaries of the pastorate, are almost exclusively in the field of the social sciences and politics. Therefore, paradoxical as it may seem, the church musician is the lesser offender,

as is the sculptor who provides the atrocious plaster statues of Christ and the saints, manufactured, as are the hymns, anthems, and Masses, by the commercial artists of religion. It is up to the churches and their administrators to realize that God's house is not an artistic attic from which on certain occasions odds and ends are temporarily retrieved for practical use.

This column's discussion of the musical programs at the Easter services in New York churches elicited a volume of correspondence rivaling the Callas controversy. It is cheering to this writer to realize—as he suspected—that many church musicians are aware of the bad state of affairs though they are powerless before their superiors and their congregations. On the other hand, some of the correspondents do not seem to understand what “artistic hodge-podge” means and, citing all manner of great names from their general repertory, cry “unfair” and want “equal space” on the editorial pages of the *Herald Tribune*.

If someone is slighted or injured, every possible courtesy is extended to him on our pages, but in this particular case I commented on 107 printed musical programs and reported on unquestioned facts. I deliberately dealt only with those churches whose programs were published on Palm Sunday, and certain excellent unlisted programs have since been brought to my attention. But the overall picture remains.

Let us take for an example the program offered by the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, where a very able and knowledgeable organist and choirmaster officiates. But on Easter Day, when traditionally something notable is expected, he did put together a program embracing Jackson, Shaw, Titcomb, Stanford, Gibbons, and Beethoven. Only one item on this very mixed program is great and bona fide church music: the anthem by Gibbons. As to the *pièce de résistance*—the final chorus from Beethoven's oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*—I submit that this composition, presented in a truncated manner, i.e., without orchestra, is neither church music nor a particularly outstanding work. Where is the great sacred art especially composed for Easter services?

No, gentlemen of the choir loft, I used the printed programs not “to criticize the chef merely by reading the menu,” but because without such documentation your indignation would have been the greater. The fact remains that on Easter Day, Anno Domini 1957, most churches in New York presented in whole or in part “sacred music” that is anemic, sentimental, sweet, and empty, unworthy to accompany the great event celebrated on that day. One might debate whether the pyre upon which Savonarola threw every artistic product he regarded as being conducive to sin was an instrument of purification or of destruction, we might debate whether religion, morals, art, and culture gained or lost by this radical act, but it is beyond doubt that both religion and art would gain if

a modern Savonarola were to collect and burn to ashes the trash that under the heading of sacred art has been introduced into our religious life within the last hundred years.

At the bottom of this situation is the fact that sacred art—not only music, but all the arts—has been stagnating for a century or so. A certain frozen concept of the churchly in art gained acceptance during the Romantic era and the great masters ceased to compose, paint, and build for the church. Until recently, to most modern Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, only the Gothic has been the acceptable churchly style of architecture; it does not matter how eclectic or even atrocious, as long as it has pointed arches, it is *par excellence* religious and Christian. Similarly, in church music the ideal is a nondescript “anthem” style that is supposed to represent whatever Palestrina is imagined to have stood for. It too has pointed arches in a musical sense, and it too is eclectic but even more atrocious than the architecture.

But let us assume that it were possible to re-create music in the image of Palestrina or Bach; what would we gain? Antiquarians can never restore the milieu that produced a certain style; the man of the twentieth century will never think with the mind of his ancestor, nor can he feel his mood. No one expects a contemporary poet to write in Dante’s style, but the architect and the composer are supposed to create in a deliberately archaic way. If every age has had the right to express its own ideas and feelings—I reiterate that the hallowed church musicians of the era of “classic polyphony” were absolutely modern masters, in the vanguard of their day—why is this right denied to our musicians? In the world of ideas stagnation means death.

It is not true that modern composers are unwilling or unable to compose for the church, it is the church, the clergy, and the unenlightened congregation that keep them out. The crux of the matter is that either the church accepts art, true art, both old and new, as it did in its youth, or it abdicates its cultural mission, permitting insignificant journeyman musicians, painters, and architects to carry sacred art to the sad fate of Byzantium.

There is, of course, such a thing as a liturgic attitude, but it must be remembered that a true composer will do in his own way exactly as did Veronese when he placed the *Wedding at Cana* in the house of an Italian patrician, or when Rembrandt presented the soldiers who guard Christ in Dutch army uniforms. This is natural. Artists are not historians; they see the past through their own creative eyes. Many, many people have prayed reverently before such “modern” and “inaccurate” pictures.

The same is true in music. Even the severe papal encyclicals on church music recognize the validity of modern art in the church; all they demand is the observance of liturgical propriety, which emphatically does not exclude the musical equivalent of the patrician’s house and the

Dutch army uniforms. The church musicians, many of whom are aware of the need, should undertake to educate their superiors and their congregations; it can be done gradually. But as long as they merely entertain them with sweet music, they are not true to their calling.

Giants of the Choral Heritage

In the current issue of one of our national magazines, the music section, devoted to the centenary of Elgar, begins with these sentences: "The English-speaking peoples have yet to produce an enduring giant among composers. Edward William Elgar came close, though not very." One is taken aback by this nonsense, but upon reflection it must be admitted that if "enduring" is taken to mean "known to the public" (and to writers on music), the author of the article stated at least a half truth. Still, it is rather shocking to think that the names of Byrd, Tallis, Gibbons, Purcell, to mention a few rather tall giants, should mean nothing to a chronicler of musical events. Actually, an original and very highly developed musical culture flourished in England since the early Middle Ages, before either Italy or Germany even appeared on the musical scene, and the brilliant Elizabethan and Jacobean schools of music are among the great glories of English civilization, every bit as great as their famous literature of the period.

Unfortunately, there is no absolute manner of musical communication, only a historically determined one. The forms of music are eternally alive, its materials eternally human, but its style is very perishable, and because of this weakness it suffers more than the other arts with the passing of time. This holds true everywhere, but especially in our country.

Because of the peculiar development of our musical life into a managerial industry, the "giants" are measured by their social, i.e., popular validity. If they are performed, they are giants; if not, they are not "enduring" and are handed over to the musicologist as cadavers are to the anatomist. According to this reckoning Mascagni and Leoncavallo are true giants, but William Byrd and Henry Purcell are mere classroom subjects. We are immeasurably the losers in this sad state of affairs, but it is by our own fault—rather, the fault of our music education, of the ruthless operating procedure of the managers, and the lack of ethical and artistic backbone of many of the performers.

There are no universal laws of style, but by intelligent study we are able to approach the compositions of every period in its own particular spirit. True, all this is somewhat relative. The recognition of this particular spirit can never be more than approximate, but the effort to do so is in itself a serious artistic act that can be most rewarding.

It is a truism that the great artist is a tremendous social unifying force, but only if men gather to hear *his* voice; conventional "subscription" attendance, the managers' ideal, provides a less responsive audience. The managers, and many of the thoroughly indoctrinated artists under their guidance, start from the premise that they are catering to the much-abused "average man." As they know from the advertising world, this individual is supposed to have a simple and undifferentiated soul which can be manipulated from the outside. Keep him happy by giving him nothing but the so-called standard repertory of enduring giants. This technique may work in merchandising, but in every man there lives the longing for better things and greater beauties, for in everyone there are the germs of imagination and passion and the beautiful dream of his independent will. It is only the lack of initiative, persuasion, and leadership, as well as the prevailing trend toward conformity so characteristic of the Age of Advertising, that crows and suppresses these instincts and feelings, resulting in a seemingly uniform concert audience. But this is only surface and largely fiction, for underneath there are real desires and real values.

Music has developed alongside the democratic evolution, and there is a certain reciprocity between the two; therefore music should be accessible and available to ever larger circles. Those in charge of our commercial musical life make a great mistake by misinterpreting the efforts made on behalf of the rights of the public in arts, letters, and sciences; we are not fighting for mass tastes as the concert entrepreneurs do, but for betterment and enlightenment. Democratization does not mean demoralization. It is true, of course, that music for the great masses cannot be as fine and intimate as that for the restricted and aristocratic audiences of old—musical training was part of the education of princes and nobles—but a concert public, numerically very small as compared to the radio and popular-music audience, is still an elite, and at least as receptive as its predecessors.

Managers, conductors, and all those who make up programs should beware; the times are changing. The premise they should start from is that there are infinitely more people able to absorb and enjoy great music, both of the past and the present, than ever before. A couple of weeks ago there was a little news item in the papers about the scant attendance at the Philadelphia Orchestra's first concert on their current tour in San Francisco. It was attributed to their program which was a bit too enduring and gigantesque. The good San Franciscans, who live on the standard musical diet, decided to forgo the pleasure of hearing the superb visiting orchestra, but turned out in force for the second concert which had a less stereotyped program. This is but one of the signs that the old-business-as-usual method of the music industry is slowly but surely passing.

From a Diary of Choral Performances

The meetings of learned societies are usually pretty professional affairs, and after a lengthy day devoted to scholarly papers, the assemblage disperses for rest—or more shoptalk. Not so with the International Musicological Society which held its triennial congress as guests of Oxford University at the beginning of this month. Erudition was present in abundance but, contrary to popular conception, most of these people are excellent musicians and fervent music lovers; therefore, every evening ended with superb music making.

The first day's papers dealt with the music of ancient times. Then, in the evening, the delegates were treated to choral singing of the most exacting perfection and refined taste. The Schola Polyphonica, directed by Henry Washington, performed English church music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is scarcely a place today where the great traditions of choral singing are so well preserved as in England.

The accuracy of intonation and the sheer beauty of sound of this ensemble are extraordinary, as are their phrasing and dynamics. None of the insufferable tricks dearly loved by many of our own college glee clubs, or the Don Cossack Choir, or the commercialized Vienna Choirboys; only pure musicianship and a fine understanding for style and medium. The music of the great Tudor composers floated through the venerable vaults of Merton College Chapel with a pristine fervor that left its hearers hushed. For this is not antiquarianism, the music of Dunstable or Taverner; it is a living choral lyricism of magic power.

The audience that listened to the remarkable choral concert in Merton Chapel at Oxford was a hard-bitten lot of musicians and musical scholars. They knew music and had lived with it for a long time; yet as they filed out of the old Gothic chapel, they were humble and did not even engage in the post-mortem so beloved by critics and writers on music.

There is something about unaccompanied choral music, about a choir that sounds like a homogeneous body and not like an aggregation of individuals, that is simply miraculous in its effect on us. No man-made instrument can compete with the sensuous beauty of the human voice, and no ensemble, not even that perfect combination for pure music making, the string quartet, can evoke the limpid, disembodied sound of a well-trained small choir. Raise the number of the participants, or add an accompaniment, and you get something entirely different. But the physical sound cannot be divorced from the music itself, and this English church music of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is what created the sound. Unfortunately, to the general public—and to most practicing musicians—this “old music” seems today a quaint relic of that

past frequently referred to as the "primitive" era of music and lumped together under the nonsensical heading "pre-Bach music." How unreasonable it is to believe that within 250 years an art could proceed from a primitive stage to the sphere of highest perfection. Is it possible that the same age that built the magnificent cathedrals could produce only the music of naïve beginners to fill its great churches?

The reason for our insufficiency—for that is behind the coolness of our response—is, of course, owing to many causes, chief among them unenlightened musical education, but what it amounts to in practice is undeveloped musical hearing. Listening to music is not a passive physical act but an active psychological participation that selects, corrects, and compares. Centuries of chordal hearing and the equalized tuning system of modern times make it difficult for us to follow these earlier compositions as they evolve during performance, and in reality most of us perceive only the beautifully sounding chords which, after a while, are found lacking in vitality. But this old music obeyed different esthetic rules and its linear construction required a response from the listener that our musical instinct cannot give without conditioning. "Equal temperament," the tuning system demanded by more recent music, in reality falsifies acoustic purity in order to accommodate the many tonalities we now have and which they did not have in those centuries.

The contrapuntal parts of old choral music, not depending on the modern tonalities and on equalized tuning, modify the intervals according to their direction of movement. When moving upward, they sharpen by an extremely slight but perceptible degree, and similarly flatten when descending. Thus every note has "intentions" and is alive, full of energy, and until the piece reaches a point of quiescence—the chord—it is literally fluid and charged with tension. This push and pull of the parts constitutes the inner life of this music, and the release of tension in the chords gives them the ethereal beauty that appeals to us.

Singers accustomed to accompaniment will not readily abandon themselves to this fluctuating, "natural" intonation, and we, bereft of the invisible but very substantial support of the usual tonal feeling, permit the musical action to pass unnoticed. However, just as the appreciation of art has disposed of the notion of "primitive" painting in the Middle Ages, the appreciation of music now making real progress, will, in due course, unlock the secrets of this great art to us.

One of the most regrettable features of contemporary musical life is its uniformity. Whether in New York, Paris, Brussels, or Vienna, one sees the same faces, the same programs, the same conventions, the same mannerisms, and the same lack of artistic enterprise. True, there are enlightened institutions and individuals to be found everywhere, but they seldom have the resources of voice to be heard above the bustle of

the fashionable concert industry. The current vogue of festivals all over the world, but particularly in Central and Western Europe, seems at first glance a most welcome cultural development, but upon scrutiny of the programs only a few of them prove to be worthwhile. In France alone over two dozen of them will take place during the summer, but if it were not for the charm of the locale and the superlative food, one might just as well stay home and go to Tanglewood.

The two weeks I spent in Paris were musically dismal. Every one is there: Bruno Walter, Ormandy and his orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic, Brailowsky, Segovia, and the rest of the international concert circuit, and, of course, the home forces and assorted local talent. But what are they playing? The Philadelphians treated the French audiences to Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and Ravel; the Viennese played Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky; a pianist played all the Beethoven sonatas, while another performed all the Chopin preludes. We should, of course, foster the "classics"—it would be a calamity to neglect the older masters—but I am sure that I am speaking for a large group of music lovers who find an exclusive diet of nineteenth-century fare very unsatisfactory.

In order to safeguard a modicum of freshness for the coming season's critical chronicles, I refrained from attending most of these events, and after a few unsuccessful stabs at what promised to be interesting, I turned elsewhere for musical nourishment. Incidentally, the Philadelphians under the leadership of Ormandy distinguished themselves and were cheered to the rafters. Such orchestral playing is not to be heard in France, but when our great orchestras and artists go abroad they could do better by the American composer.

It seemed to me that *Salut à la France*, though accomplished and well organized has—musically speaking—a faint odor of chichi about it that, while fitting in very well with the spirit of the tourist-patronized festivals, is not quite representative of present-day musical thought. We must not forget that under such circumstances one has to fall back on other sources of musical enjoyment that are far from the beaten path. Yet how silly, this cliché of the "beaten path." Church music used to be in the center of musical life, and its literature contains much of the greatest music ever written.

Wending my way north I found myself in the old archepiscopal city of Malines in Belgium. After the Baroque splendors of Italy, the somber mass of the great Gothic cathedral, with its breathtaking tower and enormous single nave, is overwhelming in its boldness. From the artistic point of view the most impressive part was the music; a pure Gregorian Mass. The choir sang with a beauty of tone, a felicity of phrasing, and a wealth of delicate shading that were memorable; all the contourless mystery of these ageless rites was conjured up, and the

solemnity of the occasion was not marred by the pseudo-religious ditties that are so often heard in our churches—and even in the churches of Italy. Curious, that the purity and high artistic quality of Catholic church music should be so well preserved in the Germanic north while the Latin south has permitted it to fall into neglect. At that, some good modern organ music was heard, too, for the organist and choirmaster of the great cathedral is Flor Peeters.

A couple of days later I heard equally great art from the other pole of Christendom. The setting was again something to behold: St. Mary's, Buxtehude's old Danish church in Elsinore. The church, attached to an old monastery, is one of the best preserved medieval buildings in Scandinavia.

Inside it presents a picture of utter lavishness. American church wardens and elders might raise their eyebrows at the pictures, chandeliers, beautiful carvings, tapestry, etc., yet this is genuinely a Protestant church. But again it was the music that brought all this to life, music of an incomparably bold imagination, unafraid of dramatic contrast, but also of a mind of gentleness and dreaminess. Several cantatas by Buxtehude were performed by an excellent small choir and orchestra under the direction of Niels Moller. Since all the participants were from the University of Copenhagen, I am afraid that Denmark too has her troubles with the backwardness of her church music and musicians.

Buxtehude's music incarnates the Protestant ideal and is as eloquent and satisfying in its religious and artistic conviction as was the music heard in Malines. The last chorus in the cantata *Der Herr ist mit mir*, a Hallelujah chorus, left the congregation in wonderment. It was sturdy, yet not of the imperial splendor of Handel's; devotional, yet not of the mystic quality that one finds in Bach; rather, it was the jubilation of a northern composer who could see the beauties of life as forming part of religion. Buxtehude absorbed a good deal from the Italian Baroque, which gave his melodies an ineffable quality, but everything in his music is most personal, and what differentiates it from Bach's is its unflinching euphony; this is vocal music from beginning to end.

Palestrina

In the hurly-burly of our public musical life, a concert such as the Dessoif Choirs gave last night in Town Hall seemed strange indeed. The evening was devoted to the works of Palestrina, an old master enshrouded in legend. Many a listener must have asked himself concerning this compelling music: "What is the secret of its greatness?" The harmony is almost immovable, yet it constantly fluctuates and trembles; light is evenly diffused, yet its rays are distinct; celestial calm reigns

everywhere, yet one feels hope, desire, delight, and even intoxication streaming out of the music. This is the music of a believer who not only has made his peace with God but is infused with grace. Such a one is victorious even before he enters battle and experiences happiness even in his sorrow. He has his spiritual harmony before he starts, therefore even fragments of his work partake of perfection, while those who could only struggle for their God, the ever-unsatisfied and tragic heroes such as Berlioz or Mahler, were never able to attain the reward—spiritual and artistic fulfillment.

Unlike the sanctimonious romanticists who “spiritualize” this music by draining the blood from it, Paul Boepple treats Palestrina simply as a composer of genius. His choir sings confidently, with a full and rounded tone, for no choral music was ever more suitably set for the voices, or had a more euphonious sound. The mystic wonderment of the six-part Mass *Assumpta est Maria* was well projected by the singers. Nor was the conductor unaware of the fact that in all works written in honor of the Blessed Virgin, Palestrina disposes the chorus in a manner that favors a particularly clear and sweet tone color. The eight-part *Stabat Mater* for double choir, written during the last years of his life, occupies a unique position in Palestrina’s oeuvre. Here the composer approaches the “modern,” that is, the early Baroque style of the Venetians. There is a notable tendency toward simple homophonic writing. But how marvelously the choirs intoned those simple chords! They were balanced as if measured with delicate scales. And at the end, with the words, “in Paradisum,” a heavenly vision of ineffable tenderness and beauty was made felt.

The *Magnificat* (in the first mode) is also for eight parts, but, unlike the *Stabat Mater*, is entirely polyphonic. This work is rooted in plainchant and fulfills the ideal of liturgic polyphony. The delicate little motifs that wander from part to part were ably brought out and Boepple was especially successful in maintaining a flexible rhythm, free of the freezing regularity of beat that so often ruins the rendition of such music.

With the *Song of Songs* we are dealing with a gentle fraud. These works are listed as motets, but in reality they are madrigals in disguise—the papal composer could not afford to indulge in such secular music making. They are exceptionally fine works and were performed by Leslie Chabay with an excellent sense for the style. Used to the glories of grand opera, Chabay demonstrated a remarkable musicianship and taste by never giving a hint of his “past,” and singing with a gently ardent devotion. That these choral pieces were presented by a soloist with string accompaniment should disturb no one; the practice was widespread throughout the so-called *a cappella* era. Thus rendered, the true nature of these appealing compositions was even more convincingly

presented. For while they are religious, they are also ethereal love songs.

A few years ago a well-known series of British biographies called "Master Musicians" came out with a new volume entitled *Palestrina*. For some reason the publishers felt compelled to justify on the jacket the inclusion of Palestrina among the worthies who supply the standard repertory. This half-apologetic attitude is quite common. Every one agrees that the old Roman master was a great man who wrote great music, but the homage accorded him is always backed by pious platitudes rather than by conviction.

Of late a tendency is noticeable to remove the halo from this saint of music, and references are made to his advantageous second marriage and to his shrewd business investments. Some profess to see the wonderful equilibrium of his music as owing to the absence of the composer's obligatory lack of financial security. "This is well-fed music," say the otherwise intelligent program notes of the Dessoif Choirs, which gave a remarkable all-Palestrina concert the other day.

Well, things are less simple than that. The mighty backdrop against which Palestrina's life and work must be seen displays the likeness of Popes Julius III, Marcellus II, Paul IV, Pius IV, Gregory XIII, and Sixtus V. They represent an immense chapter in history, the gradual change of the Rome of the Renaissance to that of the Counter-Reformation and the unfolding Baroque. Palestrina's music reflects all this faithfully, even though the reflection is not always in accordance with the musical trends of the time. Nor can purely religious, personal, or social reasons account for the attitude of the composer. Worldly splendor or the violence of the Borgias were only by-products of the Renaissance; its essence was in its approach to humanistic learning, entailing an appreciation of arts and letters. This attitude permeated both secular society and the Church. Palestrina's art is truly great church music—prayer in song—but it is also the ultimate in the humanistic ideal of art. This priest of music, hailed on the one hand as the "savior of church music" and on the other seen as an arch-conservative whose music was considered fit for the archives less than twenty-five years after his death, was indeed a savior of music, but in a different and larger sense.

The art of music, like everything else in this pre-Baroque period, was in ferment, and Palestrina joined those minds who wanted to preserve certain aspects of Renaissance culture. He was in no mood to compromise what he considered the ideal in art, not even when religious reasons were advanced.

Therefore, when commissioned to reform the great body of Gregorian chant, encrusted with musical barnacles from centuries of misuse, he did not carry out the mandate but left it to others. He could

not address himself to this task because his art, the art he wanted to save from decline, did not express itself in the pure, single-voiced melody of the chant, but in the many-voiced, many-faceted polyphony of the choir.

Nor was he willing to abandon certain technical and stylistic principles dear to the great polyphonic masters for generations. When secular tunes, often used for the foundation of Masses, were frowned upon after the Council of Trent, this savior of church music used them in disguise.

What the artist Palestrina wanted to accomplish was the ideal balance of melody and harmony. He succeeded, but also virtually arrested time, for around him music was changing rapidly. In Venice new and unheard-of sounds, harmonies, and melodies appear in the madrigal and in the great antiphonal choruses, while in Florence there was taking shape an even more revolutionary movement that was to usher in opera.

This is not "well-fed" music, nor is it "otherworldly"; this music is the highest distillate of art and humanity. For this reason it is such great church music. Those who are not intimately acquainted with it—and that includes most church musicians—are always a little disappointed when listening to Palestrina, wondering why his music should be considered one of the highest points in sacred art. But after considerable study, we begin to discover a simplicity, a transparency, a never-failing mastery of the technique of composition, and a sheer perfection of means and proportions that alone can lead to great art. The marvelous organic and spiritual unity of this music does not admit the slightest change; not one note can be disturbed.

Yet this is not cool contrapuntal virtuosity, even though Palestrina's music absorbed all the fantastic skill of his Flemish musical ancestors and contemporaries. The limitless contrapuntal facility is there but can hardly be apprehended by the listener; it is inconspicuous because the musical construction follows the natural breathing of the human voice.

This is the music of a stern and heroic Roman to whom less than perfection was not acceptable and whose artistic principles were inviolate. This is also the music of a fervent Catholic who in matters of faith was equally unshakable, but who knew that beyond a certain point art cannot be governed by liturgy, philosophy, or ethics. He consummates and closes a long period of music and thus looks more into the past than into the future. This was so with Bach too, both being the products of a cultural milieu that had outlived its own times. Both said the last word and there was nothing that could be said after them. What they did and stood for ended with them, and music had to start a new life, in a different world. Bach had slumbered for three-quarters of a century before the world rediscovered him. Palestrina too had to wait for more than two centuries after his death, yet he lived—and still lives—as a legend, a canonized institution. Perhaps with the growing awareness of the

existence of a vast literature of great music beyond the limits of the standard repertory this "Prince of Music," as his tombstone proclaims him, will be better understood.

Lasso

Even those who profess a total lack of interest in music older than the Romantic era have at least heard the name of Palestrina, and perhaps even one or the other of the three spurious pieces that are sung here and there when people want to be very high-brow or very holy. (They are pretty good pieces, even if not by Palestrina.) But Roland de Lasso (or Orlando di Lasso) is an almost total stranger to the public—and even to most church musicians. Yet this Fleming, idolized in the sixteenth century as the "Belgian Orpheus," was one of the greatest composers of all times, bar none.

A musician of the tribe of Handel and Mozart; i.e., the kind to whom no type or genre of music was strange, he could compose with equal facility in the Flemish, French, German, or Italian style. In spite of this many-sidedness, almost every one of Lasso's works is within the traditions of the respective genre; it is his very personal manner that gives them his unmistakable stamp.

Paul Boepple knows this music intimately, and it was an excellent idea to devote last night's entire Dessoif Choirs concert in Town Hall to this rich and varied composer. The well-selected program gave us real insight into the life work of this fabulous master.

The evening began with the Sixth Penitential Psalm, and as the choir intoned "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord," the music glowed in dark Baroque martyrs' mood. As a composer of Masses, Lasso was not quite so supremely accomplished as the Roman "Prince of Music," Palestrina, but in his motets and Psalms he had no equal.

Christ is risen, a lovely German part-song composed almost a quarter of a century later, is so genuinely German in spirit that it even has a tinge of the Lutheran about it. The four-part motet, *We are but dust and shadow*, once more showed the great melodist, while the ensuing *Christ, offspring of God* was tender, quietly dramatic, and boldly chromatic.

Psalm 54 carried us back to the intensely emotional religious mood of this earnest northern Catholic who speaks here with the prophets' elemental eloquence.

The first part of the program ended with the ineffable little choral prayer *Hail, Queen of the Heavens*, the musical equivalent of the Madonnas of the last great Flemish painters of the waning Renaissance.

After the intermission Boepple and his valiant singers gave a demonstration of Lasso's incredible versatility. His Italian madrigal is touched with the ardent melancholy of the best originals from beyond

the Alps, his French chanson airy and piquant, his German song simple and naïve. In some of these pieces the choir was much too large—this is chamber music for a handful of voices. However, except for the louder passages, the voices were well handled. And in the last pieces, for eight and ten(1) vocal parts, respectively, the size of the choir only underlined that this is no longer Renaissance music but the overwhelmingly colorful and sonorous Venetian Baroque.

A few days ago the Dessoff Choir presented an absorbing concert of works of the great sixteenth-century composer, Roland de Lassus. In our musical life this sort of thing is a rare exception, the work of a devoted and scholarly musician and of an equally enthusiastic choir of amateurs. For this music is seldom considered a living art; most of us know neither how to perform it nor how to listen to it.

Usually when one of the great Latin sacred works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is performed in church or concert hall, we hear an anemic and timid piece of music listened to with reverence because of the milieu and the subject—but it does not touch us. This music is considered free of all worldly fetters, even free of human emotions—a particular delicate flower that can grow only in a particular climate. But whatever the flower and the climate, it originates from this earth, and while many of these composers were clerics, they were still men. Priests, monks, saints, or hermits, they were men like ourselves; restless, aspiring, perhaps sinful and penitent souls. Not unfeeling prayer machines and cold theologians, but men whose eyes were amazed and awed by the world of God, whose ears became intoxicated by the wondrous sound of music, and whose minds thirsted for the truth. Theology itself was not yet dry learning; rather it was the divination of the highest truth and at times its bold appropriation.

These composers were investigating the inner secrets of Divinity, they eavesdropped on the conversations of the persons of the Holy Trinity; Father and Son became the heroes of musical ballads. This may indeed be a strange world to us, but the music is as warm and true as Mozart's or Schubert's, for it is the fruit of the same human dreams and fantasies that we recognize in the later composers. Those who listened to Lasso's motets with an open mind and heart could not have failed to feel how subtle theological thought and stern otherworldly vision were melting into the warmest and most human sound: musical lyricism.

Mass and motet of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are not "primitive ore" in which the precious metal is hidden; they are the perfectly shaped jewels themselves, wrought with the elegance that emanated from what was then the capital of culture, Paris, and enriched by the mysticism and architectural bent coming from the Low Countries. Even in the earlier Middle Ages there was a strong ecstatic element in church

music, as well as a most refined and accomplished knowledge of the craft of composition. This fire, this radiance, this elegance and sensuous pomp is akin to amorous lyricism, for this is not suppressed eroticism but passionate love poetry.

Modern man, especially the non-Latin, full of inhibitions, is surprised, perhaps even shocked, when confronted with the many amorous similes and symbols that can be found in the poetry of Catholicism, but he forgets that religious feeling encompasses every deep sentiment of man. It was only following the era of the Enlightenment that religion was raised exclusively into the cool sphere of the brain. The God of the Middle Ages wanted the whole of man, his whole soul, with its most ardent dreams.

It was this amorous warmth in the works of the church composer that liberated music from the coolness and rigidity, the marvelous but abstract designs of the Gothic, enabling this art to become the foundation and first culmination of Western music. But the altar, under the profane flowers lavished on it, gradually is lost to sight, and modern secular music of the Renaissance and early Baroque, shedding its solemn Latin vestments, adorns its national garments with these flowers. Beside the holy muse a younger sister comes of age, but we should never forget that they were sisters.

Whether we shall be able to recapture this music in all its greatness and beauty, but especially in its warmth and ardor, remains to be seen. Aside from the fact that its infinitely refined and complicated nature calls for considerable musical literacy, and that it must be liberated from a thick overgrowth of sanctimonious misconceptions, there stands the formidable obstacle of performance. This music was not written for amateur choirs but for the most accomplished professionals. Unless and until we have *small* professional choral organizations of the caliber of our best instrumental ensembles, it will be impossible to restore this music to its erstwhile position. There is little hope that our churches will take the lead in this work of restoration, but a farsighted and generous grant by the Rockefeller Foundation to the New York Pro Musica Antiqua, one of the very few small professional choral organizations, augurs well for the future. What the Virtuosi di Roma and other similar chamber-music organizations did for the Baroque, some day a Virtuosi di New York may do for the choral music of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Gesualdo Redivivus

Igor Stravinsky's *Gesualdo Monumentum*, first performed a couple of weeks ago by the Philadelphia Orchestra, is a curious freak: vocal madrigals three and a half centuries old transcribed for modern orchestra.

Yet while neither the procedure nor the resultant work made much sense, there is some consistency in the modern composer's interest in his very distant predecessor.

Don Carlo Gesualdo (ca. 1560-1613) was a member of one of the oldest noble families of Naples and the Sicilies. The family was very art conscious and the young prince had at his disposal a musical academy in which he gathered some of the ablest musicians of a region rich in talent. There is ample testimony to the fact that Gesualdo was not only well trained but was regarded a redoubtable virtuoso on several instruments. As the second son in a Renaissance family, it was quite possible for him to devote his life to music, which was his intention. Then the death of his older brother in 1588 changed all this; Don Carlo became the ruling Prince, and soon he even found himself compelled to contract a diplomatically advantageous marriage.

Maria d'Avalos, his bride of an equally distinguished old family, was a very beautiful woman, but a woman with a past—this was her third marriage. The chronicles say that her first husband died of "an excess of conjugal bliss," while the second is reported to have escaped a similar fate by a timely divorce. As to the third husband, when it turned out that he was too much interested in hunting during the daytime and composing during the night to pay enough attention to his spouse, Donna Maria sought compensation elsewhere. Surprised in the arms of the Duke of Andria, she was killed with her lover on the Prince's orders.

Later the Prince married Leonore d'Este, daughter of the great art patron, Duke Alfonso II, taking up temporary residence in the bride's city of Ferrara. The court at Ferrara was at that time the most sophisticated center of music in Europe. The ducal house had an almost unrivaled tradition of being served by the greatest musicians, and during Gesualdo's visit he met there some of the most celebrated madrigalists of his time.

Nevertheless, the restless and haunted man had to return to his fief, and then began his last, religious, period. Gesualdo built and endowed a monastery for the Capuchin Fathers and caused an elaborate mural to be painted depicting him as a humble penitent in the company of St. Francis, St. Catherine, and St. Charles Borromeo, who was his uncle. But the mural does not memorialize his own crime, rather that of his first wife and her lover. This phase of Gesualdo's life saw the composition of his religious music which, though its sole topic is *mea culpa*, nevertheless is worthy of investigation. The unhappy man fell into a deep pathological melancholy, filled with remorse and feverish visions. The human wreck that remained departed this world, some say not without assistance. A life so fantastic and violent could not help attracting the romantics, but since Gesualdo's music is no less extraordinary, he became in modern times the much-admired prototype of boldness and

independence in music, the outstanding hero of "old music." The amateur archeologists conveniently overlook the mainstream of this highly refined aristocratic vocal chamber music of the period. There is no lack of great masters whose music is bold and forward-looking—after all, Monteverdi was one of the group—but all these composers firmly believed that even the most personal utterances must obey the canons of art—not petty little rules, but the great unwritten and unformulated canons of form and logic.

Gesualdo's music is compounded of the most violently antithetical elements, flaming eroticism, death agony, and repentance, and is saturated with the startling expressive force of a psychopath of genius. He set to music not poems but mostly words: "death," "pain," "sorrow," "languor," etc.; therefore Tasso as well as the worst doggerel were equally acceptable to him so long as they contained words on which he could vent his passion. In his madrigals he yields himself to every whim and fleeting emotion, trying to render them in harmonies never before heard, in an exaggerated chromaticism, and in forms that have no contours. This iridescent music, often beautiful and moving, is even more often bizarre and almost senseless, and when in that mood, it goes far beyond the confines of the madrigal; it can no longer be sung. It was music of this kind, Gesualdo's and others, that hastened the demise of the wondrous *a cappella* style. Monteverdi realized the implications, abandoned the madrigal, and turned to something entirely new. Gesualdo refused to go along with the truly modern composers, sinking deeper and deeper into a fantastic and arbitrary manner that had no future and from which there was no way out. Thus he created the closet madrigal, paper music that only instruments can intone.

It is this that must have attracted Stravinsky, who for the last few years has also devoted himself to paper music—more for the eye than for the ear. Still, it is a riddle to me how a man as orderly, reasoned, and coldly intellectual as the aged Stravinsky, can reconcile himself and the violent expressionism of the man whose music he currently worships.

Purcell Anniversary

The history of music, as a rule merely the subject of a perfunctory college course, is invoked by musicians, the public, and Commissioner Patterson when a famous composer reaches a centennial anniversary. We should not object, because the sudden *réclame* results not only in some fine performances of seldom-heard works, but these performances open eyes and ears and may help restore a forgotten or unappreciated composer to his rightful position.

This year saw the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Handel's death. Handel is certainly not a forgotten composer, although

his works, other than *Messiah*, are among the least known. The public's reaction to his music was warm and appreciative and it is hoped that this fact did not escape conductors and performers. But the title search in the calendar, now happily encompassing two centuries, could be widened. If the searchers had been willing to extend the validity of music by still another century, they would have found another anniversary to celebrate: Henry Purcell was born 300 years ago, in 1659. Moreover, no Handelian commemoration is complete without a bow, a deep one, toward Purcell, for it was his music that illuminated the British musical scene for Handel. In the second half of the seventeenth century three great musical nations, England, Spain, and the Low Countries, left the mainstream of European music. After centuries of glorious production and leadership, they no longer had anything individual to contribute and became a mere theater for the music coming from the new leaders. The world's musical headquarters was in Italy and it is significant that Purcell, the solitary great English composer of the age, stated in the preface to his sonatas that he "faithfully endeavour'd a just imitation of the most fam'd Italian Masters." But he did not imitate, he simply accepted the dominant current, as Mozart later did, within which his remained a sovereign personality. Nor did the young musician grow out from this style but from the choral music of the Chapel Royal and Westminster Abbey. This, alone and undiluted, would have stifled him as it did every other English musician, for the Restoration Church was hidebound, stuffy, and uninspiring. But Purcell also learned to know the theater, Shakespeare's and Dryden's, and the composer of anthems and odes instantly realized that the breath of life was to be found not in the "welcome songs" but in the freedom of the theater. *Dido and Aeneas*, written for a girls' school in Chelsea, the music to *King Arthur*, and *The Fairy Queen* are the artistic representations of this life. The beauty of these works can be deceptive. The musician may see in them only remarkable lyricism, but in the great moments of his short life, Purcell was a true and profound dramatist who could create character and conflict and shape destinies.

It is remarkable how much the English Baroque inherited from the fantastically rich music of the English Renaissance, its out-of-doors spirit, its closeness to nature—and this in spite of the Cromwellian episode. In his wonderfully bold and original instrumental music, notably the sonatas and fantasies, Purcell fairly protests against the courtly Baroque, against the absolutism of Continental art, especially of the French who made even nature conform to their ideals as the gardeners in Louis XIV's Versailles made the trees grow in predetermined shapes. Yet, from the point of view of English music, this hopeful portent is a mirage, for Purcell's is the last message of the Island to Europe's music, a final flare-up to be followed by long, smoldering silence. After his death English music had only strength to enrich Handel and prostrate

itself before the giant. But in Handel's success Purcell had a large share.

While many of his anthems and odes are no more than well-wrought "official" music—the Queen had many birthdays—others are of impressive beauty. Such works as his odes for St. Cecilia's Day, the *Yorkshire Feast Song*, or the burial anthems for Queen Mary should be universally known. None of the anthems expresses Christian spirituality, for the Established Church was entirely secular-political, but their splendid festive vigor profoundly impressed Handel, who found in them the British tone *par excellence*, the tone of the proud and confident Englishman who knows on whose side God is. It is most interesting to observe that whenever this British pomp and circumstance does not inspire him, and when his dramatic instinct is not aroused by the requirements of the theater, Purcell's music has an Italian or French cast. But when he is in his element, it is a final cry, the last voice of the English summer. And there never was another composer who could set the English language to music with such infinite grace, accuracy, and natural inflection.

Outlines of the Classical Choral Style

Pergolesi

Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, recently performed in Carnegie Hall, is an utterly tender and delicate work, and although it was not meant to be heard in a large hall, from all accounts it appears that Leonard Bernstein and the able soloists performed the cantata with a fine feeling for style. Still, I wonder whether in our day its unique quality and significance are properly appreciated.

The young Pergolesi, just out of the conservatory for the poor in Naples, no longer represented the august Baroque; he was a thoroughly modern composer, far more so than his contemporaries, though not conforming to the type as we imagine it. He came from unhealthy stock, his father and mother dying in their forties, his brothers and sisters in infancy, while Giovanni Battista himself, limping and frail, showed the effects of tuberculosis from his childhood. He died a mere youth, and the graduate of the conservatory for the poor was buried in a pauper's grave. Yet this frail dreamer gave Western music a new heart and a new pulse. His whole activity lasted but five years. At twenty-three he wrote *La Serva Padrona*, the little opera that was to change operatic history; at twenty-five, battered and distraught by failure upon failure, he composed the *Stabat Mater*; at twenty-six he was dead. A tremendous talent, an original mind who in everything he did showed the way for a hundred years, the Fra Angelico of music passed away in the monastery of Pozzuoli, broken-hearted and perhaps not quite sane in mind.

Soon after his death he became famous. The marvelously fresh tone, the radiant color, lightness, and melodiousness, all undoubtedly influenced by the rich folk song of the Neapolitan countryside, struck Italians, Frenchmen, and Germans as a miracle. But color and radiance, gracefulness and lightness meant far more in this music than mere virtuosity. Pergolesi caught the essence of the genius of his people, for in his music, life and the stage waited with open arms for the new impulses of form and expression.

Pergolesi's melodies are put together from the play of tiny, gambling motifs; everything sings, even the instruments. But what most enchanted his contemporaries and followers was the virginally gentle, melancholy, dreamy lyricism we hear in *Stabat Mater*.

The means in the little opera were modest: three protagonists, one of whom is mute, a few strings and a harpsichord (*Stabat Mater* calls for similar forces), but through this modest ensemble a whole new world speaks. The first to enter this new world, Pergolesi acts like the instinctive discoverer who, almost by accident, with childlike yet absolute certainty, makes a landing on a never-seen continent. In *La Serva Padrona* the sweet and flexible melody of Naples, with its fluent, smiling, and coquettish motifs in light, loose, and subjective forms, created a new genre. In the sacred cantata the brooding, longing lyricism created an atmosphere of tearful devotion. But even here the tears are gentle and devotion genuflects without plaint, accusation, or *mea culpa*; Pergolesi only sighs and bows his head. This peculiar dualism is characteristic of Naples, and it was to conquer the world. It is to be found, at times more profoundly, more dramatically, in other composers' works, but never with such innocent abandon. And the double visage is present everywhere, whether oratorio or opera, Mass or fugue, sonata or concerto—the chiaroscuro reaching its culmination in Mozart, a direct descendant of the school.

To the northern, non-Italian listener this music is suspect, for indeed, this warmth, this radiance, this sensuousness recall the tone of amorous lyricism. But there was once a saint who called his verse *amor sanctus*—holy love—and there was a poet to whom poets “Are all but ministers of Love.” Even the pious monk of the Middle Ages could not dismiss from his memory the secular folk song—the very melodies he helped to persecute. He could not forget them, and the warmth and beauty he learned from them he placed before the Crucifix like the profane flowers he picked in the meadow.

Pergolesi's music is as subtle, pure, and naïve as the monk's song, his *amor sanctus* as divine as Dante's love for Beatrice or Petrarch's for Laura. They were no longer earthly women; they became mystic desires, inexpressible divinations. And the bittersweet music of *Stabat Mater* was written to bittersweet words. A great medieval poet, Jacopone da Todi, composed the poem—a man who took holy orders after he suffered a terrible bereavement: his wife was buried under a collapsed row of theater seats. Theater? The dreaded word was always flung at the Italian composer of sacred music. What kind of a mystery or morality play could it have been in which the poet lost his wife and his mind? For ten years after the tragedy he was insane. But did not God select the insane to humiliate the wise?

These Latin-Italian religious poems and music cannot and must not be judged by the simple expedient of calling them “theatrical” or “secular”; they are heartfelt and sincere, come from the very bosom of the people, and contain a good deal of the eternity of beauty.

Mozart and Haydn

Tanglewood's Mozart weekend culminated in a Sunday afternoon concert that presented a rich and substantial program. A welcome feature of this final event was the variety brought into the proceedings by the appearance of the festival chorus under the expert direction of Hugh Ross. Mozart without vocal music is a very incomplete Mozart, and we might add that Mozart without church music is a very incomplete vocal composer.

The *Mass in C Major* (K. 317), better known as the "Coronation" *Mass*, is perhaps the most popular of Mozart's many liturgic works, while the tremendous *Kyrie*, a great torso of a *Mass* (K. 341), and the *Graduale* (K. 273) are little known. The selection was intelligent and felicitous, for it showed that Mozart was well acquainted with the works of the great Italians while at the same time he was fully aware of the requirements of the Salzburg tradition. The *Kyrie* is a very passionate work, yet liturgic in feeling. The *Graduale* is entirely different in texture, purely vocal, with the orchestra in a subordinate role. Both works express very personal confessions, which in those days was expected of a church composer. They were well performed and impressed the audience with their intimate tone.

The "Coronation" *Mass* was a shade less successful. Occasionally one felt that the performance tended toward the vigorous "oratorio style" of the north whereas this is the dramatic-lyric style of Austro-Italian Catholicism, but on the whole everyone enjoyed the spirited singing of this fresh and melodious music.

The performance of Haydn's *The Creation* by the Philharmonic last night was twice welcome. It afforded a change from the heavy nineteenth-century fare, and it presented a great masterpiece usually mangled by amateurs.

The oratorio is a musical form that has many types and variants, though our choral conductors seem to have rolled them into one synthetic type. This particular work is a new, independent, and entirely personal oratorio style, not a Handelian imitation. Admittedly, Haydn brought the text and the idea from London, but this represents only a point of departure; neither the spiritual nor the musical attitude have anything to do with Handel's Baroque. Haydn's oratorio is Italian-descended, though *The Magic Flute* and other similar works strongly modified the purely Italian style Haydn employed so felicitously in his earlier oratorio, *The Return of Tobias*, and the role of the orchestra is far more significant than anywhere heretofore. *The Creation* is not a stern Biblical oratorio, but an idyllic, pastoral one. It begins with Holy Writ, but as soon as the awe-inspiring miracle of the Creation itself is dealt

with and life appears, Haydn's gentle and idealized worship of nature dictates the tone.

There are those who smile at the delightful genre pictures, at the rapidly alternating, engaging animal portraits, but this is really nature idealism, calling for more finesse than realism. Like Schütz and Verdi, Haydn at seventy was at the height of his creative power and *The Creation* pulsates with it from beginning to end.

The Cantata Singers announce that their next concert will present Haydn's oratorio *The Seasons*. I cannot offhand recall a performance of this work within the last twenty or thirty years, as indeed *The Seasons* seems to be much less popular than Haydn's *The Creation*. Church choirs do not perform it because the work cannot be made to carry an obvious religious message; moreover, Haydn calls for a large orchestra (with trombones) that is charged with exacting duties which the church organ cannot duplicate. I suspect, though, that the main reason for this undeserved neglect is that *The Seasons* is a gloriously uninhibited, friendly, and "innocent" work, qualities that nowadays are found embarrassing. But the oratorio is an unqualified masterpiece and those who have not heard it should not miss the opportunity, for they will be rewarded by music that is as delightful as it is unusual.

Our audiences are used to the German Protestant oratorio and Passion, which is a type altogether different from the southern, Catholic, Italianate species. While it is incontestable that Haydn was deeply impressed by Handel's oratorios, which he heard in London, and that some of the older master's incomparable choral art left its mark on the Viennese composer's vocal style, Haydn's concept is altogether his own. If *The Creation* shows some of the spirit of the great Handelian "victory" choruses, *The Seasons*, idyllic and contemplative, shows a kinship with his *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso*. One should not look here for great religious themes—Haydn's oratorio is no more religious than Handel's—but for genre painting of the most attractive and delicate sort. The libretto was fashioned from James Thomson's original nature poetry. It follows the course of the alternating seasons, offering scenes from nature and from human life. Thomson moralizes a bit in "Spring" and "Summer," but that does not shake Haydn's sunny disposition. In turn, Haydn is a bit gauche in the love scenes, but aside from this there reigns in this admirable work of the almost seventy-year-old composer a verdant charm, a sense of pictorial detail the delicacy of which is comparable only to that of the Netherlands landscape painters.

Haydn was able to draw on his own life and personal experience in recreating sturdy folk scenes, which the Lower Austrian countryman witnessed before he became a member of a princely household—vivid hunting pictures, remembered by the hunter who used to roam the fields,

and a storm that is as skillful a piece of program music as one finds in the literature. But the wise old composer knew that music should never be descriptive to the detriment of its own nature and he always observes a certain restraint, inviting the imagination to leap in and supply the unexpressed. This painting in music is fascinating. We shiver with the winter frost, we hear the song of birds, the buzzing of bees, the croaking of frogs, the patter of rain. Everywhere one feels the working of an inexhaustible imagination. The scene where the vintners celebrate is a peasant festival of realistic, earth-bound vigor, and there are also some highly dramatic moments that are exploited to the hilt, as well as a magnificent sunrise and charmingly peaceful pastoral sounds.

The human *dramatis personae* are Hanne, Lucas, and Simon. Unlike the Handelian oratorio, there is no story or action and no dramatic relationships, though Haydn provides a modest love interest for Hanne and Lucas. Their love duet is the only part of the oratorio that is somewhat perfunctory. Actually, these three figures fulfill the role of the narrator (or Evangelist) in the northern oratorio, surrounded by the chorus, which takes the part of the country folk. They convey with a moving directness the feelings people experience with the approach or passing of the seasons.

One would call *The Seasons* a "peoples' oratorio" were it not for the unpleasant connotation that the term has acquired during the last few years. This music is popular in the noblest sense of the word, accessible and delectable to persons in all walks of life. Unfortunately, this sort of thing is now out of fashion. Haydn is dismissed as an innocent optimist, and however unjust this dismissal may be, it is eloquent of the temper of the contemporary mind that no epithet could be more damning. It is to be hoped that there are enough lovers of music left who will find this innocent optimism and direct and instantaneous musical communication refreshing.

Beethoven

Our readers may have noticed that the Ellenville Festival opened with Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and that Tanglewood plans to end its season with the same great work. There is nothing unusual about this because the last of Beethoven's symphonies is a symbol of monumentality, and especially after Wagner's demonstrative use of it, has come to be regarded as the solemn, consecrational piece *par excellence*.

That Wagner used it for the opening of the Bayreuth theater is explained not only by reverence and admiration. The fact that Beethoven, the supreme master of abstract instrumental music, called on human voices in the finale of this symphony appeared to support Wagner's theory of the "universal art work" uniting poetry, drama, and

music, and the composer of the *Ring* did not hesitate to imply that he completed what had been begun by Beethoven.

The Romantic era canonized the choral symphony, and every composer from Mendelssohn through Berlioz to Mahler tried to use it as a model. Its influence was so great that an entire chapter of the history of music could be dedicated to it. Yet the work was—and is—misunderstood even though its popularity is genuine, as is the profound impression it makes on the listener.

The nineteenth century took Beethoven for the father and epitome of Romanticism. His expansive musical gestures and his tone, which has the quality of a tribune addressing the multitude, led posterity to believe that this was the first time that the cult of the individual, so dear to the Romantic world, had been manifested in music. The title of a very bad book, published in this country a few decades ago, *Beethoven, the Man Who Freed Music*, expressed a widely shared view. Well, what did he free music from? From the fetters that shackled a Bach or a Mozart? Granted that with Beethoven a personality with tremendous individual force made its appearance, but his universalism made him into an arch-Classicist, sharply different from the Romantics.

Indeed, Beethoven was the greatest representative of Classic idealism, whose artistic integrity was unparalleled. By this integrity is meant the exemplary conscientiousness in the choice and handling of his materials, the uncompromising carrying out of original plans in which not the slightest allowance was made for caprice or mood.

What principally distinguishes Beethoven from the earlier Classicists in the Viennese school is the difficulty he had with his themes. Haydn and Mozart, like all eighteenth-century composers, used anything for a theme; they were just as likely, especially in opera, to invent a beautiful melody or to use the first handy cliché from the public domain. All that mattered was what was to happen to this melody. But Beethoven struggled with his themes and melodies, lived with some of them for years, using them only after repeated recastings. The theme for the "Ode to Joy" in the *Ninth Symphony* was one of these; it occupied him for a long time, and the composer even gave it a preliminary trial in the *Choral Fantasy*. His sketchbooks (Mozart and Haydn composed "in their heads") testify to this laborious procedure, but once having settled on the theme, he had little difficulty even with the most elaborate structures.

Now the "*Choral*" *Symphony* remains an abstract symphonic work conceived along purely instrumental lines in spite of the choral finale. As a matter of fact, the famous finale turned out to be a mistake, if a glorious one. Beethoven tacitly acknowledged this by planning a tenth symphony in the traditional manner without voices. Up to the finale we are dealing with a work that carries the symphonic ideal to its apogee; even the scherzo is a tremendous sonata structure.

Then the naïve idealist wanted to express his abiding faith in humanity by calling on Schiller's *Ode to Joy*—again the universal, cosmic thought and gesture. But all naïveté disappears in the iron-fisted symphonic logic of the realization. The voices are there and they sing, but they sing only by the grace of the symphonist and neither the form, texture, and language of the movement, nor, as is well known, the vocal setting, take due cognizance of the fact that this movement is supposed to be a sort of cantata.

The finale is quite clearly cast in the shape of a theme with a set of variations, and its fate is altogether determined long before the first voice is heard. This first voice, incidentally, is not Schiller's but Beethoven's, and the recitative the "librettist" composed upon it is rather clumsy. As to Schiller's *Ode*, it does not fare particularly well in Beethoven's hands. He selected some verses at random and then used them in a haphazard order. Both poetry and the voices are absolutely subordinated to the symphonic procedure, so much so that when this incomparable master of the art of variation wanted to write one in the form of a rapid double fugue, he simply omitted the voices.

Thus it can be seen that there is little in the work to justify the belief in a fundamental innovation that changed the course of the symphony. Change it did, but that was owing not so much to Beethoven as to the misreading of the implications of this magnificent score. Brahms and other thoughtful students of the symphony once more realized and proved that text and voices are essentially opposed to the nature of the symphony, that vocal music demands certain compromises befitting its nature. Indeed, every other "choral" symphony turned out to be a failure precisely because it ceased to be a symphony.

The incorporation of the "Ode to Joy" may have been a mistake, nevertheless, the grandeur and magnificence, the utter sincerity, the deep pathos of this finale, allied with the elemental power of the preceding movements will forever delight listeners, and perhaps it is not without justice that the *Ninth Symphony* has become a sort of international artistic anthem.

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