

# Birmingham Despatch – 1<sup>st</sup> August 1928

## THE ROMANCE OF A POPULAR COMPOSTER

### How a Birmingham Man Rose to Fame

It can be said with something approaching certainty that there is no more popular composer in the British Isles today than Mr Albert W Ketelbey; if there are any people who do not know him by name, surely there can be no one who does not know him by his music?

Take "In a Monastery Garden" or "In a Persian Market", or "In a Chinese Temple Garden", or "Sanctuary of the Heart". No one with ears to listen can fail to have heard any of these colourful pieces played by all kinds of orchestras and bands in seaside pavilions or town halls, by hurdy-gurdies, by wireless, by gramophones.

There must be thousands of homes which have none or more of them scored for the piano, violinists find them attractive material, and other solo instrumentalists have made good use of these romantic tunes.

Quite recently I met a man with a cornet on a street corner essaying the "Monastery Garden" with, I am afraid, only a modicum of success. Still, he was playing it. And what small errand boy, on his useful daily rounds, has not relieved his monotony by whistling it?

### *Romance*

Romance is the key by which Mr Ketelbey unlocked the magic gate leading to fame with the great British public! That subtle, almost indefinable, mystic something which softens hearts and lulls one almost into tears is the formula – very difficult to discover – of finding success with the many. It has been adopted by musicians, painters, novelists, actors, singers for centuries past.

It may not be highly intellectual, but it is clean and honest and entertaining. Mr Ketelbey found it romantically – by accident.

A conductor friend had asked him if he could or would write a romantic piece which his orchestra could play at a well-known seaside resort in the north.

Mr Ketelbey, engaged upon writing quartets or piano sonatas or overtures – music genuine loftiness – wanted, of course, to oblige, so he sat down and thought, and played and made queer marks on sheets of paper, and there emerged presently, "in a Monastery Garden".

His friend took the MS up to his seaside pavilion and, from manuscript form, his orchestra played it there for three seasons. It was immensely successful from the start, the conductor was inundated with requests for it to be played and many demands for it to be repeated.

### ***A Birmingham Man***

So he went to the composer and pleaded with him to publish it. Several publishers had before this heard of "In a Monastery Garden", and had asked to be allowed to issue it. The result was that Mr Ketelbey was forced to agree.

I have it on excellent authority that well over a million copies of this one piece have been sold.

Mr Ketelbey's can be understood when it is known that he sought success with more ambitious efforts; indeed, there exists a library of his works which discerning musical enthusiasts recognise as being of high quality.

Mr Ketelbey does not disguise his regret that fame should have come to him through other than these. But the great British public is the final arbiter in bestowing its laurel wreaths.

Mr Albert W Ketelbey is a Birmingham man and as a child showed clearly that music was going to be his metier. I hate the word, but Ketelbey was a prodigy, though unlike most of these "wonder children" he has sustained his brilliant gifts through youth to manhood.

He was a pupil at the Midland Institute for a time, and was composing serious music before he was anywhere near his teens. A "Sonata for Piano" was one of many little works he had composed when he was eleven; he played it himself at Worcester a year later, a performance which Sir Edward Elgar praised.

### ***An Early Success***

At thirteen he had won the Victoria Scholarship at Trinity College, London, and a year or so later was appointed organist of St John's, Wimbledon. Then his thoughts turned to conducting and, forsaking the organ loft, young Ketelbey went on tour with the baton.

We next find him – quite a young man – acting as music editor to Messrs. Chappell and Co., the famous publishers, and later as musical adviser to the Columbia Gramophone Co., a position he filled for many years.

All the time he was composing. Music of all forms came from his brain to paper. One effort was a Quintet for wood-wind and piano which won him the Sir Michael Costa prize.