

THE PLACE OF THE AMATEUR IN MUSICAL HISTORY

FROM OUR MUSIC CRITIC

Histories of music are little concerned with amateur effort except in so far as it fills in the social background of a period. The Collegium Musicum at Leipzig has more interest for the historian than the doings of most university musical clubs because it provided the occasion for John Sebastian Bach and his sons to make their innovations with concertos for keyboard instruments. But normally history is made by professionals.

There is even some difficulty in extending the account beyond composers to include the activities of performers. Yet no one ought to attempt to write our own history of music in the present century without taking into the profit and loss account the doings, the attitudes, the fashions, and the tastes of amateurs, audiences, and connoisseurs, or estimating the impact of the gramophone and radio on the practice of music by amateurs as it was known to our grandfathers.

SCHOOL PRODUCTIONS

There is still in these days of mechanical reproduction of music a great deal of active music-making by enthusiastic and often skilful amateurs. A little of it comes to light in the Press, as when an operatic society produces a forgotten opera, or when a choral society gives the first performance of a new cantata. The doings of a closed society, such as a school or university, are reported from time to time. It has, for instance, been the policy of *The Times* to have accounts at intervals of what the competition festival movement does, to notice performances such as that of Verdi's *Requiem* at Cranleigh School the other day, and in this way to give some indication of the health of the musical body politic.

But from the nature of the case publicity is not necessary to the wellbeing of music clubs, still less of friendly quartet parties meeting in each other's homes, or even of so remarkable an institution as Mr. Bernard Robinson's music camps, near Newbury, which are famous among initiates, but still blessedly private from the world. There come times, however, when a glimpse of private and amateur music is not an intrusion, but a salutary reminder to the professional musician that he is a member of a larger community.

THOUSANDTH CONCERT

Such an occasion was the thousandth concert of the Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club, which was held last Saturday evening in the Great Drawing Room of the Arts Council. The very first work to be played in a long and miscellaneous programme was significant of the changes in social music that have taken place since the club was founded in 1899. Mozart's wind octet in C minor for two each of oboes, clarinets, horns, and bassoons was admirably played by eight youngish men, who, one would dare swear, were scientists to a man. Sir Charles Snow not long ago drew attention to the fact that the culture of the scientist and technologist was more often musical than literary and claimed that

the understanding of music by scientists was both wide and deep. Apparently it does not end with the purchase of gramophone records.

The profusion of wind players also reflects the change in the status of music in the public schools which slowly took place in the 50 years following Thring's appointment of Paul David to Uppingham. The universities now have almost an embarrassment of riches when they come to get their orchestras together for their regular choral concerts or their annual operas, so many and so good are the available wind players.

A QUEER HYBRID

Strings still remain more problematical, as they are bound to do, for the violin gets no easier to play well, and the amateur who will be efficient enough for an orchestra may be less comfortable in the exposed position of a string quartet. Nevertheless there was a workmanlike performance of Beethoven's first Rasoumovsky quartet at Saturday's concert, though it has to be admitted that the leader was an ex-professional, and there was a great congregation of cellists, led by Mr. Christopher Bunting, in some numbers from Villa-Lobos's queer hybrid, *Bachianas Brasileiras*. The noise of an orchestra of cellos is like that of a brass band in being immediately gratifying and quickly cloying, but when Miss Judith Pickles sang a wordless cantilena to its accompaniment the effect was that of a successful exploitation of an unusual medium. Another significant change was marked by a small choir of female voices, conducted by a young Hungarian, Mr. Laszlo Heltay: women are now members on equal terms with men both of the London club and its parent bodies at Oxford and Cambridge.

NEW CLUB PREMISES

The Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club was formed to make available in London the same sort of facilities for hearing and playing chamber music as members had enjoyed in the Oxford University Musical Club or the Cambridge University Musical Club and with similar amenities. Its first home was in Sir Joshua Reynolds's old house in Leicester Square, and subsequently in a fine house in Bedford Square, which had to be given up in 1940. At last new though more modest premises have been found in Woburn Square to house the library and afford rehearsal room, and the club looks forward to a resumption of its old activities on a full scale. The prospects certainly seemed favourable at Saturday's gathering, which was addressed by Mr. E. D. Chetham-Strode, who was a founder member and who played in the 500th concert in 1921.

The pursuit and practice of chamber music by anyone whose skill is sufficient to spare him the pangs of exasperation and frustration can be a source of life-long satisfaction, and though a private club does not need to live in the limelight its activities provide a leaven of influence in the musical life of the country which is wholly healthy and beneficial. The similar case of the Madrigal Society, which is 215 years old, is proof of that, if further proof is needed.