

Vocal Chamber Music

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The development of music over the last century has, through continually increased demands on technical virtuosity, brought a tremendous increase in the means of expression. The music of the last decade has sufficiently exploited the advantages of this achievement: it has made use of the most refined possibilities of instrumental resources. But this raising of the technical level has itself produced a side-effect of catastrophic significance: the instrument has become *a matter for professionals*. Today, an unscalable wall separates performers, professional musicians, from the mass of consumers, the music-loving public. This division is not the only cause, but it is the main one, of the crisis in music which are experiencing today, and which expresses itself in the fact that the great majority of the public is either indifferent or hostile to new music, while the artist, robbed of his great resonance, is turning more and more merely to his closest professional colleagues. The catchword "Music-Festival music", clearly marking the watershed of this development, is already with us. It is obvious that an artist without an audience is unthinkable. But I am just as much of the opinion that *an audience which does not itself make music is nonsensical*. A really close relationship to music can never be achieved merely by listening, without one's own musical activity. No gramophone or broadcast can alter the fact that the most beautiful and noblest things that music provides remain inaccessible to a person who is unable to become a musical organ himself; and that one cannot really take possession especially of new music until one grapples personally with it on one's instrument. What our musical life needs is — this contemporary need is already being expressed in the youth music movement — a revival of the joy in music-making, a fresh impetus for domestic music. But most advantageously placed for this is what has long slumbered: a-cappella singing. I don't mean the singing club — there's no lack of this, but it misses the main point with its mass-drill — but *vocal music-making as chamber or domestic music*. The noble artistic bloom of the a-cappella style has almost disappeared, or at least become absolutely meaningless, as a result of three centuries of all-dominating instrumentalism and the large mixed forms of opera and oratorio. It is only in the course of the last decade, with the decline of the massed orchestra and the move to chamber forms and thin, transparent treatment of instrumental resources, that the interest in pure vocal music has again awoken. The chamber choir and madrigal group are starting their activities, a new a-cappella literature is beginning. This more than any other form of music is dependent on a chamber-music effect. Its most precious effective means, the mutual support and intermingling of words and music, demands, in order to succeed, an intimate space and a small, almost solistic, number of singers to each part. Vocal and instrument styles are as different as day and night; failure to recognise this difference is one of the main characteristics of the recent epoch, which has with heart and soul been devoted to instrumentalism. The correct collaboration of words and music produces, with polyphonic organisation, a plasticity, an effect of light and shade, which is incomparably superior in its directness to that of instrumental polyphony. The secular music of the 16th century, the madrigal, which was almost exclusively chamber music, makes the richest and most felicitous use of these possibilities for effect. The splendours of the a-cappella epoch have largely been made available in the last few decades through new editions. Here is a treasure to be unearthed for practical music-making that can be compared in significance with what the musical life of the last century gained by the rediscovery of the life's work of Johann Sebastian Bach. But above all there is a task in this area for the creative musicians of our own time, the solution of which would be able to have an incredibly stimulating effect on the whole

of musical development: *a new vocal music* can be created, music which, born of the spirit of our time and making use of the newly-acquired expressive possibilities, leads back to the long-buried sources of genuine vocalism, a *chamber* music in the true sense of the word, which offers the joy and stimulus not only of listening but also of singing. The creation of the necessary prerequisites is a task on which educators are already working intensively; music-reading, sight-singing, speaking practice and a-cappella singing are, where sufficient trained teachers are available, already being undertaken with amazing success in schools. In any case the obstacles to be overcome here are child's play compared with the difficulties and demands on time of instrumental tuition. The main question is probably the professional training of teachers, musically gifted pupils are available everywhere. It is very important for this kind of musical practice to have a minimum of voice, if it is well taught and supported by good speaking technique. A loud voice would merely disturb such an ensemble, because it is too dominant. But the performers must first overcome the remains of instrumentalism in vocal style, which is above all a question of melodic line and the respecting of the natural limits of the voice-range. The simplest test is to demonstrate by singing it oneself: anyone who writes vocal music should sing each part through individually. If he succeeds without going even a quarter-tone out of tune, then it is satisfactory. But if not, then he should not expect more musicality from his singers than he is capable of himself, and should not excuse himself with the cheap excuse "I can't sing!" *Every person can sing* as long as he can *hear*.

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