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INSTRUMENTS IN THE ORCHESTRA: (2) The Viola

THE second of a series of short articles on the instruments of the National Orchestra, written to help interested listeners towards a more informed appreciation of orchestral music and a better understanding of the resources at the command of the conductor

THE viola section of the orchestra is almost invariably situated on the conductor's right, immediately up-stage from the second violins. The unaccustomed eye may have difficulty at

first in picking out the violas from the violins, as both are played in the same manner and held in the same position.

There is in fact little difference between the two instruments. Their acoustical principles are the same, but although the viola is larger than the violin it is generally agreed that it is too small for its pitch (it is an alto instrument, tuned a fifth lower than the violin) and as a result its tone lacks brilliance and incisiveness. The *viola pomposa*, an instrument invented by J. S. Bach, was larger, had five strings and produced a far better tone, but it was abandoned as too tiring to hold and play.



Spencer Digby photograph
FRANK HOFFEY
Principal viola in the National Orchestra

Because of its limitations the viola is not a good solo instrument, although many composers have written works specially for it and such players as Lionel Tertis have won for them a lasting place in the concert repertoire. But the viola is an indispensable member of the orchestra and is of great importance in chamber music ensembles. There are seven in the National Orchestra.

Unholy Church Music

CHURCHGOERS would have good reason to be startled and offended if ministers took to reading erotic poetry from the pulpit. Just as jarring to the sensitive, trained ear of Professor Richard T. Gore is much of the music now played and sung in Protestant churches. "Go where you will," he advises in *Christian Century*, "to the village church or the great metropolitan cathedral . . . most of the music used in our worship services is little better than blasphemy."

A long-time church organist and head of the conservatory of music at the College of Wooster (Ohio), Professor Gore divides the church music he scorns into two broad classes. One kind is "soft purrs from the organ, a gentle humming from the choir, hymns sung slowly and glueily and . . . a maudlin ditty played sotto voce on out-of-tune chimes," the whole being calculated to "lull the listener into a dream state." The other kind is erotic music calculated to excite the listener into a state of unholy.

Bad music, thinks the professor, has infiltrated the Protestant service from start to finish: "The organists play pieces either transcribed literally from secular sources or written in imitation of them. . . . The congregational hymns in widest use recall the rhythms of the beer garden and the dance pavilion. . . . Most of the choir anthems and canticles are the grandchildren of French opera, piano pieces and military marches."

Examples of the lulling school: Tchaikovsky's *None But the Lonely Heart*, Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, and "scores of feeble organ pieces called *Dreams, Harmonies du Soir, Berceuse, or Forest Vespers*." As for sexiness, Gounod is perhaps the worst offender: "Voluptuousness . . . was in Gounod's nature; he could not escape it. In opera it is fine; in the church it has no place. Listen to *The Redemption* . . . or to the *Seven Last Words* of Gounod's spiritual disciple, Dubois! The suave melodies are the same, the suggestive rhythms are the same, the osculatory orchestration is the same. Only the words are different. You can't make sacred music out of operatic by using sacred words. . . ."

Why is such music tolerated in churches? Professor Gore thinks that it is only because "music is a foreign language; one person in a hundred knows its grammar and syntax, not one in a thousand knows its aesthetics." Good church music, the professor believes, besides being written by the best composers, must either: (1) be set in musical style that does not sound at all like secular music (i.e., the unaccompanied Gregorian chants—still sung in many a Catholic and Anglican church); or (2) have its secular elements "assimilated and purged of their worldly connotations" (i.e., the cantatas, Passions, and organ works of Bach).

As soon as churchgoing ears become educated enough to recognise irreligious

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