

The First Book of the
GREAT MUSICIANS

***Books by
Percy A. Scholes***

The Listener's Guide to Music

The First Book of the Great Musicians

The Second Book of the Great Musicians

The Third Book of the Great Musicians

The Complete Book of the Great Musicians

The First Book of the
GREAT MUSICIANS

*A Course in Appreciation
for Young Readers*

by
Percy A. Scholes

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS
ITHACA, NEW YORK

Cover and arrangement © 2021 Yesterday's Classics, LLC.

This edition, first published in 2021 by Yesterday's Classics, an imprint of Yesterday's Classics, LLC, is an unabridged republication of the text originally published by Oxford University Press in 1922. For the complete listing of the books that are published by Yesterday's Classics, please visit www.yesterdaysclassics.com. Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of Gateway to the Classics which presents the complete text of hundreds of classic books for children at www.gatewaytotheclassics.com.

ISBN: 978-1-63334-128-9

Yesterday's Classics, LLC

PO Box 339

Ithaca, NY 14851

TO THE READER

If you want to play a good game at cricket or football or tennis you have to *learn* how the game is played, and to *practise* it. When you have learnt and practised, then you get the enjoyment.

And, in the same way, if you want to listen properly to lots of the very best music you have to *learn* about it and then to *practise* listening. And, here again, when you have learnt and practised you get the enjoyment.

But learning about a game, and practising it, are really quite good fun in themselves.

And I hope you will find that learning about music, and practising listening to it, are also quite good fun in themselves.

If you don't get some fun out of this book as you study it, and then, when you have studied it, get greater enjoyment out of listening to music, you will greatly disappoint—

The Author

CONTENTS

I. THE COUNTRY PEOPLE AS COMPOSERS	1
II. ENGLISH MUSIC IN THE DAYS OF DRAKE AND SHAKESPEARE.....	9
III. HENRY PURCELL	22
IV. GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL	33
V. JOHN SEBASTIAN BACH	47
VI. 'C-O-N-T-R-A-P-U-N-T-A-L'	57
VII. ALL ABOUT FUGUES AND HOW TO LISTEN TO THEM	64
VIII. HAYDN.....	73
IX. MOZART	82
X. SONATAS AND SYMPHONIES	92
XI. BEETHOVEN	100
XII. WHAT IS AN ORCHESTRA?.....	109
XIII. ROBERT SCHUMANN	117
XIV. CHOPIN.....	125

XV. WHAT IS 'ROMANTIC MUSIC'?	138
XVI. GRIEG AND HIS NORWEGIAN MUSIC	147
XVII. EDWARD ELGAR	160
XVIII. MACDOWELL—THE AMERICAN COMPOSER	170

CHAPTER I

**THE COUNTRY PEOPLE
AS COMPOSERS**

A CHAPTER ON FOLK MUSIC

THIS is a book about the Great Composers—by which we generally mean men of musical genius, who have had a long training in music, and learnt how to make beautiful songs and long fine pieces for piano, or orchestra, or chorus. But these are not the only composers.

It is not so difficult to compose little tunes as people think, and if you keep your ears open you will often find people composing without knowing they are doing it. For instance, if a boy has to call ‘evening paper’ over and over again in the street, night after night, you will find that he turns it into a little four-note song. Notice this and try to write down his song next time you hear it. Little children of two years old croon to themselves tiny tunes they have made up without knowing it. It would surprise their mothers if you told them their babies were composers—but they are!

And in all countries the simple country people, who

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

have had no musical training, have yet made up very charming music—songs or dance tunes, or tunes for playing games. Music such as this we call FOLK MUSIC.

A Folk Tune is never very long or difficult, and it is only a '*Melody*' (that is, it is only a single line of notes, without any accompaniment). But, in their simple style, the Folk Tunes are very beautiful, and no composer can make anything better than the best of them.

Just in the same way you will find that the country people in every land have Folk Tales and often Folk Plays—so they are not only composers, but authors and playwrights too.

Work Music, Play Music, and Religious Music

Some of the Folk Tunes are a part of children's games which have come down for centuries. Others are a help in work, such as rowing songs (to help the rowers to keep time with their oars), songs to be sung while milking, and so on. Others, again, are part of the religion—Folk Carols to sing at Christmas from house to house, and songs and dances belonging to far-off times, before Christianity, when people thought they had to sing and dance to welcome the Sun God when he reappeared in spring; such pagan dances and songs as these latter still go on in some places, though people have forgotten their full meaning. Then, of course, there are love songs, hunting songs, and drinking songs, and songs about pirates and highwaymen, songs about going to the wars, and sea songs. There are songs on all

THE COUNTRY PEOPLE AS COMPOSERS

manner of subjects in fact, for everything that interested the country people was put into songs.

How Nations Express Their Feelings in Music

You cannot imagine a sad baby making up happy little tunes, can you? Or a happy baby making sad ones? And so with nations—their general character comes out in their songs. And every nation gets into its own particular way of making its tunes, so as to express its various feelings. English tunes are generally different from Scottish tunes, Irish from Welsh, and so forth. You can generally tell one of the negro songs from the Southern States when you hear it, and nobody who has heard much Folk Music of various nations is likely to hear a Norwegian song and think it an Italian or French one.

Collecting Tunes—A Useful Hobby

The trouble is that the country people are now hearing so many of the town-made tunes, that come to them in cheap music books or as gramophone records, that they are quickly forgetting their own old country songs. So some musicians have made a hobby of collecting the Folk Tunes before they get lost. They go out with note-book and pencil, and get the older folks to sing them the tunes that were sung in the villages when they were boys and girls, and where the old Folk Dances are still used they manage to see these, and to

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

copy down the music of the fiddler and the steps of the dance. So much of the Folk Music is being saved (only just in time!), and some of it is now printed and taught in schools, so that it may be handed down by the children to coming generations.

In America, where so many races mingle, you can collect Folk Music of all nations. In the Southern Appalachian mountains, where the people are descended from British settlers of long ago and have not mingled much with other people because the mountains cut them off, the Folk Songs are still much the same as you find in England and Scotland. You can collect lots of Irish tunes in other parts of America, and Russian, and German, and Hungarian, and Italian tunes. In addition there are, of course, negro tunes (partly descended from African melodies) and American Indian tunes.

How Folk Songs Have Influenced Composers

In all the countries the skilled and trained composers have at times used Folk Songs as parts of their larger pieces. How they do this you will learn later in the book. And the 'Form' or shape of the Folk Tunes has shown composers how to form or shape their big piano and orchestral pieces. It will help us in our study of the big works of the great composers if we can come to understand the little tunes of the people.

The thing to do is to play or sing a Folk Tune and then find out how it is made up. For instance, if we take this little North of England song and examine it we shall learn a good deal.

QUESTIONS

*(To See Whether You Remember
the Chapter and Understand It)*

1. If somebody said to you 'Can you tell me what is meant by the words "Folk Music"?' what would you reply?
2. What do we mean by a 'melody'?
3. Mention some of the different subjects of the songs sung by the country-folk.
4. What should we mean if we said 'a nation's heart is seen in its songs'?
5. Which do you think is the most useful hobby: (1) collecting foreign stamps, (2) collecting bird's eggs, or (3) collecting Folk Tunes, and why do you think so? (Do not be afraid of saying what *you* really think.)
6. Say two ways in which skilled composers have got help from the music of simple folk.

THINGS TO DO

(For School and Home)

1. Play, or get somebody to play for you, a lot of Folk Tunes from some song book, and find out how each tune is made. You will find a great many of them are either in the two bits (I-II) or the three bits (I-II-I). This exercise is important: it will teach you how to listen.

THE COUNTRY PEOPLE AS COMPOSERS

2. Get into your head as many good Folk Tunes as you can, so that you will always have something jolly to sing or whistle. This will help to make you musical. Some of the country people in England know as many as 300 or 400 old tunes. How many can *you* learn and remember?

3. Play or listen to a good many Scottish tunes, and see if you can find out from them what sort of people the Scots people are. Then do the same with the tunes of the English, Irish, Welsh, or any other nation.

4. Get somebody to teach you a Folk Dance, or, if you cannot do this, make up your own little dance to one of the Folk Tunes in a song book.

5. Find a really interesting Folk Song that tells a story and then get some friends to act it with you, whilst some one sings the song. Dressing up will help to make this enjoyable.

6. Find a good FOLK tune with a marching or dancing swing; let one play it on the piano whilst the others put in a note here and there on glasses tapped with spoons, and any other domestic orchestral instruments of the kind. Some can also play the tune on combs with paper. (Glasses can be made to sound particular notes by putting more or less water in them.)

7. Discover any other ways of getting some fun out of Folk Tunes and learning a lot of them.

BRITONS AND BRETONS

The Story of a Thousand-year-old Song

In 1758 a British force landed in France—at St. Cast, in Brittany. A Breton regiment was marching to meet it when all at once it stopped—*the British soldiers were singing one of its own Breton national songs!* The Bretons, carried away by their feelings, joined in the refrain. The officers on each side told their men to fire—and the words of command were found to be in the same language. Instead of firing at each other, the two forces threw down their weapons and became friends.

How was this? The British regiment was Welsh, and the Welsh are descendants of the ancient Britons—driven into the mountains of Wales by the Saxons in the sixth century, at the same time as the ancestors of the Bretons were driven across the sea into Brittany.

After more than a thousand years, the descendants of these two bodies of the old British nation met, and found they knew the same language and the same songs. Differences had crept into the language and into the songs, of course, but the two regiments could talk together without much difficulty, and join in a chorus together.

This shows how people cling to their national songs. This one is now known in Brittany as *Emgann Sant-Kast* (The Battle of St. Cast) and is still popular in Wales as *Captain Morgan's March*. It can be found in some song books.

CHAPTER II

ENGLISH MUSIC IN
THE DAYS OF DRAKE
AND SHAKESPEARE

A CHAPTER ON THE BEGINNING
OF MODERN MUSIC

An Explorer and His Music

When Francis Drake set out on his expedition round the world in 1577, tiny though his ship was, he yet found room in it for *musicians*. You would imagine that he would use all his little space for sailors and soldiers; but it was not so, and at meal-times he always had the musicians play before him. A Spanish admiral whom he took prisoner and whose diary has lately been printed says 'the Dragon' (for that was what the Spaniards called Drake) 'always dined and supped to the music of viols'.

The music of Drake and his men always interested the natives wherever they went. When the ship approached one island the king came off in a canoe to meet them, with six grave old counsellors with him.

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

The ship's boat was towing at the stern and the king made signs asking that the band whose music he heard might get into the boat; then he fastened his canoe to the boat and was towed along in that way, and (says Drake's chaplain, who wrote the story of the voyage) for an hour the king was 'in musical paradise.'

Drake's crew were great singers, and when they went on shore in another place, and built a fort to stay in for a time, the natives used to come to hear them sing their psalms and hymns at the time of prayers. 'Yea, they took such pleasure in our singing of Psalms, that whensoever they resorted to us, their first request was commonly this, Gnaah, by which they entreated that we should sing.'

If you read the chaplain's book, *The World Encompassed*, you will find many other little stories that will show you how musical were Drake and his seamen, or, if you prefer a modern tale book about Drake, Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* will tell you much the same.

So much for an Elizabethan explorer. Now for an actor and author.

A Dramatist and His Music

In these days the Stratford boy William Shakespeare was in London and had become a famous writer of plays. He must have been very fond of music, for we find he brings it into almost everything he writes. When he wants to make his audience believe in fairies (as in

DRAKE AND SHAKESPEARE

A Midsummer-Night's Dream) he has music—pretty little fairy songs. And when he wants to make people realize how horrible witches are (as in *Macbeth*) he has grim witch songs. His mad people (like *King Lear*) sing little, disordered snatches of song in a mad sort of way. His drunken people sing bits of songs in a riotous way. His people in love sing sentimental songs.

When Shakespeare wants to represent a vision of any sort (as when Queen Katharine is about to die, in *Henry VIII*) he prepares the feelings of his audience by music. Whenever a marvellous cure is to be performed (as in *King Lear* and other plays) he has music. When there is fighting he has trumpets and drums, and when there is a funeral procession he has a Dead March.

There is much more music in Shakespeare than this, but enough has been said to show you how musical was that writer of plays and how musical must have been the audience for whom he wrote the plays. Because of course he wrote what he knew people would like.

A Queen and Her Music

Once when an ambassador from Queen Mary of Scotland came to the court of Queen Elizabeth of England, one of the courtiers took him into a room and hid him behind the arras so that he might hear the Queen play the VIRGINALS (a sort of keyboard instrument, something like a small piano)¹. The courtier told him to be very quiet as the Queen would be angry

¹The Virginals was a small harpsichord.

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

if she knew. But the Scotsman pulled the arras aside, and the Queen saw him. She seemed very angry with him for taking such a liberty, so he fell on his knees and begged to be forgiven. Then the Queen asked him—‘Which is the better player, the Queen of Scotland or the Queen of England?’ and of course he had to say ‘The Queen of England’. As he did so he saw, of course, that his being taken to hear the Queen had really been at her command, so that she could ask this question.

So queens played in those days and were proud of their playing.

Everybody Musical Then

In those days everybody seems to have been musical. The common people sang their Folk Songs and their Rounds and Catches. The rich people and courtiers sang a sort of part-song called a MADRIGAL, and if you went out to supper it was taken as a matter of course that when the madrigal books were brought out you could sing your part at sight.

There were many musical instruments such as the Virginals (mentioned above), small Organs in churches, Viols (big and little instruments of the violin kind to play together in sets), Recorders (a kind of flute, big and little, also playing together in sets), Lutes (something like mandolines), and Hautboys, Trumpets, and Drums, for military and other purposes.

Choral Music

The choral singing was very famous then. It was so made that every voice or part (Treble, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) had a beautiful melody to sing, and yet all these beautiful melodies put together made a beautiful piece of music. There were lovely Anthems in the churches, made in this way.

The ROUNDS and CATCHES mentioned above were pieces where all the three or four voices sang the same melody, but beginning one after another, and the melody had to be carefully made so as to fit with itself when sung in this way. *You* can sing Catches; they are very good fun. A Round and a Catch are almost the same thing. We might say that when a Round has funny words we call it a Catch. *Three Blind Mice* is an Elizabethan catch.

Keyboard Music

The English composers led the world at that time in writing for the Virginals. They showed how to write music that was not just like the choral music, but was really suited for fingers on a keyboard. All the piano music of the great composers may be said to have sprung from the English virginal music of the sixteenth century. The Elizabethan composers laid the foundation, and Bach and Beethoven and Chopin and others have built upon it.

Form in Instrumental Music

When discussing Folk Songs we learnt a little about Form. In Queen Elizabeth's day composers were trying to find out good 'forms' for instrumental music.

One form they found was the VARIATIONS form. They would take some jolly tune (perhaps a popular Folk Tune), and write it out simply; then they would write it again with elaborations, and then again with further elaborations, and so on to the end. All the great composers down to our own day have been fond of the Variations form, and it was the English Elizabethan composers who invented it.

Another form was made by writing two little pieces in the style of the dances of the day and playing them one after the other, to make a longer piece. Generally one was a slow, stately dance called a Pavane, and the other a quick, nimble dance, called a Galliard.

The Fame of English Musicians

In these days English musicians were famous all over Europe, and were often sent for by the princes and kings of various countries to be attached to their courts. One called John Dowland became the King of Denmark's lute player and composer, and his music was printed in many European cities. Another, with the truly English name of John Bull, became organist of Antwerp Cathedral. A very famous composer of choral

DRAKE AND SHAKESPEARE

and virginal music in these days was William Byrd, and another was Orlando Gibbons. Try to remember the names of these men and to hear some of their music.

QUESTIONS

*(To See Whether You Remember
the Chapter and Understand It)*

1. What do you know of Drake and his music?
2. What do you know of Shakespeare and his music?
3. Tell a story about Queen Elizabeth and music.
4. What were the virginals like?
5. What were the viols?
6. What is the difference between a lute and a flute?
7. Mention a kind of flute common in the sixteenth century.
8. What is a Madrigal?
9. What is a Round?
10. What is a Catch? Do you know one?
11. How did English composers lay the foundation of modern piano music (two ways, please!)?
12. Describe 'Variations'.
13. Describe a form which consisted of dance tunes.
14. Mention four great English musicians of Shakespeare's day.

THINGS TO DO

1. Get two of your friends to learn this Catch with you. (It is quite easy.) Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and the Clown sing it in *Twelfth Night*.

QUARRELLING CATCH

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of three staves. The first staff begins with a star symbol (★) at the end. The lyrics are: "Hold the peace, and I pri - thee hold thy peace,". The second staff begins with a rest for the first measure, then continues with "Thou knave! Hold they peace, thou knave!". The third staff begins with a rest for the first measure, then continues with "Thou knave!" and ends with a double bar line.

At first practise it, all singing the same notes, as though it were an ordinary song. Count the rests carefully and sing firmly.

Then sing it this way—first singer begins and when *he* gets to the mark ★ second singer begins, and when *he* gets to ★ third singer begins. Now all three are singing, but each treading on the tail of the one before, so to speak.

When the leader has sung the Catch about five times through he gives a sign and all stop together, or better, as this is a quarrelling Catch, after going through three or four times, shaking fists at each other, you can fall to fighting and so stop.

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

2. Then (for a change) practise this quieter Round of Shakespeare's day. Here some occasional soft singing will be in place. Try various ways of arranging soft and loud passages, with *crescendos* and *diminuendos* and settle on the way that sounds best.

CHURCH-GOING CATCH

The musical score for 'Church-Going Catch' is written in a single treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb) and a 2/2 time signature. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with a star symbol in the upper right corner. The lyrics are: 'All in - to ser - - - vice'. The second staff continues the lyrics: 'Let us sing mer - ri - ly to - - geth -'. The third staff concludes the lyrics: 'er, Ding dong ding dong bell.' The piece ends with a double bar line.

3. Now practise *Three Blind Mice* in the same way.

4. Play this Elizabethan hymn tune on the piano:

The musical score for the Elizabethan hymn tune is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of two systems of two staves each. The music is a simple, homophonic setting of a hymn tune, featuring a steady bass line and a melody in the treble clef. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

DRAKE AND SHAKESPEARE

Glory to thee, my God, this night
For all the blessings of the light;
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
Beneath thy own almighty wings.

Forgive me, Lord, for thy dear Son,
The ill that I this day have done,
That with the world, myself, and thee,
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.

You see that this tune has parts for four voices—Treble and Alto (on the top stave), and Tenor and Bass (on the bottom stave). Play or sing the Tenor by itself. Have you discovered anything?

Now perform the tune in this way. Get a friend to play it on the piano. You sing the Treble and get some grown-up male person to sing the Tenor.

This tune is called *Tallis's Canon*. Tallis was a great composer in Queen Elizabeth's reign. A CANON (as you have now discovered) is a piece in which one voice sings the same as another, but a few beats after it. We say that these two voices are 'singing in Canon'. In your Catches *all* the voices were 'singing in Canon'.

5. Go through any Shakespeare play that you know and find any allusions to music. Where Shakespeare means music to be performed in the play, see if you can find out why he does so.

6. If possible, get some grown-up or other good pianist to play you a piece in Variations form belonging to the Elizabethan times, for example:

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

John Bull's *The King's Hunting Jig*
Orlando Gibbons's *The Queen's Command*
Giles Farnaby's *Pawle's Wharfe*

Get them played several times and listen carefully, so as to find out how the tune is changed in each of the Variations.

7. In the same way get some one to play some of the other Elizabethan Virginals music. Giles Farnaby's is perhaps most likely to please you—especially when you get used to it (of course it is in a different style from the music of to-day, so may take a little getting used to).

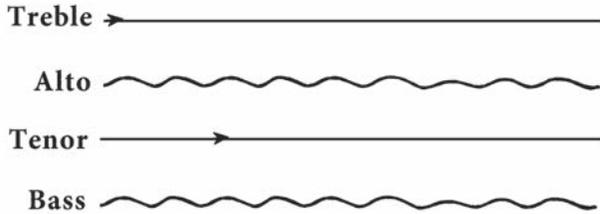
He has one little piece called *Giles Farnaby's Dreame* (what sort of a dream was it that suggested this piece to him?) and another called *His Rest*, where you can feel him falling asleep. You can find bits of canon in *His Rest*: try to hear these as the piece is played.

Then there is a bright little piece called *Giles Farnaby's Conceit* ('conceit' in those days simply meant a bright idea), and another called *His Humour* ('humour' then meant character or temperament).

So in his music Farnaby used often to picture himself. Judging by these pictures, what sort of a man do you think he was? Listen to them carefully several times, and then make up your mind.

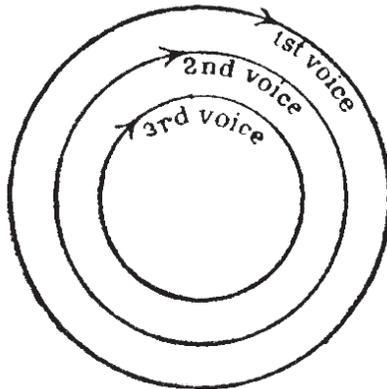
DIAGRAMS

1. TALLIS'S CANON



The straight lines show the two parts that are written in Canon. The wavy lines show the parts which just go on their ordinary way, not in Canon (we call these 'free parts'). The arrow points show where the melody begins.

2. A ROUND IN THREE PARTS



It is a very good plan to make diagrams of the pieces you sing and play and hear, because it helps you to grasp how they are made, and so to understand and enjoy them, better.

CHAPTER III

HENRY PURCELL

THE GREATEST BRITISH COMPOSER

1658-1695

ON a certain Tuesday afternoon in the month of February, 1660, four men sat before the fire in a Coffee House in Westminster. One was called Pepys, another Locke, another was a Captain Taylor, and the last was a Mr. Purcell.

There they sat chatting, and if you think for a few minutes of what you have read in your history books as occurring at that time you will be able to guess what it was they were discussing so eagerly as they sipped their coffee. What happened at the beginning of the year 1660? Why! *the King came back again!*

That is what excited them so much. The Long Parliament had been recalled and it had been decided to ask Charles to return.

‘Look!’ said Pepys suddenly, pointing at the window, and turning round they saw the glare of bonfires all along the river banks. The city was soon ablaze with

HENRY PURCELL



HENRY PURCELL

flames. 'Listen!' said Captain Taylor, and as they did so they heard bells beginning to ring: the bells of St. Clement's, and the bells of St. Martin's, and the bells of Old Bailey, and the bells of Shoreditch, the bells of Stepney, the bells of Old Bow, and, deep below them all, the big booming bells of Westminster Abbey and Old St. Paul's—soon they were all clanging and jangling together.

How They Sang Songs for Joy

Then some more friends came into the room, and they all began to sing. Locke and Purcell, who were both musicians, sang some Italian and Spanish songs, and Pepys struck up a tune too. And by and by Mr. Locke pulled out of his pocket a fine piece of music he had made as soon as he heard that the King was likely to come in again. It was a 'Canon' for eight voices, with Latin words, *Domine salvum fac Regem*.

So Locke taught them the tune and they all sat round the fire in their high-backed chairs, and one after another, at a sign from the composer, they began to sing the words *Domine salvum*, until they were all singing merrily together.

When Pepys got home that night he took down a little book in which he was accustomed to write his diary, and wrote his account of the day's doings, and how he had gone to the Coffee House, and seen the fires and heard the bells. '*It was a most pleasant sight,*' he wrote, '*to see the city from one end to the other with a glory about it, so bright was the light of the bonfires, and so thick round the city, and the bells rang everywhere.*'

Why Mr. Purcell Rejoiced

Now when Mr. Purcell got home (he had not far to go, for he lived in Westminster) you may be sure he told his good wife all about his doings, and it is certain that

HENRY PURCELL

they both remembered one special reason for rejoicing that the King was coming back.

You see Mr. Purcell was a musician—one of the best musicians in London. Now, whilst the Puritans were in power there had been no Church Music. Mr. Purcell had earned money by singing in the Opera² and at private houses, and by teaching young ladies to play the harpsichord³ or teaching men to sing. But with the King would come back the old Church ways, and that meant anthems and choirs and organs. The Puritans liked music—but not in church. The only music they allowed in church was plain psalm-singing by all the congregation—no organs and no choirs. Mr. Purcell loved anthems and other Church music, and knew that it was very likely that now his fine voice would earn him a good position in some choir. Besides he had a little baby son, and he may have had a fancy that he would in a few years make him a choirboy, and so get him a good musical training.

This chapter is really about the baby son, for he became the greatest British composer. But first it must be said that when the King came back and the music began again in Westminster Abbey, Mr. Purcell was chosen to be a member of the choir, as well as master of the choirboys and copyist of the music. (In those days there was little music printed: most of it had to be copied by hand.) And the King made him a member of

²An Opera is a play set to music.

³A harpsichord is a keyboard instrument that has quills to pluck the strings.

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

the Chapel Royal choir too, so he was now very happy.

Henry Purcell Becomes an Orphan

It was a sad thing that the little boy, Henry Purcell, was soon left an orphan. For the father died when the child was only about six years old. However, the father's brother, little Purcell's Uncle Tom, also a good musician, was very kind and adopted him, treating him as his own son.

Purcell Becomes a Choir Boy

In the same year that Purcell's father died his uncle got him admitted as a choirboy in the Chapel Royal. So every Sunday, with the other boys and men, he sang before the King. In Purcell's day they had not only the organ, but also four-and-twenty fiddlers, for the King loved the sound of stringed instruments, and as soon as he had returned had set up a band like that which he had heard at the Court of France.

So for nine or ten years young Henry sang in the King's choir, and in his leisure time practised the harpsichord and organ, and, no doubt, the violin also. And besides all that he soon began to compose. When he was twelve he was chosen, as the cleverest of the choirboys, to write a piece of music as a birthday present for the King. It was called *The Address of the Children of the Chapel Royal to the King on His Majesty's Birthday*, A.D. 1670.

Purcell's Voice Breaks

Purcell's voice broke when he was fifteen or sixteen, but they kept him on at the chapel for a time, perhaps making use of him for some odd jobs, such as teaching the younger boys. Then the Westminster Abbey authorities said they would make him a music-copyist (as his father had been twelve years before). And by and by some of the theatre managers heard what a good composer he was, and asked him to write music for their plays. So he soon began to be quite busy.

Organist of the Abbey and the Chapel Royal

Purcell was now becoming famous, and when he was twenty-two a wonderful thing happened. Dr. Blow, the organist of Westminster Abbey, seeing how clever Purcell was, offered to resign so that Purcell might take his place.

Purcell must have been grateful to Dr. Blow, for now, as Abbey organist, he had a big enough income to marry a girl of whom he had become very fond. So in a little house in Westminster Purcell settled down. Then two years later the King made him organist of the Chapel Royal. So now he held two great positions and had become the most important musical man in England, and you may be sure that his young wife was very proud of him.

Purcell's Compositions

All this time Purcell was very busy composing. He composed a great deal of church music—Anthems and Services for Westminster Abbey and the Chapel Royal. Some of the Anthems are very solemn, and those, I believe, were for Westminster Abbey. And others were quite gay; probably these were for the Chapel Royal, for Charles II loved jolly music, even in church.

For the Violin he wrote one piece—a wonderful Sonata—which was only discovered a few years ago.

Purcell also wrote a lot of lovely music for two Violins with one 'Cello and a Harpsichord. This music is very much neglected, which is a great pity.

Besides all this, Purcell wrote a good deal of music for the theatres, and when you hear a Purcell song, such as *Full Fathom Five*, or *Come if you dare*, or *Nymphs and Shepherds*, or *Come unto these Yellow Sands*, you are generally listening to one of Purcell's theatre pieces.

There are, too, some lovely sacred songs that singers to-day neglect frightfully—to their great disgrace.

Purcell's Kings and Queens

When Charles II died Purcell went on being royal organist, and so became a servant of James II. And when James II was turned out of the country, Purcell became organist to William and Mary. So he was royal organist in three reigns.

HENRY PURCELL

One of his tasks was to write ‘Odes’, or complimentary verses set to music, whenever anything happened in the Royal Family. For instance, when the King came back to London from his holidays, he would be welcomed with the performance of an Ode, for solo voices and chorus and orchestra. And Purcell would sit at the Harpsichord and lead the music.

He also had to play at two Coronations in Westminster Abbey, and at the funeral of Queen Mary.

Purcell's Death

It is a sad thing that the greatest British composer died when he was only thirty-seven years of age. Who knows what he might have done if he had lived twenty or thirty years longer?

The Form of Purcell's Music

If you take any little harpsichord piece of Purcell's and play it on the piano you will generally find that its form is like that of *Barbara Allen* and similar folk songs (p. 5). That is to say, it falls into two strains; in other words, it is a two-bit tune—or, to use the proper term, it is in BINARY FORM. You can find a sort of half-way house in the middle, where we have a CADENCE—that is, a sort of ear-resting place. Then the piece starts again, and we come to the end of the journey with another Cadence. Another word for Cadence is ‘Close’.

It has already been said that the Elizabethan

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

Composers often strung two little pieces together to make one longer piece. Purcell went farther than this, and often strung three or four little pieces into one. Such a string of pieces we call a SUITE. Generally these little pieces were all in the style of the dances of the day, except the first piece, which was a PRELUDE, the word 'Prelude' simply meaning an opening piece.

Purcell for some reason does not seem to have cared much for the Air and Variations of which the Elizabethans were so fond. But he sometimes wrote what we might call a Bass with Variations, in which the same little bit of bass comes over and over again, with the tune above it changed every time. This we call a GROUND BASS, or simply GROUND. Some of his songs and some of his Harpsichord pieces are written in this way.

Some of Purcell's songs have a piece of RECITATIVE before them—that is, a piece of singing which does not make much of a tune, but imitates the way in which one would recite the words in a dramatic performance.

QUESTIONS

*(To See Whether You Remember
the Chapter and Understand It)*

1. How many historical events can you remember which will fix in your mind the time when Purcell lived? How old was Purcell when the Plague of London happened?—And the Fire?

HENRY PURCELL

2. How many facts can you remember about Purcell's family?

3. What sort of music do you think Cromwell liked in church? And what sort did Charles II like?

4. In what church was Purcell a choirboy? And in what churches was he organist?

5. How old was Purcell when he died?

6. Mention any instruments for which Purcell wrote music.

7. What is a Cadence? Give another name for it.

8. What is Binary Form?

9. What is a Suite?

10. What is a Prelude?

11. What is a Ground Bass?

12. What is a Recitative?

THINGS TO DO

1. Learn one of Purcell's songs (*Come if you dare!* and *Britons strike Home* are bold songs, and *Full Fathom Five* and *Come unto these Yellow Sands* are gentler songs. All are quite jolly and they cost very little if you get them in a school singing-class edition. *Full Fathom Five* and *Come unto these Yellow Sands* are settings of words in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. You might turn up the play, if you like, and find out just how they come in.)

FIRST BOOK OF THE GREAT MUSICIANS

2. Get somebody to play a few of Purcell's Harpsichord pieces, and when you feel the middle Cadence has come, call out 'half-time'. Have each piece played several times and try to notice as much as possible how the piece is made. Some pieces are made almost entirely of one little group of four or five notes, over and over again, sometimes high and sometimes low. And in some pieces you can find bits of IMITATION—that is, one 'part' or 'voice' giving out a little bit of tune and another answering it. Most of the instrumental music by Purcell (like most of the Elizabethan music) is in 'voices' or separate little strands of melody woven together, almost as though (say) a Treble and Tenor and Bass were singing it.

3. If you are a pianist, practise some of Purcell's music for Harpsichord.

4. If you play the fiddle you can buy some little tunes of Purcell which have been arranged for that instrument, and practise them.

5. If you have a School Orchestra get it to play some of the Purcell tunes that have been arranged for stringed instruments.

6. You could make up a dance to some of the Purcell music. For instance, you could dance to the song *Come unto these Yellow Sands*, the words of which are about dancing on the beach.

7. Make a little play of Purcell and his wife giving a little party to celebrate the coronation of William and Mary and have some of his music performed as a part of the play.