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## Letters to the Editor

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From Guy Rickards

Admirers of the music of Havergal Brian are used to reading vilifications of his music in the press, negative reviews by bewildered commentators or the snarlings of the witless who feel they must adopt any pose rather than be seen to be unsure about unfamiliar work. It was therefore a great disappointment to read the review by the 'not-at-all ill-disposed' Justin Connolly in *Tempo* 167 of the recent EMI disc of Symphonies 7 and 31, etc. Instead of abuse came indifference; in place of insight, muddle.

I am almost at a loss to explain why Mr Connolly bothered to review the disc, for the music seems to have elicited precious little response and in a review of over 1700 words, he avoids discussion of the specific works until the last 250, prefacing this final paragraph with considerable longueurs on notions of musical eccentricity before moving to a generalized - and contradictory - view of Brian's compositional technique. At no point does he sully his review with specific examples in any Brian works of his views as expounded. We are told, for example, that the course of Brian's music equates to

...what happens in a private mental experience: linkages necessary when communicating with others are suppressed or entirely omitted. When you are talking to yourself, there can be little need to explain what you already know from within.

In the same paragraph, however, we are told that:

...virtually a trademark of Havergal Brian's writing ... is the way in which themes are never quite the same on subsequent repetition; development proceeds by way of continuous alteration, though since only small details get changed, it does not represent a technique of continuous variation, of course.

Indeed (though one wonders quite what degree of thematic manipulation is required to transform the one into the other). But surely these two views of the music are contradictory? If Brian's themes are only altered in small details on each repetition (irrespective of 'apparently irrelevant' interruptions) what other 'linkages' are necessary when communicating with others?

Surely this is - if Mr Connolly's description is correct - quite straightforward and simple. What the reviewer describes so slightlying is not 'free association' (as he later terms it) but genuine *symphonic* development and would stand just as well if applied to the symphonies of Haydn or Beethoven as to Brian. I fear Mr Connolly has missed a vital point about symphonic writing, namely *development*: organic growth of musical material evidenced as clearly in Haydn, Beethoven and Brian as in the symphonies of Robert Simpson and Edmund Rubbra, or in the metamorphosis techniques of Holmboe and Bentzon. As for Brian's themes changing because the composer '... couldn't quite be bothered to check what he had written elsewhere', this seems to this reader at least, one of the most idiotic statements of 'criticism' I have ever read, and I beg to suggest that it applies more literally to Mr Connolly's review.

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From Janet Snowman  
and Hilary Bentley

The Royal Academy of Music is currently setting up an information database on its past students, to include leavers from 1945 to the present day. It is also planning a series of events for its former students, including recent graduates. We are particularly keen to hear from anyone who left between 1945-1964, as a weekend reunion for these years is planned for later this year. Get in touch, then come along and meet your long-lost friends, colleagues and teachers! Please let us know where you are and what you are doing. Phone Janet Snowman (935-1665) or Hilary Bentley (935-5461, ext 257) or write to

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