Bach Festival Impressions
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Published by: Musical Times Publications Ltd.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/903593
Accessed: 04-01-2016 02:07 UTC

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BACH FESTIVAL IMPRESSIONS.

(By our Special Correspondent.)

Leipzig, October 4.

A carnival of moving basses. A discredited pianoforte.

The joyous penetrative trumpet. The earnest faces of

wholly skilled men. A perfect concert-hall. A church

whose every corner seems to resound sympathetic to music

specially created and born to fill it. An inimitable violon-

cello performance. A rich self-reliant tenor voice. The absolute

triumph of those who treat old music as still flesh and

blood, and the conviction that their opponents can

stand no more than chaff will lie against the wind. An

intercourse with some strong personalities. The vigour of

German debate. A tour through old Leipzig, and a sense

that it is better than new magnificent Leipzig. Some

peaceful lazy moments in the Rosenthal. The recognition

of these shrewd Alt-Sachsen as our veritable cousins. The

thought of the chasm in music, if some great Saxons, as

Handel, Bach and Schumann, had been out of it. The

overwhelming recognition forced on one, sitting in Bach's

own church, of the infinite genius of this man, who united

the cold judgment of the intellect, the fairy visions of the

imagination, the warm pleadings of the heart, and the

submission of religion. The recognition that in our

megapolitan, cosmopolitan London, we can do much, but

cannot rival the best indigenous manifestations; Bayreuth is

still Wagner, Ober-Ammergau is still the Passion-Play, the

Dauphiné is still Berlioz, and Leipzig is still Bach. To

those who doubt, one can say with Aemilius Paullus in

Macedonia, 'come and see.' These are the most vivid

impressions of the last few days. Inclination says, daily

with them; duty says, proceed to a straightforward report.

Those moving basses are the gist of the matter. These

are what tramped their march eternally through Bach's

brain, and even to those of the less gifted of his age. We

had them once ourselves in England in the music of our

viol-writers. Homophony has since gone on absorbing the

realm of true polyphony. It has been the parent and just

vehicle of sentiment. And the new polyphonic systems of

the latter Beethoven, of Schumann, of Wagner, of Brahms,

of Richard Strauss, &c., have known how to hold it correctly

brigaded with its predecessor. But for the mass of the

musical world it has been the occasion for insipidity and

degeneration. Here is where the lesson of a Bach Festival

comes in. There are reams of modern music, where the
double-bass player stands listless by his instrument, plucking

a casual occasional string with easy forefinger; one may be

sure then that homophony is paramount, and, if it be not

very rhythmic music, at its worst; and compare that with

these tireless men of the iron left-hand, who go on stopping

multitudinous intervals for an hour at a stretch, and so

making a bass which has the vitality of quicksilver. It may

be said that this soon makes a surfeit. As a matter of fact,
such is the power of motion, that it does not. 'Come and

see.' There is also a class of composer, those of the

stagnant imagination, who in spite of a brave show of

pseudo-polyphony, and while supposing that they are doing

great things, are in reality only setting down just a harmony
to a bar with the monotony of a first harmony-exercise.

There cannot be imagined a better thoroughly-cathartic

lesson for minor and younger composers, especially those

who despise counterpoint studies, than a dose of Bach such

as this freely administered. The melamopoe might give

them a revelation, and new ideas how to walk truly in the

steps of the great moderns.

Then about Bach's power of colour-variegation, though

this is perhaps more for distant wonder than modern applica-

tion. It was most noticeable in the four Church Cantatas

yesterday evening. His palette contains voices high and

voices low, accompanied and unaccompanied, solo and chorus,

orchestra, organ, cembalo, solo violin, solo violoncello, solo

hautboy, and last and possibly best the marvellous trumpet.

A sectional interchange of these elements, when conjointed

with architectonic structures of immense breadth and tonal

clearness, gives ample relief to the ear, and indeed steeps the

most hardened sense in a bath of delight. The trumpet,

introduced with such skill as to seem like an agile flute, and
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with entrancing small counterparts, sailed through and above everything in the loftier Gothic arches, a supernal voice discreetly yet dominating. Alone did the hummers of the pianoforte strike a jarring tone, not so much in pure recitative as in their strings; but for the rest, Bach thought of no hammers and only the plucking jacks.

Then as to the style of execution. There are two camps here in Germany. And I may take the privilege of a correspondent to declare at once to which I myself attorn, and have for forty years. I am unable to see why in playing old music one should be as melancholy as an indigo-dyer. The old writers had just as much heart as we have, perhaps. But Bach played, played, and had the played, without commas and semi-colons; that he refused an effect of contrast, when he could get it; that he played a dead-level mezzo-forte; that he prevented a voice from expressive utterance; that he used no dynamic marks except what he showed in his scores; all this is inconceivable. Nay further it is plain that men of that day, being human beings like ourselves, would have rejoiced just as much as we do, if their fingers had found their way to the velvety beauties of a Broadwood and the sonorities of a Beethoven, or if their ears had taken in the richness of a Böhm and Sax orchestra. What they would have then done with their own scores, I do not know, but they are the readiest to make accommodative and elastic alterations, large or small, therein. The only true, sound rule can be to play old music now so as to make it thoroughly effective according to the best modern instinctive methods, to give them a new sound, new life. And Bach's recent performers have brought out editions, and diverted the inspiration into this and that practical channel. On March 21-23, 1901, was held at Berlin a First Bach Festival. Now they have held a Second Bach Festival at Leipzig on October 1-3, 1904. The whole programmes will not be detailed. They can be found entire in the International Musical Society's Journal for August, 1904 (page 461). The Saturday noon or just-after-noon concert 'Motet' service or church music was practical. The Festival opened, has been practically continuous since 1358, when in appreciation of a great pestilence there was ordained a Mass to the Virgin 'singularis Sabbathi perpetue'; but actual and large motets threaten only a hundred years ago. Bach motets were then being sung before Sunday service by an amateur choir, and about 1810 Cantor J. G. Schicht shifted them to the Saturday afternoon concert service. The motets were not at all popular, and the good effort nowise occasioned any enthusiasm. The Cantor Schicht published a whole series of Bach motets for his church, and 'Promenade,' pulled down a few years back. The whole Festival, from about 1200 the chapel of the Augustinian canons of St. Thomas, was built in its present form 1482-96, by Thomas Scherllin, and has attained an immense height; style, highly ornamented German Gothic; end-west spacious organ and choir gallery, where all the music is made. The church itself, from its foundation in 1255 in the Liebfrauen-Kirch (St. Mary's Church) at Eich, renovated in 1610, and this was Bach's organ; in 1772 replaced by a 'Schweinefleisch,' and that again in 1889 by a 'Wilhelm Sauer' (Frankfurt). The organ-tones (vibratos and accompaniments) are of surpassing grandeur and mellowness. Except the two motets ('Singet dem Herrn' and 'Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf') under the usual direction of Cantor Gustav Schrock, the whole Festival was conducted by Karl Straube, Organist of St. Thomas; as above indicated with convincing warmth and effectiveness. Joachim's participation lent a solid dignity to the proceedings. The tenor of the Festival was Emil Pinks; a glorious voice with perfect intonation, and wherever he came in there was a sense of entire security in the music. Alfred Reisenauer (Leipzig) was chief pianist. Solo violin, Julius Klengel. Petzold unerring as trumpet. Chorus, the Leipzig Bachverein. Orchestra, Gewann atmosphere.

A few words on special items. Julius Klengel's tour de force, Bach's No. 5 Suite in C minor for violoncello solo, was wholly in contrast with the performance of the Berlioz solist in the same piece. The Berlioz solist speaks in phrases that are but crude, and the composer struggling with four-part chords which exasperatingly upset the rhythm at every other bar, are known to patient concert-goers, and it is a pity they ever leave the class-room. Herein there was no such sense, and perhaps Klengel also had a rather flat bridge. He gave twenty minutes
MUSIC IN NEW YORK.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

New York, October 19, 1904.

I change the customary headline of my letters this time because of the fact that circumstances compel me to confine myself (with but trifling excursions) to an account of musical doings in the American metropolis. Music in New York is not music in America, though the musical activities of the metropolis come near to outweighing in extent and importance all those of the rest of the country.

The record of promises for the season about to open will not look so imposing to Londoners as it does to us, but it is still impressive enough for mention. Confronting the music patrons of New York are at least one hundred orchestral concerts,—counting the popular entertainments of this sort which will be given at the Opera House and a few theatres on Sunday evenings; chamber-music concerts by three organizations; choral concerts by the New York Oratorio, Brooklyn Oratorio, and Musical Art Societies, the People's Choral Union and other organizations; fifteen grand operas at the Metropolitan Opera House; an undetermined (or at least unspecified) number of performances of Wagner's ' Parsifal,' in German and English; recitals and concerts by visiting pianists, like Ysaye, Kreisler, Venevy, D'Albert, Pachmann, Hofmann, Paderevski and Kubelik; in addition to a host of local performances of all kinds—vocal and instrumental.

A few words touching some of the promises held out in the various departments I have specified. The repertory, that is to say the list of works from which the operas to be performed will be selected, differs from any that New York has seen for years in a significant respect, viz., more than one-half of the operas are Italian. Since there can be no diminution of the Wagnerian list, this means that, exclusive of Wagner, France and Germany are to have a comparatively significant show of revivals of less recent operas. In all this, the quasi-novelties (or respectives revivals, as the Germans would say) are 'Gioconda,' 'Lucrèzia Borgia,' Puccini's ' Manon Lescaut,' 'Norma,' 'Die Fledermaus,' and 'I' Puritani,' besides the ballet 'Die Puppenfee.' 'Parsifal' is to be relied upon to make the success of the company when on the road after the metropolitan season is over. It is to become the Repertoirestück, against which Wagnarians have railed so long, and may be heard this season in Boston, Pittsburg, Chicago, Cincinnati, and San Francisco, as well as New York.

We are promised an extremely interesting orchestral season. The set concerts will be given by the New York Philharmonic Society, fifteen by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, six by the Young People's Symphony Society, six by the People's Symphony Society, an undetermined number by the Russian Symphony Orchestra (in Carnegie Hall), and six by the Russian Symphony Orchestra. The last-named represents so determined a purpose to make propaganda for the Russian school of composers as to compel attention. Last year the concerts were begun amidst the humble environment of the 'East Side,' inhabited by the city's hundreds of thousands of foreigners—now it is proposed to remove them to the more aristocratic surroundings of Carnegie Hall, and an attempt is making to give them social as well as artistic prestige, the Russian Ambassador at Washington having lent his name to the undertaking. The list of works promised contains works more or less unfamiliar by leading Russian composes. The New Philharmonic Society will this year again present foreign conductors as 'guests'—Gustav F. Kogel, of Frankfurt, Edouard Colonne, of Paris, Wasil I. Safonow, of Moscow, Felix Weingartner, of Berlin, Karl Panzer, of Bremen, and Theodor Thomas, of Chicago. As was the case last season, an extra concert outside of the subscription will be arranged for Herr Weingartner, at which he will conduct Berlioz's 'Harold in Italy; Beethoven's 'Coriolan,' and Mozart's 'Uncle Noah.' Thomas was conductor of the Society for many years before going to Chicago, and his visit will provide a gladsome celebration, as he is completing the fifteenth year of his career as a conductor.

The Forty-seventh Annual Festival of the Worcester County Musical Association took place at Worcester, Massachusetts, in the last week of September. It did not differ in any essentials from its immediate predecessors.