

# Elizabethan Music

"TO the Golden Age of Elizabeth we owe much of the best of our music, poetry and drama. But those arts weren't approached as clinically and discussed as wordily as they are now. They were just enjoyed." W. Roy Hill said that in a talk on Elizabethan song broadcast by the NZBS and now to be heard again with an evening of Elizabethan music from 2YC during the Royal visit to Wellington. Mr. Hill went on to say that in the first Elizabethan Age good music particularly did not have to fight against Hit Parades on the one hand and the too-often-arrogant condescension of professional critics on the other. "There weren't," he said, "any concert audiences in those days, with their appetite for virtuosity and their susceptibility to advertisement. Four hundred years ago music wasn't so much an art as a cultured social recreation, to be practised and enjoyed within the family circle. It was truly 'Pass-time with Good Company.'"

Mr. Hill thinks that by the 19th Century the capacity for enjoyment had so increased as almost to smother criticism. The Victorians "enjoyed" much music that was soon to be considered downright bad. But the pendulum has now swung so far the other way that today our capacity for criticism is stronger than our capacity for enjoyment. "Music and music-making isn't a happy and intimate part of our daily life, but rather an extra-mural activity to be discussed, written about and criticised, rather than just enjoyed for its own sake."

If listeners will put up their feet and relax for a few hours from 7.0 p.m. on Wednesday, January 13, they may be able to recapture something of the spirit whose passing Mr. Hill deplures. For a start they will hear a group of songs by John Dowland, who in the 16th and early 17th Centuries achieved great fame as a virtuoso of the lute, and a singer, though he is best remembered now as a writer of songs. Dowland was a pioneer in the development of the art song and made notable advances in melodic and harmonic style. The short programme of his songs will be sung by Aksel Schlotz (tenor) and by the counter-tenor, Alfred Deller.

After Dowland will come a talk by Lucie Street about the character of the first Queen Elizabeth. Lucie Street, who lives in Sussex, formerly held the John Bright Fellowship. The first Elizabeth, she points out, was crowned in a male world—the Parliament of her day never for a moment thought of the possibility of being ruled by a Queen. The politicians looked about for a husband. But "the spirited young woman surprised them. She marched into Parliament and addressed them firmly and lovingly..." The title of the talk, *Kiss That Fair Correcting Hand*, comes from one of the moving letters written by Essex in prison.

Before and after Mr. Hill's talk on Elizabethan song will be recitals of

Tudor keyboard music and of madrigals. Composers for keyboard represented include Johnson, Gibbon, Byrd and Weelkes, and their works will be played by Thurston Dart (clavichord and harpsichord), Robert Donington (viola da gamba) and Geraint Jones (organ). The madrigal was, of course, one of the three main types of Elizabethan song, and some of the best-known poets of the day—Spenser, Marlowe, Ben Jonson and Walter Raleigh—wrote verse which was used for madrigal texts. These, as Walter Rubsamen has pointed out, immediately created a distinctive atmosphere in the native madrigal, the chief musical characteristic of which was a solid Anglo-Saxon tunefulness. It was probably Raleigh who wrote the words for "What is our life?" composed by Orlando Gibbons—one of the madrigals to be heard sung by the Cambridge University Madrigal Society in next week's programme from 2YC.

The Elizabethan lyrics—"literally, words for music"—were written by established poets, anonymous poets, small and forgotten poets, says Professor S. Musgrove, in a talk on "Elizabethan Lyricists" to be heard in the programme—or at least not so much a talk as a series of readings, briefly introduced: on the one hand poems that "are the airiest of trifles—brief fancies that need to be caught in the net of music, so quickly do they slip through the fingers;" on the other, lyrics like Spenser's triumphant *Epithalamion*—"perhaps the greatest lyric of love in all English poetry, in range, in integrity of passion, in mature vision..."

The programme continues after this recital of lyrics with a programme of Elizabethan church music and ends with three works by composers of the second Elizabethan Age—Ralph Vaughan Williams and Michael Tippett—who have been influenced by the music of the age of Elizabeth I.

## British in Flavour

**MUSIC FOR AN OCCASION** is the title of a BBC programme with a very British flavour which 2YA will broadcast at 8.0 p.m. on Friday, January 15. The flavour is not surprising, for the transcription was recorded from a programme first broadcast on Empire Day. In it Sir Malcolm Sargent conducts the BBC Opera Orchestra, with Webster Booth as soloist. There are two of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* marches in the programme, as well as William Walton's *Crown Imperial* march, composed for the Coronation of George VI. The other orchestral items are by Sullivan, German, Vaughan Williams and Percy Grainger. Finally, Webster Booth sings three of Shakespeare's songs to the music of Roger Quilter and a song from Coleridge Taylor's *Hiawatha*.

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 8, 1954.

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