

WALTON AND LAMBERT

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THE coupling of names is an idiosyncrasy of musical folk. Twenty years ago it was next to impossible to mention Debussy without adding "and Ravel." For the last ten years Bartok and Kodaly have been as inseparable as beans and bacon. And now, today, we in England are getting into the way of speaking of Walton and Lambert as if they were partners. The one common feature of all such associations is that the associates have really very little in common. The prim precision of Ravel is practically the opposite of Debussy's fanciful weaving. Kodaly is at times nearer to Schubert than to Bartok. And Walton and Lambert find themselves on opposite sides of the cleavage in European esthetics. But that alters nothing. Walton and Lambert they are and remain. Cecil Gray has written an article on them jointly. Ernest Newman has bestowed upon them a joint blessing—which is an embarrassing attention since he has hitherto shown a disposition to begrudge praise to originality in thought or method. And here am I, yielding to the current with an article on Walton and Lambert. Why? Because they stand out together from the generation to which they belong.

The story of the so-called English Renaissance tells itself in three chapters. The first embraces the composers born between 1872 (Vaughan Williams) and 1883 (Arnold Bax). The second is furnished by men not yet forty, such as Bliss, Goossens and Heseltine. And the third lies open for the young men to fill. The candidates are fairly numerous, but among them only two have so far been admitted by general consent. They are Walton and Lambert. Beyond that there is nothing that links them together. They have not the same creed. Walton, the elder and more sophisticated, has affinities, slender though they may be, with Central Europe. Lambert, the younger, and more ingenuous—using the term in its friendlier sense—has an affection for Boro-

din such as, apart from his compatriots, only French musicians have shown. Neither is in any real sense under Continental influence, but they are Europeans, and to some extent divided in their tastes by the rift that cleaves European art.

William Walton was born at Oldham, Lancashire, March 29th 1902. He comes of a musical family. At ten he became a chorister at Christ Church, Oxford, and entered the choir school. At thirteen he began to compose. He studied for a time with Sir Hugh Allen, but from the age of sixteen he has been his own teacher, with occasional assistance in the form of advice from musicians he has met, notably Busoni and Ansermet. Whilst still at Oxford he formed a lasting friendship with the Sitwells which has proved at the same time stimulating and protective—stimulating because it brought him into intimate contact with the art of the day, with its moods and tendencies, and protective because it spared him the rougher contacts that fall to the lot of a musician struggling for his livelihood. Such, briefly, is the record of his life. To the public he has been known since 1923, when two works simultaneously attracted attention to him. By then he had written many works of which the following have survived the usual weeding out: *A Litany* for mixed voices (1916); two songs, *Tritons* (William Drummond) and *The Winds* (Swinburne) (1918); a *Quartet* for piano and strings (1918-19); *The Passionate Shepherd* for tenor and orchestra (1920); *Dr. Syntax*, a "pedagogic" overture (1921); a *String Quartet* (1922); and the first version of *Façade* (1923). After one or two private performances which aroused considerable interest *Façade* was presented at the Aeolian Hall on June 12th 1923. It consists of poems by Edith Sitwell spoken through a megaphone from behind a proscenium curtain, to an accompaniment of trumpet, flute, clarinet, saxophone, cello and percussion. Meanwhile the jury of the International Society for Contemporary Music had selected Walton's *String Quartet* from the works submitted by the British Section for performance at the annual festival, due to take place in August at Salzburg. This tribute from abroad to a young musician whose name was still unknown at home was a welcome corrective to any possibly tendency there might have been to regard *Façade* as a mere flash in the pan.

In the meantime he had written a *Toccata* for violin and piano (1923). His remaining works consist of *Bucolic Comedies*, three songs for voice and piano (1924); an overture, *Portsmouth Point* (1925) which was chosen for performance at the Zurich festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in 1926; the revised version of *Façade*, and an orchestral suite derived from it (1926) which has since been used in Germany as the basis of a ballet; *Siesta* for chamber orchestra (1926); a *Sinfonia Concertante* for orchestra with piano (1927); and a *Concerto* for viola and orchestra (1928-9) of which the first performance was given October 3rd, 1929, with Paul Hindemith as soloist. The revised version of *Façade* was performed at the 1928 festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music, the third of his works to be thus honored. It is a remarkable record.

Walton's development to this point is characteristic of the period. The earlier works have an ironical detachment which some have called cynical. The *Piano Quartet*, of which the first London performance was given October 30th, 1929, is an astonishing achievement for a mere lad of sixteen, but even at that early age he was addicted to satirical allusions, particularly in the scherzo. *Façade* is brilliantly clever and effective but certainly breathes the very spirit of parody. The most serious work of those early days was the *String Quartet*. At the time it was supposed, without much reason, to reveal evidence of Schönbergian leanings, but whilst Walton had certainly become interested, possibly through Busoni, in Central European tendencies, he was not of the type to yield to the fascination of any particular doctrine. As a matter of fact he wrote the work, and particularly its extended fugal section, largely as a step to acquiring fluency, without much idea of ever having it performed, and, gratified as he was at the jury's choice, he was a little taken by surprise. A real step forward was taken in *Portsmouth Point*, a bustling tone-poem suggested by Rowlandson's print of the same name. Paradoxically, as with so many contemporaries, it was also a step back, a *reculer pour mieux sauter*, in short a recourse to older models, at least in the conciseness of the form and in the avoidance of all that the Romantics implied in the term *espressivo*. From that moment it became certain that his

next work would owe some allegiance to neo-classicism, not at the dictate of fashion, but from inner inclination. And then came the *Sinfonia Concertante*. Here is no *pastiche* of the *concerto grosso* type, such as one hears only too often nowadays, but the fruition of early technical experience in an effective solution of the problem of balancing elaboration with clarity. Possibly the balance still inclines to the former. Walton's tendency is to surround his material with a wealth of contrapuntal arabesque and a profusion of cross-rhythms. But it is such clean writing that clarity suffers but rarely. And so it is in the *Viola Concerto*, with one remarkable difference. Up to now Walton seems to have shared the self-conscious fear of relapsing into the romantic which haunts so many young composers, and tempts them to be unnatural lest they should appear sentimental. In Germany particularly, young men impose the most violent inhibitions upon themselves in this respect. But in the step from the *Sinfonia* to the *Concerto* Walton has acquired confidence that, when he is so disposed, he can allow a subjective emotion to rise to the surface without any fear that it will float there like an oil-stain. It is not romanticism, but romance which shows itself at certain points in the *Concerto*, not the conscious intention to express an emotion, but an emotion which escapes through the music because the composer does not need to impose a censorship.

Constant Lambert was born August 23rd, 1905, in London. His father, George Lambert, is a well known painter, and his elder brother, Maurice Lambert, has risen rapidly to fame as a sculptor. He studied composition at the Royal College of Music under Vaughan Williams and R. O. Morris, and conducting with Adrian Boult and Dr. Malcom Sargent. It is said that he at one time showed signs of falling into line with the sham folksong fashion but I cannot bring myself to believe it. He was however much attracted by Russian music, particularly that of Glinka and Borodin, and he confessed to a certain aversion from German idioms of musical speech, notably certain melodic and harmonic inflections. To this day his melodic invention retains this character. One could not say definitely that it has any English, French or Russian idiosyncrasies, but one can assert positively that it has none of German origin.

Whilst at the College he composed a great deal of music he has since discarded, which explains the circumstance that when Lambert's name first became known to the public it was attached to no great array of compositions. *Prize Fight*, a short work for the kind of orchestra one finds in a variety theatre, was written in 1923 and revised two years later, but though rescored for use as a ballet it has not yet been presented. There was also an overture, *Bird-Actors*, composed in 1925, but otherwise when Diaghilev produced the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* at Monte Carlo on May 4th 1926, and afterwards in Paris and London, it represented practically all that Lambert had, or rather all that he was willing, to present to the public. For a year or two he had been turning out comparatively short essays of a crisp contrapuntal type. These formed the substance of the ballet, which was the first one Diaghilev produced by an English composer. It was a great day for a musician who had barely attained his majority. Other short movements of a similar character went to the making of another ballet *Pomona*, which was produced Sept. 9th, 1927 at the Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires. It is difficult to describe in words wherein lies the incontestable charm of this simple unpretentious music. The melodic line is neat and characteristic, but only here and there displays any noteworthy ingenuity. The counterpoint has a certain spicy, or even vinegary flavor which not everyone admires. The orchestration however is irreproachable, piquant and refined. The one composer to whom one might perhaps compare Lambert at this stage is Georges Auric, and yet there is no real likeness between them, for Auric is as French as Bizet himself, and this music is not French. Even technically there is nothing that could be described as indebtedness. Such bitonality as is employed in *Romeo* is nobody's monopoly.

Lambert's next work consisted of settings of *Seven Poems* by Li-Po, translated by Shigeyoshi Obata, published in two sets with pianoforte accompaniment and afterwards scored with string quintet, flute, oboe, and clarinet, in which form they were first performed October 30, 1929. All except one were written in 1926. They are dedicated to Anna May Wong.

The first important work to follow his success with the ballet was entitled *Music for Orchestra*. Though written in 1927 it

has not yet been performed. It consists of an *Introduction* and *Allegro* of elaborately contrapuntal character. During the same year he also wrote *The Rio Grande*, which has quite recently brought him an enviable success. It is not so much a setting of Sacheverell Sitwell's poem, as a tone-poem to which the former supplies a kind of choral background. It is scored for eight brass instruments, a few strings, percussion requiring five players, solo pianoforte and small chorus. For some time previously Lambert, like other modern composers, had felt the attraction of jazz rhythms and instrumental devices, but unlike most of them he has succeeded in assimilating them without emphasis or exaggeration. It is jazz idealized, transmuted, enlisted to a service to which it had hitherto seemed alien. The effect is, of course, exotic, as is the poem. But, more than that, it is poetically evocative.

The same year (1927) Lambert wrote a short *Elegiac Blues* for piano, in memory of Florence Mills. It has since been scored. Then in 1928 he occupied himself with editing the eight symphonies of Dr. William Boyce, an English composer of the eighteenth century. Since then the only important work from his pen is a *Piano Sonata* which again reveals the jazz influence, but in a totally different aspect. It was completed in 1929 and has so far had only one public performance, and that not a very illuminating one, so that criticism must be deferred until it appears in print. For the present Lambert's reputation rests upon his two ballets and *The Rio Grande*.

Both Walton and Lambert possess remarkable technical skill, but whereas in the former it is conspicuous, the latter, being of a more subtle temperament, usually keeps it in the background. In *The Rio Grande*, for instance, it is the sureness of touch rather than the ingenuity that impresses one. This reticence is entirely sincere. Lambert has no affectation, but he is an intellectual, to whom craftsmanship is incidental and ancillary. Walton's interest is more narrowly musical, and therefore more directly concerned with it. They are, in fact, entirely different types, each with his full complement of desirable attributes, but claiming few in common. There is no reason why they should be thrust, willy-nilly, into the kind of partnership implied by "Walton and Lambert."



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