

# MUSIC AND THE BEAST

## The Charmer Charmed

(Written for "The Listener" by "KATH")

We all know that Music can soothe savage beasts. It would appear, however, that beasts can also soothe musicians, or they would not appear so often in famous compositions. Here are a few examples:

SINCE Adam the stock ingredients for songs have been the lovely maiden, babbling brooks, shady groves, stars; or such variants as broken vows, torrents of tears, stars again; and even graveyards. Nightingales are of course strewn as thickly through classical songs as currants in a Christmas cake. And now the crooner has a different way of saying the same thing: O-oh, I wanno woo, I wanno woo an' bill an' coo.

But other matters crop up too—little irrelevancies from a needle to an anchor. (In music I have met the anchor but not yet the needle. Has anybody?) Themes have every possible variation—the Arab steed; the vacant chair; bananas; the Brooklyn Theatre; silver bells and cockle shells; the chord that gets lost; the picture-no-artist-can-paint, which is surely the negation of the negation; the bird in the gilded cage; the leaf that caused such grief in the dim long ago; silver threads among the gold.

We get personalities, too: Hugh the Drover; Handel in the Strand; Tom the Rhymers; Helen of Kirkconnell Lea; Nancy Dawson, of No. 5 Old England Square; the man with the nigrum-snidrum on the end of his nose; the fellow dashing away with the smoothing iron; the anti-social man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo.

By way of a change Bach writes a Coffee Cantata, Beethoven dashes off an angry trifle to celebrate a lost penny. Haydn gives us a Clock and Beethoven a Battle Symphony.

### Birds, Beasts and Fishes

But I think the most extraordinary fact of all is the affinity that birds, beasts, and fishes have for crotchets and quavers. But Beethoven in his symphonies attempts the cry of the

quail, and of the cuckoo. The swan finds an interpreter in Grieg, the swallow in Abt, the stork in Wolf and Taubert. Schumann invokes the prophet bird (whatever that might be). Stravinsky has given us a sumptuous firebird and Rimsky-Korsakov a golden cockerel.

Schubert is a regular aviary: larks, rooks, cuckoos, roosters, pigeons, ravens, with other birds not specified. "Die Vogel" is a most magical song for a lyric soprano, and never sung! From a Jacobite song hails another bird, also unspecified: "A wee bird cam' tae oor ha' door." Perhaps the most lugubrious of all bird songs is "Twa Corbies" where one bird deliberates with another about picking the "banes clean" of a corpse.

In "La Poule" Rameau presents a clucking, scratching fowl. Couperin deals graphically with bees, butterflies, budding lilies. Schubert and Grieg have also a shot at the butterfly. It is a poetical insect, apparently, but it takes some doing to get it across, as Moussorgsky did with the flea.

A modern Dutchman represents, in five preludes, the humming bird, the cat, the camel, the mouse, and a herd of deer. When I first heard this series I was greatly taken with the heavy galumphing of the camel and the nimble frisking of the mouse's tail.

### A Beetle, Too

Perhaps the most lovable song in this genre is Moussorgsky's song about the beetle and a child's terror. "He flew and hit me straight on the forehead—O Nana, I just sat quite still. . . then I peeped with one eye nearly shut and listen what happened, Nana dear. On his back with nose turned up and paws all folded lay the beetle—he was not fierce now and did not twiddle his whiskers—did I kill him—or was he shamming?"

Fish don't come, in for so much notice in music, except in Hebridean songs, and these certainly pullulate with all manner of live sea things—seagulls, whales, seals, and walruses. What a rare song that is in which the mother seagull teaches her baby to speak. In no place but the Hebrides would that be thought a suitable subject for a song!

And of course there is Schubert's famous "Trout," which pleased him so much himself that he elaborated it into the Trout Quintet. "Down in a brook swift running, a trout both swift and wise, did dart with happy cunning, as swift as the arrow flies." It is all there in the music; the swiftly flowing water, the quick silver bubbles, the cheeky flirt of the trout's tail.

The list could be drawn out indefinitely, but I have written enough to show that there are few things living or dead that genius cannot use as grist in its mill.

## FILM REVIEWS

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that after a while the process becomes ludicrous and even boring. If this is a true picture of the "easy come, easy go" nature of American matrimony it is disturbing; but I prefer to believe that Vicki Baum was just stuck for a way to carry on and finish her story.

Masterpiece of mis-casting: Ralph Bellamy as a ballet impresario.

### FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS IN TROUBLE

(Columbia)

THIS is the first of the series I have seen, but I have seen enough to think that these five little Peppers are not so hot.

## RADIOTRON VALVES

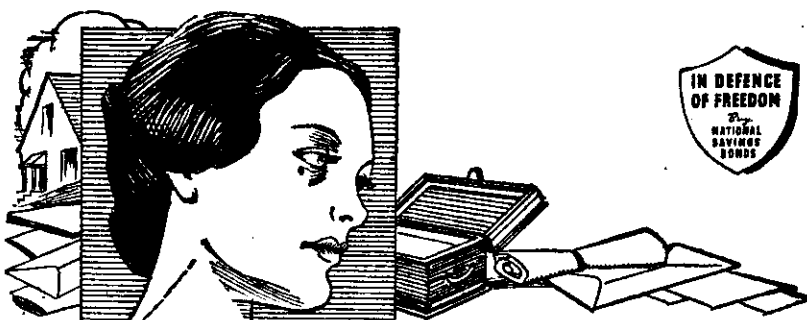
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