

# English People are Unmusical

# 4YA to Broadcast Thrilling Drama

## An Effectively Answered Challenge

## Life in the Amazon Wilds

(Continued from page 13.)

the prerogative of having the handsomest women, of keeping the best table, and of being the most accomplished in music, of any people."

In the reign of Elizabeth, music was in universal estimation. Tinklers sang catches; milkmaids sang ballads; caddgers whistled; each trade, and even the beggars had their special songs. Henry VIII composed music, and Queen Elizabeth was a clever keyboard performer—one of many fine performers of her realm. In the drawing-rooms of the great houses hung the bass-viol, for the amusement of waiting visitors, while the lute, cittern, and virginals, for the amusement of waiting customers, were the necessary furniture of a barber's shop. Sir Francis Drake, in his little ship, managed to find room for musicians; for it is recorded by a Spanish prisoner of his that he "dined and supped to the music of viols."

In Devonshire, every farmhouse had an instrument called the thrums, hung in the common hall. It consisted of a board, with fret and strings, and was taken up in the evening by one of the farmer's sons or daughters, or by one of the farm labourers, who struck cords on it while singing a ballad. John Dowland, the English lute-player and madrigal-composer, was long in the employ of the King of Denmark, and in an age of very little music-printing, works of his were published, in France, Holland and Germany. In many courts and cities of the Continent, English musicians and actors were employed.

Nobody in those days thought of saying that England was not a musical country.

It is always assumed that during the years of the Commonwealth, "The voice of music was silenced in England, and that music of every kind became an object of loathing and contempt."

So, at least, says Ernest Ford's "History of Music in England," published in 1912. Certainly, the Puritans destroyed cathedral organs, disbanded the singing men and boys, and burnt much of the anthem and service music. Yet they did not hate music itself, nor did they all hate even music in church. What they did dislike was elaborate choir-music, instrumental music in church, and professional church musicians; and even to-day many of their descendants maintain the same position.

### Traditional Folk Songs

THE folk-song movement of the present day has sufficiently rebutted the accusation that as a people we are unmusical. These folk-songs were at first preserved by tradition, and, when the decline set in, they tended to become forgotten and lost. Fortunately, large numbers have now been recovered and written down, before it was too late.

There was, for a time, a little danger of a sort of folk-song and folk-dance worship. Not everything that the "folk" think or say is gospel; and not all that they sing is as good as Schu-

bert or Mozart. But at its best, British folk-music is really great. According to a recognised authority, Mr. Percy Scholes, no composer of the past or present has made anything more lovely, within tiny limits, than the more perfect of the British folk-tunes.

The quantity still preserved is enormous. In England alone 5000 have been collected; and who knows how many more were lost before the collecting hobby came into vogue? And how many more can Scotland, Ireland and Wales, all of them singing countries, add to that number?

These songs are tender lyrics, long-winded narrative ballads, and rhythmic labour-songs. There are sea-chanties of the sailing-ship days; there are hunting-songs and drinking-songs; soldier-songs and poacher-songs; Christmas carols and wassails.

### "Whence Came Our Tunes?"

HOW did these tunes come into existence? Some, no doubt, were "composed" by the village musical genius, and then handed down the generations, to suffer some change, small or great, from the hand, or rather mouth, of almost everyone into whose possession they came.

Most, perhaps, simply grew up—came to existence as mere germs, and then evolved and developed. Children to-day, quite little children, often unconsciously hum tiny tunes of three or four notes. And so, in an early age of civilisation, may have come into existence phrases instinctively "composed," phrases which may have haunted the memory of their originator, passed into the ears of his fellows, and started on a long period of evolution. They were lengthened into actual "tunes," fitted with words, refitted with fresh words, elaborated, re-simplified, changed in all manner of ways as they spread about the country and came down the centuries.

So, the tune we may hear in a Yorkshire bar-parlour to-day may have for its ancestor some wassail-cry that came over with the Danes; and the old woman sitting at the door of a Kentish farm-house, and thinking of her son away at the other side of the world, may be crooning a tune that, in an earlier form, cheered Boadicea in her moments of discouragement.

### "Summer is a' Cumen In"

OF the evolution of such songs the following example is of outstanding interest. It is described by authorities as "An English musical miracle" and as "The most interesting musical manuscript in the world."

It is called "Summer is a' Cumen In," and is, indeed, the only piece of choral music earlier than the fifteenth century that could be performed in a modern concert room without a demand for "money back." It was written about 1226 by a cheerful monk called "John of Fornsete," belonging to Reading Abbey. The joyous words of

ON Friday evening, January 23, 4YA will present an interesting drama entitled "Up-Stream." The libretto, the work of Clifford Bax, was written in 1922. The scene of the story is near the source of the Amazon River, in South America; the time 1876. The play concerns incidents in the lives of the pioneers of that part of the country.

The principal characters are English, with the exception of two, a Brazilian engineer and a Spanish-American lady. They are headed with George Gillespie, chief engineer of an expedition for the opening up of Bolivia. Others are Henry Hooker, aged 26, a small, insignificant, and irresolute man, one of Gillespie's engineers; Jonathan Wise, a doctor; Rudolf Gottman, clerk to Gillespie; Arthur Wyatt, aged 26, a naturalist; Garcia Soriana, aged 52, the Brazilian engineer; and Gilda, aged 20, ward of Gillespie, a Spanish-American.

Gillespie is accused by Wyatt of sacrificing his best friend in the jungle, through failing to provide him with supplies when these were urgently

required. Wyatt's friend, Jim, was sent on a message up the Amazon, and Gillespie was to follow, but, according to Wyatt, purposely failed to do so. The attitude Wyatt takes with regard to his treatment of Gillespie is very interesting, and he ends up by resigning, and certifies that he is leaving immediately to report Gillespie's treatment of Jim to the company directors. Wyatt's story would cost Gillespie his position and would also imperil him in many other directions, including the future of his ward, Gilda. He therefore takes drastic steps to stop Wyatt from leaving the company, and he entices Gilda to use all the power she possesses to this end. This section of the play is most dramatic, but perhaps it would spoil the climax to divulge the outcome of the difficult situation. The drama contains many exciting incidents of jungle life, and is a real thriller.

Major F. H. Lampen, who has had wide experience before the microphone and as producer for the Dunedin Operatic and Dramatic Society, will produce the drama.

"Summer is a' Cumen In" suggest that it was composed for a merry May meeting in a castle grounds, when the barons were all-powerful and a musical monk had to do as he was told.

In any case, John of Fornsete immortalised himself by writing a dance measure in the form of a canon or round for four tenor voices. Now, the curious thing is that the canon, a most ingeniously artificial form, occurs nowhere else in musical records for over two centuries to come; and to anticipate one's artistic descendants by two centuries is surely a feat unparalleled.

But this is not all! Our friend also anticipated a practice of Purcell and of Bach, that of composing a tune over a ground bass—a little phrase repeated over and over again—but John of Fornsete "went one better" than these two, for his ground bass was a double one, for two bass voices, also singing in canon! So here we have a remarkable piece of music, to be performed by four tenor monks singing in canon, and by two bass monks singing a ground, also in canon!

Surely this was trotted out on many a festive occasion in the refectory! We can imagine the six jolly monks at it, and their fellows joining in until the vaulted ceiling rang with the sound. A second set of words, religious words, in Latin, is provided; but these fit clumsily, and seem to have been an after-thought. Perhaps they served as an alternative when the abbot's form was seen approaching!

This manuscript is now in the British Museum. When it was written Henry III was King of England, and the signing of Magna Charta was but a few years old in the memory of living men!

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