



Hogarth Essays

Second Series

17402

4.45

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

THE HOGARTH ESSAYS

Second Series

- I. COMPOSITION AS EXPLANATION
By GERTRUDE STEIN. 3s. 6d.

- II. ROCHESTER.
By BONAMY DOBRÉE. 2s. 6d.

- III. IMPENETRABILITY.
By ROBERT GRAVES. 2s. 6d.

- IV. CATCHWORDS AND CLAPTRAP.
By ROSE MACAULAY. 2s.

- V. HUNTING THE HIGHBROW.
By LEONARD WOOLF. 2s. 6d.

- VI. THE NATURE OF BEAUTY IN ART AND
LITERATURE.
By CHARLES MAURON. 3s. 6d.

- VII. THE APOLOGY OF ARTHUR RIMBAUD.
By EDWARD SACKVILLE WEST. 2s. 6d.

- VIII. THE PROSPECTS OF LITERATURE.
By LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH. 1s. 6d.

- IX. POSTERITY.
By STEPHEN KING-HALL. 2s. 6d.

- X. CONTEMPORARY MUSIC.
By ROBERT H. HULL. 2s.

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

BY

ROBERT H. HULL



*Published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at The
Hogarth Press, 52 Tavistock Square, London, W.C. 1*

1927



NOTE

Part of the discussion on chromaticism in this essay appeared originally in the *Times Educational Supplement*, to the Editor of which paper I desire to make the customary acknowledgments.

R. H. H.

September 1927.

Printed in Great Britain by
NEILL & CO., LTD., EDINBURGH.



CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

IN a discussion of contemporary music one's choice of treatment is limited practically to two methods. The subject may be considered from a purely national standpoint, which means in result that the musical achievements of each country are in turn examined and estimated. Alternatively, one may disregard almost entirely the limitations imposed by geographical boundaries and simply concentrate upon those developments which, while appearing to be common to "the new music" as a whole, irrespective of country, possess at the same time an importance which is clearly more than temporary. It is to the latter plan that I shall incline in the present essay. The term nationality,

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

as applied to music, has no very precise significance. It is scarcely possible to tell exactly where internationality begins and nationality ends. But apart from all other considerations one does not feel that the clue to the questions here discussed is to be found by an examination conducted upon lines so purely artificial. The problems of modern music are in themselves sufficiently complex to make one anxious to avoid any restrictions which tend to obscure the final issue. The "national" view, therefore, must not become more than secondary in the present investigation. That, at least, represents the immediate point of view.

The question first to be determined amounts to this. In what respects does the texture, that is to say the essential stuff, of modern music differ from the texture of a classical like Bach? That is the kernel of the whole problem, and if the point can be satisfactorily re-

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

solved the major difficulties should be at an end.

Without preamble, the most obvious difference is that the normal texture of Bach is horizontal whereas that of a composer typically modern, like Schönberg, is vertical. If these terms require explanation let it be said that Bach made real part-writing his primary concern, whereas Schönberg and the majority of modern composers most certainly do not. This change from methods fostered by classical tradition is not, however, solely the product of the twentieth century, but may be regarded as the result of a continuous movement from the time of Bach up to the present day. A brief historical sketch may serve to make this clear.

An examination of any score of Bach's which may be said fairly to represent that composer shows us that for every voice and every instrument employed, he wrote a part that was in itself com-

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

pletely satisfying. His utterances, in themselves individual, were fused with fine musicianship into a harmonic whole. In concentrating upon horizontal values, Bach wove a texture which was scarcely less satisfactory, even when viewed from a vertical aspect. It is in this markedly coherent blending of two essentials that the finest achievements in music are to be found.

With the advent of Haydn and Mozart, however, there came a relaxation of technical discipline so far as texture was concerned. In the music of Bach could be found, for instance, four-part writings in which every part excelled both contrapuntally and harmonically. But after his death the fashion changed. Haydn would write a movement for string quartet in which the only real part was played by the first violin, the others attempting nothing more than an accompaniment to the melody. In fact from one angle

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

the efficient value of the music was equal to about one quarter of Bach's conception in a similar medium. This clearly marked a degeneracy. Mozart did not forget his counterpoint entirely —the *Jupiter Symphony* shows that—but it did not occupy, as in the case of Bach, the foremost place. Hence the character of the texture shifted gradually from the horizontal to what was now becoming quite definitely vertical.

With Beethoven the process went a step further. For him horizontal values appeared to hold no precise meaning. His music, in character essentially dynamic, by its very nature forbade such an outlook. That he was sufficiently a genius to exploit his method with success cannot be denied. But his example was dangerous in the extreme, as his successors and imitators found to their cost. Hence our present troubles. In the discussion on rhythm

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

this view will be expanded; it will be the endeavour to show to what extent we can trace back to Beethoven, as represented, for instance, in the *Fifth Symphony*, the origin of those problems of percussive expression which so worry us in the music of to-day. For the moment, so far as questions of texture are concerned, let it be said that Beethoven reversed almost completely the methods of Bach. Vertical writing was, with him, the rule and not the exception. Mozart might be apt to forget his counterpoint, but Beethoven scarcely gave it a thought. To that extent had the old order changed. The methods of Bach and Beethoven, direct opposites to one another, formed the principal part of Wagner's inheritance.

The music of Wagner seemed, at first, to herald a general return to the best classical tradition, and in that composer himself this promise was certainly fulfilled. He employed the

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

horizontal writing which was so much favoured by Bach, the principal difference being that Wagner's medium was chiefly chromatic, whereas Bach's was diatonic. To this he added the best of Beethoven's dynamic method, coupled with his own amazing powers of expression. But men of his genius are rare at all times, and it was only to be expected that those of his contemporaries who attempted to imitate him should fail. Nevertheless, Wagner's influence was far-reaching both in his own and the present generation. If we take him as a pivot for our discussion of certain developments in contemporary music, it may be possible to obtain a fairly clear idea of the connection between the present and the past.

It is here that the argument begins to centre round chromaticism. In the later music of Wagner it was seen for the first time what were the possibilities of chromatic device supported by

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

inspiration of the first order; the earlier explorations of Spohr dwindled into insignificance by comparison, and, even if we allow that in the first instance Wagner was not without certain obligations to that composer, it soon becomes perfectly clear that the influence affected only his earliest works. From late Wagner to early Schönberg is only a step, but if we feel that *Verklärte Nacht* could have been written by either composer it is equally clear that in Schönberg's later works, in which tradition is expanded beyond anything known hitherto, the direct influence of Wagner is practically non-existent. At the same time one cannot exaggerate the importance of the fact that it is possible to trace a development from early Spohr to late Schönberg. In this we have an answer at least moderately conclusive to those who would maintain that the new music is entirely unconnected with the old classical values.

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

The development of chromaticism has been as consistent and logical as anything in the history of music, and in our attempt to estimate in what direction the future of music lies we have therefore to emphasise that chromaticism, as a language, has become permanent in character.

The movement for what may be termed chromatic economy first became apparent with the advent of Wagner, but it was in his later works that the tendency to condense musical thought became more and more pronounced. It was these methods that first suggested to his successors the possible expediency of eliminating from music everything that was not strictly essential. Bach had written economically, but his was an economy of a different kind. Unlike Wagner, he was not primarily concerned with a chromatic medium. It was with the attempts to develop and at the same time to concentrate chromatic thought

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

that birth was given to the acute questions connected with the new music. We are immediately confronted with problems of tonality. Wagner was not consciously atonal, although at times he came very near to something of the kind. But those who succeeded him, notably Schönberg, knew no such restraint. In their refusal to be fettered by tonality they were, in actual fact, imposing upon themselves the severest limits of expression. It was not long before Bartòk was writing music of a character almost diatonic simply as the result of pushing chromaticism to its extremes. The movement became definitely retrograde, while the texture of the music, in spite of its apparent freedom from tonality, was scarcely less confined or less formal than the writings of Palestrina.

Nor was this all. The disappearance of tonality was attended by a corresponding vagueness of melodic outline

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

which was sometimes so completely formless as to give the impression that it was altogether lacking. At the best it was remarkably angular; more often the result was apparent incoherence. It is extraordinarily difficult to define what should be the critical attitude towards music of this nature. We are able to analyse to a certain extent the essential stuff of it. We can recognise the absence of tonality and definite melody together with an intense compression of musical thought; it is also clear that the texture is inclined to be vertical rather than horizontal. But after that generalisation is at an end; the point of view becomes individual. To many people the music of Schönberg, for instance, lacks æsthetic conviction. They maintain that its definitely intellectual character debars it from containing anything of real poetry. By ordinary standards of criticism the verdict should be one of condemnation.

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

But from another angle one would urge that since we can trace a tangible connection between Schönberg and the classical values of music, it may be only a matter of further and more detailed study before it is realised more generally that his music contains, admittedly in a form somewhat cryptic, the poetry which to many now seems absent. I do not suggest that Schönberg is "ahead of his age." Mr Ernest Newman has shown convincingly enough the foolishness of any such theory. But it may well happen that appreciation is delayed until the close of the composer's generation. Beethoven's Symphonies, or some of them at least, were in his lifetime considered as an outrage upon musical convention. Later, Brahms on occasion met with similar treatment. We have classic warnings as to the futility of hasty judgment.

In the music of Bartòk we find a history of development which illustrates

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

in the most satisfactory sense a growth from “nationalism” to complete individuality. Bartòk’s earliest works were built, to all intents and purposes, on Hungarian folk-song. The structure was excellent of its kind, but the derivation was clear. In his later period, like all composers of real worth, he breaks away entirely from this influence. There is nothing of a “national” flavour about his second Violin Sonata, for instance. Bartòk’s utterances are couched in an idiom essentially modern, but he has sufficient regard for the forms of music to make his expressions fairly coherent. Closer acquaintance with his work confirms one’s belief that it contains much of real beauty. On occasion his music may be vague and fantastic, but we can hardly charge it with anything worse, and that at least is something to be thankful for. The vertical texture which is such a feature of contemporary writings is there seen at its best.

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

It may be as well to point out that neither Vaughan Williams nor Gustav Holst have succeeded in freeing themselves from the influence of folk-song as Bartòk has done. This inclination to borrow folk-tunes and manufacture imitations as a substitute for less derivative thematic material is one of the most dangerous tendencies in modern English music. When one sees the practice followed and encouraged by composers who might reasonably be expected to write music of a character at least moderately individual, there seems some justification for taking rather a severe view with regard to the future musical condition of this country. There is one English composer at least, however, who has contributed something of worth. The reference is to Frederick Delius. His music, as Professor Weissmann has indicated, acts as a mediation between the old order and the new, and the reasons for this opinion

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

are not far to seek. Delius's writing is chiefly vertical and intensely chromatic, while he has at the same time a gift for non-derivative melodic thought in which he exceeds by far the efforts of most of his contemporaries. In result he has given the world some of its most beautiful music. But his work will not bear imitation; an explanation for this can be found in Mr Heseltine's comment that Delius comes at the close of the Romantic period, and that any further developments on his particular lines would tend to produce music of an over-ripe quality. This does not prevent him from having a very particular significance in present and future developments. It is true that he has made occasional use of folk-melody, but his employment of it has always been discreet and sparing, and he never permits its inclusion unless the context is eminently suitable. Delius is not swayed by fashion. The

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

rhapsodic nature of his art has meant in effect that his utterances have been addressed to the few. But of the genuine and lasting beauty of his music there can be no doubt. It is, perhaps, the most encouraging sign as yet displayed in the present revolution.

The results of the Wagnerian movement were far-reaching. A close examination of Debussy's *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* shows that its debt to Wagner was considerable, and yet in a general estimate one would hesitate to couple the names of these two composers. In actual fact Debussy soon freed himself from Wagner's influence, but not until the method of the latter had had a certain effect. It cannot be said with certainty that Debussy was any the worse for the experience, but whatever there is of chromaticism in his music is implied rather than directly stated. In a yet finer degree the same applies to Ravel. These two com-

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

posers have, in their mature achievements, contributed works, the nature of whose beauty is quite unlike anything before their day. Critics have been at pains to expose the limitations of the whole-tone scale and are inclined to impose upon Debussy the responsibility for its creation and its faults, but while one has to acknowledge that the possibilities of this particular mode are very few it must also be admitted that on the whole Debussy handled it with credit, whereas his disciples, using it in a foreign context, have failed ludicrously. There is a general tendency to forget the fact that Debussy did not write all his works or any great part of them in the whole-tone scale. One imagines that in future years, after this mode has been allowed to rest for a while, it will take its lawful and not too prominent position in the musical scheme, and no doubt composers will realise eventually that while it has its

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

limitations it has also its uses if employed sparingly and discreetly.

Strauss and Elgar both hold a very definite place in the music of to-day, but since each of these composers has himself worked to its complete fulfilment, the basic idea upon which his mature work is constructed, their actual compositions do not concern us so closely as does the significance of their contribution to musical experience. Strauss showed us the brilliance of which he was capable in the symphonic poems, but he showed us also his limitations. His career has been, from a musical standpoint, in some respects amazing. *Tod und Verklärung*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, and *Also Sprach Zarathustra* indicated in the plainest fashion the excellent account to which the Wagnerian tradition could be turned. But it was impossible for Strauss to subsist for long on the resources of another, and the end, when it came, came quickly. The

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

sequence of symphonic poems concluded as abruptly as it had begun. It seemed, for the moment, that Strauss had nothing more to say. *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier* were probably the most interesting products of his next outbreak, but they scarcely left the composer, musically, in a better position than had the symphonic poems. It was due largely to his flair for orchestration that he escaped any serious charge of dullness. But the present generation owes him a debt, quite apart from any value that his works may have, in that by his example he exposed fully the limitations of post-Wagnerian development in at least one direction. Contemporary composers have the benefit of his experience, and on those grounds alone we must consider his explorations as being justified even though on occasion they proved unsuccessful.

Elgar's importance in the present

discussion lies in quite another direction to that of Strauss. His original sources were undeniably Brahms and César Franck, but he had sufficient individuality to shake off their influence at a fairly early stage in his career. So far as his connection with these two composers is concerned, its significance lies in the fact that Elgar showed more clearly than anyone to what extent the pre-Wagnerian tradition was capable of expansion. For posterity it should be enough that he exhausted the resources in that direction, thereby giving us the fruit of a very helpful experience. His mature achievements do not affect, and are not affected by, the new music. It is difficult to recall another composer of Elgar's position so completely remote from contemporary movements. If Delius does not follow the fashions of the day, at least his influence is considerable. But to the younger generation of composers Elgar, as an example,

means little. One cannot insist that this is unfortunate, since an imitation of mannerisms is not to be desired at any time. Nevertheless, Elgar does not lead others: his is a purely individual art. This may be regarded as a welcome sign so far as it indicates that the best of his music has sufficient character to survive isolation. The same is true of any composer who has the slightest claim to greatness.

It is a far cry from Elgar to Scriabin, but if we keep Wagner as our pivot the connection of ideas should not prove very obscure. In an earlier paragraph we observed that the first works of Wagner derived to some extent from Spohr. The idiom of Scriabin is, in its essence, not unlike a blend of these two composers. Harmonically, the common ground is fairly extensive. The later developments of both Scriabin and Wagner could scarcely be more unlike one another, but in the matter of origin

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

there is agreement within a certain range. The exact position of Scriabin in contemporary music has ever been the subject of acute controversy, but in the present essay we can hardly allow ourselves to evade the question on the score of its difficulty. It will be the endeavour to approach the matter without prejudice.

Scriabin has suffered as much from his friends as from his enemies. Those who would urge his claims upon us have done so with an impatience which to some extent defeats itself. His antagonists have shown little discretion in their choice of weapons. For them Scriabin is a charlatan and nothing more. But when the mass of literature connected with him is cleared away we begin to get somewhere near the truth. If he is to be judged in accordance with the normal standards of criticism we must be prepared to consider his music as entirely divorced from any philo-

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

sophical programme which the composer may have attached to it. We do not need to depend upon the story of *Till Eulenspiegel* in order to understand Strauss's symphonic poem. With or without the programme it is an excellent piece of writing. The same must apply to Scriabin. Then, and then only, do we gain any clear perspective of his work as a whole.

The composer himself is much to blame for the more gross misunderstandings to which he has been subjected. His insistence upon the so-called philosophical aspects of his work has done him more harm than good. Stripped of its philosophy and its fables the music is easier to estimate. We can then see the *Divine Poem* as a cumbersome but promising structure. The *Poem of Ecstasy* we either like or loathe. Certainly Scriabin's faults as an orchestral writer are clear enough. His lack of real colour or rhythmic sense, his

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

rigid adherence to form, his occasional hysteria—all these are too obvious to require discussion. But in spite of these manifold disadvantages there is a cohesion and a conviction about the work as a whole which enables it to stand despite an acknowledged handicap. One feels the same with regard to *Prometheus*, except that the general conception is clearer, more vivid, and incidentally more effective. The colour scheme need not concern us. It is not essential to the performance of the work and distracts rather than unifies. If the *Poem of Ecstasy* and *Prometheus* are not better than the more mature of Strauss's symphonic poems they are certainly no worse, and there we must be content to leave them.

The Ten Piano Sonatas, viewed collectively, are excellent literature. In the first place they are written by a composer with a very real knowledge of the instrument for which they are de-

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

signed. They are also more forceful and more controlled than the orchestral achievements. If they do not rank with the very highest piano works, they may be properly placed alongside the writings of Debussy.

Scriabin has been unfortunate in his biographers so far as England is concerned. It seems that there are only two English volumes which pretend to deal with him at any length. Both are mediocre: the one, an hysterical and unbalanced effusion; the other, an inadequate sketch. Mr Gray's essay on Scriabin in his volume on contemporary music is intended to be damning, but as a piece of criticism one can hardly be expected to take it seriously. We have yet to see a detached estimate of the composer's life and work.

It may be asked quite fairly whether the new music is distinguished by any characteristics other than those to which reference has already been made.

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

In this connection it is permissible, perhaps, to point to one device which in the music of our time has been exaggerated above all others, namely the use to excess of intricate rhythm. It is not to be denied that rhythm has a legitimate and important function to fulfil as part of a composer's technical equipment. But when we find works which, like "Mars" from Holst's *Planets*, depend for their ultimate effect upon rhythm alone, one is tempted to question whether this means has not assumed a significance altogether disproportionate to its value as a vehicle of musical expression.

It was Beethoven who set the present fashion in dynamics. The opening of his *Fifth Symphony* shows the crude material from which modern developments have sprung. Tschaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony* is an exact parallel to it and is consciously built upon the same model. We have seen in our own time a subtler

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

handling of the method in Honegger's *Pacific No. 231*. But the composer upon whom it is necessary chiefly to concentrate in connection with modern rhythmic achievements is Igor Stravinsky.

Even if Stravinsky had written nothing after *The Rite of Spring* there would be ample justification for acclaiming him as a composer whose influence on the music of our age has been remarkable. His technical capabilities are beyond dispute; his powers of orchestration phenomenal. Yet historians are to be found who question his position as a composer of permanent worth. This may be due to the fact that Stravinsky has written a certain amount of music which is frankly experimental—for instance, the *Three Pieces for String Quartet*. But work of this kind should not be allowed to prejudice our estimation of the composer's more significant achievements. Beethoven and Wagner both had their

less successful moments and it is scarcely possible that a lesser genius can escape if these two did not go unscathed. It must be recognised, too, that for progress experiment is essential. There is little doubt that the somewhat speculative works of Stravinsky have served their purpose in enabling him to see his way more clearly in his subsequent endeavours.

It has become the custom to refer to Stravinsky's early ballet, *The Fire-Bird*, as though it is to all intents and purposes the product of the composer's master, Rimsky-Korsakov. Actually it is very far from being anything of the kind. A fairly close acquaintance with the work makes clear that it has characteristics quite different from any that Rimsky-Korsakov's music displays. There are certain factors in common, no doubt, but they can hardly be accounted as important. In point of rhythmic effect alone Stravinsky far out-

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

shines his master. Even in this early work he shows signs of a remarkable inventive power. Had he relied solely upon technical brilliance his music would scarcely have survived the year of its birth. His second ballet, *Petrouchka*, supplies still more abundant evidence as to his capacity to think for himself. The work is essentially individual and, rhythmically, extremely ingenious. In connection with Stravinsky it may be well to point out that he escapes to a considerable extent the charge of employing a wearisome metre disguised as rhythm. This latter weakness is the besetting sin of those of the modern dynamic school who have yet to learn what rhythm really means. A favourite device is to alter the time signature with remarkable and unnecessary frequency with the result that a monotonous metre is set up, entirely devoid of any genuine vitality. Stravinsky himself is occasionally at fault in

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

this respect in *Petrouchka* and *The Rite of Spring*, but the lapses are not due, as in many cases, to sheer ignorance. By skilful use of accents he frees himself to a great extent from metrical encumbrances; the only pity is that on occasion he fetters himself more rigidly than any classicalist in his endeavours to obtain further liberty of expression.

At present it is too early to speak with any certainty as to the ultimate value of Stravinsky's experiments with what amounts to a modern Bach idiom. A recent performance of the *Piano Concerto* left one with the impression that a certain refinement would be necessary before the composer could express himself with that clarity which the new style so urgently requires. At the same time one must admit that in suitable contexts the hard, dry brightness of this music is extremely effective. It is illustrated to great advantage in the "Rondoletto" from the *Serenade* for

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

piano. In that work we see a good horizontal texture together with a remarkably effective rhythmic scheme. The combination of these essentials, if successful in other respects, should play an important part in the ultimate coalescence of the best that is in the old and new methods.

The reason why Stravinsky succeeds and Holst fails as an exponent of rhythm is that Stravinsky has sufficient inventive genius to make rhythm his servant and not his master while Holst apparently lacks this essential quality. The whole vexed question hinges upon this point. Rhythm for rhythm's sake is worse than valueless; it is a curse. On the other hand a composer of originality can find it a very useful asset. In contemporary music it has been greatly exaggerated by numbers of musicians who have mastered little more than its worst clichés. Progress will scarcely be possible until it is realised more

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

generally that the indiscriminate use of rhythmic devices serves not to stimulate but to kill the character of music.

Arthur Honegger, to whom we made reference in an earlier paragraph, is one of the few composers who seem to realise the necessity for musical coalescence both in style and form. Like Stravinsky he has succeeded admirably in making rhythm subordinate to his creative impulse with the result that his mature work is extraordinarily vital. His symphonic psalm, *King David*, is one of the most significant of modern choral achievements. By its very nature it opens up vast possibilities in connection with vocal writing, and if the composer's present method is ultimately successful, the influence upon the choral music of the future should be considerable. *King David* has a number of characteristics which call for attention. In the first place, that part of the narrative which is normally taken as recita-

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

tive is spoken, not sung. It is urged by some critics that this serves only to interrupt the sequence of the work, but one feels that as normal recitative does this in any case the situation is not seriously aggravated. Incidentally, as the oratorio proceeds, the proportion of vocal writing increases markedly, so that the narrator does not really come into prominence except for the first part of the work. But the principal importance of *King David* as a contribution to contemporary music is that Honegger fuses vertical and horizontal writing with remarkable effect, not hesitating to employ either medium, separately or combined, according to the suitability for his purpose at the moment. The final chorus in Part III is an excellent example of this type of treatment.

It was not the fortune of the present writer to see a single piece of criticism favourable to *King David* when it received its first performance in England

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

early in 1927. No doubt the peculiar acoustics of the Albert Hall destroyed much of the detail, but, even so, it was possible to gain a fairly clear idea of the composer's conception. The work had great success in Paris, and perhaps a more intimate acquaintance with it will result in a further extended appreciation of its merits.

By way of conclusion to our discussion on rhythm it may not be out of place briefly to consider the relative positions of what are known respectively as "classical" and "jazz" music. In recent years the problem has been discussed over and over again, though without any appreciable result. The principal reason for raising the question in the present context is that it seems desirable to indicate, as far as one can, the manner in which the difficulty should be approached if there is to be any real understanding of the matter.

Up to the present the issue has been

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

unnecessarily obscured by critics who have expended a great deal of energy in trying to find a basis for reconciliation between classical and jazz music. All such attempts have been and must be, inevitably, quite useless. Until it is realised that each is an entirely separate branch of the same art any efforts to obtain a clear perspective of the question must be in vain. We have to recognise that there is plenty of room in the world for both kinds of music; the trouble starts when one attempts to invade the domain of the other. Further, it must be realised that a predilection for classical music does not debar one from deriving pleasure from dance music of the best type. One of the most irritating arguments that a musician has constantly to face is that he cannot with sincerity entertain both points of view. It is true that the upholders of each cause have frequently made tactical errors. The supporters of jazz music

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

have attempted to justify mutilations and distortions of classical tunes for dance purposes, but the principle is inexcusable. Composers of the best kinds of dance music have shown us that they possess sufficient inventive ability without having to resort to such practices. They have also a fairly adequate technique of their own. In their own province they fulfil their task admirably. It is in their excursions into departments foreign to their art that they come so hopelessly to grief.

But if they have erred, the exponents of classicalism have judged no less inaccurately. They have continually derided jazz music on the score that it falls far below the level of classical works. They seem unable to realise that dance music can be compared only with other works of the same type just as classics must be measured by classics. This confusion of standards has been the cause of half the totally unnecessary

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

disputes that have raged round the present problem. It is to be hoped that presently the question will receive a more impartial treatment at the hands of the critics, but for the moment the outlook is not promising.

With regard to the contemporary revolution, it may be said that jazz music will at least preserve the best and the worst of the dynamic system. One must admit, however, that the developments of even the last five years have shown to what extent purely dynamic dance music is limited. There are signs now of a return to coherent melody, though it must be confessed that the restraint which should accompany it is still absent.

And this brings us to a point at which it is necessary to summarise our total findings in the present investigation. It has not been possible, nor is it desirable, to dwell upon every aspect of contemporary music. Our business

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

has been to emphasise those achievements which appear to be more than temporary in their significance. It remains to indicate to what extent they are likely to affect the future.

The question of texture is, perhaps, the most pressing. Schönberg and Delius may be said to be typical of the present movement, and both employ a texture which in its formal characteristics is undeniably vertical. Of the two, Delius appears to be the more successful. But if he does not falter, a dozen others who use the same method fail to survive the test. The system is dangerous, and success is given only to a few. One would suggest that the foremost reaction against the present fashions will be that horizontal writing will once again come into its own. This step seems both necessary and inevitable. We cannot subsist for any length of time on the crude blocks of sound which so much of the new music

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

offers us. Intelligence is revolted by it. From another angle its texture supplies one melodic interest instead of four or five. Common sense demands a change from the present starvation diet, and there are signs that this change is slowly but surely coming to pass.

An indication that justifies this assertion to a marked extent is the gradual re-birth of the chamber orchestra. It is being realised that a vast and unwieldy combination of instruments is not always expedient. On financial grounds, too, the full orchestra as seen to-day is difficult to maintain. It may be that in the future we shall revert more and more to the ideals of Bach in this respect. But such a process, if it comes about, must mature gradually. As far as music is concerned, the tendency of the present age is to extravagance. We have the folk-song and Elizabethan revivals; there is the Dolmetsch Festival at Haslemere. These

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

developments are too good, or too bad, to last. Their supporters are apt to show lack of discernment and moderation. A readjustment of orchestral ideals would require careful thought and a restraining hand. Granted that, there are hopes of a reversion to musical prosperity.

The return to a horizontal texture would bring with it a saner conception of melody. It is true that we have never been without melody in one form or another, but there is a very clear difference between the melodic product of horizontal and vertical writing. With a vertical texture the melody may become an accident; with Bach there were no accidents of that nature.

One feels that the more barbaric music of recent times, as seen in the cruder utterances of the modern dynamic school of thought, must eventually suffer a decline. No one with any pretence to sanity can continue to beat a

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

drum for ever, and assuredly the drums have been beaten enough within the last decade or so. Beethoven, at least, did not supplement his string quartets with percussion. Yet in our own time we have seen endeavours not far from this extremity. Musical sense is still at a premium.

On the other hand there have been developments in the new music which, as we have tried to show, may well take a permanent place among the classics. It is to these that we must turn should the outlook seem unduly discouraging. Whether or no one takes a gloomy view of the efforts of one's contemporaries matters little to posterity. It is according to the judgment of our successors that the music of the present time will stand or fall. Let us hope that they will at least approach with discrimination the more significant achievements of our age.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
NEILL AND CO., LTD.,
EDINBURGH.



THE HOGARTH ESSAYS

FIRST SERIES

I. MR BENNETT AND MRS BROWN.

By VIRGINIA WOOLF. 2s. 6d.

II. THE ARTIST AND PSYCHO-
ANALYSIS.

By ROGER FRY. 2s. 6d.

III. HENRY JAMES AT WORK.

By THEODORA BOSANQUET. 2s. 6d.

IV. HOMAGE TO JOHN DRYDEN.

By T. S. ELIOT. 3s. 6d.

V. HISTRIOPHONE.

By BONAMY DOBRÉE. 3s. 6d.

VI. IN RETREAT.

By HERBERT READ. 3s. 6d.

VII. FEAR AND POLITICS: A DEBATE AT
THE ZOO.

By LEONARD WOOLF. 2s. 6d.

VIII. CONTEMPORARY TECHNIQUES OF
POETRY.

By ROBERT GRAVES. 3s. 6d.

IX. THE CHARACTER OF JOHN
DRYDEN.

By ALAN LUBBOCK. 2s. 6d.

THE HOGARTH ESSAYS—*continued.*

X. WOMEN: AN INQUIRY.

By WILLA MUIR. 2s. 6d.

XI. POETRY AND CRITICISM.

By EDITH SITWELL. 2s. 6d.

XII. ANONYMITY: AN ENQUIRY.

By E. M. FORSTER. 2s.

XIII. A SHORT VIEW OF RUSSIA.

By J. M. KEYNES. 2s.

XIV. NOTES ON LAW AND ORDER.

By J. A. HOBSON. 2s. 6d.

XV. THE REVIVAL OF AESTHETICS.

By HUBERT WALEY. 3s. 6d.

XVI. ART AND COMMERCE.

By ROGER FRY. 2s. 6d.

XVII. THE POET'S EYE.

By VERNON LEE, Litt.D. 1s. 6d.

XVIII. ANOTHER FUTURE OF POETRY.

By ROBERT GRAVES. 2s. 6d.

XIX. THE STRUCTURE OF WUTHERING
HEIGHTS.

By C. P. S. 2s. 6d.



Hogarth Essays



Second Series

