

## SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 9: By MARSYAS

**A**FTER eight weeks of listening with a marked copy of *The Listener* always by the radio and always open at the right day, I discover that this is the best way to use your radio, without any doubt. If you go through the programmes with a red pencil and decide what evenings you will spend at home, and then map out a selection from two or three stations for any one evening, you'll very soon get a feeling that there is so much good music on the air that you'll never be able to hear it all. Whereas if you just turn on at an odd hour and hope that the next thing will be something good, you will just as soon be complaining that the air is filled with *Pomp and Circumstance*, *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, and *Meditation from Thais*.

**SOMETIMES**, even one good programme will prevent your hearing another. I would like to have heard Vaughan Williams's orchestral folksong arrangements from 2YA this Friday, but I couldn't miss George Butterworth's "*Shropshire Lad*" *Rhapsody*, which came from 1YA about the same time.

It was accompanied by a quaint announcement: "We now present the 1YA studio orchestra, conducted by Sir Thomas Matthews, late leader of the London Philharmonic. . . ." Mr. Matthews would be amused by this confusion. Actually I wouldn't swear to it that the word was "sir," but it was a very similar sound.

As for George Butterworth: With poets and musicians and other artists who lost their young lives in the last war, you have to be careful not to accept their admirers' propaganda too readily. Considerations of "what he might have been" tend to influence the considerations of "what he was." It is easy to think of "war poets" who fall into that category.

With George Butterworth I am convinced that it is different. He was a friend of Vaughan Williams, who dedicated to his memory the "London" Symphony (which I notice was played by the NBS Orchestra this week). Butterworth needs no other man's work for a memorial, though. His own "*Shropshire Lad*" *Rhapsody* is transcendent sound. It has a ravishing opening, one of the most beautiful openings I have ever heard.

Vaughan Williams' settings of "Shropshire Lad" poems are spoken of as the "inevitable" ones, and some of them certainly give the impression (like Schubert's songs), that the words and music have never been separate. But if George Butterworth's setting of "Loveliest of trees the cherry" is as beautiful as the rhapsody he based on it, then it might also have been "inevitable."

I was carried away by the "*Shropshire Lad*" *Rhapsody*; don't ask me why, because I don't know. It had some bits that sounded like a certain kind of music I hate. But I hope we may count

on a repeat of the *Rhapsody* so that those who missed it may have a second chance.

**STATION 3YA** has been running through the Beethoven symphonies on Wednesday nights, a commendable enterprise, and since the first week of March we have had Nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7; I can't locate No. 2. This coming week it is to be No. 8. Then there comes what Beethoven himself might have called "The Difficult Resolve"—*Der Schwer Gefasste Entschluss*. Do we, or do we not get No. 9?

It lasts just over an hour. That would mean no "Music, Mirth and Melody" till about 10.40! Will precedent be overruled, or will it be found again that there is no room for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in a Main National evening programme! I've never heard of its being broadcast except on the auxiliaries or on a Sunday afternoon programme, so there may be some country listeners who have never had the chance to hear it. I'll be glad if I see that such a worthwhile series is not spoiled for a ha'p'orth of Time.

**INTERESTING** is the word that comes to mind first of all, I am sorry to say, when I read that 4YA is to broadcast some 17th century and 18th century pieces played by the "American Society of Ancient Instruments." I wish I could sweep off the dusty layer of respect that obscures the true colour of such music. No doubt the society has the finest aims, but such a name is prejudicial. (It immediately puts me on my guard because it reminds me of the stale and musty offerings of the Dolmetsch family.)

I listened to a galliard by Galilei from 2YC on Saturday simply because I was curious to hear a composition by the father of Galileo the astronomer, and I felt ashamed when I found that the music was so good to hear.

**RECENTLY** I got worked up because the melody of the slow movement of Beethoven's "Pathétique" sonata came over the air arranged for piano, violin, and solo voice, but I see that 2YA listeners were the other evening treated to an extended arrangement for brass bands! What could be more astounding?

The only parallel I can recall is an arrangement of W. B. Yeats's "Lake Isle of Innisfree" which was sung by 1,000 Boy Scouts at a Jamboree! It was a grotesque treatment of a poem which, as far as it has any personal content, expresses an idealised longing for solitary retreat in the poet's native land. Naturally enough the result was that Yeats forbade anyone at all to set music to his verse, and Warlock's *Curlow* was only permitted to be published when the Carnegie trustees gave it a prize. But Beethoven cannot protect himself. There ought to be a Defenceless Immortals' League to protect the rights of dead composers!



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