

Letters to the Editor

SIR,

Your contributor Mr. W. Mellers in his article on Shakespeare Music which appears in the current number of *Tempo* makes some very damaging statements concerning the Music Department of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

He says that "as long as I can remember, the music at Stratford has been restricted to the Edwardian musical-comedy genus."

From 1932 to 1942 I was intimately associated with the Summer Festival. During that period a highly efficient chamber orchestra—including "a small body of first class string players" with three trumpets and drums for the historical plays—performed with great success the incidental music to the plays.

I know nothing of the policy of the Memorial Theatre before or after this period ; but if your contributor visited Stratford during the years 1932-42 it would have been quite impossible for him to hear any music approaching the type he so justly derides.

I will not trouble you with a complete list of works performed under my direction during this long period : but in order to refute your contributor's fanciful claims, so far as they apply to the years 1932-42 and in justice to myself and the players concerned, I append a list of some of the composers whose works were included in our repertoire : Byrd, Farnaby, Ferrabosco, Morely, Locke, Gibbons, Jenkins, Blow, Purcell, Eccles, Arne, Boyce, Rameau, Lully, Gervaise, Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Alessandro and Domenico Scarlatti, Monteverdi, Corelli, Vivaldi, etc.

Incidentally, the terms of my contract excluded the use of music by living composers.

ANTHONY BERNARD.

London, S.W.7, September 22, 1946.

[Mr. Mellers replies : The nature of my comments was a relatively impersonal reflection of the manner in which it was customary for intelligent musicians to speak of the music at Stratford. I wrote of course with the last few years oppressively in mind ; but even during the period of Mr. Bernard's directorship (though I must admit I hadn't realized it lasted so long), I can remember remarking myself, and hearing others remark, that the music was not worthy of a musician of Mr. Bernard's attainments.

I am surprised that so much "early" music was performed but must accept Mr. Bernard's testimony on this point and offer my apologies ; but I certainly recollect that this early music was supplemented by what seems to me in retrospect to have been a very considerable quantity of specially composed music which, rightly or wrongly and with due respect to Mr. Bernard's distinction as a conductor and musicologist, I must, as a critic, be permitted to consider inadequate. (There were, of course, successful scores, notably a delightful one to Komisarjevsky's *Comedy of Errors*).

Finally I should add that there is not and never has been any question about Mr. Bernard's musicianship, taste and scholarship, all of which I admire greatly (I have often had occasion to refer in flattering terms to his concerts of early and new music, for the nature of his programmes is always of the highest significance and the quality of the performances usually admirable) ; but it is my belief that for whatever reason Mr. Bernard was not able to make the best use of his talents and qualifications while at Stratford. I should however perhaps apologize for a certain splenetic quality of tone which has no doubt unjustly overflowed on to Mr. Bernard from the full cup of my indignation about the last few years.]

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