

Alvar Liddell appeared to relish his role as speaker in three strange wartime works, melodrama-settings of patriotic verses about the defeat of Belgium, by the poet Emil Cammaerts. *Carillon* (1914) and *Le Drapau Belge* (1917) are abominable tub-thumpings. *Une voix dans le desert* (1916), however, is rather better: it introduces a soprano solo and is a haunting evocation of the bleak Belgian landscape after the invading armies have passed, but it hardly bears comparison with Debussy's treatment of a similar theme in *Berceuse Héroïque* and the second piece of *En Blanc et Noir*. It is a disturbing thought that these were among Elgar's chief works during the war, a period when he ought, surely, to have been at the height of his powers, consolidating the achievement of the Second Symphony.

Perhaps. But *The Music-makers* and *Falstaff* are the work of a man already turning in upon himself, long before the official 'failure of inspiration' with Lady Elgar's death. The rest of his life—until the last, too-late arousal in the fragmentary Third Symphony—was a long retreat from the world: even the great Cello Concerto and chamber works are part of that pattern. The call to provide patriotic pieces in wartime produced, it seems, only the most automatic musical gestures; while the music for the 1924 *Pageant of Empire* at Wembley Park sounds as if it was written by Elgar's ghost. The ghost could still turn a trick or two in the *Empire March*, which is technically dazzling and worth an occasional revival despite its heartlessness.

The Kensington Orchestra played with spirit, and the large audience seemed to enjoy the long, loud and brassy concert.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

from YUJI TAKAHASHI

'Xenakis and the Performer' by Peter Hill (TEMPO 112) raises an interesting problem of precision in performance. But it seems to me that the article overlooks the problem of notation and different 'in-time algebrae' in the pieces discussed. The 'rhythm' in *Herma* and in *Eonta* is stochastic: that is, the notation is only an approximation. In *Evrjali* it is more deterministic, the evenness of attacks being the decisive factor to achieve the continuity.

In his Ex.1, taken from *Herma*, Peter Hill explains that the rhythmical accuracy is more important than pitches. But what counts here is the order of presentation of pitches and the approximate speed. Whether we hear a quintuplet or a distorted sextuplet is of secondary importance. This section of *Herma* introduces *pitches*. Besides, with enough practice all the pitches in this piece are possible to be reached. There is no 'genuine impossibility' here.

Unfortunately, Hill's Ex.2 perpetuates a silly misprint in the printed score. The third line must be in the treble, instead of the bass, clef. So Hill's Ex.3 is *not* what the performer should play. Also the octave transpositions we find in Hill's 'performing version' disrupt the continuity of lines. *Evrjali* is not a twelve-tone etude. The names of pitches (G#, A etc.) are less important than the register or pitch zones.

What, after all, is impossible in *Eonta* or in *Evrjali*? The hands cannot reach those pitches in time, therefore the performer can only try his best to attain the distant goal like an athlete or an ascete? This is a dangerous view. A pianist is not

just two hands. He also has two ears. And these ears recognize the sonority of each cloud that changes its colouring incessantly. It is a sort of generalized harmony (or the harmony in the ancient sense). Listening to it guides the performer throughout the performance. (It is the other side of the coin. Ears and hands collaborate in a feed-back loop.)

In Hill's article, the image of the composer appears so high above that of the performer that he might be a Platonic Creator specifying the ideal form of the world. This is merely a most academic reflection of the common view that a performer is nothing but a slave of his instrument.

A performer is an adventurer who explores sonic nebulae following the star map provided by the composer. A composition is a model which is used again and again to open the door of perception. It will be modified, if necessary, and discarded when it is no longer valid.

5-10-25 Zaimokuza
Kamakura 248
Japan

from STEPHEN PRUSLIN

I am not in the habit of taking issue with my colleagues in print, but I must say that Peter Hill's article on Xenakis's piano music in TEMPO 112 alarmed me to a degree. Not only have I found it possible to give numerous performances of *Herma* over the past five years without resorting to octave transposition (and at a tempo at least respectable enough to lead score-carrying members of the audience through quite a paperchase, according to various eye-witnesses), but the idea that a piano work is a kind of piano reduction, and that one plays outwards from the effect to the notes, is suspect even in principle. Suspect also is the idea that wrong notes at the ends of the keyboard are less crucial than those in the middle, even if this were acoustically and harmonically true, which it isn't. Composers agonize just as much over extreme registers as any other ones, and when one's ear is sensitized to contemporary harmony, a wrong note bothers just as much as it would in classical harmony, even if it is very high or low. A player must be ready and able to cope with the vicissitudes of a particular performance, but to found a whole theory of performance on a premise of compromise is not only dangerous, it also gives ammunition to the idea that as a performer of contemporary music, one's whole art needn't be as precise, honest, or caring as, say, the art of someone who chooses to spend his time in the service of 17th-century performance practices—an idea which I and a number of my colleagues have spent a considerable amount of time in recent years trying to correct.

39A Danbury St.,
London, N.1

ANNOUNCEMENTS

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR CENTENARY CELEBRATION

A memorial to Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) was unveiled by Sir Thomas Armstrong, chairman of the Musicians' Benevolent Fund, during a service at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Holborn Viaduct, London E.C.1 on 5 September, in the presence of the American Ambassador and the composer's daughter, Avril Coleridge-Taylor. The proceedings also featured performances of music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, including his String Quartet.