

In spite of what was said in the opening of this essay, such a passage might very well be pondered for the illumination it throws on the 'works'. The implications constitute a very salutary corrective for the still current sentimentalization of Swift.

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TOWARDS A CONCEPTION OF MUSICAL TRADITION (II):

VOICE AND DANCE IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES (II)

V.

I said early on that the triumph of sixteenth century technique contained latent in it the seeds of its destruction. It is this process—which is also the end of the mediaeval world—that we have now to examine. Broadly speaking there are two aspects of it, which became related; one of them purely destructive, the other re-creative. The destructive aspect is the phenomenon known as chromaticism; the re-creative one is the increasing influence of the dance.

The emergence of chromaticism we have already referred to in our discussion of the inflectional nature of sixteenth century tonality; and we also saw how the association of chromaticism with specifically harmonic expressive effects was evidence of latent dramatic tendencies which in general sixteenth century composers weren't interested in exploiting. Quite apart from chromaticism there is an undoubted feeling for what we would call 'harmonic' expression in many of the purely chordal passages. The famous triads at the opening of Palestrina's *Stabat Mater* are certainly the consequence of pure part-writing, and melodic in technique; but I think there can be little doubt that the composer used that particular kind of extremely simple note-for-note part-writing because he wanted the peculiarly solemn harmonic effect which is produced by that succession of melodically rather than harmonically related triads, with their supple elusive rhythm. It is easy to see that in passages in which the chromatically inflected semitones appear the most astonishing relations between triads could occur, relations which are the more subtle and surprising as the parts overlap. As Peter Warlock has pointed out, their effect was entirely towards

the destruction of the vocally founded modal system and not at all (as the history books used to suggest) in the direction of the new diatonicism. They led rather to 'the modern juxtaposition of diatonically remote chords in a sequence that is logically justified by a thread of melody'. The possibilities were no doubt first realized through the continual juxtaposition of major and minor thirds in false relation ; and most of the composers, particularly Marenzio, Weelkes, Dowland and Lasso, achieved effects of tremendous intensity through the distortions and modifications of a vocal texture occasioned by an intertwined chromatic scale part. Such passages were of course always exceptional, and in church music very rare ; in secular music they were always associated with highly charged emotional conceptions such as grief, love, pain, etc., and were essentially short-lived. The main effect of chromaticism is to break down the long flowing vocal line characteristic of the sixteenth century polyphony ; to splinter the vocal modality into chromatic fragments which concentrate attention on the poignant incidental harmonic drama. Significantly Lasso, who used chromaticism quite a lot in the middle of his life, discarded it from his most mature work and returned to the traditional vocal methods. The noble mellifluous line of a Palestrina mass or the intense grandeur of a mass of Byrd are remote from the violence of chromaticism which, intensely personal and usually very melancholy, emphasizes the individual passionate drama of harmony and tends to reduce melody to the condition of declamation. Sixteenth century polyphony had grown up as the sublimation of speech intonation into lyricism ; through chromaticism the lyrical line again disrupts ; but backed by harmony the disrupted line becomes the vehicle for the new humanistic impulses. Chromaticism is a phenomenon which seems to occur when civilizations are in a transitional phase. We find the supreme Renaissance representative of it in Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa, who epitomises the breakdown of modalism and the mediaeval order just as Wagner and Delius, two other harmonic-chromatic composers whose work is remarkable for its indefiniteness of melodic contour, epitomise the breakdown of diatonicism and the civilization of the modern world. (Warlock cites some amazingly close parallel passages from the three composers). Gesualdo's astonishing music shows a superlative gift for the wailing fervent phrase and for audacious strings of inflectionally coloured harmonies (chromaticism, the theorists held, literally gave 'colour' to music) which are related only by the most tenuous enharmonic tied note or sometimes (like Delius's) by nothing at all except the continuity of 'feeling'. But these phrases are not seen, as are Weelkes' and Marenzio's chromaticisms or those in the marvellous lute fancies of Dowland, in relation to a wider vocal context. They are in essence dramatic, fragmentary, even operatic. They are related not so much to the great polyphonists as to the new technique of Monteverdi, with its passionate declamation and vivid 'vertical' harmonies in which abrupt contrasts of tonality (presaging 'shape' music) are used for explicitly dramatic effect. The choral version of Monte-

verdi's *Lasciate mi morire* is quite close in method to the madrigals of Gesualdo, but it accomplishes with great lyrical power, poise and maturity what Gesualdo was merely tentatively feeling towards. Despite its assured mastery of traditional polyphonic technique its attitude manifests a definite breach with the past. There can be little doubt that Monteverdi's example taught some of the later English composers, especially Weelkes in such a miracle as 'O Care thou wilt despatch me', how the *dramatic* potentialities of chromaticism were not irreconcilable with the old methods, even though such a compromise must prove ultimately abortive.

Significantly Gesualdo's music is so unvocal in its transitions that it seems probable that it must have been sung with instrumental doubling; it has even been suggested that Gesualdo may have been the first composer to compose 'at the keyboard', a procedure which would have been unthinkable to Palestrina or Byrd or Bach, whose 'feeling' was always inseparable from craftsmanship. Gesualdo is the first 'romantic', the ultimate triumph over the mediaeval attitudes of the more individualistic attitudes of Renaissance culture. Man, with his passions and desires, has become the centre of his universe rather than a contributory cog in the universe of God. Perhaps we may say that opera—the conscious discovery of the relation between music and language (and therefore life)—became necessary only when the more intuitive relation between life and speech, speech and poetry, poetry and song, characteristic of the earlier 'religious' society, had all but passed away.⁸ At any rate one of the main motives behind the seventeenth century operatic venture was the desire to make the words expressive and audible, conversational, rather than lost in the mazes of outmoded polyphony. Maybe men like Caccini and Peri, with their rather pedestrian declamation, didn't realize that sixteenth century polyphony was perhaps the most successful solution of the speech-song relation which has ever been achieved. Yet in a sense of course they were right; the time had come for a change because the temper of life had changed. Seventeenth century operatic declamation was the first of European music's returns to contemporary speech (we are witnessing another today); out of it Monteverdi and later Purcell were to evolve the new lyrical efflorescence—which at the same time did not altogether forget the old. It is interesting to note that whereas Gesualdo's latently operatic

⁸*Cf.* Jeppesen: 'The older music (*musica mondana*) has a quality that seems to open out on the universe, something cosmic. It is as though the music frees itself of individualistic bonds, glides away and dissolves into space. Of the newer music (*musica humana*) it might be figuratively said that it also strikes against the limits of the individual but is hurled back on itself and condensed into the individually characteristic. The tension arising from the process finds its resolution in the accent (in its extreme form the free dissonance). The epochs separate at this point for only the new music has the violent, vehement emphasis'.

chromaticism not only broke down the old order but also helped to release the impulses which were to achieve a new social formalization through the interoperation of the new dance shapes, culminating in the great 'social' structure of the eighteenth century sonata; Wagner's chromaticism takes the wheel full circle, and here an essentially dramatic, theatrical art attempts once more to establish *religious* and textural significance. In Gesualdo we see the transition from vocal melody to harmony, from the church and the communal conception to the stage and the individual conception, effected more or less unconsciously; in Wagner we see the individual Ego (only a capitalized one seems adequate) consciously striving to attain a cultus of religious validity. A Palestrina Mass and Wagner's *Parsifal* are thus the absolute inverse of each other. In the Palestrina the unfolding vocal lines make the harmony, the 'personal' expression; in *Parsifal* an attempt is deliberately made to derive a 'new polyphony' from the basic surge of harmonic feeling and the passion of the individual by 'spreading out' chromatic chord formations into indeterminate linear motives. Wagner's harmonically generative music, as against the melodically generative music of Palestrina, was the inevitable consequence of the nineteenth century's increasing preoccupation with the individual, the attempt to find him a *raison d'être* now that the social hierarchy of the eighteenth century had crumbled. The prelude to *Tristan* is a formal discovery which as far as it goes is unanswerable; however we may feel that it represents a catastrophic decline of civilization compared with the Palestrina, we cannot dispute its amazing genius.

VI.

Chromaticism marks the emergence of the 'dramatic' instinct but only through association with the dance do the new individualistic attitudes achieve formal coherence. The increasing influence of the dance on polyphonic technique was to some extent fostered by the extremely homogeneous imitative entries of the lighter madrigals, because the answering of voices inevitably implies a technique in which is latent the harmonic idea of sequence. This is not often the case in the long fluid melodies of the church music but is distinctly noticeable in Wilbye's superb *Draw on Sweet Night*, which is mainly diatonic, though very plastically so: still more is it noticeable in fugal madrigals, like those of Morley and Jones, with relatively brief and pithy subjects, and in the vocal-cum-instrumental technique of Byrd's six-part string Fantasia. Such things as these provide a link between polyphonic technique and the more or less symmetrical dance-songs and dances proper. This was important because, as we saw in the first section, the possibility of harmonic sequence and modulation was alone to make possible the extension of dance pieces into musical compositions which could challenge the polyphonic motets in range and seriousness of purpose. Chromaticism brought home the dramatic potentialities of harmony; the dance shapes were to indicate how these dramatic influences could be given formal significance.

The link was effected through the development of solo song with instrumental accompaniment. Very early there was manifested a natural tendency in the simpler strophic dance songs for the interest to become centred melodically in the top line, the other lines making perfectly good part writing and being always interesting in themselves to play or sing, but fulfilling a subservient function in the whole scheme—a tendency encouraged by the simpler folk dance variations in which the tunes were often diatonic (or strictly speaking Ionian). Many of the exquisite French *chansons*—the work of men like de Costeley, du Caurroy, and Bertram—were habitually sung either chorally or by a solo voice with the other parts played on viols and recorders (a medium of great purity and delicacy). The combination of extremely simple, balanced dance structure with traces of the customary rhythmic and modal plasticity gives these songs a kind of virginal tenderness, combined with an aristocratic sophistication, which is peculiarly moving, and which is not exactly paralleled by the dainty elegance of the English ballets and fa-las, also designated as being ‘apt for voices or viols’. (Originally of course the ballets were literally danced songs or sung dances).

Gradually, as the interest increasingly centred in the top line, the lower parts became less melodically defined and (which was still more important) the character of the main line itself became slightly modified. This is particularly noticeable in the songs which Thomas Whythorne published in 1571. A big contrapuntal piece such as *Since I embrace the heavenly grace*, though diatonic is clearly in the old tradition and can be adequately performed only with the polyphonic chorus; but songs like *It doth belong more of good right* and *As the Shadow* are equally clearly solo lyrical tunes, with accompanying parts, and the tunes themselves, while having their roots in English folk-song (Warlock pointed out the resemblance between *As the Shadow* and *Greensleeves*) seem to point forward to the great ‘shape’ composers of the early eighteenth century. They have indeed a magnificent sweep and majesty, completely diatonic with clearly defined modulations to the dominant and an architectural balance of clause against clause which though in a sense fresher in feeling, one might almost call Handelian. They are simple and noble and *easily memorable*; tunes rather than the highly subtle and unobtrusive melodic lines of sixteenth century polyphony proper; (unobtrusive because the effect is always conceived with reference to the combination of lines one with another). Although not actually intended for performance with an instrument, they are in fact more ‘modern’ in outlook than almost all the lute songs which followed, or than the beautiful songs of Byrd for voice with strings, the great vitality of which depends on the completeness with which the old polyphonic tradition and the new declamatory and instrumental experiments were reconciled. Even in Campion, musically one of the least interesting of the lutenist song writers, one can see how polyphonic rhythm, speech rhythm and strophic dance-song are merged with character-

istic fluidity ; while Dowland in his late work (his first book is closer in method to the French dance-songs published by Tessier) soars far beyond the limitations of strophic instrumental music and beyond the fragmentary chromaticism of a Gesualdo. Significantly as Warlock remarked, his greatest work, *The Pilgrimes Solace*, is both his most polyphonic and also that in which his most advanced harmonic chromaticisms appear. The setting of the words is as passionately sensitive as Monteverdi not only rhythmically and in the 'expressive' progressions it gives rise to, but also in the polyphonically created harmony of the lute part ; and beyond this expressiveness the song line is sublimated to an immense arching plasticity (again with trope-like melismatic decorative detail) which is musically completely self-subsistent and which has been rivalled only very seldom in European music (say in Perotin, some troubadour songs, Palestrina, Lasso, Byrd and among later composers Bach and Berlioz). In such stupendous songs as *From silent night* and *In darknesse let me dwell* we have superb examples of music that is local in its foundations and European in comprehensiveness and range. They were written in 1612—within three or four years of Byrd's Five Part Mass, the greatest music of Gibbons and Bull, not to mention the most mature poetry of Donne, Jonson and Shakespeare. In all we see the merging of the local with the European ; in all we see that the changing attitudes of the Renaissance, with their ultimate economic implications, seem to have been necessary for the old order to achieve its supremely consummate incarnation. All had divided sympathies ; but in general I think the musicians were closer to the old world than the poets. In all the versatility and range of mood and attitude which we can observe in Byrd's work as a whole, we do not find any of the bewilderment, the sense of false appearances and the reversal of values, which was consequent on the onslaught of 'gold' and commerce on the old manorial order ; we find nothing analogous to the phenomenon of the Malcontent and Seventeenth Century Melancholy (the initial Poor Law, we remember, is dated 1600), or to the sardonic humour of Jonson, the macabre farce of Tourneur, or the disillusion and disgust which temporarily afflicted Shakespeare. The closest musical approach to Seventeenth Century Melancholy is in some of the most intense ayres and the chromatic lute fancies of Dowland, a few songs of Alfonso Ferrabosco the Younger, John Danyel's astonishing *Chromaticke Tunes*, and the bigger keyboard works of that dark and saturnine genius with the ludicrously inappropriate name of John Bull. The position of Bull in the Jacobean musical scene is peculiarly interesting. Deeply rooted as is his finest music in the old polyphony, his work and personality are pregnant with intimations of the future. Alone among his contemporaries he is first and foremost a keyboard composer rather than a vocal one ; and his almost legendary reputation as organist and virginalist itself suggests a kinship with the new, more exhibitionistic attitudes, quite apart from the implications of 'the development of Keyboard Technique.' Again, his fame on the

continent, both for virtuosity and learning, was even greater than his fame in England (we may compare the continental reputation of the lute virtuoso Dowland), and it was during his travels that he became acquainted with Sweelinck, under whose influence, probably, he indulged in those intrepid enharmonic experiments the full significance of which was not to be revealed until a later age. Even his greatest music—the big *in nomines*, variations and pavans—which is entirely sixteenth century in approach, is imbued, through an unusual prevalence of accented dissonant passing notes, false relations and inflectionally augmented intervals, with a singularly gloomy and enigmatic passion; while the brilliant vitality of the keyboard writing (consider the whirling, cascading fioritura in the bass parts of the galliards) itself tends to render this passion more directly and humanistically dramatic than the more religious (if no less intense) keyboard style of Gibbons. (The beautiful portrait of Bull in the Oxford Music School is completely in keeping—from the long sad face with its piercing fiery eyes to the skull and hour-glass in the background; it is not surprising that John Bull was the kind of person around whom picturesque anecdotes ('it must have been the Devil or John Bull', etc.) accumulate. We remember the parallel if vulgarized case of the nineteenth century virtuosos, Liszt and Paganini). But Bull's music, like that of Dowland and Ferrabosco and Danyel, has always a lyrical ardour and maturity that makes it more comparable with the tragic intensity of Donne than with Ford or Webster. So far as I know Gesualdo is the only musical Melancholic.

VII.

The French chansons, the choral ayres of Whythorne, the conversationally rhythmized airs of the French lutenists such as Guedron and Boeset, and the work of the minor English lutenists song writers were none of them 'dramatic' in the modern sense; even the great songs of Luis Milan and Dowland and Danyel were much more impersonal in their tremendous passion than the declamatory Monteverdi. Their presentation of 'emotion' is less explicit; Byrd's *Tancred and Gismunda* is an isolated approach to the Italian theatricality. But the developing shapes of solo song and dance provided the framework within which the ostensible harmonic expressiveness and declamatory rhetoric of the operatic attitudes were to establish themselves; in order to understand how this establishment took place we might profitably confine our attention to England for a moment and contrast two English composers of the beginning and end of the seventeenth century. These composers are Gibbons and Purcell.

Orlando Gibbons, probably England's greatest composer after Byrd, was born in 1583 and died in 1625. His most significant work was written in the last fifteen years of his life, when Byrd was about seventy, Bull over fifty, and the great church composers of the preceding generation—Tallis, Whyte and Tye—were dead. In temperament and attitude he was essentially a man of the past

order. At a time when the English madrigal was virtually dead he made some of the finest contributions to the genus in an idiom more austere and elaborately polyphonic than that of almost any of the masters of the madrigalian age proper, except Byrd, and although he sometimes wrote delicately tender madrigals such as *Dainty Fine Bird*, they have always a peculiar wistfulness and chaste melancholy; even his exceptional contributions to the strophic choral ayre, such as the famous *The Silver Swan*, have this typical mournful nobility and are much more polyphonic in treatment than is usually the case. His most characteristic madrigals—usually on philosophical subjects such as ‘What is this Life?’—are indistinguishable in kind from his big church anthems, and show greater independence of part-writing, fewer homophonic passages and a more severely ‘vocal’ (though very personal) harmonic idiom than we find in any of the Tudor composers except Byrd at his greatest. So complex are the rhythms, so subtly are the lines ‘framed to the life of the words’, and so habitually elliptical the entries, that the music of the great anthems, services and madrigals might almost be considered the ultimate culmination of the sixteenth century polyphonic outlook: and yet beside these things there are other church works of Gibbons—verse anthems and services—written for solo voices with organ accompaniment in a style, first tentatively investigated by Byrd, which seems to presage the operatic declamation of Pelham Humphrey and Purcell—the shifting of music’s centre of social gravity from the church to the stage. Even in the polyphonic church music itself there are sometimes rapid melismatic scale passages, particularly in cadences, which give intimation of the very different effect to which such virtuoso vocal writing will be put in the operatic melody of seventeenth century composers such as the brothers Lawes. Such a verse anthem as *This is the record of John*, for solo voices, chorus and strings is similar in method and in its reconciliation of diverse tendencies to some of the dramatic madrigals of Monteverdi.

Fine as are some of these experimental works, Gibbons’ greatest achievements are undoubtedly his polyphonic compositions; and in view of his natural proclivities and of the time at which he worked it is significant both that he should be, with Bull, the greatest and most prolific of English instrumental composers, and also that his mature instrumental work should be consistently polyphonic in outlook. Gibbons’ most ‘modern’ sounding keyboard pieces such as *King’s Juelk* with its more or less consistent major sevenths and its neat little sequences, are almost all early works; and the most vocal and inflectional in line and rhythm (such as the great four part organ Fantasia or the Fancy in Gamutt flatt) are, as in the case of Dowland, late works which also contain his most profound and poignant harmonic irregularities. The big pavans and galliards too, and a marvel of contrapuntal workmanship such as the *Hunts Up* variations, with their noble ‘vocal’ lines flowering into a passionate florid keyboard arabesque clearly related to the melismatic passages in the vocal works, are both ‘new’ in the sense that they are genuinely

instrumental music and 'old' in the sense that they are the creation of a mind powerfully rooted in the past. This is equally true of the amazingly complex string fantasias, so subtly vocal in their rhythm that even competent professional string players often, nowadays, find them unplayable. And yet with their repeated notes and sequential passages their technique is genuinely that of string music, quite distinct from the idiom of Gibbons' vocal works; and though they are of the past, they are a tradition that Matthew Locke and Purcell and the other Restoration theatre composers were nurtured on. We might even say that there are connections between the impulses behind them, and Bach. Nor do I know where, outside Bach, one can find organ music of a subtlety and concentration comparable with that of Gibbons.

The merging of tendencies which is only latent in Gibbons becomes explicit in Purcell, the third greatest figure (many would say the second) in our musical history. Purcell's early string fantasias, which many consider his finest works, were deliberately written as exercises in the old—in Gibbons'—manner, and are essentially vocal and fugal in the sixteenth-century sense. In their melodically created, intensely poignant augmented intervals and false relations, their contrapuntal ingenuity and rhythmic plasticity, they are an amazingly mature achievement for a man of twenty-two, and a tribute to the vitality of a great tradition. The last of them, the five part fantasia 'on one note' is indeed a kind of swan-song of this tradition, for we see here the sixteenth-century technique of instrumental *in nomine*, which in turn was derived from the mediaeval technique of the vocal polyphonic decoration of the plainsong or folk-tune, carried to its ultimate extreme; the plainsong melody is lengthened out, beyond recognition, until, in the Purcell, it has become one continuous note. At the same time the more *dramatic*—relative to Gibbons—quality of the repeated false relations in, say, the fourth 4-part fantasy can be traced to the continual overlapping of phrases that, compared with Gibbons' long-breathed fluidity, are short and strikingly memorable; and though in general the rhythmic conception is that of the earlier 'religious' attitudes, in the quick sections we can observe a peculiarly lively (and latently theatrical) sense of physical movement which is foreign to the temper and purpose of the string music of Gibbons.

For increasingly through Purcell's career we can see that, despite his roots in the sixteenth-century attitudes and in English folk-song, he was striving to discover the 'new' idiom of the English language which should be adequate to the changed emotional and social conceptions. His problem was, how to achieve a kind of declamation which grew out of the way people spoke and thought at the time, and not out of traditional preconceptions about how to write for voices; and complementarily how to make the simple metrical dances of the concerted spectacle of the masque (which demanded a superficial lilt to which feet could be stamped and stylized groupings arranged) reconcilable with the power of this declamation, and capable of dramatic development. He tackled

these problems from both sides. In the first place he endeavoured to reconcile his declamatory conception with the theatre dance by making it depend for its dramatic effect on being sung in strict time—he evolved an extremely subtle compromise between speech accent and metrical accent much as Bach was to do later, and created a model for the merging of declaimed English verse into lyrical song which has never been surpassed. (Consider the manner in which the robust lyrical tune at the end of that fine song *The Aspiration* grows out of the vigorously sensitive preceding declamation). This rhythmic dramatic declamation, as opposed to the unmeasured declamation of the Florentines, was a necessary preliminary to the attempt to achieve a union between dramatic declamation with harmonic accompaniment and the formalism of the dance; having established it, Purcell could proceed to tackle his problem from the other end—to develop the latent dramatic possibilities of the dance by exploring the possibilities of diatonicism. He made dramatic declamation more consistent with the dance, and the dance more potentially dramatic.

His first attempt to extend the dance form was by way of a technique much favoured by seventeenth-century composers—that of the ground bass, which provides a link between polyphonic treatment and dance shape (for there is no more obvious way of extending a dance than by perpetual repetition!) No composer, not even Bach, has excelled Purcell at the playing of plastic lyrical lines against the repeated shape figure, so that the metrical and melodic accents continually come in different places, as we may see from, among many examples, that superb (and curiously Bachian) song *Solitude*, with its passionate soaring lines rooted in the language and its dark chromaticisms in harmony, now conceived in the explicitly chordal form of the instrumental continuo. But of course the ground bass technique was essentially lyrical and reflective, not dramatic; and although Purcell never discarded it, as he developed he increasingly turned to diatonicism with its possibilities of groupings of tonal centres, as both a more satisfactory method of extending the dance structure and also as one more easily reconcilable with his operatic declamation. Thus whereas *Dido* is constructed on a basis of the alternation of recitative with metrical dances, the big dramatic climaxes all being marked by the placing of one of the great lyrical-reflective arias on a ground bass, the later *Diocletian* is built on a rudimentary system of key contrast, with some recapitulation of tonal centres in the concluding section. In developing these new methods Purcell turned from his native traditions towards Italy (and later France), where the great school of violin composers had already developed the diatonic sonata-shape while Monteverdi and Carissimi developed the operatic conventions. (The explicitly dramatic opera and the implicitly dramatic sonata were, as we shall see in our next article, mutually influential; for instance Professor Dent has demonstrated how the splitting up of the operatic words for dramatic effect led to the introduction of short rhythmical phrases which became the instrumental 'themes'

of the sonata.) Purcell complained of the barbarity and provinciality of his local traditions; he sought Italian elegance just as Dryden insisted on the necessity for French polish. Up to a point he was quite right; the methods of the Italian violin school were those of the future and they showed already a mature understanding of what was always to be the fundamental problem of sonata or shape music—how to reconcile the architectural balance of phrases with lyrical drive and fluidity. But I think it is significant that there is now a much more self-conscious insistence on the necessity for a connection between the local and the European than would have been conceivable to Byrd or Dowland. Both Dryden and Purcell owed much of their strength to native traditions; Purcell's roots in folk-song and the Elizabethans are clear in the modal flavour of many of his great strophic tunes and in their habitually irregular rhythms (what variety of phrase grouping there is in Purcell compared with the eighteenth century's 'forming fours' in music, in highly developed military discipline, in Palladian architecture and what else!), and there is always the contact with the language, the typical snapped syncopations and drooping diminished fifths that make Purcell's idiom so personal and immediately recognizable. 'A Song,' he said, 'is the exaltation of Poetry'; but perhaps there is not quite the almost intuitive relation between folk composer and art composer which in the time of Byrd gave evidence as to the manner in which the surviving manorial order preserved an organic contact between all classes of society. Purcell is a theatre composer, and that entails too the idea of a body of people addressed rather than themselves participating. Both Byrd and Purcell were composers for the home, but whereas Byrd wrote for the home and church, Purcell wrote for the home and theatre, for the coffee-house mentality. It is true that Purcell composed some magnificent church music, but Byrd would not have recognized it as such. The difference is not that Purcell's music is more passionate than Byrd's—it isn't—but that the presentation of the emotion is more explicit (and harmonic); more, as we say, theatrical. The way Purcell's art was tending is indicated in dramatically conceived works like the Playford Elegy with their mingling of accompanied declamation and the old ground bass aria with European diatonic sophistication and the architecture of the key system. The neatest instance of the new order is in the late sonatas for two violins with continuo. Here the contrapuntal movements are explicitly instrumental in approach, with brief metrical diatonic 'subjects' which are developed not by fluid lyrical growth but by key grouping, so that they are a compromise between polyphonic and homophonic procedure. On the other hand the slow movements are operatic vocal arias transcribed for violin, to the accompaniment of dramatic chromatic harmonies in the continuo part. Undoubtedly Purcell's compromise produced some of the most beautiful music in the European tradition; yet ultimately it failed as 'the sixteenth century compromise' hadn't failed, and the reasons for its failure—and the failure of the operatic venture of Pelham Humphrey (probably, after Purcell,

potentially the most talented composer England produced for over two hundred years), Blow and Matthew Locke—were of course fundamentally social and economic.

With the reasons for this failure in England we are not here concerned ; but we may point out that the results of the failure are very clearly revealed in such eighteenth-century phenomena as *The Beggars' Opera*, since we can see here the beginning of the patronising attitude to the 'folk' which is evidence of the deep cultural split, and which would have been as inconceivable to Byrd as to the mediaeval composer who used the tunes of the folk (such as the famous *L'Homme Armé* or the *Westron Wynde*) along with the plainsong melodies as the thread round which to crystallize the lines of his polyphony, so that art music and folk music, and monody and polyphony, are both technically and sociologically complementary. In the eighteenth century Dr. Pepusch (who was a man of considerable intelligence, with a genuine love of the English musical tradition) dresses up the 'quaint old' tunes according to Gay's diatonic prescription, as an amusing entertainment for a relatively sophisticated town audience. This is a technique quite distinct from that of the Elizabethan virginalists, to whom folk song was an omnipresent reality of their musical experience so that the local element and the European lived together without shame and on equal terms ; in a great work such as Bull's *Walsingham* it is impossible to say which is the more beautiful, the folk tune itself or the art-composer's realization of its polyphonic and figurative possibilities ; because the folk tune is not a musical entity which the art-composer takes over and 'treats', it is a part of his living experience which in a sense—in so far as there were then no artificial barriers between folk-composer and art-composer—he helped to create. The Tudor composer did not think of music as 'entertainment' in the same way as did the composer of the later eighteenth century. At least in so far as music was entertainment for them (and much of the best of it was in the first place homage to God) it was active rather than passive entertainment, music to perform rather than to listen to. It is interesting to compare Byrd's famous remark quoted at the head of this essay (there are similar statements from Vittoria, Palestrina and Bach) with the account of the function of music offered by Dr. Burney in the eighteenth century : 'An innocent Luxury, unnecessary indeed to our Existence, but a great improvement and gratification of the sense of Hearing.'

VIII.

But of course England was exceptional in the rapidity with which the vitality of her Renaissance humanism turned sour and was stifled in the allied phenomena of Puritanism, commercialism and industrialism, so that the native idiom, dominated by foreign models, did not re-emerge until the twentieth century. Mammoth performances of the *Messiah*, interspersed with Songs by Mrs. Arne and Comic Interludes by Mr. Arne, sanctioned once and for all the divorce between Art and Entertainment, and popular Sentiment (the

roast beef of old England) became increasingly factitious, identified with the interests of the ruling classes. (The eulogy of the Chosen Race, sung in the *Messiah* with an admirable manly gusto, has become, in *Elijah*, a double-faced snivel). On the continent the black-out process was delayed for a hundred more 'glorious' years; if Purcell, for all his genius, proved culturally abortive, composers in Italy, Germany and France were to achieve the consummate expression of the civilization of the modern world (previous to the machine age) which we in England by-passed. Curiously enough one of the first works completely to express the new humanistic outlook was written deliberately in the old technique. As early as 1594 that amazing comic genius Orazio Vecchi wrote a work called *Amfiparnasso, comedia harmonica*, which although designed as a series of polyphonic madrigals, is virtually a 'concert' opera without action, not merely in the fact that it tells a dramatic story with elaborate characterization but in the whole temper of its conception. The polyphony is of singular flexibility and the resultant harmony peculiarly audacious, as one would expect in a latently dramatic work. Whereas the chromatic madrigals of Gesualdo have a somewhat tentative and experimental quality, in the *Amfiparnasso*, the old vocal polyphony, the tradition of the commedia del Arte, harmonic chromaticism and dance measure mingle with a brilliance that rivals Monteverdi himself. This work, the immediate product of a period in European history which has many points in common with our own, should be given a contemporary performance. Its glittering wit and sophistication should be congenial to modern audiences while its lyrical fervour should induce a salutary humility. It is remarkable for its emotional range—from tragic pathos to ribald high spirits; and although written in what is basically the old technique it becomes, through abrupt changes of tonality and extraordinary complexities of rhythm, the first great and mature incarnation of Italian humanism.

In Monteverdi's operas and madrigals we come to the supreme achievement of seventeenth century baroque culture. It is not, as the history books used to suggest, for his declamation in itself that Monteverdi is important; there was nothing new in the idea of musical declamation which was indeed fairly common in mediaeval secular music. What is important is the central position occupied by Monteverdi's declamation, the way in which it combines with the elements of choral polyphony, instrumental ritornelli and dance structure; Monteverdi's significance rests in his prodigious assimilative powers—powers such as belong only to the very highest genius. I do not know any music more profoundly moving than Monteverdi's *Lamento da Ninfa*, and we see here a truly remarkable concatenation of tendencies. There is a direct dramatic ardour of phrase almost comparable with that of Gesualdo; but there is also a lyrical detachment, a freedom from the narrowly subjective, which is a legacy from the methods of the old polyphonists; there is a new sensuous delight in the possibilities of instrumental colour; and there is also the poise and tragic intensity which, in moments of

the highest inspiration, may be conveyed through the rigidity of dance formalism (*cf.* Couperin's use of the *rondeau*). We can see in Monteverdi's example how all these 'tendencies' which we have referred to individually, could never have achieved their full significance until a supreme genius revealed their inter-relations; to appreciate the maturing of Monteverdi's assimilative powers we have only to compare the beautiful but tentative passion of *Orfeo* with the masterly stylized synthesis of all the elements involved in a highly developed theatre music, which makes the *Incoronazione da Poppaea* not only the prototype, but also the ideal, for baroque opera during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nothing could be more absurd than the one-time text-book commonplace that increasing familiarity with instruments 'produced' chromaticism and the shift from the voice to the dance. It would be truer to put the matter the other way round. The ideals of baroque civilization, consummated in the passionately human music of Monteverdi, produced the changed musical conceptions, and they led to the increasing exploitation of instrumental resource. Of course when once the instruments were in general use, they speeded up the process of the evolution of the new idioms; but they were not in any sense their cause.

Though supreme, Monteverdi is by no means isolated. Analogous tendencies are perceptible in the fervently dramatic cantatas of Luigi Rossi and in the balance between declamatory accent and architectural proportion in the cantatas of Carissimi, whose work is a model of the pure Roman style in dramatic music as Palestrina had been the model of pure Roman church polyphony. In Monteverdi, Rossi and Carissimi we can observe the pallid unrhythmical recitative of the Florentines swelling into a rich lyrical *arioso*—Monteverdi's (recorded) *Ballo delle ingrato* is an instance as illuminating as it is beautiful. In all the music, secular and ecclesiastical, the contours become fuller, the proportions more stylized, the figuration more voluptuous, the harmonies more boldly (chromatically) coloured, the instrumentation more sonorous and varied. Both Monteverdi's operas and Carissimi's oratorios (which were in essence theatrical) call for very considerable instrumental resources, used not in the deliberately blurred homophonic fashion of the nineteenth century, but with great clarity and lucidity and a sharp opposition between brass and strings. We can note the same quality in the works of the Venetian Giovanni Gabrieli, both in his colourful almost theatrical and orchestral handling of choral masses in his motets for double choir and in his magnificent grandiose frescoes for wind instruments and strings. (It is illuminating to contrast the austere noble polyphony of the Sonatas *Pian e forte* of 1597—which for all their colour contrasts are vocal and modal in conception and are written for brass and *viols*—with the brilliant florid instrumental virtuosity of the canzoni of 1615—which are written in more diatonic baroque figuration for brass and *violins*). Thus in music without any ostensible dramatic purpose the humanistic impulses manifest themselves. Keyboard music evolves from

the fluid mystical intensity of Cabezon and Gibbons to the latently diatonic fugue and improvisatory toccata of Frescobaldi and Sweelinck, with their anguished chromaticisms, more architectural balance of key centres, and opulent figurative arabesque: string music evolves from the polyphonic fantasia to the texture-shape compromise of the two-violin sonatas of Corelli and Rosenmuller, with their elaborately ornamented two-part lyrical polyphony soaring over the stable dance-structure and the diatonic harmonic foundation of continuo part (related to the homophonic basis to operatic declamation). Even choral church music itself became in the work of Lotti inherently rhetorical, its overlapping fugal entries conditioned by its diatonic harmonic proportions, its supple part writing moving freely within the harmonically conceived mould of its chromaticisms, rather than the chromaticisms being the 'inevitable' result of melodic precedence. In all these things,—in the melodic and harmonic sumptuousness of Lotti's terrific eight part *Crucifixus*, in Frescobaldi's organ music, Rosenmuller's violin sonatas, Gabrieli's instrumental music, Carissimi's and Rossi's cantatas and Monteverdi's operas—we see the humanistic expressive passion, the rounded lyrical curves, the florid figuration, the brilliantly 'coloured' harmonies which are paralleled in baroque architecture and painting. Only very seldom did even the nineteenth century orchestra achieve anything approaching the sensuous radiance and glitter of baroque instrumentation. Listening recently to Berlioz's *Te Deum* and the *Funeral March for the last scene of Hamlet* it occurred to me that Berlioz's famous orchestration is much closer to Giovanni Gabrieli and the seventeenth century in effect than to anything in the nineteenth or even eighteenth centuries. Here too the orchestration is not merely a filling in of harmonic chordal blocks; it is melodic orchestration, depending not on the blurring of tone colours but on their sharp opposition. But then Berlioz is altogether an unnineteenth-century-ish figure, with his melodically based art and his aristocratic finesse. His romanticism has more in common with baroque rhetoric than with the subjectivism of the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth century baroque even chamber music acquired an orchestral sensuousness. Those who know seventeenth century violin sonatas only in the usual medium with piano continuo should listen to the wonderful record of the Rosenmuller E minor sonata with continuo played, as originally intended, on harpsichord organ and string bass; quite apart from the baroque splendour of the music, the noise of the instrumental combination is entrancingly lovely.

Seventeenth century baroque music came to fruition in Italy; but Heinrich Schutz, who studied in Italy under both Monteverdi and Gabrieli, carried the technique to Germany and brought the Lutheran Reformation to a belated musical consummation in his reconciliation of polyphonic and modal plasticity with passionate humanistic declamation and sonorous and harmonic vitality. In France, Lully evolved a new declamation of the French language through the deliberate study of the voice inflections of La Champmeslé, the

great interpreter of Racine; and at the same time made this declamation consistent with a shape structure apposite to one of the most highly stylized social orders in European history. The formal Lullian overture, with the majestic clarity of the periods and the richness of the diatonic harmony in its slow introduction and rhythmic verve of its contrapuntal section, looks back to the noble Carissimi, as Schutz's Passions do to Monteverdi. Though more explicitly social and less religious than Schutz, the music of Lully is the reverse of 'frigid' if sympathetically performed; and it is closer to the slowly evolving social hierarchy of the eighteenth century. Indeed Lully's opera-ballet, providing for a direct social (as opposed to ritualistic) alliance of voice and dance, was the most extreme form of a tendency which in varying degrees dominated baroque music from Monteverdi's *Poppea* to the work of Piccini and even the ostensibly realistic and unbaroque Gluck. The seventeenth-century stylization, less 'natural' than the stylization of the sixteenth, is nonetheless part of a continuous tradition which links up with the great figures representing the transition into eighteenth-century civilization—with Alessandro Scarlatti and Handel, with Couperin and Rameau and Gluck, with Buxtehude and J. S. Bach. We shall be dealing with these more fully in our next article when we consider the significance of the device of the continuo and the bases of diatonic thought. Here we may refer to the main theme of this next essay—the comprehensiveness of the genius of Bach who summarizes in his work the story of European musical evolution as we have so far traced it, the mediaeval Christian polyphonic outlook, the baroque humanistic rhetoric, and the emerging social and dramatic concept of the eighteenth century. This colossus stands firm in the centre of European musical history, embracing worlds past and worlds to come. No one man can contribute more, musically speaking, to an understanding of the evolution of European civilization.

IX.

Perhaps the most convenient single word to describe the idiom of seventeenth-century baroque is Rhetoric, providing one can rid the word of any pejorative implications. Although the lines became influenced by diatonic instrumental thought, the proportions influenced by key balance and the harmony homophonically and expressively conceived, you do not get, in the seventeenth century, the fully fledged dramatic conception of the eighteenth century sonata because, as we shall see, this is not conceivable—in Haydn's, Mozart's or Beethoven's sense—without the possibility of unrestricted modulation which arrived with more developed systems of temperament. This does not mean that seventeenth century baroque music suffers through its inadequacy in the clear definition of key contrasts (when we protest against such a suggestion reverence to the memory of Parry should not blind us to the incalculable harm done by his contribution on the seventeenth century to the Oxford History.) If only the more obvious diatonic

modulations were available as a structural tonal basis to a composition, seventeenth century composers used incidental colourings of tonality and other melodically derived freedoms arising from their direct contact with sixteenth century methods, which the sonata technique had to dispense with. (The test case is, of course, the avowedly experimental Hexachord fancies of Bull; but although these cover the whole range of chromatic modulation with the obliteration of the acoustical 'coma' and the identification of F sharp and G flat, sometimes in the same bar, they are essentially fugal and melodic in technique and do not attempt to exploit the architectural and dramatic implications of diatonic and chromatic tonality). As Tovey said, 'the importance of a change of key depends, not on its remoteness, but on whether it is a colour effect in the course of a melody or a dramatic action which has caused the home tonic to disappear below the horizon. Composers long before Beethoven were often fond of experimenting with brilliant changes of key. Such experiments may almost be reckoned among the means by which the founders of classical tonality established the normal solidity of their harmony; but between such colour effects and the most ordinary sonata-like establishment of the orthodox dominant, or the relative major, there is as much difference as there is between looking at pictures of foreign places in an album and travelling, bag and baggage, to spend the night in another house.' From this point of view the rhetoric of baroque opera from Monteverdi to Alessandro Scarlatti and Handel occupies a half-way house between vocal polyphony and the instrumental design of the dramatic sonata. While one doesn't want to countenance the apallingly wrong-headed (and still fairly widespread) notion that sixteenth-century music ought to be performed in an attenuated, remote and 'refined' fashion, and rather slowly (it was certainly performed with the utmost passion), there is some justification for considering sixteenth-century methods 'intimate'—a welling up of lyrical life both as complex, and as natural, as breathing. Comparatively, seventeenth-century baroque music, in particular the operatic, is the conscious (rhetorical) presentation of emotion, in which the stylization assures its social validity (hence perhaps the significance of the mating of dance formalism with the obviously expressive elements). Comparatively again, in the eighteenth century sonata the 'drama' is inherent in the nature of the organism, and although it starts as a social medium, in the hands of the masters it becomes, as the social hierarchy crumbles, increasingly personal until in Beethoven you get the most aggressively individual human personality incarnating the drama of its struggle with and against society in the most violent dispositions and oppositions of key centres and thematic motives. The transition is from vocal polyphony as a communal activity, to the rhetorical presentation of emotion by solo voices linked with instrumental technique through the social framework of the dance, to the complete projection of the struggles of the human personality into 'absolute' self-contained instrumental form. These phases correspond to the dominating phases in the evolution of our

civilization; for convenience, we may refer to them as lyrical, rhetorical and dramatic.

W. H. MELLERS.

APPENDIX.

The above is an attempt to define an attitude to musical evolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not an attempt at a comprehensive musical history of the period. Readers with sufficient training in musical technicalities are asked to consider it in conjunction with the classic text-books—R. O. Morris's *Contrapuntal Technique in the Sixteenth Century* and Knud Jeppeson's *Palestrina's Use of the Dissonance*. The best technical account of the phenomenon of chromaticism is Philip Heseltine's chapter from his and Cecil Gray's book on Gesualdo. Less specifically technical works which the reader is referred to are Prunières's book on Monteverdi (Dent), Westrup's on Purcell (Master Musicians Series), and Fellowes' writings on the English School (O.U.P.) The best history of music I know is Prunière's *Nouvelle Histoire* which has just been issued by Dent in translation. This is particularly valuable because it devotes adequate space to mediaeval music, and stops with the eighteenth century. It is perhaps not free from bias: but I'm inclined to think that for English people to read musical history with a *French* bias might be salutary in so far as it helps to counterbalance years of Teutonic training.

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

RISE IN PRICE AND REFUSAL OF SUBSCRIPTIONS.

We owe apologies for having given no earlier or more formal notice of the raised price of *Scrutiny* than is to be found at the bottom of the inside back cover of the last issue—the issue with which the new price began. Circumstances precipitated the decision, which had to be enforced at once. Naturally, we very much deplore too the necessity of refusing new subscriptions (*not* renewals of old subscriptions): the printing cannot at present be increased.

EDITORIAL PROBLEMS.

In ways, not all of which will be immediately divined by the reader, the exigencies and accidents of war-conditions defeat editorial planning and impose hand-to-mouth solutions. An article has to go in now, and not later, as intended, and the balance of the number is upset: the planned distribution of attention is undone, and perhaps (as in this number) the pages allotted to reviewing encroached on. We can only hope to maintain a fair balance over the year. And projects involving long-term planning and sustained co-operation are impossible.

CO-PROSPERITY ?

THE CASE FOR EXAMINATIONS, by J. L. Brereton (C.U.P., 8/6).

‘Examinations . . . one of the most potent instruments of progress in human society’. ‘No competent observer will deny that examinations are now woven into the fabric of English education and play an intimate part in holding it together’. (pp. 48 and vi).

The first thing to ask a specialist on his specialism is how his activity fits in with the major aims of society—in fact what is his idea of the good life. ‘Progress’—with a flavour almost archaic in midsummer 1944—is a fair summary of what Mr. Brereton takes to be our guide. He is not explicit about what he understands by progress, but by inference it will lead to a tidy planner’s world. A