

EXCELSIOR

THE VOICE OF THE
TREORCHY
&
DISTRICT
MALE CHOIR

Price 4d.

The Conductor's Notes

FEW members of male choirs know of the noble and ancient musical tradition which they inherit. Singing was the first channel of human musical expression. Organised instrumental music is but a few centuries old: singing is as old as mankind.

But from earliest times, "when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy," singing as a serious art was a male preserve. Throughout long centuries the all important work of worship in song was exclusively entrusted to male voices. William Byrd wrote in 1588, "There is not any musicke . . . comparable to that which is made of the voyces of men, where the voyces are good and the same well sorted and suited." Even now Cathedral choirs do not include female voices.

What of the future? It is surely significant that all the names of angels are masculine. This suggests that the Heavenly Choir will be of male voices. A verse in Revelations says that for the space of half-an-hour there was silence in heaven. Does this indicate that women will be absent not only from the choir but also from the audience?

At the present time women have infiltrated into many musical activities which were once purely male. They have consolidated their place in the symphony orchestra. Before long we shall see them in our Brass Bands. (On your guard, Haydn; you have been warned!) Then the last refuge for that displaced person, the musical male, will be in choirs like ours. Women may be able to blow trumpets or trombones: we challenge them to sing bottom bass.

But do not interpret this article as an attack on the ladies. (God bless them!) Let them run riot in their ladies' choirs, sewing guilds and tea parties. Rather it is a call to men to hold their heads high, spread their chests and sing, for it is we who are the Aristocrats of Song.

" In everything we are sprung
Of earth's first blood, have titles manifold."
(Wordsworth).

JOHN HAYDN DAVIES.

A Visitor's Comments on the First Celebrity Concert

RAIN and cold do not deter music lovers from attending a concert.

I mention this, only because I am a visitor from that part of the world where it was high summer very recently, and on the evening of the concert it was cold and wet.

In spite of the weather, Bethlehem Chapel was filled to capacity, proof positive that the audience consisted solely of music lovers. Their discrimination was made immediately evident by the storm of applause which anticipated the end of Handel's *O Praise the Lord*.

I think that all concerned with the success of the concert knew at this time that their journey through this adventurous programme was "set fair". There are many people better qualified than I to tell you why this First Annual Celebrity Concert of the reconstituted Treorchy and District Male Voice Choir proved such a happy success.

The standard was exceedingly high; the hard work had accomplished something worth while; the artists were talented, the audience completely captivated; the programme nicely balanced, and the duration just right. I fully agreed also with the Chairman's reference at the concert to the need for a public hall in the Upper Rhondda. If art is to continue to flourish in these valleys, there must be a place where rehearsals and performances can be held. To-day, local art must vie with art in the greatest centres, and with television and broadcasting. Therefore, local art should have suitable and adequate facilities locally, and these should provide comprehensively for literature, painting, the stage, and music in all its forms.

The Rhondda people have contributions to make to the general culture of these islands, and the best encouragement that can be given to those who serve this cause is a place where they can give full expression to their capabilities.

This is no luxury. Indeed, it is a necessity, if you believe that high art is akin to that vision, without which the people perish.

Salisbury, S. Rhodesia, S. Africa. J. A. KINSEY.

Topical Brevities

BY common consent our First Annual Concert held at Bethlehem Chapel was an unqualified success. Many people competent to judge expressed the opinion that the present Party is the most promising body of singers that has been in Treorchy for many years. We thank the public for their excellent support, and also all persons who helped in any way to make our debut such an outstanding success.

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Accompanists are often "unhonoured and unsung". Our best thanks to Mr. Tom Jones and Mr. Tudor Davies for their excellent contribution. Mr. Tom Jones, who accompanied the Artists, was personally congratulated by Mr. William Parsons and Miss Linda Parker at the close of the concert. This gesture is appreciated by the Party, who realise what a great help Mr. Jones is in his quiet, unobtrusive way.

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Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Elfed Knapgate and Mr. and Mrs. Ieuan Butler on their recent marriages. Our best wishes go forth to both happy couples. May they enjoy many years of health and felicity.

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It is appropriate that the first entry of the Treorchy and District Male Voice Party into the competitive field should be staged in Treorchy. The Party is entering the Male Voice Competition at the Treorchy Chair Eisteddfod at Whitsun. Pontypridd, Pendyrus, Treorchy and Tredegar are competing and will sing in this order.

May the best Party win—and may the best Party be Treorchy. "Ymlaen Treorci." It has also been decided to complete at Llanharan on June 26th.

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Two members of the Party, Mr. Eddie Lewis and Mr. D. T. Davies, have recently been patients at the Treherbert Hospital undergoing operations, which were successfully performed. We hear good reports of progress in both cases, and we hope for a rapid recovery and a speedy return to our midst.

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We regret to note the passing of Mr. David Roberts, Chapel Street. Although Mr. Roberts was not connected with the present Party, he was for a number of years a Committee Member of the previous Party. His unbounded enthusiasm and untiring efforts made him an outstanding Committee-man. Tributes to his memory were

paid at a practice by Mr. Tom Jenkins and Mr. John Davies, our conductor. While not wishing to establish a precedent, the members unanimously decided that a floral tribute be sent.

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When Mr. Tom Lewis resigned the conductorship of the Treherbert Male Voice Party, Mr. Tudor Davies was approached by the Officials and Committee to fill the vacancy. While appreciating the honour, Mr. Davies felt that with his present commitments he could not devote the necessary time. We extend to the Treherbert Party our best wishes for the future.

Dear Billy,

How extremely kind of you to send me that case of whisky for Christmas. I have never tasted such marvellous whiskey in my life. I have never tasted such marvellous whiskey and I keep tasting it.

The whisky you have sent me for Christmas is marvelous I keep tashing it and how kind of you to send me thish wonderlous whichkey for Christmas which I keep tashing.

It's really really it's moshkind of you tokeep sending me thish whisky in cases which I keep tashing for Xmas and tashing hic doc dickery dock.

What kind whisky ole man how ex thash extremely marvelous to tash on Xmas you great fine ud thatthank you ole for extrextra extrem whwhaishy ininain cash case 6½c you %%% XXX kisses Kissmus & Xmus (1½y)½½f½c opa ///

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Ode on Salt Beef

ALL praise to the men who ate salt beef,
Who worked all day on a coral reef
Practising the arts of knottin' and splicin',
And kept their watches twice in a night.

But give to me a life of leisure,
For I'm afraid I would not treasure
A diet of "salt beef and hard tack".
I'd rather be tortured on the rack.

So all you lads who think the Navy is fine,
And that the Wavy boys are happy,
Think again of "salt beef and hard tack",
And thank your stars you're not a "Jack".

Top-Note Reynolds

WHEN I joined the Battalion, "Top-Note" Reynolds was the Regimental Choir's pride, and as the leading tenor he was always on the "right of the line", and woe betide any of the lesser lights who questioned his right to be there.

He certainly had a good voice and invariably used a Staff copy. He couldn't read Tonic Solfa and in his loftily superior way indicated that he had no time for those who did. His mother had been a noted Welsh singer,—so he said,—and had only just missed National honours through an attack of laryngitis on the day of the competition and never sang again. It was his mother who taught him how to hold a copy, who taught him, too, to raise on his toes when taking any note above high "G". And if appearances counted "Top-note" Reynolds was not an operatic tenor only because he liked soldiering and the life in the east.

He stood astride the musical stream of regimental singing like a giant Colossus. His fruity tenor was always to the fore in "Comrades in Arms" and even more fruitily if somewhat more subdued in "Ar hyd y nos". These two were the choir's stand-byes and, with the "Soldiers' Chorus" from *Faust* were included in all our programmes.

No concert party in the regiment was complete without a tenor solo by the Maestro. His favourite renderings were "O na byddai haf o hyd" and "Waft her, angels". That was the situation when I joined the choir in Shanghai in 1927. I sang second tenor in those days, and as a mere stripling of seventeen summers, I held "Top-note" Reynolds in as much awe as the remainder of the regiment. Then came the big news: The Regimental Choir had been invited out. We were asked to give a short musical programme at a wedding party after the joining together of two of the richest families in the city. The wealth that some of the rich people of Shanghai were supposed to possess made Croesus seem a pauper. What with Chinese mandarins, British and American multi-millionaires, and a few dozen Russian princes, it was a wonder that any money existed in any other part of the world. We had never sung in public before, at least not to civilians. We were to sing four items and supply one soloist. A local baritone with a Russian name that I couldn't even pronounce, let alone remember, was to complete the programme. Of course, "Comrades in Arms", "The Soldiers' Chorus", and "Ar hyd y nos", were to be the main pieces and the Band Sergeant, who was the sub-conductor and a beefy second bass, chose the "Three Chafers" as the fourth piece. He would, because only the bass seemed to have anything to do in it. The soloist

picked himself, and that, of course, was "Top-note".

We practised an hour each evening and the rooms adjoining the singing room were fed up to the teeth with music. If it wasn't the choir it was "Top-note", and even when the choir practised it was still "Top-note". His voice soared, he seemed to add inches to his stature, as he rose higher on his toes to each note. The first tenors on his left stood further away to give him room to expand, and he seemed to inspire the rest of us to even greater efforts. During his own individual practises his voice could be heard all over the barracks.

So it went on for a whole month, and the great day arrived. We paraded at 6 p.m. on the barrack square and the Band Sergeant called the Roll. All present except "C" Company choristers. We shuddered: our own "Top-note" belonged to "C" Company. A word of command came through the still air and "C" Company party came round the corner. "Halt"! "C" Company reporting, Sergeant", the orderly said. "All present except Private Reynolds, who is in hospital with laryngitis."

History had repeated itself.

Film Music Quiz.

1. What celebrated composer's life story is told in the film *A Song to Remember*?
2. What is the name of the composer of the music in the *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier) film? When and where was he born?
3. In which film is the *Warsaw Concerto* played and who composed it?
4. Can you name a film in which the Tchaikovsky *Piano Concerto No. 1* is used?
5. What film title gives the name of the composer of *Messiah*?
6. What well-known English pianist doubled for Ann Todd at the piano in *The Seventh Veil*, and from which two piano concertos did she play extracts?

BRIEF ANSWERS.

1. Frederic Chopin (1810-1849); 2. William Walton, born Oldham, Lancashire, 1902; 3. *Dangerous Moonlight*, Richard Addinsell, born London, 1904; 4. *The Great Lie*; *The Common Touch*; *Concerto for Two*; *C.E.M.A.* (documentary) and *Song of Russia*; 5. *The Great Mr. Handel* (Geo. Frederick Handel, 1685-1759); 6. Eileen Joyce: *Pianoforte Concerto in A Minor*, Greig; *Pianoforte Concerto in C Minor*, Rachmaninoff.

J. RAYMOND TOBIN.

"The Nun of Nidaros"

TWENTY-FIVE years have passed since I first heard "Nidaros" sung by the Treorchy and District Male Choir. Imagine my utter amazement the other day when, on being asked to tell the story of "Nidaros", I was unable to respond, for the poem, as it stands in the male voice setting of Dr. Dan Protheroe, is not very helpful. Neither was I able to correct, with any certainty, a mistaken impression that "Nidaros" was a Welsh name given to the work. ("Nidaros" was the name of a convent in the kingdom of Drontheim.) A well-spent hour in the local library soon set my mind at rest.

In 1860, a distinguished Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, made a concert tour of North America and stayed for a time at the Old Red House, Sudbury, Massachusetts. Longfellow, the poet, was a frequent visitor at this wayside inn where, during the long winter evenings, it was the custom for tales to be told by each member of the company in turn. The Norwegian legend, related by the musician, was later written in verse form by Longfellow, and was entitled "The Saga of King Olaf."

There are twenty-two lengthy poems in this work of Longfellow, and the last of these, "The Nun of Nidaros"—forms a kind of epilogue to the legend. The male voice piece is a setting of this last poem. (Elgar's "King Olaf" is based on the complete work.)

Olaf, the son of Queen Astrid, has made a name for himself as a ruthless warrior, having accepted, time and again, the challenge of Thor—the God of Battle. As the story unfolds, Olaf turns Christian, and forsakes, for a time, the old ruthlessness. But he soon becomes a violent upholder of the Christian faith, sweeping aside all opposition to the new faith at the point of the sword. (It is this mistaken attitude to Christianity which is the moral of the story, as indicated in the final poem.)

He plans to marry Queen Sigrid, but a ring which he has given Sigrid is found to be made of copper and not gold. Furthermore, Sigrid refuses to forsake her gods and becomes a Christian, whereupon Olaf loses his temper.

"His zeal was stronger than fear or love,

And he struck the Queen in the face with his glove."

The insulted Queen marries Svend, King of Denmark, and a feud between Svend and Olaf ends in a naval battle. It is the last challenge to be accepted by Olaf.

In the last poem entitled "The Nun of Nidaros", Astrid mourns the loss of her son Olaf, but she finds consolation in the Christian faith. The words from "It is accepted" to "Christ is eternal" are those which Astrid imagines to be spoken by

Saint John, the beloved disciple, during her lonely midnight vigil at the convent.

TUDOR S. DAVIES.

The Terrible Twins

ON joining the Party the sum total of my musical knowledge was the realisation that the notes of the Modulator represented the stepping-stones of music. The first practice completely shattered my pathetically sublime confidence in my sight-reading.

The conductor's introductory remarks inspired confidence and encouraged initiative. I tackled my opening bars of music with a certain degree of success. Then I encountered my first serious obstacle—the semitone "ra". Obviously, this note was difficult to negotiate since most of my colleagues were equally nonplussed. Nevertheless, with out-thrust chins, we sang on. The result was chaotic. Discord piled upon discord in a ruined heap. Further effort was impossible.

We were silenced by the tap-tapping of the baton. The conductor addressed us, endeavouring to direct us along the Royal Road of Music. Hesitantly we re-started. My confidence had so diminished by this time that I feared to sing. This was a grave error since the only results I achieved were but whispered fragments of the true original. I continued to trip over semitones with a clumsiness akin to imbecility. I did not forage, but laboured behind the others, my croaking being but a false echo of their voices.

I was consoled by the realisation that I was not alone in my predicament; others, too, were obviously but blind followers. Cheered, I laboured on, finding my efforts become progressively easier as time went on. My confidence returned when I realised that I was singing in tune, and I felt well prepared to meet the more difficult works which, inevitably, would be forthcoming.

My mental Elysium was, however, rudely and unwarrantably invaded by the serpent *Transition*. I retreated from the fray, and sought guidance again. This conflict was beyond my powers of operation. Feeling utterly thwarted, I found myself "goldfishing," an expression which did not appear as hideous as those facial contortions which I saw all around me. A few handy choristers valiantly battled on, but all to no avail. The conductor's explanation cleared our minds once again.

Since the initial rehearsal, I have experienced many more difficulties, without wilting from my task. I have sung on, being occasionally right, but more often wrong. Gradually, I have regained my confidence. Now, I feel sure that I will never succumb to the twin bogies of *Semitone* and *Transition*.