Studies in Social History

A Social History of English Music

E.D. Mackerness

STUDIES IN SOCIAL HISTORY

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E. D. MACKERNESS

LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1964

This edition published in 2007 by
Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 4RN
270 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

First issued in paperback 2010

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

A Social History of English Music

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-40266-8 (set)
ISBN 13: 978-0-415-41306-0 (volume) (hbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-415-61139-8 (volume) (pbk)

Routledge Library Editions: Studies in Social History

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF ENGLISH MUSIC

by

E. D. Mackerness

GREENWOOD PRESS, PUBLISHERS
WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Mackerness, Eric David.
A social history of English music.

Reprint of the ed. published by Routledge and K.
Paul, London, in series: Studies in social history.
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Music--England--History and criticism.
2. Music and society. I. Title.
[ML286.M25 1976] 780'.07 75-40994
ISBN 0-8371-8705-2

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Originally published in 1964 by Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, London and University of Toronto Press, Canada

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Reprinted in 1976 by Greenwood Press, a division of Williamhouse-Regency Inc.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 75-40994

ISBN 0-8371-8705-2

Printed in the United States of America

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Preface

In this volume I have tried, without going over too much familiar ground, to present a view of English musical history which is supported by the evidence available to me. I do not claim that my treatment of the subject is in any sense exhaustive, or that it could not be handled in other ways. I have attempted to see English music and musical customs in relation to significant social tendencies, my aim being to follow up the musical consequences of the trends and movements I discuss. That something of this kind has already been done by more capable scholars I should be the first to admit: nor do I deny that a good many of the topics I have merely touched on in passing could, given a few more years' research on my part, be fully and definitively documented. But my aspirations have been comparatively modest; I have simply hoped that here and there I may have added something to what earlier writers have said: or at any rate, that I may have placed certain things in a perspective which will be of interest to the reader who is not primarily a musicologist.

Of the many friends who have assisted me in the composition of this book I must mention two in particular—Charles Cudworth and Reginald Nettel. Their encouragement and interest have always been a source of pleasure to me: I only hope that what I have written shows an adequate appreciation of their abundant generosity over the years. From Harold Perkin, the editor of this series, I have learned a great deal about the scope of social history, and I must thank him for putting his expert knowledge at my disposal. In different ways I have received valuable counsel from Professor W. H. G. Armytage and Professor Sidney Pollard, and at one stage Dr. Macdonald Emslie gave me pertinent advice. The staffs of the Sheffield Central Reference Library and the Sheffield University Library were unusually

considerate in meeting my demands: in the sphere of reference and bibliography I received essential help from J. A. B. Townsend of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, and from Leonard Duck, Librarian of the Henry Watson Library, Manchester. Several other librarians in different parts of the country responded promptly to my requests for specific information: I am glad to acknowledge such collaboration, particularly as it frequently involved quite detailed researches by people unknown to me.

Our Department Secretary, Mrs. I. W. Fawcett, came to my aid when I was preparing the manuscript for the press. I am, of course, solely responsible for the book in its final form. But in this connection I owe a considerable debt to my colleague W. E. Yuill, Senior Lecturer in German at the University of Sheffield. His wide experience of scholarship, research and publication has saved me from embarrassment on more than one occasion, and I record with gratitude the many hours we spent—mainly in the vicinity of Great Russell Street and Gordon Square—discussing this project in the various phases of its evolution.

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Introductory

I

THE social history of music first makes an appearance—even if only sporadically—in treatises which during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave some account of the manners and morals of specific periods, and of these socio-historical writings one of the most comprehensive is Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* (1751). In the thirty-third chapter of that work the author writes: 'The arts which do not depend solely upon the intellect had made but little progress in France before the period which is known as the age of Louis XIV. Music was in its infancy; a few languishing songs, some airs for the violin, the guitar and the lute, composed for the most part in Spain, were all that we possessed. Lulli's style and technique were astonishing. He was the first in France to write bass counterpoint, middle parts and figures. At first some difficulty was experienced in playing his compositions, which now seem so easy and simple. At the present day there are a thousand people who know music, for one who knew it in the time of Louis XIII; and the art has been perfected by this spread of knowledge. Today, there is no great town which has not its public concerts: yet at that time Paris itself had none; the king's twenty-four violins comprised the sum total of French music.'

The key word in that passage is, of course, 'progress', and Voltaire's attitude is akin to that of Dryden when, in an address to the author of *The Double-Dealer* (1694), he hails William Congreve as a master dramatist sent into the world to rectify the tasteless errors of earlier playwrights. From a purely factual standpoint Voltaire's observations may fail to satisfy the

scholarly critic, but he has devoted at least one sentence of this cursory account to the specifically *social* history of music: 'At the present day there are a thousand people who know music, for one who knew it in the time of Louis XIII.' It would obviously be rash to draw significant conclusions from a single item such as this. All the same, Voltaire's very choice of topics points to the fact that he does not think of seventeenth-century music solely with reference to the outstanding performance of leading composers, and he is aware that musical expression is not entirely unrelated to social behaviour.

Voltaire's habit of uttering large generalizations in a tone of optimism with cynical undercurrents had some effect on the formal musical histories of the second half of the eighteenth century. In England two major works of this kind appeared almost simultaneously: Sir John Hawkins's *History of Music,* which was issued complete in 1776, and Charles Burney's *General History,* of which the first volume appeared in the same year. For a long time these writings were unsurpassed. Indeed, a recent critic has declared that at the opening of the nineteenth century 'Burney and Hawkins loomed so large that the history of music seemed to be a subject that had been exhausted.'[1] Both writers have their own peculiar virtues and shortcomings, but their interest for us lies in the fact that they paid a considerable amount of homage to the purely social history of music.

A careful selection of materials drawn from these two great source-books would yield a valuable social history of music up to the middle of the eighteenth century. But it is clear from Dr. Burney's working definition of music that his general point of view would not be altogether acceptable to the modern reader. 'Music', Burney writes, 'is an innocent luxury, unnecessary, indeed, to our existence, but a great improvement and gratification of the sense of hearing.' This definition could only have been drawn up in a society which had come to a tacit agreement that 'the arts' are to be regarded as an ornament to life, and are to a large extent the acquired property of suitably enlightened *cognoscenti.* On the face of it, Burney's description seems perfectly sane and reasonable. Yet a careful examination reveals its inadequacies. If man were an entirely rational creature, devoid of passions and unaccountable predilections, the notion of music as

[1] Warren Dwight Allen, *Philosophies of Music History* (1939), p. 85.

simply a 'great improvement and gratification of the sense of hearing' might be acceptable, but in ordinary conditions it is not. In the present state of existence, indeed, it is not too much to claim that music is very much a necessity of life in both civilized and uncivilized communities. Even the simplest social groups evolve—whether deliberately or not—distinctive musical traditions, and all sophisticated societies seem to have a strong inclination to establish their own characteristic preferences among possible patterns of sound. And though it may be argued that men can exist without music, just as they can exist without drama, poetry, or formalized recreation, experience has shown that a balanced and integrated social life inevitably produces its appropriate form of musical expression.

This, perhaps, is a truism, and most people would agree that there is a whole range of human experiences which seems incomplete without some kind of musical accompaniment. To Europeans, for instance, dancing without music—as performed by some primitive tribes—is quite unthinkable; and although café and restaurant orchestras are now less numerous than they were thirty years ago, the dissemination of canned music in many public eating-houses would argue that *Tafelmusik* still has an important part in our national life. The great majority of religious denominations make elaborate provision for music in worship, and many of the better-known hymns enjoy great popularity in purely secular contexts. Brass bands are always in demand at garden fêtes and other outdoor functions, and music is essential for the creation of certain types of 'atmosphere' as at weddings, funerals, Remembrance Day and during Christmas festivities. The social functions of music, in fact, are numerous and varied, and the main difficulty about Dr. Burney's definition is that it would seem to place a disproportionate value on what for want of a better name we must call 'art-music'—music composed with the intention of giving pleasure solely by virtue of its formal beauties. For art-music is, after all, only one branch of music as a whole, and we have no right to assume that it is necessarily superior in status to occasional or *Gebrauchsmusik*.

Throughout the ages the social value of music has been generally recognized. So much so that at certain periods historical writers have simply not considered it necessary to place on record the customs and attitudes which, as they thought, were

too commonplace to mention. A case in point is that of the twelfth-century topographer Giraldus Cambrensis, whose *Description of Wales* is often quoted in histories of early English music. Giraldus's observations on part music (in his thirteenth chapter) are of the first importance, but they tell us rather less than they appear to do because Giraldus has not felt it necessary to supply the background information to illuminate his account 'Of their Symphonies and Songs'. Other writings are similarly inconclusive, and it has been left to the archaeologist and the musical palaeographer to piece together whatever is now known about the instruments and vocal ensembles of early times. Admittedly, savants like Burney and Jean-Jacques Rousseau have produced learned dissertations on the music of the pre-Christian and mediaeval epochs, but for the most part they drew their material from literary sources dating from the periods in question, and then engaged in speculation upon these. But they did not suppose that ancient Greek melodies or the 'mediaeval church modes' would be acceptable to the ears of their more enlightened contemporaries. Burney's distaste for most of the music written before the fifteenth century is, indeed, well known: from passages quoted by Franchinus and Thomas Morley he concluded that John Dunstable's melodies were 'very uncouth and unmeaning'. For Burney, in fact, mediaeval music (like mediaeval theory) had an existence on paper, but its habitual use of unpolished themes and inaccurate harmonies rendered it unsuitable for performance along with the masterpieces of Haydn and Pergolesi. Needless to say, more recent scholars have taken a different point of view. Thanks to the labours of men like Barclay Squire and Arnold Dolmetsch it is now possible for us to adopt a less strictly antiquarian attitude towards the remoter periods than was inevitable a hundred and fifty years ago.

It is only fair, however, to acknowledge that from the social historian's standpoint some parts of Burney's *General History* are unusually generous in their treatment of the subject (the same is true, to a less extent, of Hawkins's *History*). His account of minstrelsy, for instance, is extremely full: and when treating of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries he gives a great deal of attention to the musical profession. In the later sections of his work we find Burney displaying one or two traits which subse-

quent writers on music developed more exhaustively than he did. Like his friend Samuel Johnson, Burney was a biographer of some distinction. This aspect of his writings has not hitherto received much recognition, though many of the short biographical sketches which he contributed to Abraham Rees's *Cyclopedia* would have done no discredit to Johnson himself. It was after Burney's time that the private lives of the great composers came to have a particular fascination for those interested in music. Handel, as we know, was the subject of many panegyrics both before and after his death in 1759, but Edward Holmes's *Life of Mozart* (1845) was perhaps the first fully documented character-study in English of a universally celebrated foreign master. Of Beethoven and Schubert it might almost be said that too many personal details are known, and in the case of Wagner and Tschaikovski there is an overwhelming mass of private records. Since the early days of the romantic movement we can observe an increasing tendency on the part of the 'musical public' to idolize composers and to set them apart from the rest of mankind. One consequence of this has been the habit of conceiving musical history largely in terms of dominant personalities.

Like drama, music has a tendency to give rise to ephemeral chatter and trivial anecdotes. During the nineteenth century a whole literature sprang up for the purpose of satisfying the curiosity of a rather special kind of reader. The type of thing represented by, say, William Bingley's *Musical Biography* (1814) and Thomas Busby's *Concert-Room Anecdotes* (1825) is not likely to have more than a marginal interest for the social historian. Fortunately, in musicological matters there are other ways of communicating a sense of historical relationship; and one of the commonest ways of doing this is through the study of musical form. In this case, the personal inclinations of the composer carry less weight than do the particular innovations he may have inaugurated. It is not our business to trace the stages by which, shall we say, simple dance measures such as the passacaille and the minuet developed into movements which could be incorporated in symphonic compositions: nor need we dwell on the functions of expositions, *stretti*, canonic variations and fugal development. The laboured investigation of form as an end in itself may easily become as tedious as the discussion of 'temperamental'

peculiarities. All the same, it must be conceded that some knowledge of the principles on which musical compositions are designed is a prerequisite to sensitive discrimination. Form, it can be argued, has its value as exercising (within an historical context) the comparative faculty. For a person who is capable of perceiving aurally the difference between a fugue by Sweelinck and one by Bach will have arrived at a kind of musical knowledge which no amount of factual information about the composer's personal idiosyncrasies can supply. Or, to put it another way: there is some point in stressing that a familiarity with one or two characteristic overtures by Lulli may very well enhance our appreciation of Handel's instrumental sinfonias.

Related to the subject of musical form is that of interpretation. Ideally, a full and detailed musical score contains explicit directions as to how the music itself must sound: it represents the composer's intentions in their totality. But the composer, however skilful he may be in the craft of composition, can do very little through the agency of mere notation to offset the limitations imposed by conditions of performance. 'Klemperer's Beethoven', as is well known, differs from 'Beecham's Beethoven', though in what ways we will not enquire. Instead we will note the significance of a situation in which it is possible for a number of different 'readings' to have gained currency. This consideration may perhaps appear to have little connection with the social history of music. Yet it would be wrong to claim that there is such a thing as an entirely *right* performance of any known composition: for every performer or group of performers imposes at some stage nuances and stylistic variants which the composer himself did not envisage. Only a wholly mechanical rendering could entirely eliminate this uncertainty, and it may be that electronic composition has moved in this direction. Most people, however, would agree that a large part of the enjoyment of music arises from the very existence of the discrepancies we have just mentioned; and the possibility of an exact correspondence between what was *intended* and what is actually realized in sound would probably rule out the existence of a specifically musical taste. This in turn would have its effect on the social relationships which music calls into being.

On the other hand, in order to guard against reckless improvisation in the concert room it is necessary to discover as much

as possible about the conventions which governed the performance of music at the time when it was composed. In the days of Corelli, for instance, music for a solo violin was elaborately decorated with ornaments which the player added (usually from memory) to the printed notation. The score served as a simple indication of the composition's main melodic features, and it was left to the violinist to apply to the melody itself figures which would enhance its original beauty. But this practice of 'gracing' was by no means arbitrary: for it was essential that its harmonic tendencies should not run counter to those of the movement as a whole. A twentieth-century violinist, trained to respect other conventions of performance than those which prevailed in the seventeenth century, might well regard Corelli's Opus 5 (1700) as a comparatively unsubtle collection of sonatas; but when it is borne in mind that during Corelli's lifetime an executant would be judged on his ability not merely to play the notes in front of him but also to produce tasteful ornaments, the importance of interpretative knowledge becomes clear. And this is also applicable to developments in the sphere of keyboard writing, solo song, and orchestral scoring.

II

What we have called interpretation is frequently influenced by conditions which are not, in the first place, of a musical nature. Turning from instrumental to vocal virtuosity we may mention the case of the *castrati*, since they figure in most musical histories. It was the intervention of humanitarian sentiment which put an end to the barbarous practice of emasculating young boys so as to produce adult male treble voices; but their absence from the European musical scene since the early part of the nineteenth century explains why some of the music which was popular in the time of Domenico Scarlatti and J. C. Bach has never been revived. The *castrati* are perhaps a somewhat exceptional phenomenon, and less drastic changes than those which brought about their disappearance can occasionally be seen to have an effect on other aspects of interpretation. There are fashions in music just as in other things. One of the most interesting was the craze for flute-playing which arose in the eighteenth century. Yet why, we may ask, did the recorder and the flageolet fall into

disuse after their considerable popularity in the seventeenth century? Partly because the German flute, which superseded them, has a more self-assertive tone-quality which, together with its wider range of notes (particularly in chromatic scale passages), could hardly fail to appeal to performers and composers. Apart from this, though, the keyed flute would never have reached the standard of development it had attained by 1800 if mechanical craftsmanship had not made it possible for delicate adjustments to be applied to the fittings used on flute barrels. The same thing, of course, is true in respect of other wood-wind instruments.

Yet we must not conclude that mechanical inventions are necessarily an unqualified advantage to the musician. Most modern string players would agree that the violin bow fitted with an adjustable 'frog' is a far less clumsy object to handle than the bow which was commonly in use in the time of Vivaldi and Geminiani. It need hardly be said that the older type of bow, with its high arched stick and loose hairs, is out of place in the performance of contemporary music. Yet there exists a school of thought which maintains that 'contrapuntal' violin music, such as the unaccompanied Sonatas of Bach, can only be properly played with the less delicately fashioned 'Bach' bow, the hairs of which are tightened or relaxed at the will of the player. It is now generally agreed that Baroque keyboard music is not heard to best advantage on the modern pianoforte, despite the fact that subtle gradations of tone can be obtained from it. The reaction in favour of the clavichord and harpsichord is now accomplished. But when performing music of the pre-classical era many concert pianists are put to the necessity of imitating harpsichord tone on an instrument which invites a different kind of touch.

These, then, are a few of the considerations which writers on musical history are obliged to take into account. They have been discussed so as to suggest the extent to which questions of 'technique' occupy the attention of musicologists. There are, of course, some perfectly good reasons for this. In music it is comparatively easy for a tolerable creative talent to produce work that is competently derivative, but it is very difficult indeed for a composer to evolve a personal idiom. Because of this, critics are inclined to give a good deal of serious attention to the manner in which a composer confronts his particular 'problems'. Conse-

quently—since the Renaissance especially—the stylistic peculiarities of the different composers (and schools of composers) have assumed a great significance. The temptation to idolize the composer himself is a fairly recent development; but it has been such as to prevent some critics and historians from visualizing a situation in which the claims of the composer, and to a lesser degree those of the performer, may be secondary to those of the listener. Even now, some people whose capacity for musical 'appreciation' is beyond dispute have difficulty in realizing that the presence of a well-known composer's name on a piece of music does not guarantee greatness; or, conversely, that a wholly anonymous composition, produced under circumstances where authorship was considered immaterial, may well have some of the attributes of genius.

III

To pursue this question further would involve us in a discussion of aesthetics; at this stage, however, some consideration must be given to the scope of music in its larger relationship with social history. Music, as has been said, has virtually no existence until it has become a shared experience between the composer-performer and the audience. There may, indeed, be composers who write music solely for their own private satisfaction: but they are few in number. The great majority normally have some kind of performance in mind when embarking on the labour of composition, and in most cases a definite demand prompts their designs. Before the nineteenth century nearly all music was produced in response to a request from some kind of patron, private or public. But the nature of the composer's contract is only partly the concern of the social historian. He is more interested in the steps taken by the various classes of society in order to satisfy the taste for music, which seems to be fairly widespread at all times. For though the capacity to assimilate the more highly developed forms of musical invention is necessarily limited by the opportunities of education and environment, the power to enjoy some kind of musical experience appears to be present in all men and women who are not afflicted with a total insensitivity to tonal stimuli. (What is commonly called 'tone-deafness' is, incidentally, a phenomenon of a different kind.)

Unfortunately for the social historian, a great deal of all music-making is quite informal, and this may mean that it leaves behind little palpable evidence. For this reason deductions have to be made from extraneous sources such as diaries, letters, journals and public records. Samuel Pepys's tastes in music are well known, as are the observations of his friend John Evelyn. Other writers are in the habit of making helpful disclosures. Thus Daniel Defoe, in his account of Bath, tells us that 'the musick plays (the visitor) into the bath',[1] indicating that as early as 1726 a form of 'utility' music was well established at a centre afterwards renowned for its concert enterprises. Occasionally pictorial representations provide us with useful information we might otherwise be unable to come by: painters like Zoffany, Gainsborough and some of the Pre-Raphaelites have left portraits of players, singers and their audiences. In churches and cathedrals, again, there are many wood and stone carvings of mediaeval instruments. These enable us to derive a very good idea of the different classes of instruments actually in use at various periods. What they do not help us to decide, however, is the exact manner in which such instruments were tuned—or what it felt like to play them in the manner depicted. How, for instance, did a woman of ordinary physique manage the twenty-string lute such as Arabella Hunt is shown holding in Kneller's famous picture? And how in any case did the performer keep such a huge instrument in tune? Then again, how did players of an earlier period endure the uncomfortable postures adopted by string players when violins were held below the shoulders and 'cellos were balanced (without any support) between the knees?

Instruction books are of considerable help as historical evidence. But it sometimes happens that accounts of musical activities are not available for periods when we would most like to have them. True, we are able to turn to writings like the *Memoirs* of Roger North, the letters of Thomas Twining and the private papers of Edward Fitzgerald. But it does not follow that the reminiscences and diaries of amateur musicians are always of the highest relevance. This is not, of course, to deny the great importance of the amateur; but the social history of music involves much more than a study of the cults which arise from the pursuit of specialized pleasures. The tastes of the inarticulate

[1] D. Defoe, *A Tour Through England and Wales* (Everyman ed.), II.34.

masses also have a claim on our attention, and to satisfy ourselves on this head we need to consult material of a more public nature than some of the specifically literary items just mentioned.

IV

It remains for us now to indicate a few of the topics which seem to call for particular attention in a social history of music. These will not necessarily be of equal importance in all periods; but whatever approach we adopt, we shall find that some considerations naturally take precedence over others. First of all we must keep constantly in mind the great number of activities—religious services, the drama, dancing and civic celebration—with which music is commonly associated. Music takes its place in Christian observance as a consequence of direct Biblical injunction[1]: but it soon came to have much more than a strictly devotional significance. Songs and instrumental pieces are not, indeed, essential to drama; yet the incidental importance of music in the theatre is generally acknowledged, even when it does not have a 'textural' relevance, as in many of Shakespeare's plays. As for dancing, there can be no question but that music has very subtle psychological associations with the dance, quite apart from its purely rhythmical function. And much the same thing applies in respect of corporate festivities: music has for centuries been an effective agent for inducing 'group solidarity'—whether the occasion be the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal, or the Cup Final at Wembley.

We must not forget that the great majority of people regard music as a form of entertainment—and indeed as only one form of entertainment among many. This affects our outlook materially when we come to investigate the way in which musical taste is manifested in different periods. For it is evident that the desire for entertainment and the capacity to obtain it are greatly affected by various social movements, great and small. In this connection it is fairly obvious that English music has been greatly influenced by the results of such phenomena as the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution and the development of popular education. Such topics as these are too momentous for summary treatment. But of the Industrial Revolution it may be said that the 'increasing accumulation of men in cities' of which

Wordsworth spoke in 1798 induced a craving for other kinds of distraction than the literary diversions the poet censures in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. On the purely technological side we may perhaps point out that without the application of mechanical inventions to the manufacture of instruments, a good many of the tone colours we now take for granted (those, for instance, of the modern organ, the concert grand piano and the brass ensemble) could not have been produced. Nor, incidentally, would a number of the well-established institutions which collectively help to make up our current musical life. The importance of music in mass education was given recognition long before 1870, but it is instructive to find a generally unmusical observer such as Matthew Arnold commenting, in his capacity as a Government Inspector of Schools, on the virtues of music as a trustworthy discipline of intelligence.[1]

There are other branches of English life with which music maintains a connection: of these we may perhaps mention philanthropy, sport and advertising. As Constant Lambert remarked in *Music Ho!* (1934), music has 'an odd way of reflecting not only the emotional background of an age but also its physical conditions'.[2] It is the social historian's business to ascertain the nature of this reflection, and to interpret it in terms which are acceptable to both the musicologist and the student of society itself. If he can do this with any degree of completeness he stands a chance of being in a position to make 'the spirit of the age' something more than a mere abstraction.

[1] See F. S. Marvin, ed., *Reports on Elementary Schools, 1852–1882, By Matthew Arnold* (1908), p. 148.

[2] Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline* (1942 ed.), p. 163.

I

Music and Society in the Middle Ages

THE music of the mediaeval period was dominated by one important characteristic: it was closely linked to specific non-musical social functions. The notion of music as an 'absolute' form of art is a comparatively recent one. To the mediaeval mind such a thing as a concert, at which large numbers of people collect together for the purpose of listening attentively to the singing and playing of others, would have seemed strange. For up to the seventeenth century music had its value in so far as it served activities other than itself. From woodcuts and pictorial records we do, indeed, occasionally derive the impression that informal recitals were not entirely unknown before the later Renaissance, and no doubt there were in the Middle Ages, as now, performers who prided themselves on their virtuosity. But generally speaking such considerations were subordinated to ends over which the individual was not called upon to exercise much discretion. In considering the music of the pre-Reformation era, therefore, we must examine its association with religion, communal festivity and the dance.

I

The early Christian missionaries to Britain disseminated in this country some knowledge of the liturgical music which for centuries before the time of St. Augustine had been cultivated among Christian communities owing allegiance to Rome. The Anglo-Saxons were certainly not an unmusical people; at the

time of their 'migration' they brought with them choral hymns, death lays, bridal songs and battle chants, and they had developed many different kinds of instruments.[1] But it was appropriate, from our point of view, that St. Augustine should be the man chosen to attempt a general conversion of Britain to Christianity, since he had worked directly under the supervision of Pope Gregory and had been trained to revere the Gregorian chant. The litany 'for the eternal salvation both of themselves and those for whose sake they had come' which St. Augustine and his followers sang before King Ethelbert in April 597 may not have been an exact rehearsal of the music commonly heard in St. Peter's, Rome, for St. Augustine adopted elements of the Gallic liturgy when this suited his purpose. But the music of the Roman rite was gradually accepted by those who embraced the Christian faith in England, and teachers of plainsong were sent out to various parts of the country. Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, makes particular mention of James the Deacon, Paulinus's disciple at York, who 'began to teach many people to sing the music of the Church after the Uses of Rome and Canterbury'.[2] He also speaks of John, the Arch-Cantor of the Apostolic See, who visited England in 680 primarily for the purpose of giving instruction in liturgical chant after the Roman fashion. Near-contemporaries noted for their musical gifts included Bishop Wilfrid (634–709), who developed Gregorian chant at Ripon, and Bishop Putta, who after being deprived of his see at Rochester when that city was sacked by Aethilred, King of Mercia, in 676 acted as a peripatetic teacher of music. From Canterbury itself, the first great centre of Christian culture in the south, came Maban, whose work as a cantor at Hexham Abbey is also spoken of by Bede.

The importance of music in day-to-day worship was given widespread recognition during the centuries which followed the Northumbrian supremacy in 613. Its place in church affairs was frequently discussed at the various synods held from time to time. The second council of Clovesho (747), for example, issued a proclamation 'De Sanctae Psalmodiae Utilitate'[3] which can be

[1] See F. M. Padelford, *Old English Musical Terms* (Bonn, 1899), *passim*.

[2] Bede, *History of the English Church and People* (trans. Leo Sherley-Price, 1955), p. 137.

[3] Translated in H. Gee and W. J. Hardy, *Documents Illustrative of English Church History* (1896), pp. 28–30.

paralleled in earlier pontifical utterances, and similar statements were forthcoming on later occasions. As Gregorian settings became more widely known the office of cantor in religious establishments assumed a great significance, and instruction on the *schola cantorum* principle spread a knowledge of liturgical tradition among the novices who proposed to enter upon a religious life. The musical medium used for the Catholic ritual was plainsong.

As the name implies, plainsong (*cantus planus*) is an arrangement of simple sounds intended to give vocal expression to the accepted phraseology of the Roman service. It is entirely monodic and does not stand in need of an accompaniment. This is not to deny that now and then it may have been supported by instruments; organs are found in this country as early as the ninth and tenth centuries, and they were probably used to keep the singers in tune. In a sense, plainsong may be regarded as a kind of 'heightened speech'; but although it follows to some extent the rhythm of spoken Latin, it clearly uses musical intervals and an appropriate alternation of long and short note values in order to give the words themselves an evocative quality which *recited* words alone cannot create. Plainsong melodies do not follow the patterns with which the music of the classical and romantic periods has made us familiar. But this does not mean that their structure is in any way *ad hoc*. On the contrary, at its best plainsong is characterized by a judicious unfolding of musical phrases which rise and fall, halt or progress according to the dictates of the liturgical text.

Some modern scholars claim for plainsong a kind of unearthly beauty which harmonized music does not attain. Cecil Gray, for instance, speaks of the 'remote, magical, and disembodied quality' of the simple unisonal chants;[1] and Dom David Knowles sees in plainsong a form of utterance 'wide in its range of emotional expression, majestic, spiritual and austere beyond all other forms of the art'.[2] Plainsong is, it must be confessed, a form of musical language which seems peculiarly pure and self-contained. Yet it is questionable whether many congregations in the early Middle Ages heard it in anything like the perfection it has achieved when performed under the direction of the monks of Solesmes.

[1] Cecil Gray, *The History of Music* (1928), p. 24.
[2] David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (1940), p. 546.

The disturbed state of the English Church before the twelfth century makes it improbable that full musical settings of the Mass were very common outside the walls of the monasteries and larger churches. Until the time of St. Dunstan (925–88) attempts to establish monasticism at all widely in Britain were again and again defeated. Consequently the Benedictine revival of the tenth century itself was an occurrence which had important consequences for the social history of music.

The establishment of secure and well-organized monastic establishments all subscribing to an accepted *rule* of life meant that the divine Office of the Church was given perpetual observance in many different localities. The Mass alone provides ample scope for musical performance, consisting as it does of an invariable framework (the 'Ordinary') to which other segments are added as occasion demands. But under the Rule of St. Benedict, the Office—which has extensive musical requirements—dominated the whole of monastic existence and ensured that musical offerings to the Deity would be made every day of the year. The importance of this particular Rule in the cultural history of Europe can hardly be overestimated, since, in the words of J. M. Ure, 'it contains the liturgical service, the *opus Dei*, which was enjoined upon the monks as a duty over which nothing was to take precedence'.[1] In its completest form the Office grew from the desire, shared by many of the early Christians, that the Psalms and other scriptural matter should be given regular vocal expression. There have been many accounts of the asceticism to which the Benedictine discipline gave rise in its devotion to this ideal; but some notion of its demands in the specifically musical sphere can be gathered from the *Regularis Concordia*, a manual compiled during the reign of King Edgar (959–75).

The *Regularis Concordia* sets out the way of life which the Benedictine monks of certain religious houses in the south of England were expected to follow; it describes also the customs they were to observe in respect of dress, food and personal behaviour. Full instructions are given as to how the Canonical hours are to be celebrated, and the special arrangements for the major festivals of the Christian year are detailed. Thus on Ash Wednesday, after the office of *None* has been performed, the Abbot blesses the ashes and then lays them on each brother's

[1] J. M. Ure, *The Benedictine Office* (1957), p. 58.

head; the brethren immediately commence the antiphon *Exaudi nos Domine* 'with the Psalm *Salvum me fac Deus* . . . the *Gloria*, *Kyrie eleison*, *Pater Noster*, the psalm *Deus misereatur nostri*, *preces* and collect. They shall then proceed whithersoever they should (i.e. to other churches), singing the antiphons which are in the Antiphonar. When they have reached the church to which they are bound, they shall again pray awhile and then, after the antiphon of the saint, the psalm *Ad te levavi oculos*, the *preces* and the collect, they shall there begin the Litany and return to the Mother church where the Mass shall be celebrated as usual.'[1] Similar stipulations are laid down for Christmas Day and Easter Day, the latter being distinguished by very elaborate chanting. No doubt the Rule was not strictly adhered to in all places where it was professed, but a rigid observance of the liturgical requirements as outlined in the *Regularis Concordia* obliged all the brothers to memorize the entire psalter as well as a great deal more musical material such as hymns, introits, antiphons and so forth. This exposition of the Benedictine Rule enables us to form an adequate idea of the considerable quantity of music performed in monastic houses which adopted this particular mode of existence. Other rules, of course, exhibit variations on this scheme of life. A particularly interesting example is that followed by the sisters of St. Clare (Clarisses or Franciscan 'Minoresses'), as detailed in the fifteenth-century Bodleian MS. 585, composed for a convent near Aldgate, just outside the City of London wall.

Only a fraction of the population, naturally, spent their lives in monasteries; and, in any case, not all monastic houses were open for general worship. According to Sir Frank Stenton, the influence of the Benedictine revival on the parochial clergy was 'direct and strong'.[2] Yet it is difficult to trace this into parish life itself and to determine the part played by the laity in early mediaeval church services. They were free to join in parts of the Mass; and in theory the principle of responsorial chanting gave them an established position in the celebration as a whole. Yet the fact that the Mass—when sung at all—was celebrated exclusively in Latin must have made active participation impossible for most of the congregation. However this may have been, a knowledge of the Gregorian idiom was assimilated by countless

[1] Thomas Symons, ed., *Regularis Concordia* . . . (1953), pp. 32, 33.
[2] F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943), p. 450.

generations of worshippers who could not conceive of devotional music in any other form. It has been persuasively maintained that scraps of plainsong were incorporated in some English folk songs, and there is a strong possibility that lay brethren may have helped to bring this about by dissociating the plainsong melodies from their sacred context. A good many of the unattached minstrels in the pre-Conquest period were probably younger men who had become dissatisfied with a religious life and taken to a nomadic existence.[1]

Although due respect was paid to the hallowed corpus of Gregorian themes, it must not be supposed that church music was entirely bound down by the contents of the original rubrics. Means were, in fact, devised quite early in the Middle Ages whereby plainsong melodies came to be distended and variegated in a very ingenious way. One method was to draw out the last syllable of the word 'alleluia' in order to insert extra notes which collectively made up what was termed a sequence. Another practice was, in the words of Daniel Rock, 'that of weaving certain pious sentences, called by the Romans "festive praises", by the Franks "tropes", between the words of the psalm in the introit at mass, as well as all through the *Gloria in excelsis*, the *Sanctus*, and the *Agnus Dei*'.[2] For example, to the concluding words of the Mass ('*Ite, missa est*', pronounced by the celebrant and followed by the response '*Deo Gratias*' from the congregation) a monk at the Abbey of St. Gall added the following interpolation:

> ITE nunc in pace, spiritus sanctus super vos sit, iam MISSA EST.
> DEO semper laudes agite, in corde gloriam et GRATIAS.

On this particular trope Karl Young comments: 'This meagre example . . . discloses sufficiently well the central intention of all these liturgical embellishments. Their purpose is to adorn the liturgical text, to enforce its meaning, and to enlarge its emotional appeal.'[3] The existence of fully-written-out tropers containing these additions to the basic Gregorian foundation confirms that such accretions were countenanced by authority—until such time, that is, as the Papacy was forced to prohibit some

[1] See E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903), I. 42 *et seq.*
[2] Daniel Rock, *The Church of our Fathers* (1849–53), III. (Part 2, 1853), p. 21.
[3] Karl Young, *The Drama of the Mediaeval Church* (1933), I. 178.

of the irrelevancies introduced. And the presence of tropers among the service books is evidence of a desire on the part of church musicians to break away from the bonds of custom and to adopt—especially in the case of the dialogue tropes, which will be referred to later—a rudimentary form of self-expression within the framework of an otherwise stylized mode of worship.

II

'Hardly ever before or since', writes A. W. Clapham, 'has a national culture been so easily, so rapidly, or so completely submerged as was the Anglo-Saxon in the last thirty years of the eleventh century.'[1] During its early stages, indeed, the Norman invasion was as ferocious as the Danish incursions of an earlier period. Historians tend to dwell on the constructive energies of the Norman settlers and to neglect their arrogance and rapacity. 'Assimilated they were in time,' says H. R. Loyn, 'but the process did not approach completion till the age of the Plantagenet Edwards.'[2] The gradual imposition of Gallic culture which transformed Anglo-Saxon England had important musical consequences. The great secular cathedrals and collegiate churches founded in the period after the Conquest made provision for a full musical rendering of the liturgy and this was subjected to many foreign influences. At Salisbury, for instance, which was closely modelled on the Cathedral of Bayeux, St. Osmund in his Customary of 1091 (revised by Bishop Poore in the early thirteenth century) laid down the duties of a Chancellor and Chanter in a manner which emphasized their responsibilities as tutors to the novices and as custodians of cathedral documents—including, of course, the service books in daily use. St. Osmund's predecessor, Thurstan, had attempted to introduce a style of liturgical chanting which the monks themselves did not approve of; for this he was eventually relieved of his post and sent back to Normandy. St. Osmund doubtless had this incident in mind when drawing up his Customary.

Well before the Norman Conquest the Church had made itself responsible for the education of adolescents in grammar, writing

[1] A. W. Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture After the Conquest* (1934), p. 1.

[2] H. R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (1962), p. 315.

and music. But up to the time of the Reformation the Song Schools maintained an independent existence; they were training establishments at which children were taught 'the elements of their faith, the *Ave Maria*, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed, a few anthems and psalms, singing and spelling'.[1] After the Conquest the importance of the Song Schools increased, for great skill in reading music was now necessary to ensure adequate performance of the polyphonic settings which came to be used in the larger monastic and secular establishments. How and when polyphony first arose will always be a matter for conjecture. But it should be borne in mind that conditions in mediaeval religious houses were favourable to a certain amount of musical innovation. Not only does constant repetition invite determined deviation from the habitual melodic lines, but when individuals with different voice ranges are singing together there is bound to be a fair degree of 'natural' harmonization. Plainsong is unisonal; but unless special care is taken in the performance of vocal music, some voices will feel the necessity of coming to rest at, say, a third or a sixth below or above the concluding tone. Admittedly, plainsong itself moves within a fairly narrow compass. All the same, before a male voice has actually 'settled', there are occasions on which it seeks relief in unpremeditated consonances. For this reason some elementary types of harmonization must always have been known among church musicians such as we have been discussing. 'Organized' plainsong was heard at Ramsay Abbey as early as 991.[2]

The deliberate exploitation of harmonic effects is, of course, a different matter from casual and accidental harmonization. The practice known as parallel organum—doubling of melodic lines at the interval of the fourth or fifth—presupposes a fairly accurate means of setting the pitch of notes and also of indicating sound and note values accurately. This subject formed part of the study of *musica practica*, which early mediaeval scholars distinguished from *musica specualativa*, a branch of learning drawn from the writings of Martianus Capella, Cassiodorus and, in particular, Boethius (481–525), whose *De institutione musica*

[1] G. R. Potter, 'Education in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries' in *The Cambridge Mediaeval History*, VIII. 689. See also Nan Cooke Carpenter, *Music in the Mediaeval and Renaissance Universities* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1958), pp. 337–48.

[2] Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, p. 559, n.