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KNOW YOUR CLASSICS

THIS is one of a further series of articles written for "The Listener" by BESSIE POLLARD. As with the preceding series, published some time ago, the aim is to help the student and the interested listener towards a more complete appreciation of good music.

(20) Overture to a Picaresque Comedy (Bax)

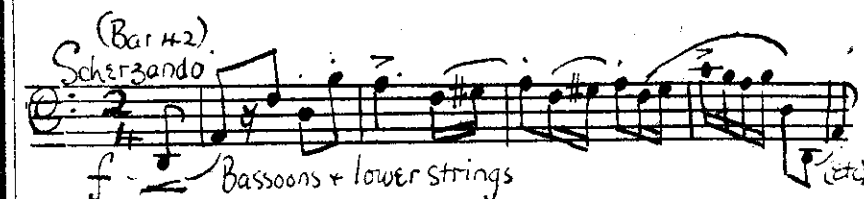
SIR ARNOLD BAX, the Master of the King's Musick, for some years was intensely interested in Celtic lore, and certain of his compositions suggest perfectly the remoteness and characteristic colour of the old Celtic legends and their poetry. His output includes highly original chamber works, some most exquisite tone poems for both solo piano and two pianos, many symphonic major works, and choral compositions and solo songs.

The *Overture to a Picaresque Comedy* was completed by October 19, 1930, and presented for the first time at a Halle Orchestra concert, in November, 1931, under Sir Hamilton Harty, to whom it was dedicated. Bax says of this brilliant work, "It does not pretend to be the prelude to any particular play; it is simply a piece of music associated with some character such as Casanova or d'Artagnan. The listener may make his own choice in the matter." The Overture is scored for three flutes and piccolo, oboe and cor anglais, three clarinets and bass clarinet, bassoon and contra-bassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, a fairly full percussion section, celeste, harp, and the usual strings.

The work begins with a "gay and impudent" theme announced by violins against a background of short repeated chords from woodwind and brass—



After the main theme has been bandied about by all sections of the orchestra, the second subject (given out by bassoons and lower strings) enters in bar 42. This is cast in a similar mood to the first—



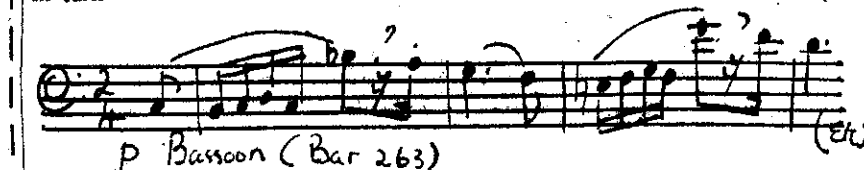
In bar 177 the time changes to 4/4 and a broad stately melody is heard in the violins, accompanied by woodwind and horns—



A very beautifully scored passage for violins and celeste begins in bar 204—



The quiet mood holds sway for some time; then gradually the music gathers speed and volume until the original humour reasserts itself. In bar 263 the bassoon leads off with a most amusing tune which is taken up by other instruments in turn—



Overture to a Picaresque Comedy by Arnold Bax will be heard from Station 2YZ Napier on Monday, May 23, at 9.30 p.m.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, MAY 29