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EXCELSIOR

THE VOICE OF THE
TREORCHY
&
DISTRICT
MALE CHOIR

Price 4d.

THE CONDUCTOR'S NOTES.

THE Human Voice is the oldest musical instrument in existence. It is still the most potent and expressive. Orchestral instruments can skip about with greater agility: they can play higher, lower, faster and louder, yet whenever the voice is admitted to any ensemble it dominates the rest. We are accustomed to hear an orchestra of over a hundred accompanying a single singer. We have yet to hear a solo instrument or group of instruments accompanied by a chorus.

Harmony was discovered (probably accidentally) as a result of the varying pitch of individual voices. Up to 900 A.D. music took the form of a single tune, sung in unison or in octaves. But at about that time certain composers were attracted by the effect of the "out-of-tune" singing of those possessing higher or lower voices and insensitive ears, who unintentionally sang the melody at a different level to the rest. What was at first a mistake was now deliberately exploited and the twin arts of Counterpoint and Harmony were born.

In olden times the main tune was 'held' by the Tenor voice. A Bass (Base) voice was first added as a foundation. Then men with higher voices were given an 'Altus' (altitude) part. A third additional part 'Triplex' became the modern treble. Ladies with low voices which overlapped the compass of the highest male part sang 'Counter-alto' (Contralto).

At about the time of the Protestant Reformation it became customary to transfer the main tune to the uppermost part, but often in Male Voice music and in Fa-Burden arrangements of hymn tunes the tune is heard in the middle with the other parts weaving their way harmoniously above and below.

There is no better musical training than in playing, singing or listening to an inner part. It is comparatively easy to follow the outside parts,

but most of the great musicians chose to play instruments in the middle of things, notably Bach and Beethoven, who played 'Tenor' or Viola. (To be continued.)

EDITORIAL NOTES. PARTY PROGRESS.

IT was not solely the lack of modern transport facilities in the eighteenth century that prompted Dr. Johnson's realistic remark that a very long journey begins with but "a single step." Obviously, the same realism applies to both cultural and physical pursuits.

Following the present Party's first celebrity concert in April, and our recent baptism in competitive work, it is understood that public opinion locally is unanimous in its declaration that the Party's progress is very promising indeed.

It has, so to speak,—if one will forgive the plagiarism—reached the "end of the beginning" of its arduous journey. Party members realise, however, that only by genuine unity can we hope to overcome the numerous obstacles associated with "the beginning of the end."

We have heard much about the NEW LOOK!

What fortifies the present Party is, that it justifiably believes that it has the necessary qualities to create and maintain a NEW ATTITUDE, —purged of pettiness and base motives, and which typifies the philosophy of Shakespeare's Prospero.

*"The rarer action is in virtue
Rather than in vengeance."*

To quote our conductor: "Competition, rightly used, shall stimulate us on the road to technical and artistic excellence."

Clearly, the *Excelsior* has a vital part to play in party policy. Let fame be its spur, and let it "scorn delights and live laborious days," in its Muse inspired mission to convince others of the Treorchy and District Male Choir's goodwill, and the sincerity of its aspirations.

FINAL REHEARSAL—AN IMPRESSION.

I DON'T like choral singing normally, so when I was told that my friend, for whom I was searching (whom incidentally I hadn't seen for more than a few years) was at a "last rehearsal" with the Treorchy Male Voice Choir, I hesitated. However, he is a very dear friend, and therefore I shrugged away my mental objections and walked through a crowded Treorchy to the Senior Schools. What I expected I don't quite know, though I do remember consoling myself with the thought that the rehearsal couldn't possibly last very long and that soon my friend and I would be plunged into an orgy of reminiscing. Such were my thoughts as I entered the school hall and saw a crowd of men facing a young, eager conductor. There was a sense of tension in the air which quickly communicated itself to all who, like myself, drifted in ones and twos into the place. Half-interestedly I heard my neighbour remarking on the youth and inexperience of the Choir. Another mental shudder from me and an involuntary "O Lord—young and inexperienced! Why on earth didn't I have sense enough to wait outside?" Listlessly I nodded to one or two of the young and inexperienced—acquaintances and friends—then sat back to suffer in silence.

Then the conductor's voice commanding attention. This man too, was young. But inexperienced? No! The Choir stiffened, much as a batsman before beginning his stroke, and suddenly a sonorously vibrant chord swept me—swept us all—back to a medieval monastery. *Non nobis Domine*, they intoned, and as they sang I saw them all transformed into cowed, tonsured and soberly habited monks beginning their long day of praise to the eternal God. In that moment I was converted—completely and utterly. Gone was incipient boredom, listlessness all banished. I was ready, willing to listen,—all night if need be—enjoying this pleasure in addition to the pleasure of seeing again an old friend. At last, reluctantly, I heard their voices die into nothingness, and once again these young ("inexperienced, indeed," I thought, indignantly) became miners and school teachers and clerks and prosaic twentieth-century people.

Next, the voice of the conductor speaking to them, advising, cajoling, explaining and then beginning a beautifully-comprehended, deeply moving explanation of the words of "Nidaros." I sat enthralled. The man was a poet, he had fire, imagination—everything necessary to inspire a sympathetic treatment of the set-piece. He stopped speaking, rapped for attention, uttered a few words of appeal and advice to the first tenors, and then—then came thrill and inspira-

tion and beauty and all the loveliness of the world, all gloriously molten in the sound of human singing. The wonderful dream of the poetry was played out before us, the light and the shade were dexterously applied, the striving was all for choral effect, and the striving was successful. The balance was there, the tone was there, everything was there that brought forth tingling scalp and a catch of the breath. At last a vigorous crescendo of sound, an extended chord, and silence.

I blinked and returned to a hard seat in a school hall again. Feebly I examined my objections to choral singing and saw them torn to shreds. Transported, invigorated, I saw my friend—and could only talk of the singing. My conversion was complete. How I willed them to win, and how (unjustifiably, for I didn't go to the Eisteddfod) did I resent them being beaten by anyone into second place! They were best in the country—in the world! How they sang at that rehearsal! What a thrill! What a memory!

REV. DONALD CARPENTER, B.A.,

Formerly Priest-in-Charge of the Parish Church, Llangynweyd with Maesteg.

Now in Brighton and Hove.

FILM MUSIC QUIZ.

1. What famous violinist of the past is the hero in *The Magic Bow*, and what celebrated living violinist played the music for the film?
2. What great English composer wrote the music for *Flemish Farm*, *49th Parallel* and *Coastal Command*?
3. What musical form is linked with the Spitfire in *First of the Few*?
4. Here are jumbled names of British composers who have written music for the film. Can you unravel them?

(a) SLIBS, (b) LAWTON, (c) WALNY.

BRIEF ANSWERS.

1. Paganini. Yehudi Menuhin.
2. Ralph Vaughan Williams (born Gloucestershire, 1872);
3. Fugue in *Spitfire Fugue*.
4. (a) Bliss (*Men of Two Worlds*, etc.); (b) Walton (*Henry V*, *First of the Few*, etc.); (c) Alwyn (*Escape to Danger*, *Odd Man Out*, etc.).

NEWPORT CIVIL DEFENCE CHOIR.

OUR Chairman, Mr. Charrington, asked me to send you a brief resume of our Choir's activities since its inception in October, 1942.

We have given 24 concerts in Newport and District (Abertillery, Hereford, Blaenavon, etc.), all those during the War years being devoted to the Red Cross Funds (for which we raised over £1,000), the Merchant Navy, Comforts for Troops for various chapels, etc. As you can guess over a period of three years (1942 to 1945) we raised considerable sums of money and we are proud to say that not one penny of this went to our own funds. In fact, at the end of the War in 1945, we had a completely empty bank account, but since then we have, of course, by our own subscriptions and concerts, been able to pay our way.

We have brought the following famous artistes to Newport:—Kathleen Ferrier, Joan Hammond, Isobel Baillie, Eva Turner, Arthur Servent, Laelia Finneberg, Francis Russell, George Pizzy, Ada Alsop, Bruce Dargavel, Walter Widdop, Joan Taylor, Redvers Llewellyn, Arthur Carron, Victoria Sladen, Norman Walker, Muriel Brunskill, Eric Greene, William Parsons.

All our concerts have been extremely well attended and, as you may know, the Central Hall takes quite a bit of filling, but on many occasions we have had to turn people away.

In January last we combined with the Choral Society to give *Messiah*, and this was so popular that we had to hold a public rehearsal on the night preceding the concert in order that the 800 people who were disappointed might have a chance to hear it through.

We have had eight broadcasts and our Conductor, Mr. Brinley Williams, has received letters from many parts of the world saying how much they had enjoyed our singing. This was particularly evidenced when we broadcast a Welsh Miscellany which was heard on the Overseas programme and seemed to bring back happy memories to many Welsh people who had left the country.

Mr. Brinley Williams has been our Conductor since the inception of the Choir and Miss Clarice Stokes has been our Accompanist for four years.

I was unfortunately unable to accompany the Choir to Treorchy on Wednesday, but by all accounts they had a wonderful evening and came home delighted at having won the first prize.

We went to the National Eisteddfod at Mountain Ash in 1946, and came third out of 16 or 17 choirs with 88 marks (three below the first prize).

We have taken part in all Civic functions since our inception, such as the yearly Thanksgiving Services, all the VE and VJ Services, etc., etc.

Last year we gave a concert for the Y.M.C.A. and raised nearly £70 for this very good cause.

If there is any further information you would like would you please get in touch with me. I should be pleased to receive a copy of the article you propose writing for "*Excelsior*" when completed.

DOROTHY LLOYD DAVIES,
Hon. Sec.

GENTLEMEN, PLEASE !!!

or, THE LIBRARIAN'S LAMENT.

THE Party is adding to its musical stature weekly, and in its train this development adds stacks of new copies to the Library. To us this means hundreds of delicate sheets of paper to nurse and handle, so we have decided to let our official Organ, *Excelsior*, speak for us—we are unable to get a word in in "Practice."

In this modern scientific age it might be possible soon to obtain Plastic copies, or shall we turn the clock back fifty years and give out slates !!!

To look at the fine upstanding body of virile manhood it is difficult to imagine that they are possessed of any nerves. However, there they stand twisting, folding and screwing the precious copies like a Prima Donna making her debut.

The 'accident ward' of the library hospital is always full. We sew, stitch and glue the unfortunate victims, but when it comes to ironing, we draw the line!

Then there is the 'posted missing after operations' list, which grows weekly. Could it be that they have found repose in the inside pocket of a jacket oblivious of the anxiety on their behalf? If so, please rescue them from such a life of inactivity, and return them to their phymates.

Gentlemen: it will greatly facilitate our work if each section of the Party would pass up their copies to the right-hand man in the front row.

Did we hear 'Volunteers to stay behind to put the copies to bed?' Thanks, that would be greatly appreciated.

A final word:

Lift them up tenderly,
Handle with care;
Obtained so expensively
Frail and so rare.

(With apologies to Thomas Moore.)

TOPICAL BREVITIES.

WE offer our sincere congratulations to Mr. Arthur Duggan, the conductor, and to the Pendyrus Male Voice Choir on their success at the Whitsun Eisteddfod at Treorchy. The placing of Treorchy Male Voice second in such a close contest was very gratifying, and the general opinion is that the Party acquitted itself most creditably under its first "baptism of fire." We extend to Pendyrus our best wishes when they once again attempt to carry off the "Chief Male Voice" at Bridgend in August.

* * *

Mr. Sam Griffiths, a member of the First Bass Section of the Party, was unfortunate in not being "staged" in the Champion Solo Competition at the Eisteddfod. This competition proved to be of a very high standard and attracted 27 entrants from all parts of South Wales. The adjudicator, Dr. H. W. Sumsion, the Organist of Gloucester Cathedral, placed Mr. Griffiths fifth in the "Prelim." and was anxious that he should appear in the Final. Owing to the lateness of the hour the officials reluctantly had to restrict the number to four. Hard luck, Mr. Griffiths.

* * *

Mr. Herbert Evans, also of the First Bass section, was recently married. Mr. Evans, an ex-Navy man, has left the turbulent High Seas for the more peaceful waters of matrimony.

The Party offer congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Evans, and best wishes for their success and happiness in the future.

* * *

The Party is very fond of the Male Voice composition, "Close thine eyes," written by a native of Treorchy, Mr. Ieuan Rees-Davies, who is now Headmaster of a school in London. Some time ago, after hearing this work broadcast, Miss Isobel Baillie, the noted Soprano, wrote Mr. Davies requesting him to arrange it as a soprano solo. It is now included in her repertoire.

* * *

Rehearsals have been in progress for some time in Cwmparc on *The Yeoman of the Guard*, a Light Opera by Gilbert and Sullivan, which the Company hope to present in the autumn. Many members of the Party are attached to this company, which has already given outstanding performances of *The Pirates of Penzance* and *The Mikado*.

Mr. Cecil Edwards, a school teacher, with a flair for producing, is again in charge of the production. May every success attend their efforts.

A TRIBUTE.

TREORCHY is my Cannes, my Biarritz, my Venice, my Norway, my Cornwall and my Devon.

I like your green hills, your Bwlch and your Rhigos more than I treasure golden sands and blue seas. For thirty years I have sun-bathed in your glorious traditions, and I have gone back to the bustle of my journalistic life refreshed and bronzed because I have found in your's, and my, Treorchy, something that cannot be bought anywhere else in the world. I am coming home again this year—for Home it is—and I shall be better equipped to fight the hurly-burly of one of the biggest publicity jobs in the world because I shall take in the oxygen of your welcomes, your friendships, your inspirations and your sincerity.

For inspiration it is. I tasted it again the other evening when my friend, J. J. Thomas, brought me to your rehearsal, and while I write in the train on my way back to London I hear the echoes of those lovely tenors and those basses whose notes have the grounding of a great organ.

You young fellows are the hope of a Wales that nearly drifted to the rocks. Yes, it's true. Wales, musically, went floundering. The nation became careless; choirs lost quality; they pot-hunted on the tunes that lacked imagination and enterprise; and they lost to the more musicianly choirs of England their once-honoured place in the music of the world.

You men of the Treorchy and District Male Choir will restore those lost laurels, and the day is coming when we shall point to you as an example. You have youth, voice, and, above all, studentship. You have, too, a conductor who is not a mere wielder of the stick. I liked the ease with which he encouraged those gradual crescendoes, and I liked the way you responded to his overtures. You have captured the tradition of your fathers and your grandfathers who, half a century ago, fought the great choral battles and made Wales the envy of the world. Develop the tradition; then you will be one of Wales' strongest possessions. There is nothing to stop it.

I have never spared my attacks on the musical apathy of my native Wales. I am seeing the revival. I have cancelled my 60,000 word book, "My Unmusical Wales". I am re-writing it, and you grand fellows of Treorchy are helping me to change the title to "My Musical Wales".

F. H. PULLIN,
Deputy Chief Press Officer,
National Coal Board.