

FORECAST REVIEW

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND HOLST

IF the modern spirit in art is, as one is inclined to think, largely a question of attitude, Holst is much the more modern of these two. Vaughan Williams is modern simply in the sense that his honest musical thinking has driven him away from the smug element in pre-established form and conception. His is a big, rather fumbling sort of sincerity which would dare to be ridiculous or even old-fashioned. His music, consequently, is sometimes rather heavy-footed, as is his actual gait. It follows also that in the matter of orchestration he is fundamentally akin to Brahms rather than to Mozart. Some of his earlier work written during or soon after his training under Ravel—such things as *The Wasps* suite—show, however, that had his musical conscience allowed, he could have learned to express himself lightly and brilliantly.

Holst's sincerity, on the other hand, proceeds almost always from an intellectual conception. Vaughan Williams is the noble victim of a special form of the Hardy-esque temperament, and is, as likely as not, groping in the darkness towards a light which he feels rather than sees, whereas Holst begins and ends his work in broad daylight, and often in brilliant sunshine. It may seem strange to group Holst, Berlioz and Strauss together, but they are like each other in this outstanding respect; all three have the ability to express anything which they can possibly conceive—and they all conceive *first* and afterwards proceed deliberately to the carrying out of their ideas. Even Strauss never *fails*—it is only the general unworthiness of his conceptions which pulls his work down. It is this power in Holst which makes him, with the other

two, a master of orchestration; there is genius in his work, as with Berlioz, but, after all, orchestration is largely a question of a keen and peculiar form of common sense.

Vaughan Williams lives and writes in the despairing knowledge that he can scarcely hope to bring on to paper the visions that are nearest his mind and heart. Whether this is due to their very nature, or to the "muddle" of his temperament (there is no disgrace in this "muddle") does not matter, but his music can never be properly appreciated until this fact is admitted—a fact which incidentally explains why, much to the annoyance of his publishers, he is always altering his scores, years after they have been put on the market.

This is why the *Shropshire Lad* of Housman has so much influenced his work since the time of its publication. Housman is one who has thought and felt like Vaughan Williams, but who, after a tremendous struggle, has managed to express himself through a medium which is classic and restrained, but which nevertheless conveys, with a terrible poignancy, a sense of the depth and the moving power of his experiences. In his *London Symphony* Vaughan Williams is still fighting a losing battle, but in his later *Pastoral Symphony* he almost succeeds in getting the spirit of Housman into his music—although in a larger, vaguer and much less finished way.

One of life's great ironies is to choose from the men of strong and profound feeling those who in the end shall become ascetic. It is they who are more often called upon to force the edge of their passions in upon themselves. The very strength of their feeling translates itself into a kind of negative intensity under the ascetic ideal. The erstwhile priest of Aphrodite turning to a sterner faith, serves the new goddess with complete loyalty yet "with an undying consciousness of the old." Of late Vaughan Williams seems to have been slowly settling down to such a renunciation and such a resolve. In his *Mass in G-minor*, written without a suggestion of pose or affectation, in the grand contrapuntal style of the late sixteenth century, with Byrd in particular as the obvious inspiration, and in his *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*, a kind of static opera in which the composer, in a scene from Bun-

yan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, fixes before our eyes a deliberate musical tableau, he achieves a strange serenity at once intimate and aloof.

And in the meantime, Holst can, by taking thought, add still another cubit to his stature.

By Jeffrey Mark

GEORGE ANTHEIL

A GREAT deal of nonsense has been written about George Antheil. The real personality of this extremely talented young American composer has been cleverly concealed by a welter of words from the most varied sources.

First we have the Antheil concocted by the musical journals,—a godless, red-as-they-come Bolshevik, whose concerts have resembled riots and whose final pleasure and purpose is to turn all Europe topsy-turvy with his astounding musical noises. Then there is the Antheil of the high-brow, literary magazines,—Mr. Ezra Pound's Antheil,—the young "genius" who has invented the "new propulsion of time-spaces," "new mechanisms," the fourth dimension of music, etc., etc. Finally, there is Mr. George Antheil's Antheil who, strangely enough, is hardly less a figment of the imagination. Mr. Antheil sees himself as a modern Mozart, experimenting in disjointed rhythms and ear-splitting dissonances, hopelessly misunderstood by the music critics of Berlin, Paris and London.

For those interested in the future of American music, some attempt should be made to present George Antheil as he really is.

It must be clear from the outset that Antheil is no mere upstart. There was a time, perhaps, when he used rather questionable methods of calling attention to himself,—touring Germany as a self-styled futurist composer and publishing wild manifestoes in the *avant-garde* magazines. In the last analysis, this was not charlatanism but simply the naïveté of a very youthful person carried away by the mode of the day. Certainly he was awarded a greater *réclame* than was good for him and it did, in some measure, turn his head. But Antheil is essentially a very sincere