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RESTORATION CHURCH MUSIC

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RESTORATION CHURCH MUSIC

There has been a great revival of sixteenth-century Church music in the last fifty years, and the whole body of such music has been printed in the volumes of Tudor Church Music. This is a library edition and not a singer's edition: but a number of anthems, motets, and services are now available in a singer's edition. It is possible now for anyone to make a study of all Tudor Church music from the library edition, and for choirs to perform a considerable amount of this music from editions which are authoritative.

But it is not so with Restoration Church music. There is at present no group of musical scholars that is officially undertaking the editing of Restoration Church music. Much of it still remains only in manuscript in libraries in different parts of the country; and what has been edited and printed has often been edited somewhat incorrectly. This applies to music edited in the nineteenth century, and that in Boyce's three volumes of Church music. More recently published octavo editions, of which there are a fair number, can be taken to be authoritative.

But besides the difficulty of getting the music of much Restoration Church music, there are other hindrances to performing it. One is that many of the finest and most characteristic anthems of the period are written for choir, string orchestra, and organ. The string orchestra is an essential part of such anthems, and to perform them without strings is to rob them of much of their character.

It is more of an artistic indiscretion to do Purcell's Rejoice in the Lord with organ alone than it is to perform an excerpt from Messiah, such as 'And the glory of the Lord', in this

way. In the Handel chorus the orchestra is playing alone for a few bars only: in the Purcell anthem it has a much more individual part to play. There is a short orchestral prelude for orchestra alone, and there are passages of some length where orchestra and voices are used antiphonally. With a skilful organist the Handel chorus at least comes off, though it is not the real thing. Moreover, most listeners know their Messiah and have heard it with orchestra, and realize that the organ accompaniment is but a makeshift. But those who hear Purcell's Rejoice in the Lord sung without an orchestra, and with the orchestral interludes omitted (since not only are they not very effective on the organ but are also not even printed in the octavo edition), and in a version in which the rough edges of Purcell's writing have been smoothed away, can hardly be said to be hearing the anthem at all. It is but a shadow of the real thing. That, even thus, it should remain one of the most popular of Cathedral anthems is a testimony to the vigour and originality of the composer's music. But there must be many churches in which this weakened version of the anthem is the only music of Purcell's that is ever heard. Another hindrance to the performance of Restoration Church music, particularly of Purcell's and Blow's, is that many anthems are verse anthems of considerable length. These require singers—especially alto singers of ability if they are to be rendered effectively; and not many churches have the singers nowadays who can sing them. They may have one or two who are good enough, but not four or five. As an example, Blow's I Beheld and Lo! a Great Multitude contains very little chorus work: the anthem can only be sung with four really good singers, an alto, a tenor, and two basses.

It does not come within the scope of this paper to write a history of the composers and the music of this period. Such a history can be found in *English Cathedral Music*, by E. H. Fellowes. What is called for here is a reference to the most

notable composers of the period, and an endeavour to indicate what music of theirs can be sung by Church choirs to-day; and, here and there, how it should be sung.

By far the greatest composer of the period is Henry Purcell (1658-95). Purcell was much more than a Church composer. Like Stanford, whom many Church singers know only as a composer of a service in B flat, he was a composer of every type of music. His Church music may be grouped under three headings: (a) Anthems with Orchestra; (b) Anthems for Soloists and Chorus (verse anthems) with Organ; (c) Full Anthems with Organ (these can mostly be sung unaccompanied). The anthems with orchestra are the biggest and most important of his Church compositions; but they are perhaps not works that can be used normally as part of a service. They are works to be reserved for special occasions. Recently¹ some of them have been broadcast from King's College, Cambridge; in particular, a splendid performance of the finest one of all, the Coronation Anthem-My Heart is Inditing-by the combined choirs of St. John's, Trinity, and King's Colleges. It is at the universities, with their highly trained college choirs and their undergraduate string players, that these fine anthems might well be frequently performed. In parish churches, too, where there are large and well-trained voluntary choirs, they might be done on special occasions. But they cannot be used as the daily-or weekly-bread in cathedrals. Detailed examination of the anthems with orchestra is not possible here; but one anthem may be considered, the setting of Psalm 96 for strings, solo voices, and chorus. This is one of the few that have kept a place in Cathedral service lists. It is a good example of the variety of ways in which the composer employs the voices.

There is a long introduction for orchestra alone—then:

Verse 1. 'O sing unto the Lord' is set for bass solo, the chorus entering with a short phrase of 'Alleluias' at the

^{1 1948.}

end of each half of the verse. These Alleluias are in 3/2, and they should go quickly and with a lively rhythm (F major).

Verse 2: 'Sing unto the Lord': a contrapuntal setting for

four solo voices (D minor).

Verse 3. 'Declare his honour': bass solo; semi-recitative

with scale passages on the word 'wonder' (F major).

Verse 6. 'Glory and worship': entrance of full chorus, answered antiphonally by the strings (B flat, ending in D minor).

Verse 4. 'O worship the king': duet for treble and alto on a ground bass (F major): followed by an orchestral inter-

lude.

Verse 9. 'O worship the king': verse followed by chorus—slow time. This is a most moving and beautiful piece of

writing (F minor, ending in F major).

Verse 10. 'Tell it out among the heathen': bass solo and chorus. An exciting and brilliant solo with a Handelian run on the word 'round'. The whole verse wants a quick pace and unflagging rhythm (F major). To conclude there is an Alleluia for verse and chorus which reminds one of the

Evening Hymn.

Here, in one anthem there is, as it were, a bird's-eye view of Purcell's various styles in writing Church music. The three minim in a bar writing (as in verse 1) can be found again and again in the Church compositions. To be effective it must be sung quickly; to sing it in a church-like style is to destroy its character altogether. These 3/2 rhythms are usually dance rhythms and they should be sung at a pace that makes them sound as such. The conclusion of the Gloria to the service in G minor, for example, is dance music unashamed: to slow it down, to try to make it solemn, spoils it.

To continue consideration of 'O sing unto the Lord'. The bass solo in verse 2 is an example, though not an outstanding

one, of the composer's skill in setting words in a free semi-recitative style. A finer example is in *Be Merciful unto Me* (Novello) to the words 'Mine enemies are daily in hand'. This oratorical way of writing, this full and generous manner of rolling the voice about and yet keeping closely to the inflections of the spoken word, is characteristic. Purcell's use of the bass-voice 'solo' in his Church music is original and daring. Some of the big solos are of great difficulty and great compass; we are unlikely to hear them again in church: and if we ever should do, we should be likely to find them more astonishing than edifying. But in a solo such as the one just mentioned words and music move together perfectly.

Verse 6 of the anthem has choral writing, simple though it

is, of Handelian majesty.

Verse 4 (the order of the verses is transposed) the use of the ground bass. This is found more often in the secular than in the Church compositions.

Verse 9 shows us the composer of deeply felt and moving harmonies: one who could set the words 'Let the whole

earth stand in awe of him' with true insight.

Verse 10 gives us a solo of rollicking vitality, and an entrance of the chorus that is magnificent. The thrice-repeated "Tis he, 'tis he, 'tis he that hath made the round

world' is splendid.

The anthem ends with the Alleluia. Near its conclusion there is the lilting rhythm—a dotted crotchet and a quaver—that is found so often in Purcell and in other Restoration composers. It can be used, as it is here, with lovely effect: but there are times, as in the anthem, O Give Thanks, when one feels that it has an air of being busy about nothing in particular. It is a rhythm that had an appeal for another great English composer, Elgar: splendidly though he could use it one has the impression that he sometimes dropped into it for lack of anything better to do.

This anthem has been considered in some detail in order

to show the range of the composer's style in one work alone. The criticism likely to be made about it is that its effect in performance must be disjointed. This is a reasonable criticism, and one that can be made of verse anthems generally of the Restoration period. But if in performance the singers refrain from treating each section of the anthem as a separate number, as a piece to be concluded with a marked rallentando, this criticism to some extent falls to the ground. This particular anthem does not, in fact, sound disjointed: but in Blow's I Beheld and Lo a Great Multitude!, with its succession of short solos, the listener gets bored if there is a slowing up at the end of each solo. Another anthem, which is more straightforward and does not, like O Sing unto the Lord, require first-class soloists is Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem (Novello). This might well be performed as part of a service when a few strings can be collected. It has a splendid introduction for orchestra alone, and it can, if necessary, be sung full throughout. It is not particularly difficult or long; and, with its resonant orchestral part, much of it in D major, it is easy to make effective with only moderately accomplished players.

There is not space for detailed consideration of more of the anthems with orchestra. O Praise God in his Holiness is another fine anthem. Praise the Lord, O my Soul (the verse anthem, not the full-there are two of this title), has a tremendous bass solo. If Church choirs or choral societies would turn their attention to My Heart is Inditing, Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem, Rejoice in the Lord, O Sing unto the Lord, and would perform them with orchestral accompaniment, and prepare the performances with care and understanding, and with regard to the intentions of the composer, they would be doing a great work in making known masterpieces of English music which are still practically unknown-or at least unknown in their original form.

To turn to the second group, the verse anthems with organ

accompaniment. Those most generally sung in cathedrals are Thy Word Is a Lantern and O God, Thou Art my God. The first is not a very good anthem. The phrase 'Quicken me, O Lord', with some of the voices singing 'Quicken me' and the others 'O', comes near to being comic. There is a fine alto recitative; and a verse, 'They are the very joy of my heart', which is interesting not so much musically as because it is an example of the necessity of quick singing where the composer uses what may be called Handelian runs. Tradition lingers on, tradition being that Church music should be sung with a church-like restraint. But that will not do in a passage like this. These runs, though on a small scale, should have the same brilliance as Handel's in For unto us a Son is Born. Cathedral singers who will, quite rightly, roll off the Handel runs at a quick pace, will

jib at doing the same with Purcell's runs.

O God, Thou Artmy God (Novello) is a fine anthem, with an opening of great dignity that should be sung slowly. The last part of the anthem should go quickly: this is one of Purcell's 3/2 dance rhythms, and the whole character of the music is changed if the Alleluia passages are made to sound solemn, instead of being tossed backwards and forwards from decani to cantoris in a dance-like manner. There are not many verse anthems that can be sung to-day. One would like to hear Be Merciful unto Me (Novello) sung by three good lay-clerks, particularly the dramatic setting of the words 'Thou, O God, in thy displeasure shalt cast them down'. But it is a long anthem: times have changed, and so have singers, and these long-verse anthems, that are almost like concert pieces, do not fit very appropriately in services to-day. And often, as in this anthem, with its gabbling concluding Alleluia, the chorus writing is meagre and uninspired. There are a great many of these verse anthems, many of them not yet published in octavo editions.

When we come to the full anthems there are some that

should be in the repertoire of every good Church choir. It seems almost impossible of belief that the composer of some of the verse anthems was the composer also of such anthems as Hear my Prayer and Thou knowest, Lord, the Secrets of our Hearts (both Novello). Hear my Prayer is a supreme masterpiece: it is one not only of expression and feeling, but from a purely contrapuntal point of view. We are astonished at the skill with which the composer of this eight-part anthem combines two subjects and, with complete assurance, uses one of them in inversion. But these are only incidental things: it is the poignancy of the music, the clashing discords, and the wonderful way in which the anthem moves steadily to the climax at the end that makes this one of the most moving works in English Cathedral music. Like all eightpart anthems it is difficult to sing: but it deserves endless study and care in preparation. Equally beautiful is Thou knowest, Lord, the Secrets of our Hearts. This is a simple homophonic work within the powers of an average choir. Other anthems of a pathetic character are Save me, O God (S.S.A.T.T.B.); Remember not, Lord, our Offences; Lord, How Long Wilt Thou be Angry? These are anthems in what may be called the Cathedral style: they carry on, with a difference, the tradition of the sixteenth-century composers. An anthem that strikes a different note is the Ascension-Day Anthem, O all ye People, Clap your Hands. This requires a good choir, particularly good trebles since they are divided: the work is difficult. But it is a splendid piece of writing in Purcell's most vigorous and gallant style. It is written for two trebles, tenor, and bass. Perhaps the most beautiful of all the anthems with organ accompaniment is the Latin motet, Jehova quam multi sunt, which needs a good choir. At the end of this there is an example of the composer using his dotted rhythm (see above) at the words 'Jehova est salus super populum tuum'. There are several fine full anthems which are not available in octavo editions. O Lord God of Hosts is an eight-part anthem

of great dignity carrying on the sixteenth-century tradition. O God, Thou Hast Cast Us Out (Boyce's Collection), O Lord our Governour, O praise God in His Holiness are others. On the whole they are less interesting than the anthems with orchestra and the more pathetic full anthems already mentioned. But they bear witness to the diversity of style that Purcell employed in his Church music. In these big full anthems he is the traditional Church composer; the master of a contrapuntal manner; a composer carrying on the tradition of the sixteenth century. One anthem may be mentioned in conclusion: My Beloved Spake. This is a verse anthem with orchestra, but it suffers less than most by being sung to the organ alone, and it is less difficult than many of the long verse anthems. This Easter anthem, with its springlike music, ought to be heard in choirs that have two good basses, a tenor, and an alto for the verses.

There is little that need be said about the settings of the canticles. There is a complete service, morning and evening, in B flat. Except for the Benedicite this is not very interesting. The evening service in G minor has an extended and beautiful gloria for the sake of which the service is well worth doing. The effectiveness of the services depends on the singers: the services mostly consist of short verses for men, or men and trebles. Sung quickly, and without breaks between the verse sections, the services have some attractiveness. The great Te Deum in D for chorus, orchestra, and soloists hardly comes into a survey of Purcell's Church music since it is on too large a scale for performance at a service. But it is a work that choral societies should sing; or it might be performed when a number of Church choirs meet together for a Choral Festival.

The other great figure in Restoration Church music is John Blow (1648–1708). Both Purcell and Blow were organists at Westminster Abbey, Blow from 1668 to 1674 and

again from 1695 to his death, Purcell from 1674 to 1695. Like Purcell, Blow was a composer of much secular music as well as much Church music. His Church compositions are very numerous. There are anthems with orchestra; anthems, both verse and full with organ; a number of Latin motets, and about a dozen services. Of all this Church music only a comparatively small portion has been printed, and it is difficult to assess his position as a Church composer with only a proportion of his music available for study. Of his anthems with orchestra it can be said that little is known, except to the few musical scholars who have gone through the manuscripts and except for the very few that have been printed. Mr. Watkins Shaw, in an article on John Blow's Church Music, quotes twenty-eight anthems as having orchestral parts. Of these the most famous is the already-mentioned I Beheld and Lo! a Great Multitude; similar to it is I Was in the Spirit. (Actually this opening is an addition, and Blow's anthem begins at the words 'And I heard a great voice'.) Provided there are adequate verse singers both anthems make their effect, and they suffer far less than do Purcell's when they are done without orchestral accompaniment. These anthems catch the spirit of the words in an extremely picturesque way. (Both are published by Novello.) Of other anthems with orchestra, Sing we Merrily and Lift up your Heads are both available (Novello). Lift up your Heads is a fine anthem: it uses both verse and chorus with great effect at the words: 'Who is the king of glory?' It is moderately difficult. Of the unpublished anthems with orchestra the biggest and the finest is the Coronation Anthem: God Spake sometimes in Visions. Of the others, I Said in the Cutting Off of my Days, Arise, O Lord, and The Lord Is King-the last a very dignified work—are notable. But it is unlikely that these works will again find a place in Church services. Like Purcell's big anthems with orchestra, they are works that might 1 Music and Letters, Oct. 1938.

be heard at special occasions—that is, when editions are printed, so that they can be heard at all.

But it is different when we turn to the anthems for choir and organ, anthems that may be described as full, though many of them have short verse parts. Blow was obviously more inspired in the setting of words expressing grief and desolation than in those of praise. Some of his full anthems are of deep and pathetic beauty. The most moving of them all is the motet, Salvator Mundi (Novello), with its deeply expressive use of chromatic harmony. This is one of the great works in English Church music. Almost of equal beauty is the Passiontide Anthem, My God, my God (Curwen: also C. F. Simkins, Windsor). This is not difficult and can be sung unaccompanied. Like Purcell-and indeed many English composers—Blow had a sensitive understanding of the rise and fall of verbal accents, and it is this that makes his music so singable. Words and music are one. It may be mentioned about this anthem that in it Blow uses a definite form, having a recapitulation of his opening sectionedshortened-to conclude the anthem. Of the other anthems of a pathetic nature the best are perhaps, Be Merciful unto Me (O.U.P.), My Days Are Gone like a Shadow (O.U.P.), and Save me, O God, in Boyce's Collection. One of the finest of them all, O Lord God of my Salvation, is not published. This is an eight-part anthem. Such sentences as 'I am weary of crying', 'I am so fast in prison', are of the kind that appealed to the composer. Blow, and others of the Restoration composers, responded to what was picturesque or pathetic in words; and with Blow especially the picturesque-pathetic would generally incite him to write moving and unusual chromatic harmonies. Blow, indeed, was in some ways a rather casual composer; harmonic clashes, daring-or if you like incorrect-part-writing did not matter to him if he got the effect that he aimed at. Some of his so-called errors, for which he has been called to account, may be due to carelessness, some to carelessness in music copying: but it seems pretty clear that his 'errors' are in the main in his music because he wanted them there.

Another big eight-part anthem, God is our Hope and Strength (O.U.P.), is, perhaps, less successful. The eightpart writing is in this a little hectic and breathless, and one has a feeling that the composer has not command of a massive enough style to set these words. Massiveness is, indeed, the quality that the composers of this period had not got. There are a number of comparatively short anthems, published as Fourteen Full Anthems (O.U.P.), a few of which are of beauty. Again, it is the pathetic ones that are the better. My Days Are Gone and Be Merciful unto Me are both moving and beautifully written works. Of the jubilant anthems among these O Praise the Lord is one of the best: it shows the composer's sensitiveness to verbal rhythm where, at the words 'For he spake the word and they were made' he suddenly uses a triple rhythm in a work otherwise in duple rhythm. All these anthems can be sung by small choirs, and they are not difficult.

Of the many settings of the canticles a word or two must be said. The services of both Purcell and Blow are less interesting than the anthems. The Evening Service in the Dorian Mode, by Blow (O.U.P.), is an effective work in the sixteenth-century style in which decani and cantoris sing antiphonally. The Evening Service in G (Stainer and Bell) is printed (transposed to A). This again is a work influenced by the sixteenth century, though the writing is more angular and more restless than that of Elizabethan composers. But it is an effective work, particularly in the Glorias which are in canon. These two services, which are essentially works for Cathedral choirs, can be sung unaccompanied, as can the Evening Service in F (Novello).

In this short account of the Church music of the two greatest composers of the Restoration period little more than the fringe of their work can be said to have been considered. As regards Blow, so much of his work is in manuscript that a true estimate of its value cannot at present be made. His greatest contribution to Church music is his pathetic full anthems such as Salvator Mundi and My God, My God, which are clearly masterpieces that should be sung by all Cathedral and large parish church choirs.

This short article is concerned mostly with the Church music of Purcell and Blow, but a brief reference must be made to some other composers. Pelham Humfrey (1647-74). who spent three years abroad, wrote a number of anthems. Seven of these are in Boyce's Collection, and two are available in octavo editions: Hear, O Heavens (Novello), and Rejoice in the Lord (O.U.P.). The first—which is suitable for Advent—can be made effective provided that the singers can dovetail its rather disjointed phrases together effectively. Rejoice in the Lord is a straightforward verse anthem—with two tenors. Humfrey was evidently a composer of some distinction, but so little of his music is in print that his position can only be assessed by those diligent scholars who have gone to the manuscripts. There is a description of his finest anthem, By the Waters of Babylon, in English Cathedral Music (Fellowes). This the author considers to 'bear comparison with the finest even of Purcell's works'. It is to be hoped that some time or other this work will be published. The best-known anthems of Michael Wise (1648-77) are Awake up my Glory and Prepare ye the Way of the Lord (both Novello). Awake up my Glory has a pretty refrain that keeps returning like the theme of a rondo. Prepare ye the Way is unusual in having a verse for two trebles, employing a sort of echo effect. Both anthems are typical of the period in that they are broken up into short sections. It is this short-windedness, this rather brittle, miniature writing, that is one of the characteristics and the shortcomings of the Restoration Church anthems. And yet there is a good deal of beauty about both the anthems; once having heard Wise's setting of 'And the voice said Cry', which are the words to the little two-treble echo verse, one feels that the music to which they have been set is inevitable and the right music, and one cannot imagine the words being set to anything else. It is not great music, but it is music of charm. The most beautiful of Wise's anthems is The Ways of Zion Do Mourn (Bailey and Ferguson), suitable for Holy Week. It is, perhaps, too long, but it is possible to make a cut in it. The account of the afflictions of Zion is given to a bass soloist, while a treble voice interposes from time to time with the words 'For these things I weep, mine eye runneth down with water', set to a beautiful little tune. It is simple, almost childish music, but again one feels it is exactly the right music for the words.

Thomas Tudway and William Turner are two other composers of the period; none of their works are sung to-day, and none are available in singing editions. Tudway made an immense collection of sixteenth- and seventeenthcentury music. Turner's name remains known through the Club Anthem which was written by him in conjunction with Blow and Pelham Humfrey. An anthem of his that awaits performance some time is The King Shall Rejoice. This is still in manuscript. It is highly spoken of in English Cathedral Music.

Two more composers may be mentioned who overlap both the Restoration period and the eighteenth century. William Croft (1678-1727) was a voluminous composer of Church music, and his works still have a place in service lists. His outstanding contribution is his setting of the funeral sentences from the Burial Service. This, if not great music, has a moving solemnity and simplicity. His anthems are not very notable. God is Gone Up is effective if the choir can be persuaded to sing it quickly. It is rather academic in style, though the verse, which is the second number of the anthem,

is in a pretty dance rhythm. Cry aloud and Shout is again a rather dull, academic work; the repetition of the word 'Great' seven times in quick succession must have been intended to sound imposing; in effect it barely escapes sounding comicif it does escape it. Others of his anthems are We will Rejoice and Sing praises unto the Lord. A finer anthem than any of the above is O Lord, Rebuke Me Not (O.U.P.). But, taken all round, one feels that Croft is a worthy rather than an in-

spired composer.

Jeremiah Clarke (1659-1707) has one anthem of the several that he wrote that still is sometimes sung. I Will Love Thee, O Lord is a fine work, mostly for tenor and bass in solos or duets. The bass solo, 'The Sorrows of Death', is a dignified setting of the words, with a very effective organ accompaniment: and the whole anthem is on a bigger scale than many Restoration anthems-that is to say, that its separate sections are not so short that they are gone almost before one has realized that they have started, as in some anthems of the period. It has a tremolo effect at the words 'the earth trembled', though perhaps choirs to-day have not the courage, or the lack of self-consciousness, to attempt this. There is a brilliant thunder and lightning duet for tenor, bass, and organ, and a concluding chorus which, if rather short for the finish of a big anthem, is yet a pretty piece of writing that carries on in a four-part setting the music that has already been heard from the soloists. The charm of the anthem lies in the simple tunes that the soloists sing, and in the composer's enjoyment of his simple effects-the 'trembling' of the earth, and the thunder and the lightning.

The Restoration period of Church music is, particularly when we compare it with the great period that preceded it, a rather childlike and naïve period in English music. Though many of the anthems are long, they are on a small scale. In a way these composers were tone poets-musicians who were exceptionally responsive to what was picturesque in the

words that they set. A picture in the words means a picture in the music. When Purcell sets 'They that go down to the sea' his solo voice will go down-and the whole way from the top note to the bottom. So with Blow in I Beheld and Lo! when the four and twenty elders 'fell down', they do so very much in the music as well as in the words. When Purcell sets 'They hold altogether, and keep themselves close', the three verse singers sing adjacent notes on the word 'close'. They must be close musically. Taken all round Restoration Church music is picturesque music on a miniature scale. It is far less spacious than the music of the sixteenth century, and less dull than most of that of the eighteenth century. That is looking at the period as a whole. Purcell's great anthems with orchestra and Blow's anthems of pathos are, however, vital contributions to music. Indeed, Purcell's anthems, with their gallant rhythms and clashing harmonies, are a refreshment to anyone who may have dwelt too long with modal or contrapuntal music. They bear witness to the fact that great Church music need not be church-like.

[Note. A list of the Octavo Editions of Church music by the composers referred to is printed in A Repertoire of English Cathedral Music, published by the Church Music Society. Jeremiah Clarke's I Will Love Thee, O Lord, not in this list, is published by Novello.]