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A School Wood-Wind Orchestra

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for a description of all sorts of vague business men who might be anything from bank managers to share-sharks. Now, 'something at the B.B.C.' has taken its place. That's what Boomwell is, but nobody seems to know just what. He breezes in and out of the Big Ship (he's always painfully breezy), and doesn't appear to be either captain or cabin-boy; but still, he's 'something' or somebody in the game. When I met him the other day, he chuckled over the mild roasting I got for daring to express a tiny belief in democracy, spite of plebs. 'Ha, my boy,' said he, 'that's what comes of trying to strike a balance. You're like that M.P. for one of the most crowded areas, to whose remark that he "represented a very dense constituency," Tim Healy retorted: "A clear case of natural selection." You shouldn't try to rationalize: just take 'em all to your bosom, like I do.' (I grieve to say that Boomwell appears to catch his English from the B.B.C., whose dance band recently issued a record on which was the injunction 'Let's all sing like the birdies sing': but the great are rarely grammatical, I believe.)

I have tried several times to find out what Boomwell really (a) does at the B.B.C., and (b) thinks of it, and of the millions he caters for. He is a mysterious creature, cropping up in all sorts of ways. Nobody knows his job. Indeed, few people seem to know anybody's job there—or even their own. It is as good as a play, for instance, to try to find out who banned Prof.

Haldane's talk, and what has happened to the banner with the strange device 'No Excelsiors need apply.' As far as I can understand Boomwell's monologues, he appears to be a sort of unofficial uplifter, who jumps into the B.B.C. breach whenever things are getting a little dull. He talks about anything, music included, and writes away like one o'clock—answering listeners' letters, writing minutes, articles, songs, reproofs to the unconverted listener, or to the giddier members of the staff. 'Mine,' he says, 'must be, at one moment the candid, at the next the candied, tongue—apt to exhort, rebuke, subdue. Above all, I exist to *uplift*. My motto is: "Not in vain the distant beacons. Forward, forward, let us range"—as Mr. Hore-Belisha might have said if Tennyson hadn't thought of it first.' Such a man is very difficult to make head or tail of. Sometimes I think he is an incarnation of the B.B.C., or its Familiar Spirit. At times he has a regular Old Testament ferocity, when he gets wound up about 'bringing in the millions' by hook or crook. He once boasted to me that 'he was the man who put the fist in pacifist'; there is a good deal in him of the dominie who 'would have smiling faces around him, if he had to thrash every boy to get them.' At one time he will prate of 'salvation through Stravinsky' (though Stravinsky seems to me to spend most of his time running round seeking a place of salvation for himself); another day he is all for 'the folk, laddie, the dear, *dear* folk!' It is really very puzzling.

Teachers' Department

A SCHOOL WOOD-WIND ORCHESTRA

By G. C. ELLIS

SHEFFIELD, while being justly renowned for the quality and quantity of its choirs, is singularly unfortunate in having an inadequate supply of instrumentalists—chiefly in the wood-wind section. One is inclined to attribute this to the fact that, while singing has a definite part in the educational life of our children, the playing of instruments by children is almost entirely ignored—with the result that instrumental progress is handicapped at the beginning, and choral music assumes too great an aspect of importance by comparison.

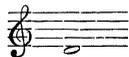
Realising this, a Sheffield elementary school teacher has attempted, in no small measure, to make good the deficiency; and from what I have heard and seen of his work, the results are truly gratifying, and are handsomely rewarding the care and trouble that he gives to the task.

Some three years ago Mr. Eric Bancroft, of the Huntsman's Gardens Elementary School, started experimenting with the making of pipes from bamboo and cork, with a view to forming an orchestra of wood-wind instruments. Not until September, 1933, was he satisfied with the results of his experiments. He then began, with a class of fifty boys (not specially selected, but comprising the whole of the class in his charge), to form an orchestra. The boys' ages were nine to

ten years, and, since they came from some of the poorest homes in Sheffield, the task presented no small amount of difficulty.

Each boy was provided with an 11-inch length of bamboo and a cork. Under the supervision of Mr. Bancroft and Mr. T. R. Ludlam (then head master of the school, whose support and help were at all times generously given), the boys, working in pairs, cut the mouthpieces and fitted the corks for fifty pipes. One of the essential features of the scheme was that each boy should make and play his own instrument. The pitch of the pipes was then tested and, where necessary, corrected—the whole class judging the individual attempts and giving opinions on the correctness of the pitch. It is important to note that throughout the whole period the judgment and criticism of the boys has been sought and directed into the proper channels. The key-note of the pipes having been pitched, the making of the seven holes to form the scale of D major was dealt with in similar manner, one note at a time throughout the class. Mr. Bancroft's object being the formation of an orchestra that could perform under orchestral conditions, the essential knowledge of reading from staff was approached in these early stages. Before the holes were made, the keynote of the pipe was sounded, and the corresponding

symbol written on the staff, and the boys learnt to recognise this symbol :



as the first note on their pipes. As each hole was pierced in the pipe and tuned to its correct pitch, the symbol of that note was added to his staff, until the complete scale of D major was formed. The making of the pipes, and the teaching of correct breathing and tone control occupied about ten weeks.

It will thus be seen that from the commencement the boys were becoming conversant with staff notation and its application to their instruments. When they had mastered this, simple tunes with notes of equal time value were introduced.

From this stage rapid progress was made, varying rhythms being introduced by means of folk tunes and national songs. Each boy then experimented with his own pipe to extend the compass (by increased breath pressure) to the production of higher notes (E, F sharp, G). Part-playing was then essayed in the form of rounds, canons, and two- and three-part arrangements of songs. Cross fingering was taught for playing in keys C, G, A, and their relative minor keys.

The next step was the making of alto pipes, fifteen inches long, with a compass from A, to C' sharp, these having a different tone-colour, which increased the effect of the performances and gave greater scope for selection of pieces. The process of making these pipes was carried out in precisely the same manner as that of the trebles.

Trebles and altos having been successfully combined, tenor pipes, twenty-four inches in length and pitched an octave below the trebles, were made. The boys playing these pipes were taught to read the bass clef and quickly acquired facility in its use. Each boy had now two pipes, some three, and could be called upon to play any of them. The orchestra proper was then formed, the children copying out their own parts in staff notation, and reading and playing them with facility. The peculiarity of varying pitch with varying temperatures which affects all wind instruments required some means of tuning. This was effected by boring several small holes in the side of the pipe, once inch from the 'window,' and plugging them with match stalks which could be removed as required.

I have several times had the opportunity of hearing the performance of this orchestra, and have never failed to experience a thrill at the delicate, ethereal albeit firm tone produced by these simple instruments. At the last time of hearing they were playing the Bach Chorale, 'Jesu, Joy of man's desiring,' arranged by the conductor: and the quality they brought to the performance was truly worthy of the subject.

Mr. Bancroft planned a course of exercises in sight-playing for the treble, alto, and tenor pipes, together with two- and three-part examples of various combinations of the pipes, arranged by him from compositions of the masters. Orchestral playing is taught by carefully graded pieces arranged from the simplest folk-tunes, madrigals, early English instrumental music, the various dance-forms, Bach chorales, and excerpts from the works of modern composers.

The educational value of this music-making is immeasurable. The boys are playing real music on real instruments, and have a thorough grasp of both. Each boy is an essential part of the whole, and feels that not only must he rely on himself for his part of the work, but that the other members are equally dependent upon him and each other: there are no 'passengers.' Again, the quality of tone derived from these simple instruments, and the type of music chosen for their performance, leads them always to give of their best. To prove that the boys are becoming 'instrumentally minded,' it only has to be added that one has bought an oboe, two have bought clarinets, two piccolos, one a flute, and five violins. Surely this is justification for the work attempted.

Another point worthy of consideration. These boys have been provided with an outlet for whatever musical artistry they may possess, and the delight they evince in playing, and the assiduity with which they practise, speak sufficiently for the keen interest they have in their orchestra.

Added interest for them is provided by the public performances given. The orchestra has already broadcast from the Leeds studio, and has many public engagements in the near future: so it will be seen that this is no 'toy' orchestra, but one founded on definite traditional lines, and working always on the methods adopted by the best professional orchestras. In the near future we hope to have them supplying the missing quantities in our music. That they certainly are on the way to do this is the general opinion among musicians with whom I have discussed the matter.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Questions must be of general musical interest. They must be stated briefly and simply, and if several are sent each must be written on a separate slip. Our 'Answers to Correspondents' column closes on the 12th of the month. We cannot undertake to reply by post.

ETUDE.—Organ pedalling: (1.) Plenty of players besides the two you name could play the passage quoted; but it is bad organ writing, as the effect doesn't come off. On the pianoforte such *tremolando* passages are easy and effective. Probably your example occurs in a transcription. (2.) The pedal-point under changing harmonies

frequently sets up dissonances that some listeners may regard as mistakes on the part of the player; but what does that matter? (3.) We do not understand this question. Anyway, we can think of no organ work in which the player is expected to pedal chords at the rate of four per second!