

## ENGLAND'S YOUNG COMPOSERS

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ENGLAND, once known as the land without music, has come to be regarded today instead as quite the opposite while London has even been proclaimed the new musical metropolis of Europe. Once slightly contemptuous, the attitude of outstanding Continental observers has changed to that of serious appreciation and careful study of English musical activities.

One fact is immediately apparent to any observer. There has been a great expansion of creative power. A significant number of young composers are determined to make their ideas prevail. England today has a host of forward looking artists of very respectable attainments who have definitely turned from the idiom of the pre-war generation of Vaughan Williams.

True, strong personalities have not yet crystallized out of this mass of composing youths, but the ground has been prepared for the emergence of such personalities.

The greatest circulation, even extending beyond the borders of England, has been gained in recent years by the music of William Walton (born 1902). In a relatively short time, it has earned more respect and admiration in his own country than has been accorded any local composer since Elgar.

Throughout the years of his development no modifications are to be noted in his style. In mood and in technical principles, he has been close to romanticism from the beginning. His output culminates in a series of orchestral works, the most meaty being a symphony. The rhythmic liveliness of his music, its freshness and insouciance are striking, these are its most characteristic features. But at the same time they constitute its greatest peril, a kind of aimlessness. Greater restraint, in line with the modern, more intense concentration, would be a helpful contrast with the overabundance of his language. The urge toward the monumen-

tal is unmistakable, and a natural talent for form is just as evident, as is the originality of conception, though it is rather uneven. Probably more than in his symphony, certainly more than in the somewhat bombastically superficial choral work, *Belshazzar's Feast*, the qualities of Walton's idiom are revealed in his *Concerto for Viola and Orchestra*. A balance between form and content is attained, a freedom of expression which, despite all virtuosity of the concertizing viola-voice, is never subordinated to it from any aspect. This work is as an especially successful piece of contemporary English tonal art.

To do justice to the music of Constant Lambert (born 1905) it is best to disregard the pretentiousness it so often assumes. Leaving aside this feature, which is inconsistent with his tendency toward the absolute, we find its amusing, dazzling superficiality, its elegant virtuosity and biting wit, quite pleasant. Lambert has been unable to avoid the influence of jazz in any of his works; it bobs up in his *Rio Grande* as well as in his *Piano Sonata* or his *Piano Concerto*. Fertility in rhythm marks his music. Its humor and bright liveliness are more appropriate than the occasional arbitrary attempts at lyrical introspection which are generally sacrificed in his slow movements to a suddenly inserted scherzando or presto. The uniformity of his predominantly homophonic passages, in which harmonic structures based on widely extended resolutions of chords of the ninth prevail, becomes tedious in the long run, and is not compensated by greatly varied rhythmic developments.

From the list of Lambert's compositions, *Music for Orchestra* should be given preference, for its combination of skill, polish and esprit.

In the greatest contrast to Lambert and Walton, is the work of Alan Bush (born 1900), student of John Ireland. Alan Bush is one of the most interesting and complex figures in contemporary English music. He knows no compromise. One of the striking features of his work is its introspection. More than other young Englishmen, he exhibits symptoms of Central-European methods. The delicacy of structure in his chamber and piano music, its distinction of idiom, suggest a certain parallel with Busoni.

The catalog of Bush's compositions, most of which are only in manuscript, includes piano, chamber, choral and orchestral

works. Let us single out from his chamber music the *Dialectic* for string quartet and the *Concert Piece* for cello and piano. Though a certain coolness and constructive spirit at times appear to obtrude in the foreground of his music, at the expense of directness, the danger of sterility is avoided through the originality of his power of expression and his creative fantasy. Of Bush's piano music, the *Prelude and Fugue* and his *Relinquishment* are especially noteworthy for their finely sustained moods. Bush's choral works also deserve high rank. He has made an important contribution to workers' music with a political angle (particularly in a *Prolog to a Workers' Meeting*).

One of the most admired figures among the youngest composers is Benjamin Britten (born 1913) a pupil of John Ireland. In his *Phantasy* for oboe, violin, viola and violoncello, and especially in his *Sinfonietta* for flute, he gives evidence of youthful genius in the best sense. His predominantly rhythmic and fruitful conceptions seem free from any problems. Experience and depth should not be sought in Britten, they are not to be found in this kind of music, for they are apparently deliberately avoided. But his technical equipment is of a virtuoso order and he uses it with noteworthy ease and skill.

Closest to him stands Lennox Berkely (born 1903), a pupil of Nadia Boulanger. Here too are the same insouciance and appealing freshness, most clearly revealed by his second sonata for violin and piano. But his string quartet offers more than that for it shows an effort to create a work in purer style, free from decorative frills.

The music of Elizabeth Maconchy (born 1907), pupil of Vaughan Williams, moves in a different sphere. It is the product of a nature whose gift is more subtilized, although not lacking in strength and vitality. Her music is markedly tough and masculine, sometimes ruled by a brazen rhythm. The intensive introspection, evident in its slow movements, bears strong traces of austerity and severity. A piano concert, two string quartets, and a *Divertissement* for twelve instruments, all command respect for her purpose and ability.

Two other interesting figures in the list of English talents are Christian Darnton and Alan Rawsthorne. Darnton (born 1905)

a pupil of Max Butting, is a remarkably fruitful composer. A piano concerto, a viola concerto, a *Duo Concertante* for two pianos, a *Suite concertante per Violino solo e diversi Strumenti* document the struggle of a genuinely radical nature for new expression and new spirit. The experimental nature of his work is apparent in all his compositions; there is perhaps too much emphasis on research.

Alan Rawsthorne (born 1905), pupil of the College of Music in Manchester has made a positive contribution to wind music, with his clarinet concerto. An appealing musical nature, he reveals a fundamentally sound technical knowledge, though his work could be occasionally more lively and fresh. His *Studien über ein Thema von Bach* for string trio is the solid music of a clever musician. Like many others, Rawsthorne has been affected in his composition by social tendencies, and has written a real piece of *Gesinnungsmusik* in his *The Enemy Speaks*, for tenor and orchestra, with words by C. Day Lewis.

Lack of space prevents discussion of other examples of musical Young England. We need only mention here Dorothy Gow, pupil of Vaughan Williams and of Egon Wellesz, whose talent is revealed by a *Quintet* for oboe and strings and a string quartet; Helen Perkins also a pupil of Williams and of Anton Webern, with a *Pastoral Movement for Septet* among a list of polished piano and chamber works; Victor Yates, composer of a sympathetic and moving string trio; Gerald Finzi, whose melodic gift is apparent in an *Interlude* for oboe and string quartet; and Arnold Cooke (born 1906) pupil of Hindemith, whose quartet for flute and strings, and a sonata for two pianos, show a noteworthy vitality and power of invention.

Further names could be added without fundamentally changing the general picture of contemporary English composition. There is no lack of talent; enough indeed wherewith to cut a good figure at every music festival. True we cannot yet associate a definitely English note; no more than an indiscriminate appropriation of contemporary foreign tendencies or material. And in the works of individuals certain influences of Schönberg, Stravinsky or Hindemith are apparent. But today no one any longer suggests transplanting "directions" or "schools" into England.