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British Music and Broadcasting

Fine Summary by Mr. J. Bishop from 2YA



I HAVE been invited to-night by the New Zealand Broadcasting Company to give Wellington listeners a brief survey of broadcasting and music in England at the present time. Before I begin I should like to express my thanks to the company for the opportunity of speaking from this beautiful studio. It seems to me that here in this fine building, in a studio that is really ideal, there is endless scope for the broadcasting of great music. Of course, one could talk for hours on the wonderful possibilities of the wireless, but, have no fear, my time is limited to a few minutes—and so I must get to my subject.

MUSICAL activity can always be divided into two headings: creative and interpretive; and it is my object this evening to give some slight idea of the work in these two branches in the Home Country. This is undoubtedly a great flowering time in the history of British music: we have composers now that give us music that lives, music with that true sense of beauty and humanity that cannot fail to stimulate and edify the listener; and here, as an aside, I would stress the importance of the listener. Such composers as Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax, Gustav Holst, Edward Elgar, Granville Bantock, John Ireland, Herbert Howells stand high in the ranks of modern composers. In the works of these whom I have mentioned there is to be found a veritable store of imaginative beauty—an endless ingenuity for uncommonly beautiful effects, and, what is worth all these, a deep sincerity.

WORK OF THE BRITISH MUSIC SOCIETY.

IN England there are many good societies formed for the furtherance of music, and with the view of bringing into the homes of the people music, both new and old, interpreted by first-class musicians. Foremost amongst these societies is the British Music Society, founded by Dr. Baglefield Hall in 1920. This splendid body of keen musicians, both professional and amateur, began their work with great opposition; but, battling ahead, there has resulted in the space of seven years a society that has 60 odd or more branches throughout England. The society was formed with the primary objects of bringing British music before the listening public, of encouraging British music and increasing its reputation, both at home and abroad; of financing the production of large works of British composers which otherwise might not have had an early presentation; and of stocking a library of English works, and in this way offering every facility for the performance of such works in England. Each little branch of the society runs its own affairs and arranges its own programme for the ensuing year. Generally, from about the beginning of October to the end of April each branch arranges a series of six to eight recitals, and at least one evening is given by the members of that branch. Visiting artists come and give a programme of music, such as "Pianoforte and Vocal Music of the Present-day English Composers," or "The Music of John Bull, Dr. Arne, Giles Farnaby (of the seventeenth century), and of John Ireland, Arnold Bax and Gustav Holst (of the twentieth century).

It has been my privilege at various times to give such a programme illustrating the different periods of piano music. I might add that these meetings being of such a delightful informal character are of great social benefit to us all. I should much like to see a branch of the British Music Society started in New Zealand here in Wellington, similar to the very active branch in Sydney.

FOUNDATION WORK IN THE SCHOOLS.

ANOTHER important feature of music in England is that of music in the schools. Within the last three years great developments have taken place in this sphere. Each large secondary school has its own choir and orchestra, which does splendid work under a first-rate music master. The music of the school being left entirely in his hands, he makes it his business to keep in close touch with the everyday musical events of London and its musicians. At regular intervals of about once a fortnight or once a month experienced executants are invited to give recitals to the boys or girls in the college hall, usually a splendid hall in which one might find (if one is fortunate) a good concert grand. I have found that boys and girls thoroughly enjoy and appreciate concerts of a little more than an hour, and that they become wildly enthusiastic and demonstrative. What fine introductions to music of all kind and variety



MR. J. BISHOP.
—S. P. Andrew, photo.

these lads and girls receive! Truly they are wonderfully fortunate and blessed. Many an English public school boy has gained a wider knowledge and appreciation of music than his father has done, who may be forty! May it come that the New Zealand boy and girl will be given these same chances some time in the near future. But the boys are keen to perform, too, and it is common to find perhaps three large schools uniting together in the public performance of such a work as Bach's "Christmas Oratorio," or the Brahms "Requiem." After all, it is through such nourishment of young, eager minds that a healthy love of good music is promoted.

OUTSTANDING MUSICAL FESTIVALS.

ONE cannot talk long of English musical activities without mentioning the great musical festivals held annually in many of the towns, both large and small. These splendid festivals provide a fine standard for amateur societies in both choral, instrumental and solo work. Almost every county has its annual festival, at which choirs from remote outlying villages compete: little villages of 200 and 300 inhabitants send their Mother's Union choir—or their "children under ten!"

I have attended several such festivals, and I cannot commend too highly the work that has been accomplished in this way. The keen competition, the spirit of friendly rivalry, and yet of co-operation, ensures a happy atmosphere. I have heard a mothers' choir comprised of ten dear old dames all 65 or over sing "The Brisk Young Widow" with immense spirit and undoubted enjoyment; and youngsters clamouring for their turn to sing. It is this great festival scheme that has done more to bring music into the very heart of the country than anything else. It sets a standard and promotes keen work. I am glad to learn that New Zealand has several such festivals: the bringing of music right into our homes and so into our everyday life keeps us from the pit of materialism.

THERE is, too, in England another splendid organisation almost entirely conducted by a dear old blind lady, whose whole time and energies are directed in the sending out of excellent little concert parties to the small towns, villages and schools all over the country. These professional musicians tour around giving programmes of songs, instrumental trios, pianoforte solos, and recitations. These performances, held in the parish halls, large barns, or the church, are always popular, and as hospitality is given to the touring artists, the whole affair becomes a friendly visit, a repetition of which is awaited with eagerness.

EFFORT TO SAVE OPERA.

OPERA in England is always having a fight for life. The cost of producing opera for public presentation is so great that it seldom, if ever, pays. However, in spite of this there are one or two vigorous bodies who work hard for the interest of opera. Covent Garden has its opera summer for about eight weeks, financed by one or two noble patrons of music. The finest British orchestra is formed and artists from all over the world are gathered together to give us the best that can be obtained. But to ensure a seat and obtain the cheapest ticket of 3s. one is obliged to stand in a queue for about three hours or more before the performance! and always that top gallery—surely that

is a challenge to those who say that we English are not musical!

THEN there is the British National Opera Company: a fine body of English musicians, singers, and instrumentalists who travel from city to city giving opera in English, a splendid and most commendable work which receives every musician's support. They manage to keep their heads above water, and with true British spirit wait and see what will turn up next. Eventually I believe that this company will develop into a real true lasting home for English music, an institution that Germany and Italy have had for centuries and that we so sadly need. Sir Thomas Beecham, that live electric wire of English music, has just come forward offering a new scheme to save opera from slipping out of England's reach. He believes that if 150,000 enthusiasts subscribed £1 per year and twopence per week for five years opera would be safe. His scheme, I believe, is to extend to Australia and New Zealand, and we all wait with bated breath to know what will develop.

GREAT ADVANCE OF BROADCASTING.

BROADCASTING in England has gone ahead by leaps and bounds, and the last few years has seen a wonderful improvement in the variety and quality of the programmes. As my subject is music I will stick to that side, and it is indeed the greater side of the work. Everyone loves music, whether it be vocal or instrumental, solo or concerted work. The stations in England have one and all a professional station orchestra, men and women whose whole-time job it is to provide first-class music, and I know from personal experience how hard they work. Long hours of fine, conscientious work go to give the listener a finished performance, and here I would like to say how much it hurts me, knowing the inside view, to hear the wireless abused. Some listeners seem to have no regard for the performers' effort. I have been in homes where the wireless set is casually tuned in at 11.30 in the morning when the programmes begin and people wash up, eat, cook and converse without the slightest regard for what is going on. It is sacrilege to treat music in this way; it is far better to switch off and turn the set on again when something of real particular interest to listeners is being given than to let a constant, unattended rumble of sound breed a contemptuous indifference. As is natural, there has been great trouble and long experiment in trying to achieve a programme every night that will make an appeal to and satisfy all. It would be impossible to satisfy everyone on every night and at any time each listener picked up his earphones or switched on the loudspeaker; and so it has been necessary to plan out each hour of every day and each day of every week so that the intelligent listener can generally go to his wireless set and get what he wants at a particular time. This, I think, is a splendid scheme, and that will be eventually universally adopted.

THOUGH it would be scarcely possible for me to go through the whole of the British Broadcasting Corporation's activities in the realm of music, I will hastily enumerate a few of the branches of their work. At seven-fifteen each evening there is a space allotted of 20 minutes to "The Foundations of Music Series." This idea was started some twelve months ago, and gradually the works of those great founders of music—Bach, Beethoven, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin and many lesser composers—have been performed. Not yet have they nearly completed their original intention of giving performances of the works of these great builders, but it is amazing the number of works that have been performed. Generally speaking, one month is allotted to one composer, and his works played or sung by an artist who has a reputation for being an undoubtedly fine interpreter of that particular composer. What a great opportunity it is to the student or amateur to follow the growth of one particular composer, and later realise the close connecting links that go to make the great chain from the earliest pioneers to the moderns.

EACH Tuesday night at 9.20 Sir Walford Davies gives his intimate and chatty talks on "Music and the Ordinary Listener." These talks are designed to help the ordinary listener, and I have known many of these folk keep this time specially set apart so that they may not miss a word of this radio favourite. Recently Sir Henry Wood has joined the band of "Broadcasters," and under his direction there has been instituted a series of public symphony concerts throughout the large cities of England, which have been broadcast to many thousands of listeners. In this way the B.B.C. are introducing into the simplest homes of the towns and isolated villages the finest orchestral music—truly a noble work. Recently in this way Sir Henry Wood has had a triumphant tour throughout Britain. As perhaps everyone knows, this summer saw the ban on the use of the microphone in the Queen's Hall, London, lifted. The promenade concerts which are given nightly throughout the summer in the Queen's Hall, and have been so given for the best part of 30 years, were broadcast by the B.B.C. after much controversy and various protests.

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