

THE MOZART BICENTENARY

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THE celebration of Mozart's bicentenary has brought out one of the chief traits by which his worship differs from other cults for writers and artists of the past, namely, the degree of personal love and devotion which attend it. The centenary celebrations of Beethoven, Schubert, Haydn, Brahms, Chopin, Bach, have fallen within the memory of most of us; great as was the burden of praise cast upon these distinguished figures, none called up such a tribute of affection. Twenty years ago, Eric Blom concluded his excellent work upon the composer with a declaration of love. It is this intimate relation between the man himself and his listener that makes our apprehension of his art so peculiar. This would be all the more astonishing if it were true, as Hyatt King as written in a recent volume of essays and as indeed many others said before him, that Mozart's music is profoundly impersonal. It would be astonishing even if one modified this by substituting 'impenetrable' for 'impersonal'. The 'Mozart friend of long standing', to whom Paul Hamburger refers in *The Mozart Companion*¹ and for whom in fact this book has been written, feels that when W.A.M.'s music fills the room it is not only the art but the very presence of the *Geliebte* that he enjoys. Except for Chopin, I doubt whether this can be experienced so keenly with any other composer.

The Mozart Companion, coming after Hyatt King's *Mozart in Retrospect* and Rosemary Hughes's edition of the Novellos' diaries, is yet another proof of this fact. No other musician's centenary has been thus honoured in England. It is a sign of the degree of intimacy with Mozart which is now expected of the British public that none of these books is a total presentation of him, and none can be deeply enjoyed by readers who are not both conversant with his music and devoted to it. The Novellos' diaries will seem in parts boring or childish to those who do not share the pilgrims' enthusiasm, and the two other books, which make little allowance for the uninstructed, however willing, will be unassimilable to them. The time has come, these books seem to say, when a knowledge of the dates, divisions, chief events of Mozart's life, and above all a logarithmic familiarity with Köchel's tables, as subdivided into (a), (b), (c) . . . by Einstein, can be assumed; indeed, it would be offensive to the reader not to assume it. They mark the distance we have travelled since the 1920's, when some very *grosses légumes* still looked on Mozart

1 *The Mozart Companion*. Edited by H. C. Robbins Landon and Donald Mitchell (Rockliff; 30s.).

as very *petite bière*, and the use of Köchel numbers would have been ostentatious and incomprehensible.

This is not to say that all the contributors have set out to make their writing difficult. Though all require knowledgeability, all are not forbidding or equally specialized. O. E. Deutsch's opening essay on *Mozart Portraits*, in fact, demands nothing more than a grain of the personal love to which I have referred. Fr. Blume's *Style and Influence* comes nearest to an all-round appreciation; after that, the non-specialist reader will find Gerald Abraham's section on the operas the most readable. The allotment of space has been unequal: Karl Geiringer's section on the church music is not only the last but also, in length, the least. The symphonies are granted more room, but the few masterpieces among them have been studied more than once, and the long, tiresome list of juvenilia has been treated adequately by Saint-Foix and again in the relevant chapter of Einstein's *Mozart*, so that J. P. Larsen has found it hard to give an original presentation of this awkward category of works. Arthur Hutchings deals very fairly, and not too idiosyncratically, with the keyboard music. Donald Mitchell has wisely forborne from swallowing the plankton of early cassations, divertimentos and serenades, and has instead devoted his self-allotted twenty-three pages to the three great wind serenades. To Hans Engel has fallen the ungrateful task of putting into prose the poetic dust of the ballroom dances; his reward comes at the end of his chapter with the one substantial masterpiece given to him, the *Masonic Funeral Music*. Paul Hamburger analyses a score of concert arias; we are grateful for his recognition of the pre-eminence of the neglected masterpiece with piano obbligato, *Ch'io mi scordi di te*, and the almost unknown *Così dunque tradisci*, which have long been among your reviewer's solitary joys. Hans Keller's approach to the chamber music is different. Of the forty-eight pages within which he has been turned loose, he uses up the first five in saying what he is not, and then what he is, going to go: both objectives are so obvious that it was a waste of precious space to define them; it is like (to quote him) telling a music-lover 'that a contrasting theme is a contrasting theme'. Here is no general presentation of even the music of the 'great' period but a series of analytical notes destined to pin down those features in selected passages which contribute to the impression of unity perceived intuitively by the sensitive but non-analytical listener. The notes are interspersed with indications concerning the playing of the same, or other, passages. This rather heterogeneous essay is given unity by the overlying attitude of contempt for almost all Mozart's quartets earlier than the ten *berühmte* and for 'most critics, (who) have never grasped the essential difference between analysis and description' and have catered for the needs of 'the backward musical intelligentsia', whose ignorance of psycho-analysis Hans

Keller deplures and seeks to dispel by emphasizing the 'underlying unity . . . between the notion of a prostitute and that of a saintly virgin'; it is not clear what light this aside throws on the appreciation of Mozart's art.

The lion's share is granted to the concertos, which contain the least known of the composer's major works; they receive eighty-three pages—nearly twice as much as the next-favoured category. Fr. Blume deals with textual matters, Robbins Landon with the music itself. With Blume's chapter on *Style and Influence*, this is the most useful part of the book, both because of the importance of the category studied and of the paucity of good studies of it. Robbins Landon agrees with others in placing the first movement of K. 503 at the culmination of the piano concertos, a fact which the infrequency with which this work is performed makes it necessary to emphasize. One's chief regret is that there is no elucidation of the origin of Mozart's sonata-rondo; it comes ultimately from the double dance of French ballet and opera, but what was the link in the chain immediately before Mozart? It is not found in Haydn or J. C. Bach. On page 270, line 19, 'latter' (i.e. K. 491) should read 'former' (i.e. K. 466). In the book-list one misses the relevant volume of Tovey's *Essays in Musical Analysis*, of which the article shows knowledge. Fr. Blume deals gently with the authenticity of the more than doubtful Adelaide concerto and upholds stoutly that of both K. 271a and K. 268; it is refreshing to hear once more that the greater part, at least, of the latter's magnificent first movement is genuine Mozart of the 'great' period even though surely no one can detect the slightest trace of the master in the adagio and not much in the rondo.

Arthur Hutchings speaks rather slightly of 'most of Mozart's fugues for solo piano'; as there are only two completed ones, K. 394 and K. 399, this judgment is somewhat unexamined. But he admits nevertheless that the noble K. 394 is unmistakable Mozart and insists that it must be played *andante maestoso*, as Mozart himself remarked to his sister. He might have included in his book list Max Keynon's *Mozart in Salzburg* which contains some good pages on the harpsichord-piano style of the early sonatas. He disregards Einstein's judgment that K. 312 is contemporary with K. 570 to which it is stylistically akin; it certainly savours more of 1789–90 than of 1774–5.

Other writers remind us that Mozart was not an infant prodigy: 'Beethoven's genius exploded far earlier'; and that only a blind adoration can blur the distinction between his immature and his mature productions. Where to draw the line is not agreed upon; Landon places it, with your reviewer, in 1778–9, but Blume considers that such a frontier 'is easily reduced to absurdity', finding mature works before this time and immature ones after it. (The truth is, of course, that such

a line is not meant to be rigid and is useful only with a majority of works.)

Though Blume's study of style and influence comes second in the volume, the reader who decides to study every page should leave it to the end. After the arduous reading of some of the specialist essays, this chapter crowns rewardingly the whole. It generalizes, but gives chapter and verse for its judgments, and hovers engagingly between panoramic vision and detailed reference. Perhaps the best formula which can be devised to express Mozart's genius in terms of literature is one of Goethe's, intended in quite a different sense from that in which Blume quotes it: 'Moulded form, unfolding itself as it lives'.

REVIEWS

CHINA UNDER COMMUNISM. By Richard L. Walker. (Allen & Unwin; 30s.)

For the first time for centuries the whole of China is ruled by a Government whose authority extends to every corner of the land. Modelling itself very largely, though not exclusively, upon the U.S.S.R. and adhering closely to the principles of Lenin, it is transforming the life of 600,000,000 people. Under the direction of the Communist Government an industrial revolution is now beginning which may have profound consequences upon the world as a whole. Chinese factories, manned by ingenious, industrious workers will soon start pouring enormous quantities of goods on to the world's markets. Its army, already the second largest in the world, will sooner or later be fully mechanized and brought right up to date.

All Asia is watching what is happening there. People in the under-developed areas all over the world will, unless they see something better in the Free World, increasingly tend to draw their political inspiration from its successes.

All this should make us realize that it is necessary to know as much as possible about what is happening inside Communist China. To date, since Mao Tse-tung took over, there has been a lot of printed and other propoganda done for and against the régime but very little serious research.

Here, in *China under Communism*, however, we have the result of a great deal of painstaking work which runs to some 400 pages, close-packed with facts.