



The Technique of Romanticism. IV. The Latest Phase Delius (Concluded)

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once troubled himself to provide original music. It is not suggested that he regarded these secular texts contemptuously. On the contrary, the scores of all the eleven that are extant are prefaced with his prayerful 'Jesu, help me' or conclude with the ascription, 'To God alone be the praise.' But it is clear beyond question that normally they did not invite him to provide them with original music. 'Schleicht, spielende Wellen' is the only exception, and for an obvious reason. The occasion afforded his first personal contact with Augustus since his petition was sent in, a little more than a year before, for the post of Court Composer. Moreover, the Cantata would be heard by the King himself. That Bach would have been as meticulous in regard to 'Preise dein Glücke' had he received adequate notice we may feel sure. And as it stands, three of its five movements cannot be discovered in other scores. Thus it becomes at once improbable that the ten movements 'Hercules' and 'Tönet ihr Pauken' share with the Oratorio are original. For what reason should Bach offer the absent Queen and Crown Prince deeper homage than the absent King?

Another point emerges which has escaped the consideration of Spitta, Schweitzer, and others. Is there no significance in Bach's very belated interest in the oratorio form? Is nothing to be inferred from the fact that he thrice experimented with it in the period 1733-36, but never before or after those years?; that the experiments synchronized with the production of the 'Hohe Messe' and his hottest wooing of the Dresden Court? It will be suggested in a later article that the Christmas, Easter, and Ascension Oratorios were all written to attract his Catholic Sovereign, and for that reason were as little likely to be second-hand goods as the original portion of the 'Hohe Messe' offered to Augustus in 1733.

Schweitzer gratuitously assumes that Bach found peculiar satisfaction in composing these secular texts, and that they stirred him to original effort. But the contrary is the fact, and the above table declares it. Moreover, though Leipzig had an operatic tradition and apparatus, and though the musical resources which performed Bach's loyal effusions in 1733-34 were at his disposal for the greater part of his official career at Leipzig, less than thirty secular cantatas came from his pen in that period. He treated them, in fact, as interruptions of his normal and preferred activity. As to the cantatas performed in the period at which he was at work upon the 'Christmas Oratorio,' only once, and on a special occasion, was he at pains to give them original music. And for that reason the secular origin of the movements these cantatas share with the Oratorio is exceedingly questionable. An analysis of the movements themselves will invite the same opinion.

(To be continued.)

THE TECHNIQUE OF ROMANTICISM

By A. J. B. HUTCHINGS

(Concluded from September number, p. 792.)

IV.—THE LATEST PHASE—DELIUS

It is but an affectation of modesty that forbids my writing 'the last phase.' I leave that pronouncement to more august pens than mine; so that when I assert, in the chorus of small fry, that romanticism is a worked-out seam, a dry orange at which a number of decadent composers are still turgidly but pitifully sucking, I do not necessarily imply that I look to see those conceptions and aspirations usually styled 'romantic' undergoing a temporary or lengthy abeyance, but merely that a technical '-ism,' a musical fashion, is now passing away as all fashions ultimately must. In the *Musical Times* of last March, Mr. Edwin Evans wrote: 'In æsthetics, "romantic" is, in fact, less an epithet descriptive of poetic content than a term of art chronology, defining the position of a work of art in the historical sequence to which it belongs. It is a definite phase, with a beginning, and therefore presumably with an ascertainable end.' From this passage, I take it that Mr. Evans regards the adjective 'romantic' as denoting a certain quality of technique; this being so, his criticism is not in opposition to that of, say, Mr. Cecil Gray, whose 'History of Music' and other writings constantly emphasise the fact that music is primarily *the* romantic art, and only attains its loftiest expression when romantic ideals are ascendant in the world of art. Many of the discussions upon 'The Knell of Romanticism' now to be found in all branches of the arts could be considerably clarified if it were first observed that the adjective 'romantic' may imply either of two connotations. It may be understood to correspond either with 'romance,' an abstract noun meaning a certain combination of creative impulses (what wretched jargon!), or with 'romanticism,' grammatically an abstract noun, but musically and for my present purpose a concrete one, denoting a certain type of musical technique.

It is my task in this essay to indulge once more in what Wordsworth would call 'The fingering habit,' and Debussy 'poking my æsthetic nose where it is not wanted.' But I hope that the distinction in terms I have just made will excuse any sin of *lèse-mystère*, on the grounds that I may be allowed to deal with the concrete thing, technique, by concrete reference. Unfortunately, I have to argue another claim—that I am justified in saying that the technical characteristics of romanticism, some of which I enumerated in my second essay of this series, having been pursued with increasing definiteness by composers of the 19th century from Schumann onwards, reached their logical limits in the music of Delius, and that therefore any creative art which followed this must either be stale and decadent or be vitalised with fresh elements which forbid its inclusion among pure works of the great romanticist school. For instance, I cannot regard Arnold Bax as one with valid orders in the apostolic succession of English romanticism. He is a great composer simply because he is one of the few who have had the ability to work both through the technique of the 19th-century school (*i.e.*, Delianism) and out to something further that dissociates him from that school. I have not yet heard the new Bax symphony; my present

impression of Bax's work is that of an amazing hybrid. But at this peculiar stage in musical history a great composer must be a hybrid if he is to avail himself of the technique of Delius and the great romanticists. I only know one composer who, with Bax, has succeeded in this. I wish his work could be heard more often in England. He is the Polish composer Szymanowski, whose violin concerto was performed at one of last season's Courtauld-Sargent concerts. But in England to-day there are quite a number of second-grade, albeit able, composers who have either realised, or are painfully realising, that to be lured into the footsteps of Delius is to be lured down a blind alley. Charity forbids mention of names—'water-cress music' was the name applied to their work by a well-known composer of my acquaintance, who himself confessed to having been drawn. It is one of the great tragedies of art that a second-rate man, no less than a first-rate one, is devoted to his creations, and blind to their decadence. What are my proofs of all this? Why take Delius as the *ne plus ultra* of a pure style?

Of course the real proof is incommunicable; it lies in the conviction of sheer intuition. It is easy to show, for instance, that in Henry VII.'s Chapel at Westminster Abbey the perpendicular style in architecture reached a logical limit; that in the prose of John Lyly the antithetical style was pushed to an extreme which would make further development mechanical and ugly; but in musical technique, distinctions of style lie in things less superficial. If one wanted just to write a catalogue of 'typical features of the period,' one might just as well go to popular music as to good stuff. In an essay on popular music, in his book 'Along the Road,' Mr. Aldous Huxley shows how the technique of popular music lags chronologically behind that of artistic music. Thus, while Delius was still writing, popular music re-echoed the harmony of Gounod and Spohr. Now, in the 20th century, our dance tunes languish with added sixths, added seconds, dominant ninths, elevenths, and all the Delian box of tricks. After all, you have only to play this sort of thing slowly, put in an extra, pulsing, octave bass, and then imagine something a little more commonplace, to find a very near approach to a clanking, processional 'blues.'

Ex. 1. DELIUS.

&c.

This is not intended in any way as a slight upon a very beautiful work. I must number myself among those heretics who hold that Delius excels in chamber, as in orchestral music. Unfortunately or otherwise, to meet Delius in chamber music, stripped of all but the minimum resources of colour, is to meet him with all the technical paraphernalia exposed. A great critical work upon the subject of Shakespearean tragedy begins with the words, 'What was Shakespeare's tragic conception? Shakespeare himself may never have asked such a question.' But this does not prevent Dr. Bradley from answering that question at length, and with illuminating results. One might do the same in the case of Delius. There is a peculiarity in the English temperament, in sport and other things just as much as in art; that is, the admiration of work which is apparently a natural gift, above work which shows previous painstaking. The one thing which most musicians fail to acknowledge, in fact do not like to acknowledge, is that Delius the craftsman is a considerable part of Delius the artist. Everything in his biography points to an intellectual rather than an emotional nature. Were it not for his malady, we should see him as he was in early life—a cricketer, a good shot, an adventurer, a rebel, a man with a sense of humour and a caustic tongue upon occasion, possessing high animal spirits, the friend of the litterateur, scientist, and philosopher, rather than of the 'watercress' musician. Delius's canonisation misrepresented him in some respects. It is just the hard thought, indeed the amount of time he himself admits spending, that raise such a work as that quoted above to something greater than mere romantic rhapsody of a refined 'blues' type. There are two questions for discussion. First, how did this later technique evolve? Secondly, wherein lies the craftsmanship of Delius in surmounting the decadence? (A question which certainly never entered the composer's head.)

When the old baroque contrapuntal school passed away there passed with it a quality which it has always been the peculiar difficulty of romantic composers to re-capture, namely, a 'horizontal' carrying power. In the words of Dr. Dyson, 'the exploitation of masses of sound rather than of threads of melody, and the consequent tendency to seek expression as much in contrasts of quantity as in refinements of quality, were consistent features in the music of the 19th century.' With a composer like Delius, who relies little on dynamic effects of the heavy, Teutonic, Beethoven-Mahler type, the employment of the wider chords of the dominant, and of melodies of a rhapsodic nature, was a necessary means of acquiring this forward thrust, something akin to what the scientist calls 'kinetic energy.' Vergil says (of Charon's boat, I think), 'Vires acquirit eundo.' But some man will say, 'Are we not told that some of Delius's most lovely moments are those when he poises almost without motion upon one shimmering chord, say an added sixth?' Certainly, but it is the peculiar nature of those rich discords, the ninths, elevenths, and thirteenth, developed in later romantic technique, together with the sevenths of the earlier stage, to possess a sort of carrying power. Originally they supported chromatic or other suspensions, and were resolved, so that when left unresolved they

suggested a 'field of ideas,' just as if I said, 'To-morrow we shall —.' Thus, while Elgar obtains the motive power of his second Symphony by metrical pulse and suspensions, Delius obtains that of his Violin Concerto by his harmonic skill, and above all by his marvellous sense of the true meaning of form and rhythm. It is just this last quality which distinguishes him from our friend the blues-concocter.

Whereas the blues man depends upon the regular recurrence of metrical pulse as a warp and woof over which to make his monotonous syncopations, Delius depends upon rhythm in its only true meaning for the cultured musician—namely, a fine sense of extended phrasing, and of diversified thought within the phrase. I quote three of the principal melodies of the Violin Sonata mentioned above :

Ex. 2 (a)

(b)

(c)

And yet there are those who speak of a lack of rhythmic interest in Delius! Such melodies as those above are born of the pure rhapsody, the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' that has begotten our most felicitous lines of poetry. Rhythm is a greater thing than mere time-values. You cannot really 'tap the rhythm' of a phrase. Pitch is as much a part of rhythm as time is. Rhythm is simply the power of extended thought. It is the very life-stuff which distinguishes the work of a master from that of an imitator. Form is but a wider application of the same thing. If form means what Pope called 'surveying the whole,' the power to give an artistic consistency and cohesion to an accumulation, or rather development, of thought, then Delius is a master of form, at least in his best works. (Incidentally, the pruning-knife could be used with advantage in most of his works in the form of variation upon a non-original air.) One of the few undistinguished works of Delius I know is the collection of three pieces for pianoforte, where there is none of the extended rhapsodic thought, but just the romanticist's pet chords, mostly laid out in arpeggios.

Recently a photograph was given in one of the daily papers of the rejected frescoes designed by Frank Brangwyn for the Houses of Parliament. The fact that the photograph could not reproduce the colours of the frescoes helped one to observe something of their form, as the limitations of the chamber do in music. Were it not for the fact that Brangwyn is more a decorative artist than Delius (I hope I am not putting my foot in it!), I should conceive that the two men have similar ideals of form. Thus, as applied to Delius, Dr. Dyson's phrase 'the exploitation of masses of

sound' implies not so much a distribution of dynamic forces as of harmonic colours. The rich quality of these colours was made for him. One has but to compare the thick, ugly spacing of the final chords of some Beethoven sonatas with the same chords as spaced out by Chopin, to realise this; and although we have to believe that Delius was never directly influenced by Debussy (?), the whole musical world learnt to acquire greater sensitiveness to harmonic colour in the days of fine pianoforte writing from the time of Schumann onwards. Someone has said that with Delius the chords became like notes in a melody. Some of his finest passages are those to be found frequently in the chamber works, in which a melody of notes is made to ride upon a melody of moving chords quite independent harmonically. The 'Cello Sonata, itself one almost unbroken melody, is full of such passages. Again, just as it is the decorative form and balance in the work of Brangwyn which demands something more than mere sensuous enjoyment, so it is the form and rhythm of Delius that prevent the intelligent listener from lying back in his seat and wallowing in a bath of lovely sound. Not so with your 'watercrossers.' In the article quoted before, Mr. Evans writes: 'Only a highly-gifted man such as Delius could have achieved so much with a medium that had reached that stage.'

Finally, why should Delius and not, say, Bax, or even Schönberg, be regarded as the ultimate stage of romanticist technique, in the limited meaning of that expression? One might argue on one point only—tonality; taking an analogy from a similar point in ethics. Suppose a free-thinker said: 'A code of moral laws cannot be of Divine ordinance. The restrictions of morality are the arbitrary accumulations of human custom. For instance, what is moral for me in this country at this time might have been quite immoral for an ancient Greek, and may be immoral for a modern Hottentot, or vice versa. Then why should I succumb to moral restrictions?' To this one would answer: 'Granted that moral codes may differ with time and place, and have been expanded or qualified from one dispensation to another; you still cannot deny that a character which is not restricted by *any* moral laws must be a very flabby affair. It is only suffering and opposition, self-imposed or otherwise, which make character at all. You may be right in your opinion that our existing code of morality needs revision, but you cannot deny the need of some code.' Small boys would find no pleasure in knocking at a door and then disappearing if they thought such a proceeding were perfectly legitimate—in the case of an empty house, for instance; it is the knowledge of trespass and the possibility of pursuit which give the thrill. Thus Chesterton sings:

'If I had been a heathen, I'd have crowned
Neera's curls;
And filled my life with love-affairs, my house
with dancing girls;
But Higgins is a heathen, and to lecture-rooms
is forced,
Where his aunts, who are not married, demand
to be divorced.
Now who that runs can read it, the riddle that
I write,
Of why this poor old sinner should sin without
delight.'

The fact is that Higgins thinks he has found a new and superior moral code, in the terms of which those things which G. K. C. delights in as sins, are preached with all the respectful solemnity due to virtues. Modern musicians might argue on similar lines. Regard modulation and chromaticism as trespasses, and it will be seen that a great part of the pleasure derived from the works of the 19th-century composers is attributable to the straying from, and returning to, a fixed tonality. Delius is one of those composers who, though he may not preserve the traditional architecture of key-relationships, retains at least a *sense* of tonality; there is usually a key-signature; his chord-structure implies the diatonic and pentatonic scales; his use of accidentals is still definitely chromatic, distinguishing between G flat and F sharp. Very differently does Schönberg bristle his sharps and flats (there is no chromaticism as such, but the deliberate use of a scale of twelve notes proceeding in semitones between the octave.) In Delius there is never a counterpoint of two streams of chords of different tonality—a practice to be observed frequently in Strauss, Stravinsky, Schönberg, Goossens, and others. Clearly these men are using a new technique and have a new code of values. There is nothing very new in Delius except a tremendous brain.

The people whom one fails to understand are the Higginses. They are merely negative and destructive. If the musical cargo of romanticism is too heavy and over-ripe, one would like to see a new technique in which the throwing overboard is making for clarity and new ideals, and not merely attenuation of the old technique without any diminution of obscurity. Is it jingoism to say that such a technique is now being perfected by our two young Englishmen, Lambert and Walton? If they fulfil the great promise shown so far, the music of the future will be indebted to them rather than to the later Bartók and Schönberg. As yet, they seem to emphasise the head at the expense of the heart, but they are at least distinct from the watercress school. That decadent body, containing many competent and, in their generation, famous musicians, will fail to achieve greatness unless they learn to demand what their idol, Delius, demanded—intelligent, as well as sensuous, appreciation. They had better follow a new path. Is it Bach?

Occasional Notes

The following letter appeared in *The Times* of July, 29. As it has roused a good deal of interest, we think it ought to be filed (so to speak) in a musical journal. We therefore reprint it, by kind permission of *The Times*. The correspondence evolved by Mr. Maginty's letter was not generally in agreement with his theory; but that fact does not reduce its interest:

'SHENANDOAH': A GREGORIAN ORIGIN

SIR,—Fishing recently in musical waters I pulled up a catch which I thought your readers would like to see. This is not the time, I know, for excursions into history, but the revival of community singing round the coast can scarcely fail to have whetted the appetite for information upon the origin of 'Shenandoah,' the song without which no programme is complete. The mystery is that while the melody is one of virile grace and haunting sweetness, its literary partner is so

ill-favoured, weak, and shallow as to compel a genuine wonder as to how he got tricked into lasting bondage with her; where he picked her up, so to speak.

The solution appears to be that both were once of equal dignity; that the melody is Gregorian plainsong and the words good Latin in disguise.

(1.) 'Shenandoah' (pronounced Shan-an-dore) is called a shantie. In the mercantile marine the shantie was encouraged as 'an extra hand.' It gave a spice to individual effort and synchronism to the collective work of rowing, hauling, and the like. A strongly marked rhythm and a regularly recurring accent were therefore indispensable. But in these essentials 'Shenandoah' is deficient; for triple time alternates with duple, and the grouping is unsymmetrical. What rhythm it has is in consequence rhetorical; the rhythm of prose rather than of verse. But the only form of melodic prose that ever became popular was the Gregorian chant.

(2.) The word 'shantie' is made up of the English affective suffix attached to the root 'chant' with the French initial aspirate; and there is an undeniable religious tang in the English word chant.

(3.) A Gregorian chant is divided between cantor and chorus; 'Shenandoah,' like most of its class, between shantie-man and crew.

(4.) The six notes of 'Cross the wide Missouri' (as figured in Sir Richard Terry's version) were to me so strangely reminiscent of 'Dona nobis pacem' that I overhauled the eighteen Masses in the 'Kyriale' (Coldwell, Red Lion Passage, Holborn; No. 605; 6d.). On p. 123 I came upon what seems to have been the original source—namely, the second and third units of the Agnus Dei of Mass XVII., prescribed for Lent and Advent. There was some divergence at minor points; but recalling Sir Richard Terry's warning that although this shantie is known on all the seas, it is difficult to find two sailors who will sing it exactly alike, I procured the Vaughan Williams and the Cecil Sharp readings. The former brings the chant and the shantie closer together; but the latter, 'wrested' into a rowing song in triple time all the way, does little to strengthen the assumption (in fact the second entry of the chorus is more akin to the *Deo gratias*, p. 124), but contributes the important link which makes the title 'Shanadar'; thus throwing suspicion upon the view that the song addresses a river or an Indian prince.

In the following sketch the two things blend into one. Minims are used where the notes are the same; non-coincident notes of the song are indicated by quavers with (to quote Dr. Burton's* Ushaw poem) 'caudal stumps erect,' those of the chant with 'caudal stumps deject.' For convenience of reading I have raised the pitch to G:

O Shen - an - doah, I love your daugh -
 Ag - nus De - - i qui tol - -
 - ter; A - - way you roll - ing riv - er. O
 - lis pec - ca - - ta . . .
 Shenandoah, I love your daugh - ter, A - way I'm
 mun - di Ag - nus De - - i qui - -
 bound to go, . . A - cross the wide Mis - sou - ri.
 - - tol - lis Do - na no - bis pa - - cem.

* Bishop of Clifton.