

GROWING PAINS IN ENGLAND

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EVER since the middle of the seventeenth century English music has been to some extent affected by foreign influences. In the nineteen hundreds these influences were chiefly German, and a good deal of Stanford and Parry sounds like watered-down Brahms. But the turn of the century saw an increase in French influence, and even such an early work of Vaughan Williams as the *Sea Symphony* owes a good deal to Debussy and Chausson. It became more explicit with Holst's *Planets* and *Perfect Fool*. At the time the growth of the English folk-music school led to an often incongruous mixture of the two elements, and one can say that in their later works Holst and Williams have turned away from the French, while composers like Ireland and Moeran have hardly been affected by them at all, except perhaps in some rather Debussyan harmonic mannerisms.

On the other hand the post-War group—Walton, Lambert, Berners, et al—have been very much influenced by their Parisian contemporaries, especially by Les Six, Stravinsky and Satie, though they too in recent years have added several more typically English qualities to their original neo-classic style. This French influence still persists today, especially in some younger composers like Lennox Berkeley, Anthony Lewis and Stanley Bate who have studied with Nadia Boulanger, as well as in a good many ex-students of the London colleges of music, such as Victor Yates, R. A. S. Arnell and Peter Pope.

Central Europe until recently has been less well represented in England. It has affected the work of men like Alan Rawsthorne and Christian Darnton, who, though of about the same age as Walton and Lambert, belong musically to a later generation. That is to say, their aims correspond more to the ideas of the "thirties" than to those of the "twenties," they both reached

a mature style a decade later than Walton and Lambert. For this reason Benjamin Britten, though much younger, belongs musically with Rawsthorne or Darnton.

England has not yet produced a thorough-going atonalist composer, nor even a devoted follower of Bartok, but the interest in—one can by now almost say popularity of—the music of that school in England has had its effect on many. They have not only learned a good deal from Schönberg, Berg, Webern and Bartok but, by escaping both the Wagnerian and the Brahmsian heresies, have realized the enormous importance of Liszt, Mahler and Busoni in the development of modern music. What they have learned from these they have combined with certain characteristically English qualities, which can best be defined by saying that they would strike the hearer as common factors in the music of Elgar, Ireland, Walton and Britten—to name four men of different generations.

In general, the recent tendency has been away from color effects and rhythmic ingenuity to a more sober and classical, though not necessarily dull approach. An important influence in this change has been Bernard van Dieren, the friend and admirer of Busoni, who spent most of his life in England; his music, though hardly known outside that country, and even there not well, combines the richness of the late nineteenth century harmonic vocabulary with an entirely individual form of classicality and some sense of purpose. Naturally the younger English composers have used a more austere and more linear style for the most part, but the same sense of form and restraint is there.

In England new ideas always take longer to find root, but once they come, they usually come to stay. For this reason it is important that a fairly large section of the English musical public is now interested in Schönberg and his school, in Bartok and Busoni. Stravinsky's early ballets have of course been accepted for some time, but it is at last being realized that his neo-classic works represent an extremely important advance rather than a falling-off and the debt of modern music to Satie also begins to be understood. These results are chiefly due to able writers like Cecil Gray and Constant Lambert, who have replaced the pedagogs of the older school in the favor of the younger generation.

This is only the good side of the picture. The average Englishman has never been as musically-minded as the average German or Frenchman, and of that small (though steadily increasing) section of the public which enjoys serious music, by far the majority refuses to listen to anything written after 1910, while of the remainder, a large proportion considers that the most important living composers are Sibelius, Vaughan Williams and Bloch. No one can deny the genius and originality of these men, but it seems foolish not to explore modern music any further than that.

Partly this is due to the attitude of the academic authorities, who refuse to incorporate any but the mildest of modern music in their curricula. The average music amateur often knows more about and is more interested in modern music than the average professional musician. And not only modern music, but even the history of music is taught in the most sketchy and haphazard way at most of the musical academies. There is no regular course of "musicology" as at German universities. The students are left to discover the classics on their own. How much chance is there then that they will get to understand and enjoy modern music? On the other hand the academies refuse to employ refugees on their teaching staff in spite of general superior knowledge and ability. I have known two men of first-class attainments who wanted to settle in England but were forced to go to other countries because of the difficulties put in their way here. The most they could hope for was a precarious living from private teaching—provided they could get a permit to teach at all.

The large universities are on the whole more hospitable than the musical academies. But music usually forms only an unimportant part of their syllabi. A number of refugee performers and music publishers have however settled in England, though their influence is not, so far, enormous. English musical culture is by now fairly well developed throughout the country, and a good many Englishmen already resent the intrusion of foreigners, whatever their attainments. However, among others, Georg Szell has become the conductor of the Scottish Orchestra, and Egon Wellesz holds a fellowship at Oxford University.

Though there is much more music, and of greater variety, played in London than in any other city in Europe, the average

concert-going public remains extremely conservative. For instance, the only contemporary work of importance announced for the forthcoming London Music Festival is Bartok's second quartet. During the past concert season practically the only modern works played at the public symphony concerts were Bartok's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (Beecham), Walton's *Symphony* and the fragments from *Wozzeck* (BBC). The latter organization has however been giving fortnightly studio concerts of modern music, including performances of works by Busoni, Burkhard, Bliss, Goossens, Ravel, Berg, Beck, Hindemith and, among the British, Rubbra, Britten and William Busch. Under the name of the Contemporary Music Circle, the English section of the I.S.C.M. also presents periodical chamber concerts. Visiting artists also bring us much of the Central European repertory now forbidden in the countries of its origin.

There can be no doubt that the chief means of spreading knowledge of contemporary music in Britain is the radio. It has always been the policy of the BBC to do this. Though the vast majority of listeners automatically switch off when a concert of modern music is announced, interest is certainly spreading. Informative talks and special programs do much to win new listeners. On the other hand, not much music has been written specially for broadcasting except as incidental music for radio plays or in the form of special arrangements of compositions for broadcasting combinations. Most of these are hardly "contemporary" in the stylistic sense. But the possibility that their works may be broadcast has undoubtedly led composers to avoid over-luxuriant scoring. Choral writing too is simplified in order that the words may be more clearly heard over the microphone.

Music and politics have never gone hand in hand in England—for instance the *Dreigroschenoper* has yet to be performed on any stage here. The average English musician likes to avoid external associations in music as much as possible. But in the last few years a number of composers have been setting poems of a definitely political nature—Britten has written incidental music for most of Auden's plays. And at the beginning of April a "Festival of Music for the People" was organized to demonstrate the connection of the two. It consisted of a pageant with music

and the dance showing, in ten historical episodes, "how significantly and spontaneously music springs from crucial phases of the people's life," a concert of folk-song arrangements by Kodaly and Grainger and songs by Hanns Eisler, and a choral and orchestral concert of John Ireland's *These Things Shall Be*, the Lento and Finale from Alan Bush's piano concerto with male voice chorus, "in which the audience is exhorted to consider the position of the musician in present-day society," and a new choral and orchestral work by Benjamin Britten, *Ballad of Heroes*, written in memory of the men of the British battalion of the International Brigade who fell in Spain. This work, composed and orchestrated within four days, is one of the finest and most dramatic things he has done, combining extreme simplicity with remarkable originality.

It is possible to hear in London today the music being produced at the present time in most other countries, though one would like to hear more of the Americans. A concert given by the BBC last winter included works by Whithorne, Carpenter and Fuleihan, but what about Copland, Piston, Sessions, Ives, Harris? Their music is hardly ever played here. Many English composers too will probably be better known in America later, such men as Edmund Rubbra, whose two symphonies combine the sixteenth century polyphonic style with a modern harmonic structure, Alan Rawsthorne, Christian Darnton, Alan Bush and others. Contemporary music obviously is to some extent flourishing in England. Chiefly there is hope for the future. Most of the original sources of this music no longer exist but the Western democracies have inherited the legacy of Central Europe. Though it is too early as yet to realize the full effects of the change, one hopes that they will make good use of what they have won.