

# MUSIC WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE

## Elizabethan Composers Gave Good Advice

**I**F you would compose a madrigal, you must "possesse yourselfe with an amorous humor, so that you must in your musicke be wavering like the wind, sometime wanton, sometime drooping, sometime grave and staide, otherwhile effeminate . . . and shew the uttermost of your varietie, and the more varietie you shew the better shal you please." This was the advice given to the young composer of Queen Elizabeth's day by Thomas Morley. And it was the composer of that day who earned England the greatest reputation in Europe for making good music, a reputation which she subsequently lost for two centuries, thanks to Handel, the Puritans, and the industrial revolution.

Now, while the figures of Michelangelo and Shakespeare dominate any view of the history of art and literature, the English people are hardly aware of their own musicians who were not merely the con-

temporaries, but the peers of those great figures.

### Popular Misconception

Perhaps the New Zealand schoolboy has a vague notion that a man called John Bull (whom he probably confuses with *Punch's* butcherlike Briton) may have been the composer of "God Save the King," but he has a slim chance of hearing much of the plentiful and very beautiful music which Bull wrote for the virginals. When he has got past the school journal stage, he may memorise some verses by Thomas Campion, but he may never know that Campion wrote them first as songs, with his own music. He will come across "It was a Lover and his Lass" when he reads *As You Like It*, but he may never know that Shakespeare got that song from Thomas Morley, the man quoted above; and if he hears it sung he is just as likely to hear a setting by some later and inferior composer as to hear the original song which Shakespeare heard and apparently liked. The same applies with many others of the songs in the plays.

William Byrd, a pupil of Thomas Tallis (he whose name is found in *Songs*

of Praise or any good English hymnal) was the founder of the school of English madrigal composers. He held a monopoly from Queen Elizabeth to print songs and ruled music paper in England, and the Queen's written document forbade anyone else to do these things "uppon paine of our high displeasure."

Byrd wrote a great deal of fine church music, and his "Earl of Salisbury's Pavan" is recognisable in one of Leopold Stokowski's transcriptions. In a book of vocal music "framed to the life of the words," he set out reasons "to perswade everyone to learne to sing," saying: "It doth strengthen all the parts of the brest and doth open the pipes," and: "It is a singular good remedy for a stutting and stammering in the speech."

### "Ballets" And "Ayres"

Thomas Morley was Byrd's most famous pupil but he was merrier and less frequently austere. His madrigals were gay, and he wrote dozens of "ballets" (pronounced like "ballots") with a "Fala" refrain after each verse. Of these, "Now is the Month of Maying," has become well known, but it is only one out of 105 little songs of similar length.

John Dowland (so named, it is believed, because he was a Dubliner, or "Doolan") was most famous in his own day as a lutenist, and he was sought after in European courts to sing and accompany his own compositions. His "ayres" were precursors of the "art song" and "lieder" in function as well as form.

Dowland alone, among the Elizabethan composers, enjoyed the distinction of being mentioned by Shakespeare (in "The Passionate Pilgrim"):

*If music and sweet poetry agree  
As they must needs, the sister and  
the brother,  
Then must the love be great twixt  
thee and me  
Because thou lov'st the one, and I  
the other.  
Dowland to thee is dear, whose  
heavenly touch  
Upon the lute doth ravish human  
sense  
Spenser to me, whose deep conceit  
is such  
As, passing all conceit, needs no  
defence.*

### "... And Such Like"

The best indicator to the style in which the Elizabethan composers set the lyrics of their day is found in Morley's own instructions to his pupils, "Rules to be observed in dittyng":

"You must when you would express any word signifying hardness, crueltie, bitterness and other such like, make the harmonie like unto it, that is, somewhat harsh and hard but yet so it offend not. Likewise when any of your words shal expresse complaint dolor, repentance, sighs, teares and such like, let your harmonie be sad and doleful. . . . Moreover you must have a care that when your matter signifyeth ascending, high heaven, and such like, you make your musicke ascend; and by the contrarie



"The bull by force in field doth raigne,  
But Bull by skill good will doth gayne"  
is the couplet attached to this portrait  
of John Bull, the Elizabethan composer

when your ditty speaketh of descending, lowenes, depth, hell, and others such, you must make your musicke descend."

Thus Thomas Weelkes, in a well known madrigal "As Vesta was from Latmos Hill descending" depicts Vesta "running down amain" and her nymphs "two by two, then three by three" and "together," all with appropriate effects; notes running down the scale, and singers in twos and threes and unison fulfil Thomas Morley's demand that the music must be "framed to the matter in hand."

### A Gentleman's Pastime

A fable told by Morley about a young gentleman who was ashamed of himself for not being able to sing at sight after supper "at Master Sophobulus, his banket" gave rise to the belief that it was part of every gentleman's education to be able to take part in madrigals and sing at sight, but it is possible that this little story was invented by Morley to help along the sales of his "Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke" without having much relation to actual social conditions then prevailing.

At any rate we do know that singing madrigals was the custom in many an English country-house. The way in which part-books were printed shows how they could be kept in a house and produced for the use of visitors. If the book were opened and placed on a table, five, or even six people could stand round it and each have his part facing him.

Thus madrigal singing would fit one critic's definition of chamber music — "the music of friends." One of the chief aids to understanding madrigals is to remember that they were written *without* an audience in mind. Most of the music we hear now was written to be played to an audience; madrigals were written so that a handful of people who could read music and sing might spend an evening enjoying themselves.

A group of ballets by Weelkes and Morley, and an "ayre" by Dowland (arranged for him for voices alone) will be heard from 4YA at 8.35 p.m. on Monday, February 16, and a madrigal proper, "Round about a Wood," by Morley, will be heard from 1YA at 2.34 p.m. on Sunday, February 15.

## HAPPY DAYS IN MALAYA

(Continued from previous page)

### COMMONER TO KING

**A**ND now for a glance at Sarawak, the kingdom whose acquisition is one of the romances of modern times.

In 1840, the year in which New Zealand officially began, James Brooke visited the north-west coast of Borneo in his ship called the *Royalist*, a prophetic name for the ship of a mere private man who was destined the next year to become a Rajah. This is what he found. "The Sultans of Brunei and Sulu exercised a nominal control and farmed out the rights of collecting revenue to natives of rank; these farmers settled at the mouths of rivers, levied taxes on passing traders and plundered the inhabitants. . . . In the interior natives settled their own disputes according to tribal custom. Head-hunting was rife, disease ravaged the country, and pirates ranged the seas." The quotation is not from any apologetics for the Brooke family, but from an official document of what might almost be termed a rival concern, the British North Borneo (chartered) Company.

Brooke found Rajah Muda Hashim of Sarawak in the throes of a death struggle with rebel chiefs. After some pressing he threw in his lot with the Rajah, and with ten members of his crew and two guns to aid him he set his foot on the path that led to a throne. After a number of engagements European men and European weapons turned the scale and the rebel chiefs sought to make peace. But only on one condition: James Brooke must become their Rajah.

Here was a quandary. If he refused the position thrust upon him he knew

very well he would be giving thousands over to torture, slavery, and death; if he accepted? He did accept, and the result can be seen to-day. The last suspicion of filibustering was refuted by the sequel.

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### CAPITALIST, KEEP OUT!

**C**AREFULLY and loyally the Brookes have fulfilled the duties of their great trust until, last year, in the reign of the third Rajah of the Brooke dynasty, the editor of the *Sarawak Gazette* was able to write: "The policy of the Rajahs of Sarawak . . . has now most signally proved its worth. At the end of three years of one of the worst depressions in history, Sarawak emerges with no unemployment, a balanced budget, and no debt."

What is their policy? Sir Charles Vyner Brooke, the present Rajah, in an address to one of the last meetings of his Council Negri made it clear. "It is not my policy, and was never the policy of my predecessors," His Highness said, "to increase the revenue of the State by inviting any influx of foreign capital. . . . Development of the resources of the country must be . . . so far as possible carried out by the people of Sarawak themselves."

Very wisely, one exception has been made to the rule. In a desolate corner of the country the derricks of the Miri oil field tower out of the dense jungle that clothes the low hills of the sea-coast, and the exploiters are taxed to raise the money with which the native people are being carefully tutored out of barbarism into a more abundant and a happier way of life.