

Blackpool Festival, October 15-20

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of sentiment in her interpretation. She was so determined not to let Byrd's *Cradle Song* speak for itself that it ended by refusing to say anything! Her technique showed off its graces in Schumann's *Er ist's*, and songs of Monteverdi and of Brahms were her successes.

Mr. Laurence Leonard, tenor, sang at Æolian Hall, and had a most encouraging sort of audience. He is on the way towards being a good singer—if he realises that he is not one yet! So far his agreeable voice is fairly well controlled, but he has a great deal to learn in the grading of tones. He veered between excesses of strength and weakness, and his quality was either a cloying *vox humana* or a piercing trumpet call. But though he must, above all, modify those ruthless high notes, and abandon some of his romantic predilections, he is on the right lines, and can, if he will, be a 'somebody' one day. A stiff course of Bach would probably be the best thing for him. The programme contained an Aria of Giordani, a Russian group, and two songs of Madame Poldowski.

A negro baritone, Mr. J. Francis Morès, showed us at Æolian Hall to what ill uses can be put a good voice. Sledge-hammered accents, rough tones, and phrasing that had no rhyme or reason were only a few of his faults, and yet there was a certain attractiveness in his virile singing. It was at least a change to hear this primitive vigour, for most of the faults at the average London vocal recital are faults of nincompoopery. Mr. Morès did not scruple to carry his open tones up to E and even to F, so that we had shattering moments. But when he liked he soared somewhat in the devil-may-care manner of Titta Ruffo, and gave us thrilling G's and an A flat. The programme, which audaciously ascribed *Dio Possente* to Bizet, was mainly made of operatic excerpts and plantation hymns.

Miss Marie Howes sang at Wigmore Hall, accompanied by Mr. Frank Howes. If her singing of everything had equalled that of the delightful English folk-song, *The Cuckoo*, we should have nothing but compliments for her. Her success there suggested that her best course is to pursue such gaily animated pieces, in which her voice tells capitally. Her sustained singing was not good. She was not half aware of the claims of clean phrasing, but allowed most of her sentences to tail off in a slovenly *decrecendo*. At its best her tone, though small, was good. The group of folk-songs was the most characteristic feature of the programme.

H. J. K.

PIANOFORTE RECITALS

The new stars of the month have been Mlle. Jeanne-Marie Darré and Mr. Walter Gieseking. Mlle. Darré, we are told, is well under twenty. She has not only a technique to marvel at, but something else which in the first few bars makes you sit up and say: 'This is a pianist.' Her judgment goes astray with sublime confidence, but it never errs through slackness. Mr. Gieseking, on the other hand, is brilliantly careful. Every note must, and does, receive its just weight, and Mr. Gieseking's rule of weight is probably more finely graded than that of any other pianist. Some of the music of his first recital lent itself to this inspired toying—Bach, for instance, and Debussy.

Among the older stars there have been Samuel, Cortôt (filling seventeen-and-sixpenny stalls), Rummel, and other soloists, with the Americans, Maier and Pattison, astonishing, as usual, in their two-pianoforte duets.

M.

RUTLAND BOUGHTON

Having been told—by what misinformer?—that *The Immortal Hour* was highbrow, Mr. Rutland Boughton resolved, he tells us, to fetch the lowbrows with three chamber concerts of his own works (two only of which we can consider now). We hope to be pardoned for telling him that he has his comparison upside down. Lowbrows ask for a loud-speaking purpose in every line and an inevitable kind of construction. Mr. Boughton writes string quartets on themes that appeal to the inner refinements of his taste, and the sequence of his ideas has a purpose equally remote. The best points in his *Greek Folk-Song Quartet* (October 12) and his *Welsh Hills Quartet* (October 19) were out of ordinary ken, and asked for a

particular mood of receptiveness even among the highly-instructed listeners. So it is with his *Chapel in Lyonesse* (October 19). All this music seems to claim highbrow indulgence in every bar, while Mr. Boughton's operatic music answers every taste from the highest to—well, a long way down. We are sure, too, that Mr. Boughton's inspiration needs a clear dramatic stimulus, and that without it he is only half articulate. We know that the fat emotions and picturesque personages of *The Immortal Hour* turned him into something like a genius.

M.

BLACKPOOL FESTIVAL

OCTOBER 15—20

This year's Festival created new records in every direction. There were no fewer than seventy-two classes, an increase of eight on last year, while the individual entries numbered 1,520, compared with 1,350 last October. The number of competitors taking part was 8,374, against 7,626 twelve months ago, and the services of twenty adjudicators were required during the week. The test-pieces were drawn from the works of fifty-six composers, representing the whole range of classical and modern works.

The most notable new feature this year was the Blackpool Musical Festival Scholarship. The idea of the scholarship, which is of the value of £150 per annum for three years, is to enable the most promising soloist, either vocal or instrumental, to pursue his musical studies at a recognised college, and for the scholarship there were 188 entrants.

Visitors to this meeting are always impressed by the enthusiasm and vitality of the audiences, and even at nine o'clock in the morning the singers or players are sure of numerous and interested listeners. The Tudor music classes, instituted last year, have now been expanded, and ultimately it seems probable that the duets, trios, and quartets will have as much vogue as the solos. Competitors in the latter class had to play their own accompaniments in the versions arranged by Dr. Fellowes from the lute tablature, and too few of them realised that sustaining pedals of a modern pianoforte destroy the atmosphere of these delicately fanciful miniatures. When the standard of accompaniment matches the quality of the singing, we shall see things as startling as we witness to-day on the 'Rose Bowl' final solo night. In the early portion of the week nothing was more encouraging than the success attending the classes in chamber music. Hitherto they have languished. Here and elsewhere the authorities have planted and watered, but the plant revealed no signs of life. Suddenly interest has quickened, and this, too, with no relaxation of the standard in choice of music: rather the reverse, for surely John Ireland's second Trio is a challenge to any professional trio; and we had the spectacle of a large, crowded hall filled morning and afternoon to listen to amateur trios playing this, and to quartets in the Haydn G major (dedicated to his patron, Erdödy). Possibly gramophone records of the piece may have stimulated interest, and I could wish that both first and second prize-winners had heard the record of the Catterall group playing the first movement—a just rate of performance is the first essential in all concerted music, and every aid to its attainment should be welcomed by amateurs. Success of a like degree was achieved in the work of half-a-dozen orchestras in Holst's recently-published *Marching Song*, scored for small bands. It is reported that one conductor thought this rather 'small fry'—'could be played at sight,' and more to the same effect. A well-known conductor, who was here in another capacity, discussing this very score, remarked on the difficulty of the first two pages for a first-class professional orchestra, and as he is to conduct this and the companion *Country Song* in a big Yorkshire centre this winter, we may pardonably point the moral of holding one's task too cheaply.

Many critics have commented on the undeviating standard of the selections here. For juveniles the tasks have been well thought-out in their bearing on subsequent development—witness Bach's *Short Preludes* or the *Finale* from an early Mozart Sonata, for youngsters of twelve or fourteen years; similar distinction marked the choice of Violin Sonatas by Purcell and Geminiani for those under sixteen

years. Wonderful to relate, a lassie of only twelve took the first place in both of these works! She may be too young for consideration in connection with the Scholarship, but it is hoped that her parents can give her the needful attention in the next few years. Similarly in an open violin class, two movements from Viotti's A minor Concerto were played by a lad from a village near Preston in such convincing fashion as to extract over 90 per cent. of marks from Miss Edith Robinson, who does not distribute praise in an indiscriminate fashion.

The selections in the open vocal solo classes constituted a definite challenge in point of range of voice, variety of style, contrasted mood, and in the demands made for both musicianly and intellectual qualities.

The songs in the vocal solo classes covered a very wide range of style and emotional power, being drawn from Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, Moussorgsky, Strauss, Bantock, Quilter, and Purcell. The Moussorgsky idiom was quite new, and the mezzo-sopranos, contraltos, and baritones who had studied him rarely possessed a vocal style sufficiently keen-edged and drastic to do anything like justice to such things as the two songs from the cycle, *Songs and Dances of Death*. Bach was much better sung by baritones than by tenors or contraltos, and Strauss and Schubert, in their most restrained and intimate aspects, revealed many weaknesses in singers otherwise richly gifted. Similarly the mezzo-sopranos found their most searching experiences in an *Adagio* air from *Così fan tutte*. The bass and baritone classes contained a higher average both of good vocal material and musicianly qualities.

Children's day brought its accustomed scenes of animation, song and dance proceeding merrily from 9 in the morning till 10 p.m.! The music conformed to the high standard prevailing in all classes—bright, cheerful stuff, with just a dash of serious thought, as in Parry's *Jerusalem*. Successive generations of children and conductors seem to fall into the good old error of 'point-making,' but it is certainly less prevalent, if the evidences of the Lancashire Festivals are any true guide. The most precious 'find' in the juvenile music was two Old English Songs in an edition edited by Dolmetsch—*Have you seen but a white lillie grow?* and *My lyell pretty one*. Anything more fastidiously beautiful than the singing of these songs by girls of 14-16 years of age would be difficult to conceive.

Musically, the Children's Day furnishes the point of repose in the week's scheme. Saturday brought us into the thick of the choral contests. Standards were not maintained in the female-voice and sight-reading classes—indeed, out of sixteen entries in the latter only three were at all good. The alto-lead male-voice class attracted eighteen entries, and uniformly good singing was heard of Clarke-Whitfield's glee, *Wide o'er the brim*. The tenor-lead open class brought choirs to Blackpool from new parts—Northumberland, Cleveland, the Midlands, &c. Although several first-class Lancashire choirs were absent, Warrington maintained the Lancashire tradition. The huge number of choirs drawn from the South Yorkshire and Notts coalfields is very significant of the industrial development there; and in Sutton-Mansfield and Sharlston there are evidently good voices which, with efficient leadership, will rapidly develop.

The principal mixed-voice classes were not so overshadowed by male-voice work as in the past two years, and half-a-dozen performances in the big open classes furnished, as usual, the finished singing one expects. Gibbons's madrigal, *What is our life?* Elgar's *O wild west wind*, Parry's *There is an old belief*, Walford Davies's *These sweeter far than lilies are*, provided ample variety both of form, mood, and emotion, and tested mental equipment no less than vocal capacity. Five choirs from Sale, Blackpool, Huddersfield, and Blackburn passed forward to sing the Parry and Davies works. Four of these five choirs, Nos. 11, 12, 13, and 14, sang in the afternoon competitions. Blackpool Orpheus started the evening session, followed by Sale and District (Manchester), Gledholt (Huddersfield), Blackburn, and Blackpool Glee and Madrigal (now in its thirty-first year), each performance showing a slight improvement on that of its predecessor. The last choir started to sing at 10.30, after the others had gone for their trains. But the crescendo of interest and of performance was maintained.

On the evening's work Mr. Herbert Whittaker's choir gained 86 for the Parry and 95 for the Walford Davies item, Sir Hugh Allen declaring that

... the singing of the choir in the Walford Davies was so thundering good, that although they came only second on the entire day's result, he proposed to contribute from his own pocket an amount which would make their prize equal to that of the first choir!

In a long experience of these Festivals I have never known such a handsome declaration from a judge to a choir. No greater tribute could well be paid to steady consistency of performance than a comment like that after so many years' work.

The chief results on the final day were as follow:

Male-Voice Choirs (alto lead).—1, Matlock Prize Choir; 2, Mansfield and Sutton Co-operative Male-Voice Choir; 3, Sandal Glee Union, Wakefield.

Mixed-Voice Choirs (B).—1, Mansfield and Sutton Co-operative Choir; 2, Blackpool Lyric Choir; 3, High Peak Choral Society, New Mills.

Mixed-Voice Choir Sight-Test.—1, Gledholt Vocal Union; 2, Dr. Brearley's Contest Choir, Blackburn; 3, Blackpool Glee and Madrigal Society.

Ladies' Choirs (A).—1, Golcar Baptist Ladies' Choir, Huddersfield; 2, Barrow Madrigal Society; 3, Stockbridge Choral Union.

String Orchestras (open).—1, Blackburn Orchestral Society; 2, Huddersfield Philharmonic Society; 3, Blackpool Amateur Symphony Orchestra.

Male-Voice Choir (tenor lead).—1, Warrington Male Choral Union; 2, Cleveland Harmonic Male-Voice Choir, Middlesbrough; 3, Rochdale Male-Voice Choir; 4, Denton Male-Voice Prize Choir.

Mixed-Voice Choirs (A) (open).—1, Sale and District Musical Society; 2, Blackpool Glee and Madrigal Society; 3, Dr. Brearley's Contest Choir, Blackburn; 4, Gledholt (Huddersfield) Vocal Union. H. C.

BRASS BANDS AT THE CRYSTAL PALACE

At the Crystal Palace, on September 29, the eighteenth National Brass Band Festival brought together crowds almost as big as at a football 'final.' When such an assembly is seen—the central transepts were quite full at the evening concerts, and there were thousands standing in the nave of the building; an audience, all told, of probably 50,000—one is impressed by the power in the appeal of the music of the brass, which certainly touches hearts for whom other music is not. The sort of music that you or I, perhaps, most cherish—the string quartet, say, the madrigal choir, or the symphonic orchestra—does not attract these multitudes. For them, so the fact stands out—for a recognisable fraction of this island's people—music is the music of the brass band. It seems as though there is, beyond the reach even of big choral singing, a mass of listeners susceptible only to the brass—to the incomparable majesty of the brass: for although the brass band be never so often humiliatingly harnessed to the vulgarest tasks, it is essentially a majestic thing, proud and ceremonious by nature, and at the same time brimming with vitality. No organ could vie with the brightness-with-solemnity of the Crystal Palace bands that Saturday night when they lifted up their huge, soft voices in some Chorales of Bach. By human perversity the noble creations are, however, liable at any minute to be turned into menials, and the Chorales were sandwiched between Two-Steps.

The National Brass Band Festival was founded in 1900 by Mr. J. H. Iles, who has directed it with increasing success ever since. This year a hundred and fifty-five bands in all entered for the six competitions. The Championship Contest brought together some fifteen of the best brass bands in the country. It took place in the concert-hall, and lasted six hours. The weather that day was peculiarly sultry, and the hall was as stickily hot as a steam bath. At every previous Festival the trophy had gone to the North of England—to Yorkshire, Durham, Lancashire, or Cheshire. It came South this time, being carried off by the Luton 'Red Cross' Band, which was second last year. This from the sporting point of view