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RECENT MUSIC

No. 26: By MARSYAS

WHETHER or not Wednesday, August 19, had any particular auguries, I cannot say, but it evidently had some quality that appealed to choral societies, since in the hour 8.0-9.0 p.m. on that day choral concerts were broadcast from 2YA 3YA, and 4YZ. Now this is clearly an impossible situation for a person blessed with only two ears; so I decided to concentrate on the Christchurch Harmonic Society, and its guests, the Southland Boys.

The programme began with a cantata, *The Passing Year*, by Robin Milford. This work is, in effect, a string of part-songs with seasonal texts from various poets, joined up with agreeable little piano interludes. Many of the choral portions are prettily conceived, and the whole thing is pleasing to the ear. It satisfied my curiosity about this contemporary composer (with a certain degree of finality, that is). Victor Peters has the mastertouch in choral conducting, as I noted before, in *Judas Macabaeus*.

Then the Southland boys stood up and paid their conductor (Kennedy Black) the tribute of singing three of his compositions. Now Mr. Black has achieved something in getting these secondary-school boys to sing, and they are an example to other boys. But until he has brought the quality of their work to the point where sheer beauty of singing will lend grace to music that lacks grace, he would do better to lead them along the familiar paths of sea-shanties, "traditional airs," and the various good things that are to be found in low-priced school songbooks. They are certainly not fit yet for "grand opera."

STILL, in Mr. Black's own composition there is some original thought. In *New Zealand*, a little piece of 16 bars, written from the heart, there are certain progressions that show him to be free of the academic snaffle. At five points there are ticks such as are used by journalists to indicate that what appears to be a mistake in copy is deliberate. (William Byrd and Scarlatti both had to take similar precautions.) One would not doubt the sincerity of L. Weatherly's words to this song any more than one would doubt the sincerity of the poems one reads in the *In Memoriam* column of the daily paper. But it would be humbug to praise them.

The *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* display an individual approach to the problem of word setting. While again I do not doubt the sincerity of the impulse in them, it appears that the composer has simply taken a series of open-vowel syllables, linked by singable consonant-combinations, and has set them to music according to the rhythms into which they fall, with an occasional special effect, such as the sneezing effect (on the words "Hosanna in Excelsis") for which precedent is found in the work of no less a master than Orlando di Lasso.

Next, a boy pianist played two pieces by Bach, and we then passed on to two items by a sextet chosen from the choir. These boys rendered Beethoven's *Creation Hymn* and then sang Verdi's *La Donna e Mobile*.

BUT what happened to those six boys when they started to sing a good piece of Italian music, in *Italian*? Was it the feeling of arriving at something good? Or was it because, as J. J. Rousseau said: "If there is in Europe one language more favourable to music than another, it is the Italian." At all events they slipped into a pleasant tuneful manner, and put all their hearts into the music. Result—good singing. But after that, excerpts from Gounod's *Faust* were not saved even by the excellent singing of the leading soloist (J. L. Thompson). The string players had been brought along to show what they could do. In fact they demonstrated what they could not do. I repeat, performers who are at this stage should not be asked to play in public, let alone over the air. It is very unfair to them.

To all who supported this venture I apologise for piling ungrateful injustices on what was patently an honest and enterprising attempt to do exactly those things that I want to see being done. But there can be no softening of the critic's heart. He must always be calling for more; and the better the response, the louder he must call again.

WHEN I wrote of the series of Beethoven symphonies (minus No. 9) and the Brahms series that came from 3YA, it occurred to me that the Sibelius symphonies might not be too much to expect, and now 3YA appears to have the project under way (though I can't trace No. 2). As Sibelius's symphonies belong to that class of music which takes me into regions of the imagination where words are of no value for any purpose, I will be content with drawing attention to them, and expressing the hope that any organisation which has enough magic at its command to convey music from a distance of any number of miles, simply by casting it into the sky, will find it just as easy to introduce Sibelius's long awaited eighth symphony into the scheme of things.

MORSE TESTS

No. 13 Course

MONDAY, AUGUST 24.

1—K, F, L, R, Q; 2—A, W, C, E, T; 3—C, E, U, T, M; 4—F, R, I, G, D; 5—B, L, F, Z, J; 6—X, E, T, S, O; 7—T, Y, S, J, F; 8—H, R, K, D, L; 9—K, A, R, E, G; 10—P, L, R, I, B; 11—Q, U, R, I, B; 12—V, F, R, S, M; 13—F, R, U, Y, N; 14—P, O, Y, L, J; 15—N, F, K, R, I; 16—V, C, M, J, F; 17—S, A, I, T, O; 18—D, R, E, Y, V; 19—X, D, S, H, Y; 20—C, V, R, A, H; 21—Q, W, S, X, D; 22—B, F, T, Y, G; 23—X, W, E, S, K; 24—K, R, O, D, S.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25.

1—V, B, G, H, U; 2—C, E, K, G, H; 3—Z, R, Y, O, K; 4—D, K, F, J, D; 5—S, O, K, F, V; 6—B, D, V, I, N; 7—C, D, F, W, X; 8—D, C, P, H, X; 9—M, N, H, U, J; 10—B, L, F, Z, S; 11—F, Q, H, K, E; 12—Y, T, B, X, Z; 13—F, A, T, D, G; 14—C, Y, H, P, H; 15—R, G, A, X, N; 16—U, A, R, N, S; 17—M, K, L, O, H; 18—E, M, H, Q, D; 19—D, L, F, T, F; 20—Q, T, F, L, C; 21—W, G, U, A, B; 22—N, D, Z, E, C; 23—N, T, E, R, Y; 24—E, D, B, L, O.

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