

Beecham's Latest Broadside

Musicians Comment on his New Campaign

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM, who was once described by Winthrop Sargent in *Life* as Britain's best orchestra conductor and the only successful democrat in the world's most dictatorial profession, has once again (according to recent cable messages) been laying about him lustily. Now 69 years of age, he is reported to have declared that he would start a nation-wide campaign—"steadily and unstoppable" among English musicians, urging them to form an institution "to protect music and resuscitate some measure of sanity in public thinking."

Beecham, according to the cables, deplored the practice of installing foreign musical executives in British institutions saying: "We put them everywhere and not a voice is raised. I know half-a-dozen people who could do a damn sight better than some who are making a mess of things. What is the use of us having all these colleges and academies if we cannot produce executive musicians of our own? If we can't staff our institutions with English musicians, close them down."

Though this is not by any means Sir Thomas's first public outburst, the indications are that what he said was said with greater vehemence than he has used for some time, so *The Listener* asked some musicians what they thought of his criticism.

Here are their views:

RESTRICTIONS ON ART

I CANNOT believe that that superb artist, Sir Thomas Beecham, is indulging in a hunt-the-foreigner campaign. He is probably blowing off against our Royal Schools of Music, and against a bad performance or two at Covent Garden. It is vexing when a dud foreigner is preferred to a good local—is *The Listener* guiltless here?—but nothing much can be done about this, short of imposing restrictions that would finally be crippling to art. It would be eminently suitable were Sir Thomas to be invited here, to blow off aristocratically against some of our institutions. How refreshing it would be if we were to get the news that the following foreigners were coming here this year: the French violinist Ginette Neveu, the Polish pianist and harpsichordist Wanda Landowska, the Swiss pianist Alfred Ferber, and the Rumanian pianist Dinu Lupatti.

—Frederick Page

(Lecturer in Music, Victoria University College).

RESPECT FOR GENIUS

I AM inclined to agree with Beecham. It is, I think, perfectly right and proper that English musicians whose merit equals that of foreigners should have the preference in British musical concerns; it is their livelihood. The mere fact that an individual has a foreign name or reputation does not necessarily mean that he or she is "one out of the box," but on the other hand genius of any nationality must be respected. My own teacher, Edward Simson, is an Estonian, and because

he is an exceptionally fine musician, he is greatly respected in Australia.

—Eileen Price

(Principal clarinettist with the Ballet Rambert Orchestra).

MUSIC IS EVERYBODY'S

I'M afraid I can't agree with Sir Thomas Beecham's attitude, though of course he knows so much more than I can ever hope to do. I regard music and the other arts as universal; not belonging to any specific country or people. There are, too, so many different types, particularly in the Continental schools. There are the warmth of the Italian and the depth of the German, for instance. I think we should take everything we can get in knowledge from other countries and mix it all together. All thinking people have in mind to-day the brotherhood of man—there is a United Nations feeling abroad, and it should be exactly the same with music. I certainly do not think we should establish such strict boundaries as Beecham seems to suggest. Let us absorb all the good that is offering, without, of course, losing our own individuality. We can't learn if we adopt a narrow, insular attitude. I would not like it to be thought I was anti-British, pro-foreign, or anything of that sort, but there is always so much to learn from others.

—Audrey Gibson-Foster

(Pianist and Teacher).

POWER OF A NAME

WE all know that the English—or rather should we say the English-speaking people—are very easily fooled by a foreign name, and this seems to be another of Beecham's shots in his many years' battle on behalf of English music and musicians. I know him well. But I would say that if the Briton can't do the jobs he refers to—the cable is a bit vague—he should not protect his inefficiency behind the barrier of national prejudice. If he can do the job, then it should be given to him.

—Andrew Morrison

(Pianist and Conductor; visiting examiner for the Trinity College of Music).

COMPETITION MEANS PROGRESS

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM may just be manufacturing publicity for Sir Thomas Beecham, but it is a fact that foreigners are steadily percolating into British music and its institutions. Competition is a good thing in any walk of life. It makes for progress and raises standards. Foreign competition has the advantage of putting the Briton on his mettle, but it must not be allowed to get out of hand. A foreign name should really cut no ice, but it is in our peculiar

make-up that if Bill Jones or Joe Brown supply themselves with one, they make a greater impression. Pure ability should be the test, but in the cases of institutions whose avowed aim is to encourage native talent, the native should have the preference if it becomes a case of choice.

—Hubert Milverton-Carta

(New Zealand Tenor).

ORCHESTRAL CYNICISM

FROM my experience with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, I agree wholeheartedly with Beecham. He

sometimes talks with his tongue in his cheek, but this is a matter which he takes very seriously. It has always been hard for English players—even those with considerable talent—to gain recognition. Albert Sammons, the English violinist, for instance, struggled for years before he was recognised. Foreigners were asked to play the Elgar Violin Concerto which Sammons played better than any of them. I'm afraid the mass of English

people are not musical; they never were and probably never will be. The Promenade concerts were always well attended, even when performances were frightful. It was like Wimbledon—the place to go. Beecham would put on a concert of modern English works but people did not go round the corner to hear them. Recently he cancelled a concert because of lack of patronage. Years ago he set out to raise the standard of public taste. The orchestra struggled hard, I remember, to present a Vaughan Williams symphony, but the box-office was thin and they lost money. They got hold of Charles Munch and carefully rehearsed a French contemporary programme, yet thousands of pounds were lost. Had they slipped in the Tchaikovsky Concerto it would have paid. I'm afraid you get very cynical in a symphony orchestra.

—Alex Lindsay

(Violinist).

SHOCK TREATMENT

SIR THOMAS BEECHAM has always believed in the shock treatment method in music just as Bernard Shaw does in the theatre. And some of his apparently outrageous remarks have had good results. Yet in art nobody can afford to be bigoted. If the state of music in England to-day is as Beecham describes it, then it would be a good thing to close the colleges down and hold a commission of inquiry to see just what is wrong. Britain has turned out some fine musicians in the past, and she still is as far as we out here can judge. But the number of first-flight composers seems to have decreased. The promise of 20 years ago when Elgar, Bantock, Vaughan Williams and Bax were in their prime and the leading voices in English music, does not

seem to have been maintained. Britten and Walton are the white hopes of British music to-day. Unless the ranks of this school are increased, in a few years there will be nobody left to carry on and then we shall have to depend on foreigners. The whole position obviously needs a thorough overhaul which Beecham, quite rightly, seems about to undertake.

—Bessie Pollard

(Pianist and Composer).

UNFAIR TO NATIVES

MORE and more artists from other countries are coming to England for work. This is a little hard on British artists, for England is a small country and there is a limit to the number of musicians from outside that country we can absorb. There is no doubt that we have first-class musicians of our own—this was proved during the war years when they carried the full load of concert-giving under the most trying conditions—and some day we shall learn to value our artists with a truer sense of value. Unfortunately British musicians are often overlooked in England and foreign countries are little interested in them, while in some measure the opposite is true for foreign musicians.

It is also true that English composers are doing as fine a job as can be found anywhere in the world at the moment—whether you take the older school as represented by Vaughan Williams, whose new Sixth Symphony is a most beautiful work, or the younger school of Britten and Berkeley.

—Val Drewry

(Musical Impresario).

KEEPING A BALANCE

ANY community of people, small village or large national group, will develop its own culture. Whether national cultures can remain isolated without contact with ideas from outside and flourish, is a question for the anthropologist to answer. History books may say that the impact of German music on English in the 17th Century at the time of Purcell destroyed the impetus of indigenous musicians, so that there was an eclipse of native effort for 200 years. The same is said to have happened in 17th Century France with the impact of the then new Italian style of music. German music at this time, however, received life and new form through contact with the new Italian style. Our 20th Century music in its forms and harmonic systems is a fusion of the old and the new, and of all national types, so that, in the long run, all new contacts, with the inculcation of new ideas, must be beneficial. It is important, however, to keep the national nucleus. We have a growing danger in New Zealand, at a time when native composers and performers are coming into being, of the increasing organisation of music for travelling overseas musicians to the exclusion of those who live among us. All societies should be adamant in a policy of keeping the balance between native culture and a foreign impact. One thinks Sir Thomas is hoist with his own petard. How does he reconcile his ideas with his own excursions abroad?

—Dorothy Davies

(Pianist).



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