

Teachers and Text-Books

Author(s): G. H. Clutsam

Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 56, No. 865 (Mar. 1, 1915), pp. 144-146

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/909512>

Accessed: 31-10-2015 04:00 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Musical Times Publications Ltd.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

performers but for the sake of the critic; that is to say, it will be his business to interest the public in his own views of music as an art. He will choose his own subject, and choose it where he will; he will go to many a concert and preserve a stony silence about everything he heard there, for the simple reason that none of it was sufficiently out of the ordinary even to be worth mentioning; and he will take his theme from some happening that to the composers and performers engaged in the concert may seem a matter of little importance. He will, in a word, put the crowd of ordinary performers and composers in their proper places. If they are really big people, he will talk about them and what they have done; if they are only ordinary people,—and nine-tenths of them are no more than that—he will as little dream of discussing them, or even mentioning them, as he would of writing half-a-column upon the restaurant cook who was answerable for his dinner. And so my last word to 'A Native Composer' is this: the mere fact that you are a composer, even a native composer, does not entitle you to any more consideration in the Press than other honest and reasonably capable workers get; if you wish to be taken very seriously you must show that you are big enough to be worth taking seriously in a world that is crammed almost to overflowing with ability of a really high average. You yourself unconsciously give your own case away. You appeal for 'treatment as sportsman-like and fair to the aspiring champion of Queen's Hall or Covent Garden Opera as that received by the idols of the National Sporting Club or the Crystal Palace on Cup-tie Day.' But the people we go to see at the National Sporting Club or the Crystal Palace are performers who have proved their possession of exceptional ability. It is right that Carpentier should have his column in the papers: Carpentiers are scarce. But minor boxers are plentiful—almost as plentiful, shall I say, as minor composers—and no newspaper would think of conferring publicity on every local bruiser who can put on a pair of boxing gloves. I myself can grow enthusiastic over Carpentier, because I know that if I were to train till doomsday I should never be as great a pugilist as he; but I cannot grow enthusiastic over the friends I spar with every day, and whose abilities I know to be just about what my own are. I can grow enthusiastic over a great composer, but not over a man who, I instinctively feel, has no more real originality in him as a composer than I have. 'A Native Composer' may say I am blasé: all critics are supposed to become blasé after a few years of their strenuous life. I find myself, however, more keenly sensitive to great music than I was twenty years ago; and if this is to be blasé, if this is the result of years of daily immersion in music, then I can only pray the gods to give me long life, and let each day of that life be filled full with music. But it must be great music. All that 'A Native Composer' has to do, then, if he wishes to be treated deferentially by the critics, is to be a great man. I am sure that will be easy to him.

## TEACHERS AND TEXT-BOOKS.

BY G. H. CLUTSAM.

Mr. Corder as teacher and Mr. Newman as critic have certainly provided entertaining matter in the last two numbers of the *Musical Times*, but the controversy can hardly be described as seriously argumentative. The one modestly eulogises his own particular functions as the producer and protector of the sound musician, and the other simply anathematises the whole process of pedagogical parturition. As we are living in an epoch of universal belligerency, with an invisible and fateful Samson tumbling the walls of a thousand-and-one ideals, conventions, sentiments, doctrines, and other fool's paradises about our astonished heads, a destructive policy in discussing such contentious subjects as music-teaching and music text-books seems for the moment the only thoroughly sound and significant means of dealing effectively with their inherent incapacities. It is true that as far as Mr. Newman is concerned, he is content to belabour the text-books with the effective but obvious bludgeon afforded by a reference to consecutive fifths, a detail in rules that was dodged in innumerable instances by the older masters, and is entirely dishonoured by the modern; but the point is only the most delicate of caramboles in a system which persistently buffets, batters, and baffles the infatuated coterie that endeavours to sustain its complete efficiency.

All attempts to reason that modern music is the outcome of the old theories are manifest and flagrant subterfuges. It is nothing of the sort. It is based on other considerations altogether, and the very attempt to bring the opposing material into line, is at the outset bewildering to the innate commonsense of the modern music-student. Any composer who has marked the development of musical art with a white stone has done so independently and in spite of his text-book or teacher, and the nearer we approach to our own time the less reason is there to treat with the smallest reverence or respect the old washed-out principles that have obtained universal recognition since Rousseau fiddled about with his system of chord inversions nearly two hundred years ago.

The present-day teacher, who, as Mr. Corder suggests, is generally a composer with only failure to his credit, spends the best part of his plodding autumnal lifetime in pleading to the young and ambitious student principles and rules that have generally been the cause of his own downfall. If he buried himself instead of his head in the sand when confronted with the necessity of considering modern tendencies, the mass of entirely discredited knowledge that gives his person a dubious authority would no longer disturb the peace of the intelligent pupil.

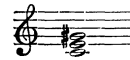
This remark, of course, is not intended to be abusive or personal. The teacher, after all, is only the embodied text-book with the cover off, and moth-eaten in the pages that might possess a little value. If the most generous view of the most complete text-book be taken, the chances of

anybody, after laboriously assimilating all its precepts, writing even a respectable waltz-tune would be as remote as Tipperary from the Punjab. The budding student—the one with a real instinct for music and reasonable ambitions—in the most desultory association with his art outside the pedagogic régime, has his musical sense set agog and vibrating with impressions that appear to him alive with potentialities no book or teacher attempts to approximate. The weary progress through a series of musical calamities based on the superfluous theory of inversions, the illicit passion for figured basses, the searching for roots to any structure of notes that may constitute the dignity of a chord generally with some idea of excusing it or forgiving it, and the orgiastic indulgence in contrapuntal and fugal exercises that would sap the vitality of any healthy musical enthusiasm if it were not for the promise of great ultimate accomplishment alluringly held out by the teacher, seem to be unquestionably no longer essentials of a musical education. Possibly these things were necessary when a practical method of forcing the all-important considerations of part-writing or harmony on the ear was not comfortably available. But surely the presence of the pianoforte for one thing, with its easy comprehension of all sorts and conditions of music, in thousands of homes, should have long since put an entirely different complexion on all teaching. The pianola, also, with its mechanical revelation of a myriad musical secrets, is likely to prove still more significant in easing up the educatory methods of the future. Already, by these adventitious aids, innumerable composers of sorts have sprung up like mushrooms in the last decade or so, and the pianoforte, which of course assists actual creation better than the pianola, has placed them in a position that serious study on the old lines would scarcely allow them to obtain. This ubiquitous instrument, moreover, has brought composition, such as it is, to the threshold of any reasonable aspiration, and if a certain dignity disallows the composer to delegate the duties to an outsider, a little practice will soon permit the transference of the musical thought, whatever it may be, to the permanence of paper. After the production of a succession of pleasant sounds that fit according to the composer's light, the need of understanding their breed, family, social connections, or general import seems somewhat superfluous. Further, what is being composed under these conditions, with an enviable security of technique, has generally a considerable and indubitable authority behind it—a question of reflection and subconscious imitation, however, that need not be considered here.

The only reason for introducing this type of composer into the subject is to call attention to a point that cannot be overlooked in dealing with the modern trend of music, although the text-books studiously avoid it. Acoustical justifications of harmony, as we generally understand it, have fallen before the practical assault of temperamental tuning in keyed instruments, the pianoforte being the all-important member of the family. Students

B

are still implored to consider, at least in their early efforts at composition, the æsthetic authority of a pure scale that for all practical purposes lost its significance a century ago, and is now as dead as the dodo. For instruments that are capable of appreciating a just intonation, *i.e.*, those of the string family or the trombone, a sense of the value of a G sharp, say, as against that of an A flat is not so much dependent on the player's ear as it is on the note's resolution and the composer's notation. For instance, some theorists, following the arguments of the early Victorian Dr. Day, will not admit the triad with augmented fifth :



but insist on explaining it away as a minor thirteenth with a resolution that would make any respectable player seriously question their authority :



Modern composers, of course, have very definite ideas of the chord, without for a moment considering its root-basis. But what text-book extant is helpful to the student in dealing with this primitive expression of the most significant of all chord-structures in the modern harmonic system ?

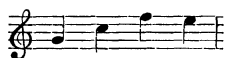
But this little side of what is altogether a reasonably complex question is not nearly so alarming in the consideration of the text-book as are the workings of the theoretical mind in dealing with elementary musical matters. The entire system supports itself on mediæval refuse, and it does not seem to have occurred to anybody that until all the débris is swept irreverently away, any sort of an approach between theory and practice is completely impossible.

The cause of all the trouble is a very simple one. The teaching of harmony from a polyphonic basis is as unnatural as it is abortive. The machinery is not only clogged, but absolutely refuses to work. There is scarcely a rule in strict Simple or Double Counterpoint that is not entirely the healthier for the breaking. The latitude permitted in the free styles is an insult to the student who has been cajoled into frittering away a lot of valuable time in appreciating the utter futility of the others.

There was a time in the palmy days of polyphony when mechanical devices were invented for the sake of insinuating a little variety into a musical system that threatened to come to a full stop at the beginning of its emotional career. They still exist. Take the matter of inversions in Double Counterpoint. The theorists were driven to a calculating table that showed at a glance the relative position of parts when they were inverted. Further, as each type of inversion (there are fourteen different species of Double Counterpoint, all beautifully irrelevant to modern composition) provides its own peculiar difficulties, it was found necessary to construct a table for all of them. Another device, that of imitation, was considered a wonderful adjunct to musical expression, and when

the main theme (generally fashioned on an anæmic *canto fermo* of a few notes) was exactly imitated in one or many parts, it was dignified by the name of a canon.

Then there were imitations by inversion, augmentation, and by contrary motion; also, but not so frequently, as the construction involved a lot of labour, that very curious arrangement *per recte et retro*, in which the theme stated was read backwards in the imitation. There was also another device in which the singer or player of the imitating part received a cordial invitation to carry out the composer's design by standing on his head. The spirit of all these terrible things is still rampant in current text-books. A very distinguished English theorist of the Victorian era and a professor of music at Oxford University, Sir Frederick A. Gore Ouseley, insisted that 'every student of music must make himself familiar with these contrapuntal resources if he would fain scale the loftiest heights and make himself distinguished as a composer of high-class music.' Again, in a work on musical composition published only a few years ago we find the following statements accented in black type, as a first principle: 'Study counterpoint first, and through counterpoint master harmony,' and as a second principle, 'the study of counterpoint, if it is to be of real value, must be strict.' As a matter of fact, all that modal counterpoint can teach the inquiring student of harmony is a succession of puerilities that can be acquired more effectually by other and explicitly simple means. On the other hand, all that is valuable for practical purposes in counterpoint is unambiguously held in the contents of a few innocent harmonic progressions. Even if the idea prevailed centuries ago, why, in the name of all that is sensible, should it still be considered necessary that the first bowing acquaintance of the novice with his art should be in terms of the voice, as represented by the village choir, in four uncertain parts, and over all the flavour of a dubious ecclesiolatry? Is the student ever permitted to evolve a tune? Not if the teacher can help it! But he is allowed to build one. Dr. Prout tells him that 'the rules for melodic expression are few and simple. A good melody is one that flows naturally and easily; it is therefore best either to proceed by step of a second (called "conjunct motion")—that is, to the next note above or below; or by leap ("disjunct motion") of a consonant interval.' He also instructs him that 'it is seldom good to introduce a leap of a seventh in the melody with one intermediate note, unless all three notes form part of the same chord, the leaps be upwards, and the last note fall one degree.' This is tune-making with a vengeance, and there are scores of similar permissions and restrictions! In the illustrative examples the following is considered *bad!*:



What must an intelligent student think of this type of instruction? An amusing illustration of

Mr. Newman's recent animadversions on the rules concerning consecutive fifths is to be found in the following example from the same author, the first two bars marked as 'Very Bad,' and the final cadence 'Not Bad':



The two examples are not intended to join up, but happen to do so very satisfactorily. Personally, I should consider the complete passage pleasant and refreshing—there is not the slightest prevarication about it. Here is another presumed 'Very Bad' passage from a contrapuntal standpoint:



but if you presume it under some such conditions as the following:



the effect is scarcely to be questioned.

(To be continued.)

## Occasional Notes.

AS TO  
ENCORES  
AND  
KNITTING.

Those of us who chafe at the encoring of ballads and other musical 'small deer' may rejoice that so far our orchestral conductors are content to acknowledge the hearty reception of a long work by merely bowing. At a recent New York Philharmonic concert, Dukas's 'L'Apprenti Sorcier' being enthusiastically received, the conductor repeated the work. Dukas's Scherzo has wit, but certainly not brevity, and we may imagine the mingled feelings of many of the applauders, especially as Debussy's 'L'Après-midi d'un faune,' down for hearing earlier in the programme, had been omitted—presumably to shorten the concert! This same concert provided yet another unusual feature, in the prohibition of knitting during the performance. We have not so far found ourselves annoyed at Queen's Hall by the efforts of the ladies in this way, but it appears that in America the deftly-moving hands and clicking needles have been so much in evidence as to distract. Hence a printed slip in the programmes calling on the knitters to cease from troubling.

The forthcoming Festival of A FESTIVAL OF BRITISH MUSIC, in May, at Queen's Hall promises to be of great interest. BRITISH MUSIC. It is quite in keeping with our attitude in the matter that the idea should have originated with a foreigner,—M. Mlynarski. In his hands, with the aid of Mr. Thomas Beecham, the artistic side of the venture is safe. It now remains for the public to do the rest. It is stated that three concerts are to be given, and that the programmes will be made from the best works which have been produced during the past ten years. But why this self-denial? One charming work occurs