

12-2014

Hamilton Harty: Musical Polymath, by Jeremy Dibble (review)

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Recommended Citation

Onderdonk, J. (2014). Hamilton Harty: Musical Polymath, by Jeremy Dibble (review). *Notes*, 71(2), 292-295. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/musichtc_facpub/31

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state, *resonance* assumed the utmost importance for Mompou's musical expression, being for him the point of transformation between sound and silence, like bells heard from a distance, when one could still sense the vibrations after the sound had ceased. Pla points out that the piano, with its unique harmonics, is the only instrument that could produce the resonance Mompou perceived in silence, and thus his narrow compositional focus on the instrument.

As Mompou moved to greater brevity of expression, the music's meaning resided in the sonority itself, sound that could stand alone without the need for complex development or dramatic climaxes. Stephen Hough captures the significance of Mompou's bell sounds in saying they "are not so much a call to prayer, as a prayer itself—an abstract orison celebrating a sacredness in the very quiver of the metal" (notes to *Piano Music* by Federico Mompou, Hyperion CDA 66963 [1997], CD). And in the prologue to *El eterno recomenzar*, pianist Arcadi Volodos commented that he felt that more than being heard, Mompou wanted to become one with the listener through the "sounding silence" (p. 16; *silencio sonoro*).

It takes a special state of mind in both performers and listeners to contact the transcendent consciousness Mompou aspired to express in his music. Early in his life he evoked the world of magic, as heard in two important sets of pieces: *Cants màgics* (1917) and *Charmes* (1920–21). The inspiration for these and other early pieces came primarily from images and memories of childhood, from the ordinary magic of direct perception, unclouded by the stress and complications of the adult life. His are not "childish" works, as are some of Satie's impish essays, but express the wisdom of a wide-eyed connection with the phenomenal world. As Hough commented, "without a spirit of childhood in the listener Mompou's 'kingdom' is closed and some of his music can seem almost infantile" (notes to *Piano Music*).

Pla's CD-set of the complete piano music is a treasure and a valuable complement to the book. This is not the space for an in-depth review, but suffice it to say that Pla's formidable technique and longstanding connection with Mompou and his music have produced an authoritative and deeply

moving set of performances, at once playful and profound. There are other recordings of the complete works, by Mompou himself late in his life and Pla's colleague at ESMUC Jordi Masó, but Pla's interpretations are distinctive and welcome additions.

The book and CD-set are well worth having in larger music libraries as well as smaller institutions where the Spanish (or Catalan) would not be an obstacle for patrons. German and English translations are being planned and could be ready during 2015. The recordings alone would be a welcome addition to any library. Pianists and adventurous listeners who are looking for a "Fresh Start" would do well to add both book and CDs to their personal library.

Writing about sensuous experience is never a substitute for the direct experience, but words can guide us and lead us back to the experience. *El eterno recomenzar* is a compelling and joyful invitation into Mompou's sonorous world, and the recordings make it easy to travel back and forth, from thinking mind to open heart, from sound and back to silence. We can be grateful to Pla for pointing out that Mompou was a very holy man, and that through his music we, too, can rediscover the essence he sought.

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Hamilton Harty: Musical Polymath. By Jeremy Dibble. (Music in Britain, 1600–2000.) Woodbridge, Suffolk, Eng.: Boydell Press, 2013. [xiv, 365 p. ISBN 9781843838586. \$80.] Music examples, illustrations, bibliography, appendices, index.

Composer, conductor, and piano accompanist extraordinaire, Herbert Hamilton Harty (1879–1941) was a central figure of the early-twentieth-century British music scene. Born in County Down in the north of Ireland, Harty was the son of a prominent church organist and music teacher. Prodigiously gifted, he obtained church posts in Belfast and Dublin before embarking for London, at age twenty-one, to work as a freelance accompanist. Expert sight-reading skills and an ability to transpose on the spot catapulted him into the foremost music circles of the capitol, where he accompanied some of the best-known artists

of the period, including Harry Plunket Greene, John McCormack, Fritz Kreisler, Joseph Szigeti, and Agnes Nicholls (whom Harty married in 1904). Orchestral conducting was an inevitable next step, and by 1914 Harty was appearing regularly before the chief English orchestras. His celebrated conductorship, from 1920 to 1933, of the Hallé Orchestra produced some of the best orchestral playing of the era and resulted in the British premieres of major works by Gustav Mahler and Dmitrii Shostakovich as well as landmark performances of Hector Berlioz's large-scale works, for which he had a special affinity. A pioneer in the studio, Harty collaborated with Columbia, Decca, and HMV on nearly 200 audio recordings (listed in an appendix). Working freelance after 1933, he enjoyed considerable acclaim in Australia and in the U.S.A. (where he was dubbed the "Irish Toscanini") before he was cut down by cancer at age sixty-one.

Harty was also a composer of distinction. Though he was formally untrained, his pianistic abilities and experience as an accompanist translated well to the writing of solo songs and chamber music, which from the first possessed striking maturity. His earliest orchestral works—*An Irish Symphony* (1904) and *A Comedy Overture* (1907)—date from his efforts to establish himself as a conductor and were likewise well received. Success on the podium severely curtailed this early creative work, but he never entirely ceased to compose, as the later songs, the Piano Concerto (1922), assorted suites, and occasional pieces, and a late tone poem based on Irish mythology (*The Children of Lir* [1938]), attest.

This last work reminds us of the importance Harty placed on his Irish heritage. He regularly attended the Feis Ceoil (the annual Irish music festival) in Dublin, typically drew on Irish poets in selecting his texts, and brought to his own melodic writing the flexible rhythms and ornamental turns of the *sean-nós* folk-singing tradition. And yet, because of his Protestant upbringing, this passion for Ireland did not include a commitment to Irish independence or an embrace of the political goals of the Gaelic revival. Declaring himself to be a "British musician with an Irish accent" (p. 148), he pointedly championed *English* music, premiering important symphonies by Arnold

Bax and William Walton, and loudly protested what he saw as the "discouragement of English music" (the title of a 1928 lecture) by society at large. Perhaps his greatest fame as a composer came from his orchestral transcriptions of George Frideric Handel's *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, works with a "national following" (p. xiii) that were a staple of English concert programming until the 1970s.

Clearly, Harty's story is complex and many-sided, and Jeremy Dibble, who has published biographies of Hubert Parry, Charles Villiers Stanford, and John Stainer, brings considerable experience to the tricky work of untangling its various strands. Drawing on a large number of published and unpublished sources—letters and private papers, contemporary memoirs, minute books, and published histories of the Hallé and other British orchestras, above all a huge array of contemporaneous newspaper articles and reviews—Dibble neatly clarifies the facts outlined above while touching on a wide range of other topics. These include Harty's Royal Navy service during World War I (he worked on submarine detection), his rancorous contract negotiations with various orchestra boards, his poor opinions of opera and jazz, his conducting technique and rapport with his players, his conservative concert programming, and his often pugnacious views on English musical life. Dibble also vigorously discusses Harty's modest compositional oeuvre. Providing detailed overviews of nearly every work and consistently singling out the telling melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic detail—twenty-one musical illustrations accompany the text—he makes a strong case for the technical assurance of this music, its surface elegance, and secure craftsmanship. These qualities derive from Harty's intimate knowledge of the standard nineteenth-century continental repertory—the Austro-German classics, Berlioz and other French masters, and "mainstream" nationalists like Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky and Antonín Dvořák, whose characteristic mixing of ethnic expression with traditional forms provided a strong model for Harty's own Irish-tinged yet basically continental idiom. This was the same repertory (and the same composers) that Harty regularly conducted, of course, and

there is an obvious parallel between his unapologetic romanticism and his lack of sympathy, as composer and conductor, for modern music. He had no time for Arnold Schoenberg and Aleksandr Scriabin and his appreciation for Igor Stravinsky stopped with *Petrushka*. Still, he had room in his pantheon for Jean Sibelius and Walton, two modernists whose music retained strong romantic and expressive features. As Dibble points out, their fundamentally emotional approach to composition, different from the “academic” and “cerebral” orientation of much ultramodern music from the period, resonated personally with Harty, an autodidact whose lack of formal training stimulated faith in “intuitive” and “instinctive” processes.

The core narrative is wonderfully supplemented by interesting sidelights on neglected, but still crucial, aspects of the British music scene. Thus we are treated to a glimpse of the recondite world of piano accompanists, and the practical and philosophical issues facing this special breed of musician. We also obtain a vivid picture of the difficulties facing young and impecunious musicians trying to piece together a living in Edwardian London. Perhaps most intriguing is the discussion of the politics of British orchestras: the exigencies of the balance sheet and its effect on concert programming, and the conflicts inevitably arising between the ambitious “star conductor” and the orchestra board working to secure his loyalty. (Harty’s termination by the Hallé followed directly on his long-term engagement by the London Symphony Orchestra.) The disruptions to British orchestral life caused by the formation of the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1930 (which led to a radical reshuffling of players from one ensemble to another) make for fascinating reading.

Excellent though the discussion is and despite the breadth of topics it covers, one thing is missing from the book: Harty himself. He never completely comes to life as a person. This is not necessarily Dibble’s fault since (as he acknowledges) very little early correspondence remains, while that which does survive, especially after 1914, is largely of a professional nature. Radio broadcasts and published memoirs by people who knew him are likewise scant on details. Thus the big events of his personal

life—his estrangement from Nicholls, his likely romantic involvement with the singer Elsie Swinton, and his late-in-life affair (probably of the heart only) with Lorie Bolland, a married Australian woman whom he met aboard ship—are largely shrouded in mystery. Dibble fleshes out these episodes as best he can but lack of solid information soon obliges him to return to Harty’s compositions and performances, the default subjects of this study. But there are other aspects of Harty’s personality that might have received greater scrutiny or, better put, more sustained pondering. Outwardly self-confident, subject to black depressions, gregarious, deeply lonely, generous, vengeful, gracious, touchy in the extreme, bullying and authoritarian, inspiring loyalty in his players, an advocate of British music, a harsh critic of British music—he was a walking paradox, even by the standards of most artists. Dibble duly notes all these contradictions and bluntly acknowledges the complexity of the man. But by discussing the contradictions in isolation and refraining from hypothesizing an overall pattern that might possibly account for them—and also by strangely muting critical moments, like Harty’s reaction to his father’s death, about which (to judge by the text) detailed information appears to be available—the portion of the narrative devoted to Harty’s life and personality fits uncertainly with the rest of the book.

Possibly no larger pattern is discoverable. Harty took great pains to maintain his privacy, and given the lack of information about his formative years, Dibble can be commended for refraining from the worst kind of psychobiography. (Indeed, he seems determined to take the high road, and rightly dismisses unproven reports of Harty’s long-term affair with Olive Baguley, his private secretary.) Even so, the habit of caution, of shying away from synthesis, seems to inform other areas in the book, notably the assertion about Harty’s “conservative” concert programming. Dibble appears to be of two minds about this, establishing the truth of his claim even as he shows how the conductor, partly in response to outside criticism, broadened his repertory and quickened his receptivity to new works. In the end, we are left a little uncertain as to just where on the spectrum,

from conservative to progressive, Harty actually lies. It would have been useful to look systematically at the programming of other British conductors from the period—the American musicologist Jenny Doctor has been writing about this for some years—in order to place him more precisely among his peers.

In other areas, though, notably his discussion of Harty's music and its stylistic influences, Dibble's "synthesis" cannot be bettered. And his grasp of context, in this case the ambiguous political and cultural

position in which Irish Protestants found themselves in revolutionary Ireland, permits him to break through one of the most puzzling features of Harty's secretive personality. With this book, Jeremy Dibble has opened up a conversation about possibly the most important "forgotten player" of the early-twentieth-century British music scene. For this we owe him a loud vote of thanks.

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HIPNESS, JAZZ

Living the Hiplife: Celebrity and Entrepreneurship in Ghanaian Popular Music. By Jesse Weaver Shipley. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. [xiii, 329 p. ISBN 9780822353669. \$25.] Music examples, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.

Living the Hiplife is a well-balanced ethnographic account of the current popular music scene in Ghana. This work is part of a series of publications that provide an updated perspective on Ghanaian highlife music since the seminal work of John Collins in the 1990s (*Highlife Time* [Accra, Ghana: Anansesem Publications, 1996]). Nathan Plageman's recent book, *Highlife Saturday Night*, for example, looks at the emergence of highlife music in the 1940s and 1950s within the context of the creation of urban middle class life, ideals, and aesthetics during the late colonial period in Ghana (*Highlife Saturday Night: Popular Music and Social Change in Urban Ghana* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012]). The present work looks at the most recent evolution of highlife music, hiplife, which the author Jesse Weaver Shipley distinguishes as a "popular music genre that fuses hip-hop sampling, beatmaking, and a rap lyrical flow with older forms of highlife music, Akan story telling, and proverbial oratory" (p. 4). In examining this new style of hip-hop music in Ghana, *Living the Hiplife* is also an important addition to the emerging body of scholarship on African forms of hip-hop, and it is among the first group of monographs dedicated to a particular African hip-hop tradition (see Brad Weiss, *Street Dreams and Hip Hop Barbbershops: Global Fantasy in Urban Tanzania* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009];

and Eric Charry ed., *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012]).

Although its title might indicate that it was written for ethnomusicologists, Shipley is actually an anthropologist, and his book rather presents an ethnographic account of popular music in contemporary Ghana, through the eyes of its stars, groups, and producers. Thus, instead of transcriptions and music analysis, the author takes an artist-centered approach through the use of interviews and anecdotes that highlight contemporary issues in Ghanaian popular music, such as transculturation, gender, digital media, popular culture, and urbanization. The author also analyzes several song texts to uncover the use of parody and humor to make oblique political and social commentaries. Shipley presents hiplife as being simultaneously global—incorporating the latest fashions in international hip-hop music and culture—and local, through its use of Twi and pidgin English, both lingua francas in southern Ghana and among Ghanaian immigrant communities. This last feature distinguishes hiplife sonically from similar-sounding musics coming out of the African diaspora.

The first two chapters outline the emergence of hiplife music from earlier forms of highlife during the 1990s within the context of a period of extensive rural-urban migration in Ghana, when young people