

# THE Musical Times ESTABLISHED IN 1844

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'Bach's Organ Works': The Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor

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Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 61, No. 933 (Nov. 1, 1920), p. 767

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/910711>

Accessed: 11/02/2015 01:52

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## BOY CHORISTER ACTORS

SIR,—Muriel Silburn's interesting article in the *Musical Times* for August on 'Kidnapped Choristers,' alludes to their being employed as actors in addition to their sacred duties at the Chapel Royal and St. Paul's Cathedral. Her account takes us back only as far as 1626. It is not quite clear that the chorister boys resumed their occupation as stage performers after the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, but it is certain that the Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal were so engaged, and continued to be until Queen Anne forbade the practice for reasons similar to those expressed in the warrant of 1626 quoted by your contributor. We learn, however, from Dr. Burney that on Wednesday, February 23, 1731, Handel's oratorio 'Esther' was represented *in action* by the Children of his Majesty's Chapel Royal at the house of Bernard Gates, their master, in St. James's Street, Buckingham Gate, the chorus being placed after the manner of the ancients between the stage and orchestra. Amongst the boys who performed on this occasion were John Beard (afterwards the famous tenor singer), John Randall (afterwards Doctor of Music and Professor of Music at Cambridge), and Thomas Barrow (afterwards Gentleman and music copyist in the Chapel Royal). The oratorio was also publicly performed by the same singers at the 'Crown and Anchor' Tavern, but does not appear to have been then given in action or on a stage. Exactly twenty-four years after the performance in St. James's Street—viz., on February 23, 1755—Horace Walpole wrote to Richard Bentley as follows:

'Garrick has produced a detestable English Opera which is crowed by all true lovers of their country. To mark the opposition to Italian operas, it is sung by some cast singers, two Italians and a French girl, and the Chapel boys; and to regale us with sense, it is Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is forty times more nonsensical than the worst translation of any Italian opera books.'

The opera spoken of was produced at Drury Lane Theatre on February 3, 1755, under the title of 'The Fairies.' The piece was concocted by Garrick out of Shakespeare's play by excising the comic characters and adding songs from others of Shakespeare's pieces and elsewhere. He also wrote—and himself spoke—a prologue to the opera. The music was composed by John Christopher Smith, the friend and amanuensis of Handel. The boys who took part in the piece as principal performers were Master Rheinhold (who afterwards became a celebrated bass singer), Master Moore, and Master Evans. The remaining Chapel boys probably appeared as fairies in the chorus. The other singers employed were Beard, Champness, and Miss Young. The Chapel boys were at that time under the mastership of Bernard Gates. I should be glad to know whether this was the last occasion on which choristers appeared on the stage in public; and if so, whether their further appearance was prohibited by any—and what—authority. I might add that in recent years the choristers of St. Paul's have given theatrical performances every Christmas at their school in Carter Lane.—Yours, &c.,

J. E. ADKINS.

Preston.

P.S.—From a poetical epitaph by Jonson we learn that one of the celebrated boy-actors of his time—Salathiel Pavy—was famed as the representative of old men. He died about the year 1601 at the age of thirteen. This boy was probably a chorister as well as actor.

## 'BACH'S ORGAN WORKS': THE PASSACAGLIA AND FUGUE IN C MINOR

SIR,—I have greatly enjoyed Mr. Harvey Grace's articles in the *Musical Times* on 'Bach's Organ Works,' and was particularly interested in his remarks on the Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor. This work, more perhaps than any other of Bach's, affords wide scope for originality of treatment. I have lately been trying various ways of registering the Passacaglia, and would like to proffer a

suggestion as to the method which seems to me most in accordance with the spirit of the work as a whole, and with the character of the individual variations.

Instead of gradually increasing the power of the organ throughout the piece, and ending with the full organ—which seems to be the orthodox way of playing most of Bach's organ music—I prefer to treat Variation 16 as the climax of the piece, and I have found the following plan of registration to be very effective:

Variations ...	I to II ...	Various quiet combinations of stops.
Variation ...	12 ...	Great Small Open Diapason.
" ...	13 ...	Great Large Open Diapason.
" ...	14 ...	Full Swell.
" ...	15 ...	Great 16, 8, and 4, with Full Swell. (Played strictly legato.)
" ...	16 ...	Full Organ.
" ...	17 ...	Great 16, 8, and 4 (without reeds).
" ...	18 ...	Great Diapasons.
" ...	19 ...	Swell or Choir <i>mf</i> .
" ...	20 ...	Swell <i>f</i> .

Begin Fugue on Great Diapasons, 'thumbing' the first note C; this enables one to make the entry of the Fugue easily and effectively on the third beat of the last bar of the Passacaglia, and avoids the sense of anti-climax caused by beginning the Fugue on Diapasons immediately after the use of the full organ. The last variation has a most charming *misterioso* effect when played on suitable quiet Swell stops.—Yours, &c.,

B. T. P. HOLLINS.

6, Downs Road,

Beckenham, Kent.

September 15, 1920.

## Obituary

We regret to record the following deaths:

JAMES RICHARD SIMPSON, of the well-known Edinburgh firm of Methven Simpson, Ltd. Edinburgh owes much to his long-sustained activities in concert-giving. He promoted the Edinburgh Classical Concerts which continued a healthy and useful existence from 1906 to the war, and have since been resumed. The Beethoven Festival under Balling was a development of this series.

MAX BRUCH, born in 1838, composer of symphonies, concertos, oratorios, a large number of smaller choral works, and operas. He was known in this country chiefly by his frequently-played Violin Concerto in G minor, and in a less degree by his 'Kol Nidrei' for violoncello and orchestra, and a Violin Concerto in D minor. From 1880 to 1883 he lived in England as conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. In 1893 he received an honorary degree from Cambridge University.

## Sixty Years Ago

From the *Musical Times* of November, 1860:

GLoucester Cathedral.—There is a Vacancy in this Choir for a BASS (not Baritone) VOICE, who will be appointed Probationary Lay-Clerk. His duties will be to attend Divine Service twice daily, and practising whenever required by the Precentor. The emoluments will be a fixed stipend of £10 a year, and 1s. 6d. for every attendance at Church; and an additional sum of £10 yearly will be set aside, and, with the accumulations of interest, will be applied for his benefit in such way as the Chapter shall think best, on his retirement from his office, with the consent of the Chapter, provided his conduct has been satisfactory. The Candidates likely to suit will be required to appear before the Dean and Chapter on some day which will be signified to them. Applications for the situation, stating the age and place of residence of the applicant, with testimonials as to moral and religious character, powers of voice, and musical capacity, to be forwarded to J. A. Whitcombe, Esq., Chapter Clerk, on or before the 21st of November next.

By order of the Dean and Chapter,

I, Barton-street, Gloucester, JOHN A. WHITCOMBE.  
October 20, 1860.