

## WHAT IS NOTEWORTHY: a practical guide to new light music

(*Was der Aufmerksamkeit ist*, by Arkadjew (A. von Gizycki). *Der Artist* (Dusseldorf) Nr.2302, 31 January 1930, p. 1-2, translated by Tom McCanna; the two synopses are given below in the original English, rather than translated back from their slightly different German versions)

Albert W. Ketèlbey is of course no new phenomenon in himself, having committed his first hit, the intermezzo *In a Monastery Garden*, to the London publishers as long ago as 1915, but in the world of German salon repertoire it is only recently that he has been a quite outstanding novelty. He offers a genre which is quite individual: the simplified symphonic poem, crossed with the style of cultivated, easily understood light music - a happy solution to the problem of fusing the spirit of the age with the immutable fundamental laws of musical aesthetics. Ketèlbey writes programme music, he illustrates, his melodies and harmonic ingredients are song', story and brilliantly coloured pictures. There are no unanswerable question-mark, as in so many of today's paintings, there are no contradictory unfinished phrases, as we are offered in today's poetry, no whirlwinds of sound in bizarre compositional forms, no shrieking instrumentation. Ketèlbey is an interesting, amusing musical gossip, an accomplished raconteur, a mental globe-trotter, he forms his musical thoughts in well-constructed sentences, polished so that the instrumental reflexion gleams with colour rather than with dazzling lights. His music does not excite, but rather stimulates the spirit. It does not overwhelm us, but calms us. And when he has related us an episode in his compositional life, we go home satisfied, aware that we have experienced a beautiful moment, that for a few minutes a pure aesthetic pleasure has released us from the everyday. He has entertained us, he has offered the most agreeable diversion - and that is the very purpose of light music. Albert W. Ketèlbey is its master.

He has been brought to the attention of German salon music by the firm of Bosworth & Co. of Leipzig. Their publicity has concentrated on him, and they have issued eleven of his compositions in exemplary fashion. When the effort of a publishing. house is applied systematically to a really worthy subject, such as the creative output of Ketèlbey, it must bear fruit all round. Salon orchestras have quickly assimilated Ketèlbey's style, as it is particularly clear and attractive. Each meaningful and plainly expressed idea is readily grasped, it saves guesswork, equivocation, rumination, finding out by trial and error. When the interpretation is masterly, it makes the listener receptive, it allows content to take precedence over form, it enables the listener to experience lasting pleasure. Ketèlbey's directness, even a certain simplicity, are here the servants of a highly skilled composer.

As already mentioned, his first great success was the impressionistic picture *In a Monastery Garden*. It is a model of how the inspiration, intention and wishes of the composer can be clearly expressed, in order to achieve what we call a "committed" performance through the total comprehension of the performers, as he explains in the work's synopsis:

*The first theme represents a poet's reverie in the quietude of the monastery garden amidst the beatific surroundings - the calm serene atmosphere -the leafy trees, and the singing birds The second theme in the minor, represents the more personal " note of sadness, of appeal and contrition. Presently the monks are heard chanting the "Kyrie eleison " (which should be sung by the orchestra) with the organ playing and the chapel-bell ringing. The first theme is now heard in a quieter manner as if it had become more ethereal and distant; the singing of the monks is again heard - it becomes louder and more insistent, bringing the piece to conclusion in a glow of exaltation.*

It would be welcomed as in the artistic interests of all concerned, if, especially in our salon repertory, such explanations were printed at the top of the principal orchestral parts. In large symphony orchestras, the great conductor himself explains in rehearsal the essence and content of the work in hand, and thus moulds his conception and motivates special nuances. Even in the field of light music we could have a much greater incentive towards making the most of the spritual content of our standard works, if we were to have the poetic design of the piece explained in a verbal commentary: then a graphic counterpart to the composition would be guaranteed, even in those bands which are too easy-going for profound thought, and not endowed with confidence in their own feelings.

Ketèlbey's *In the Moonlight* is another product of his skilful tone-painting. He is a master of ethereal colouring: transparent when he is creating a clearly articulated picture, faithful to the mood of the work when he choses harmonies and modulations which befit the theme.

By the time he wrote the dance-intermezzo *Wedgwood Blue*, he had firmly established his popularity. It is a special gift to hit upon fine-sounding titles, and Ketèlbey possesses that gift like hardly anyone else. Titles are signposts for performer and audience, perhaps even more for the publisher (how many mediocre works are today accepted by the publisher because of a fine title?). In *Wedgwood Blue* we find the real characteristics of Ketèlbey: form, construction, everything which exists in typical salon music - but then a special "something" is added, and the composition is somehow artistically enobled, and becomes worthy of serious performance. Whenever I look through Ketèlbey's works, I always have the feeling that he has not quite achieved great symphonies, he has not had the gift of weight, of radiant power, of the really long line, so he has resigned himself to devoting his ability to a sort of orchestral art-in-miniature, a musical Wolzogen cabaret act for salon orchestra music.

The next landmark on Ketèlbey's road to fame was his scene *In a Persian Market*. In this ethnographical musical illustration scarcely anyone can equal him. How many tone-pictures of this kind have been written and released "in the market"? It is not merely a couple of characteristically exotic intervals, not merely a couple of diminished or augmented harmonies, not merely a certain rhythm, which can mould such a composition into a worthwhile artistic product. Most compositions lack a sense of feeling for the spirit of the place and for the people they are telling us about: And this is the strong point of this English composer, the gift almost of musical clairvoyancy, allied with his skill at musical narration.

This intensity within the confines of the simple yet skilful construction of his compositions is also found in the intermezzo *Bells across the Meadows*. Here, in just 78 bars lasting scarcely four minutes, he paints a picture that makes us experience so realistically God's sunny open countryside, with its sounds and textures mingled with the distant ringing of bells, that we have the possibility, because of his masterly style; of exactly imparting our experience to the listener an advantage which unfortunately we rarely encounter in our performing material.

The art of Ketèlbey in inventing and finding themes is demonstrated in two compositions of a more religious character, an area where our repertoire has been greatly lacking on special days such as ember days, Remembrance Day or Holy Week. These pieces are *Sanctuary of the Heart meditation religieuse*., and a reverie *The Sacred Hour*. How original Ketèlbey is in his inspiration is shown by the printed synopsis of the latter work

*A young priest is playing the organ, the melody expressing his changing mood. His thoughts are suddenly interrupted by the singing of the "Ave Maria", and in an access of fervent emotion he resumes playing and almost imperceptibly his melody adapts itself to the "Ave Maria" (which is still being sung) and rises to a grand climax of devotional fervour.*

The composer deserves special praise for the skilful scoring for organ within the context of the salon orchestra. One feels that with this artist, everything is polished, smoothed, well thought-through, combined and tried out till it all fits together, as though it were cast from a mould.

Ketèlbey has given us two more convincing examples of his distinctive ethnographic tone-painter's ability to characterise (I have found the same expertise in Bruno Luling with his *Indian Suite*). These are his oriental fantasy *In a Chinese Temple Garden* and the tone-picture *By the Blue Hawaiian Waters*. The latter especially offers us a very welcome addition to our novelty repertory, with its weaving of Hawaiian song and dance motives.

To conclude my review of Ketèlbey, I can recommend his gipsy tale *Chal Romano (Gipsy Lad)*, which he clothes in the form of an overture. With this work he comes nearest to the realm of the symphonic poem. The label "overture" should not deceive anyone: the work can be the rewarding introduction to the third part of a serious orchestral concert, or even a successful main number at the centre of an evening programme of salon music.

In recent years, our main publishers deserve our gratitude for introducing our light music ensembles to selected works from the foreign literature in complete series. These include Benjamin with their Tchaikovsky series and Scandinavian music, Belaieff with the works of Rimsky-Korsakov, B. Leopold's Continental Verlag with their Czech series, and Wilhelm Zimmermann the *Stimmen der Volker* by Leopold. The Ketèlbey series produced by Bosworth now belongs to what is for us performers a very necessary and without question successful method of refreshing the vitality of our repertoire.