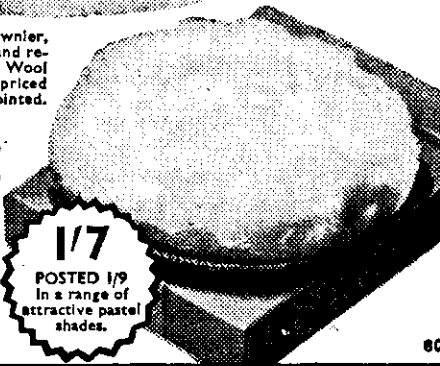


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## RECENT MUSIC

No. 23: By Marsyas

SO soon after my writing about George Butterworth's revelatory *Shropshire Lad Rhapsody*, which provided me with that kind of musical adventure I like best — the exploration of new ground not already classified for me by copious literature — 2YA made a more familiar examination possible by introducing me to the song-cycle of *Shropshire Lad* poems by the same composer, and of course, the two are connected. Early in May, I speculated on the content of these songs, particularly on the setting of *Loveliest of Trees the Cherry* (basis of the rhapsody), never expecting to hear them so soon.

Before the songs began, there was an excellent appraisal of their place in the recent history of the art. It was musical annotation at its very best, concisely comprehensive. Perhaps the real reason why it pleased me so much was that it authorises me to say now just what I have been meaning to say about English songs of a certain type (although I could just as reasonably be piqued at having my intentions forestalled!); the point being that it took men like Butterworth to come and "blow away the fog of German influence" and to "breathe the fresh clean English air."

That is the point, and those are the words that come to it. Likewise, Housman's position of great importance (paradoxically, in an art that was not his own), was acknowledged in this annotation. Cases where persons other than musicians have made such a vital contribution to music's progress are not altogether numerous.

BUTTERWORTH died attacking a German trench, we are told. To which I would add that he lives attacking a certain other German trench — the one that breathes that "fog of German influence." (Which remark may be taken to mean that I regard the greater *lieder* writers as inhabitants of a ditch, unless I explain that I refer to their lesser fellows and their even lesser English followers.)

So, in the meantime, until Lieut. Butterworth's action is successfully completed, his supporters will fix bayonets and challenge all Wolfians and Wagnerists, and will cry, "Out with balladeers, away with the effeminate Mendelssohnian vocal line and the Schumannesque accompaniment!"

WE turn from propositions to the Butterworth songs themselves; they are fresh and clean; perhaps they have less of the effect of *entrain* than there is in the Vaughan Williams equivalents, but they have none of the farce-risking declamations of these. Phrases are sweetly turned, with none of the twisted-tail effect that Hugo Wolf gets just by landing you on a wrong note.

Though I have suggested a comparison of the cycle with the Vaughan Williams *On Wenlock Edge* settings, there is a big difference between the two works. Only one poem is common to each. If you are a frequenter of the pages of the

*Shropshire Lad* and have wondered why V-W left out your particular favourites, you may find that Butterworth has chosen them. When *I Was One and Twenty*, *Look Not in My Eyes*, *Think No More Lad*, and *The Lads in Their Hundreds* are all there. And in *Is My Team Ploughing?* this composer has not omitted the football stanzas.

THOUGH it was unnecessary in the end, I followed each poem in my copy of the "slim volume of verse" (having taken down the names as they were announced and looked up the page-numbers). When I say unnecessary, I mean that Roy Henderson conveyed every word clearly to me. But even so, I find there is a lot more to be felt in songs if you can have the lines before you and see them being unwrapped, as it were.

Apart from the clarity of his diction, Roy Henderson gave me no reason to be more than merely grateful for the opportunity to hear these songs. His voice has that quivery quality which I always associate with a man I knew who could sing while he shaved and did so. And his treatment of the songs is in the gallant manner; our familiarity with the style doesn't make it easier to accept. I hope some local singer will get hold of them and show us how they go.

AT last I see some reason to allow Nancy Evans a position of some eminence among contraltos of the day. Her singing of English songs has never shown me one, but after hearing her do the seven Spanish popular songs arranged by Falla (not de Falla, unless preceded by *Manuel*). I know her for a singer of great natural force. She makes these pagan *melismas* go with such zip that in future I won't want to hear her sing anything that comes from north of about latitude 45. A glance at the map shows such an exclusion to be meaningless, but anyone who knows what *north-ern* and *southern* mean in music knows what I mean here. If only they'd give her a guitar for accompaniment instead of some superfine studio piano, she might seem to be one of those enchantresses whom Professor Walter Starkie found in gipsy Spain (and he had to watch his step, too). The danger would be that of making some of the audience self-conscious.

## THE LISTENER CROSSWORD

(Answer to No. 106)

(Constructed by R.W.C.)

F	R	A	U	G	H	T		M	A	P	L	E
I	U	A	H	O	E	L						
L	A	G	O	B	E	I	S	A	N	C	E	
C	M	L	O	Q	C	C						
H	E	E	L	A	R	G	U	M	E	N	T	
	N	I	Y	I	O							
L	A	T	E	N	T	S	T	U	P	O	R	
A		D	P	O	A							
N	A	R	C	O	T	I	C	O	S	L	O	
D	U	L	R	T	T	N						
I	M	P	R	E	C	A	T	E	U	P	S	
N	E	N	T	A	R	E						
G	U	E	S	T	E	A	R	N	E	S	T	