

GUILDFORD
CORPORATION
CONCERTS

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC
VERNON HANDLEY

GUILDFORD
PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Leader : WILLIAM ARMON

FESTIVAL CHOIR

THE FOURTH
CONCERT
IN THE
ENTERPRISING
SERIES

CONDUCTOR

VERNON HANDLEY

SATURDAY,
14th
NOVEMBER,
1964

PROGRAMME 6d.

FESTIVAL CHOIR

The Festival Choir is the largest of the three choirs under the conductorship of the Musical Director. It meets on Monday evenings at 7.15 p.m. in the Methodist Hall, North Street, and is mainly concerned with the performance of large choral works with orchestra. Its numbers are in the region of 120 and at present there are a few vacancies for tenors. The training and running of such a choir is not the work of one man and the Musical Director wishes to acknowledge with thanks the help he has received from the assistant conductor, Kenneth Lank, and accompanist Mary Rivers, and from Mrs. D. W. Wren and Mrs. D. Hutchings who have given much time to a seating plan to accommodate both choirs.

PROGRAMME

Variations on a Theme by Paganini for Orchestra,

Opus 26 . Boris Blacher

Boris Blacher was born in 1903 in China of German parents and grew up in Siberia. He settled in Berlin in the Twenties and studied at the High School for Music. As a composer, Blacher learned much from his contemporaries but has formed his own individual style, even though a great deal of his music has been experimental. His best known works are his two Piano Concertos and the Orchestral variations to be heard this evening. The theme is the Paganini Caprice for Violin which has been used by a number of composers, notably Brahms and Rachmaninov. Blacher says of this work: "The Orchestral Variations (16 in number) were written in 1947. Few of them contain the well-known theme from Paganini's Caprices in its entirety. Most of them make use of important elements from it, sometimes several of them simultaneously." This is an extremely modest summing up of a brilliant free treatment of the thematic material. The work delights in colourful orchestration, at times sonorous and rich and at times, as in the eleventh variation, light and pointilliste. The climax of the set is No. fifteen, which is in alternately 4/4 and 5/4 time and consists of two sections; the first a set of two bar groups for the horns punctuated by loud chords on the orchestra and the second, a variation for the solo clarinet with divisi cello accompaniment. In several of the variations, the influence of jazz can be felt. In some the theme is very clearly picked out (variation nine) and in others, references to it are hilariously obscure (variation eleven). Above all, it is a very good humoured and, at times, wickedly funny work, posing no emotional problems.

Symphony of Psalms

Stravinsky

Stravinsky wrote his Symphony of Psalms in 1930 and the score bears the message that the Symphony "composed to the glory of God is dedicated to the Boston Symphony Orchestra." It won immediate recognition and recently a reviewer in a London magazine said that he felt it might in future come to be regarded as Stravinsky's greatest work. Other critics feel that, dramatic and individual though it is, a great deal of the so called development is not really apparent to the listening ear and the connections between the movements are, therefore, sometimes justifiable on paper, but in fact do not lead to any aural connection. For instance, the fugal subject of the second movement is based on the sequence of thirds used as an ostinato in the first movement but as the thirds themselves are not an unusual basis for ostinato, the strength of the "development" of them to a fugal subject does not seem to be an advance when one is listening to the work as an experience.

There can be no doubt, however, about the dramatic impact of the work. Stravinsky's employment of strange forces (flutes, oboes, bassoons—no clarinets—horns, trumpets, trombones, harp, two pianos, cellos and basses, but no violins and violas) is masterly and his integrity of expression remarkable. He feels rightly annoyed with the composers "who have abused these majestical 'feelings'." He

knows that the Psalms are expressions of exaltation, anger, judgment and even curses. The three movements, the first two of which are quite short, are all positive statements of Stravinsky's eagerness to challenge the composers referred to in the above quotation.

The first Psalm is "Hear my Prayer, O Lord" and, according to the composer, was conceived in a state of religious and musical ebullience. The second and third movements, Psalm 40 followed by Psalm 150, are more interdependent emotionally (though not musically), for Psalm 40 is a prayer that a new canticle may be put into our mouths and the beginning of Psalm 150—Alleluia—is that new canticle. The second movement is fugal; the last a number of sections. Stravinsky is not averse to using the thoroughly romantic device of the cycle in his last movement and, after the final slow and poised Hymn of Praise, the reference to the beginning of the movement seems inevitable.

The affirmative nature of this religious work is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the impact it has made. Whether it is divided from other settings of these Psalms by as great a gap as Stravinsky would have us believe is doubtful. It is hard to cast aspersions on other composers' sincerity merely because of their harmonic idiom. Its sincerity is undoubtedly the thing that will make it live.

I

Exaudi orationem meam, Domine, et deprecationem meam : auribus percipe lacrymas meas. Ne sileas : quoniam advena ego sum apud te, et peregrinus, sicut omnes patres mei.

Remitte mihi, ut refrigerer prius quam abeam, et amplius non ero.

II

Expectans expectavi Dominum, et intendit mihi.

Et exaudivit preces meas : et eduxit me de lacu miseriae, et de luto faecis. Et statuit super petram pedes meos : et direxit gressus meos.

Et immisit in os meum canticum novum, carmen Deo nostro. Videbunt multi, et timebunt : et sperabunt in Domino.

III

Alleluia. Laudate Dominum in sanctis ejus : laudate eum in firmamento virtutis ejus. Laudate eum in virtutibus ejus : laudate eum secundum multitudinem magnitudinis ejus.

Laudate eum in sono tubæ : laudate eum in psalterio, et cithara.

Laudate eum in tympano, et choro : laudate eum in chordis, et organo.

Laudate eum in cymbalis bene sonantibus : laudate eum in cymbalis jubilationis :

Omnis spiritus laudet Dominum. Alleluia.

INTERVAL

Symphony No. 4

Arnold Bax

According to modern criticism Bax and Stravinsky would seem to be strange bed-fellows, yet close study of their works reveals many likenesses. Too often critical utterance is based on preferences or a superficial summing-up of a composer's style, rather than upon judgment of what a composer does with his style. Bax's idiom is linked with the harmonic language of several composers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, including Ravel and Delius, but only linked, because harmonically he is in advance of either. The large orchestra he uses is like that of Richard Strauss, but the intensely personal emotionalism of Richard Strauss is something that Bax rebelled against. He turned more for inspiration to the strength of Sibelius where the emotion of sure conviction is not wanting but the maudlin nature of some germanic romanticism is never reached.

After 1922 Bax turned away from the tone poem and concentrated almost entirely on symphonic writing, producing seven symphonies between 1922 and 1939. The fact that a man with a colossal musical technique should turn his entire attention to the type of work in which form is the most important feature, has escaped most serious critics and they have labelled him romantic, meandering and formless. The real problem is that Bax managed to fuse his romanticism and his considerable formal achievements in such a way that he gives us a double task. Julian Herbage

wrote, "Bax's form has always been clear and based on a true development of classical tradition. His thematic material is on the whole unusually diatonic but almost invariably the harmonic texture is richly wrought and highly individual. As listeners we have a double task—to appreciate the form and structure while absorbing the colour and the harmony."

The Fourth Symphony (1930-31) poses this same problem, but is the most approachable and exuberant of the set. The first movement launches straight into the material which will be used extensively in the development and in the second movement. An angular figure with accents over every note, much closer to Stravinsky than to any of the Romantics, is punched out by various sections of the Orchestra. This is followed by a snarling chromatic passage on the organ and woodwind which receives triumphant brass treatment in the last pages of the work. A heavily dotted rhythm in a fanfare is next heard and immediately followed by a more lyrical phrase in 6/8 on the strings. Straight away these elements are all used in a development section. An inversion of the first angular figure now in 3/4 and less accented leads to what in Bax's form is the second subject group—two tunes, the first on the oboe and then the cellos; the second on the flutes and then the cellos, but accompanied by a bass clarinet version of the first page of the symphony. The first phrase of the second subject group is going to be used as an important binding element in the second movement. Now comes a new recapitulation and development with the fanfare motive to the fore. It does not remain a fanfare for long. Bax turns it into a lilting 6/8 tune. He develops the tune until six quavers in the bar begin to show the angular outline of the very first material in the movement and in this way works his way back to a statement of the heavily dotted figure. He then combines one of the themes of the first subject group with the main theme from the second subject group and together they move towards the Coda. This is five pages of the full score and we are back in the world of sharp accents and strong fanfares.

By contrast, the second movement is intensely lyrical and straightforward. One beautiful long tune is stated in three parts. The first on the clarinets and bassoons, the second on violins and cor anglais and the third on solo trumpet. This gives way to a passage of great mystery in which scales and a dotted figure reminiscent of the first movement are used, as if the elements of the first movement were trying to assert themselves against the mood of the second, but another serene and lyrical tune on the cellos subdues these elements and works up to a grand climax, after which parts of it are turned into another tune boldly stated on the strings and very Scots in flavour. (According to the composer a great deal of this Symphony was inspired by the scenery of Inverness-shire and the coast line of Western Ireland.) The movement becomes more agitated; the second theme predominates in a fortissimo climax and out of the noise comes the main subject of the second group from the first movement. Then there is a shortened recapitulation of all the material so far used and the movement ends very quietly.

The last movement is a scherzo and finale combined, with some of its own material, but extremely clever use is made of elements from other movements. It would be wrong, however, to call this a cyclic symphony, since these elements like the chromatic phrase at the end of the movement are transformations of what has gone before, rather than re-statements. The main materials of this movement are a bustling tune, first heard on cellos and bassoons and then *molto marcato* on horns; an ostinato with a jig-like tune first heard on the trumpet, and then, after a pause for breath, the six horns play *molto cantabile* a tune which is an expansion of the fanfare of the first movement. After a development of this material, the oboe introduces a beautiful, if somewhat naive song, which is contemplated by the woodwind and solo violin and then played with great expression by the cellos. A bridge passage, brilliantly made out of the first subject of the movement, though it contains triplets like the accompaniment of the oboe tune, leads to the recapitulation, and without wasting a bar, Bax cuts this off short before an epilogue. The epilogue is an astonishing compression of the material used in this movement. The oboe song becomes a triumphant march and then an exalted version of it, now in triplets, is accompanied by one of the ostinato passages of the movement on the horns. At the end of each phrase the trumpets shout the ostinato that was used beneath the jig. This runs into a vigorous statement of the first subject of this movement shared by the fiddles, horns and trumpets. The collision of all these forces is blotted out by a plangent version on violins and organ of the expanded version of the fanfare from the first movement. The brass attach their triumphant chromatic phrase, and the full orchestra exuberantly hammers out the last optimistic bars.