For Paul and Liz Chipchase

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[The Sanity of Spring Lambs]
(1923)

'Sursum Corda! – we've a long time to be dead. Cheerio!' This was the greeting I received some days ago from a composer returned from a 'wanderjahr'.[1] Someone having quite a little joke, you know. There is more in it than meets the eye, as the burglar said when he fell into the water butt. The point is, there is a spirit of restlessness about, often akin to irritation – despondency prevails at times; it is so in the stream of life everywhere.

There is a breaking up of old ideas, and the new things are often buried back a thousand times before obtaining a foothold. Progress is so slow. Fashions stay a long time with us, and you never seem to quite wear them out. They very much resemble the head and tail of a circular chain. By the time the head has moved off and resolved itself, the tail is slowly following behind in its wake – but never overtakes it. There is always a big distance between those in front and the laggards behind with a grumbling crowd in between.

Almost any day at Victoria Station you may get off a train, and before you can reach outside the station, you may have bumped into half-a-dozen men whose get-up gives them a resemblance to the late Paul Krüger[2] or William Gladstone or Benjamin Disraeli. These men are quite unconscious that their appearance is incongruous. They are perfectly happy in their apparent mentality of 1863. Who would be cruel and render them unhappy by tightening them up to 1923 or something beyond it? Yet, cheek by jowl, you will find them

[1] Sursum Corda – 'Lift up your hearts', from the preface to the Eucharistic prayer in the Latin rite. Also the title of a solemn piece by Elgar (1894) for brass, organ and strings and an overture by Korngold (1920). Brian frequently used the phrase in correspondence in the sense of 'be of good cheer'. *Wanderjahr* ('Year of wandering'): *cf.* Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (published in 1829). The identity of the composer is unknown.

[2] President of South Africa (1825–1904). He sported mutton-chop whiskers and a neck beard, a very old-fashioned style by the 1920s.

rubbing shoulders with those who think in terms of 1923 or beyond it.

It is so with the females too. If you walk along the sea front at Brighton you will see some curious things – if you are observant. Not all of them are to be found at the ice-cream cart, or the periwinkle and cockle stall, or in the boxes for mixed bathing.

You may walk along the front and pass modest dowagers of 50 – with skirts and flesh-coloured stockings – quite delighted to show a plump calf, you know.[3] These are they which may not have been in great tribulation,[4] but you know from their appearance that they have a young mentality. Thinking young sharpens their mentality, keeps them alive and keen, on the outlook for new conquests. If there is a likely young man to be hooked, they are after him. It is all in the game of life, you know.

Jostling side by side you find the young flapper, sometimes a blushing maiden unable to express her feelings from lack of experience, yet trying to appear like her elder sister just described, who in turn is trying to look like the young flapper.

A fat calf may not appear at first sight to have any relationship with a trombone or a euphonium, but there is a great deal of sympathy and understanding between them.

You may say these things nowadays without being thought rude. Plain speaking leads to a clear understanding, as the burglar said when he got out of the water butt. At the same time, I think the working out of the relationship must be left to each individual.

It isn't for Peter and Joan or Paul and Susie that we write up this column – it is made to reflect on some important things that have happened and to speculate on those that may.

[3] The repeated 'you know', not normally a characteristic of Brian's writing, seems to be a suggestion of a particular kind of casual speaking voice.
[4] Alluding to Revelations vii. 14: 'These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'. John Foulds had set this verse in Movement XIII of his *A World Requiem*, a work that 'Wassail' would be writing about in *The British Bandsman* for 10 November 1923.

We want to talk about what young England is doing in the way of composition; ditto Russia, Italy, France, Germany, Spain and America. There are some who say that the superstructure of music rests on a foundation of lies – and wants smashing up. We don't know what that means unless it is that musicians as a body are worse liars than fishermen.

We wonder what the English brass would think of Alfred Casella, Eugene Goossens, Arthur Bliss, Francesco Malipiero, Lord Berners, or the more daring of the lot, Igor Stravinsky, or the Spaniard, De Falla. I hear there is excitement in Germany over a young composer named Hindemith.

There is a dazzling star in the Hungarian Béla Bartók. Many minds opine that these men have the goods. Others think that they have only been brought forward, like so many others have been, only to be shot down again before they get into full flight. Perhaps the big star all Europe is awaiting is amongst these men. At one time it was thought to be Erich Korngold – or Schönberg, or Stravinsky, or Ravel, or Strauss. We must not forget that when Elgar's enemies were quietly slandering his *Kingdom* as a work of a tired brain, he suddenly blazed up with his First Symphony, a work of great magnitude. The brain which forged *Don Juan, Don Quixote, Elektra, Rosenkavalier,* may yet blaze again. Strauss is still a young man.

I have heard it said that if we could but compress three of our English composers into one, we could make the world stand still. Pity we are so divided.

Personally I believe in the outlook of sanity exercised by the dowagers of 50. They think young and dress like spring lambs. A few aldermen among the composers are following their example. A little revision in the harmonic outlook, the scrapping of two-bar rhythm, and thinking steadily and writing continuously helps muchly. Malipiero, one of Italy's brightest stars, who was applauded in Paris, Vienna and other Continental cities as a *rara avis,* came to the conclusion at the age of 36 that his outlook needed correcting, so he scrapped his early works as useless and commenced to write works of a different kind, which he considers are only worthy to represent him. As Malipiero's early work may be

said to belong to a school of technique quite common throughout Europe, those who are interested should obtain one or two of his works for piano.[5] All his early work has been destroyed.[6]

There is not a great deal of difference fundamentally, say, between the English young bloods or those of Russia, Italy, Germany and Spain. As Gretchen commented on Faust's discourse on religion, 'They all think alike, but express themselves differently'.[7]

[Emotion in Modern Music]
(1930)

More often Brian offers a more measured, if occasionally ironical, tone. This short essay – headed simply 'Emotion' – appeared in his column 'The Musician's Diary' in the September 1930 issue of *Musical Opinion*, pp. 1079–80.

The Oxford Summer Course in Music Teaching introduced the professors and teachers in variable and frivolous moods. An appropriate note was struck by Dr. John McEwen, principal of the Royal Academy of Music.[8] His remarks on the tendency of the present age to consider emotion as old-fashioned, and which produces music too cold in feeling to excite anyone, could not have been delivered before a more typical gathering than was assembled in the mediaeval city of Oxford. From Bach, onwards to Wagner and Strauss, the greatest composer is he who can give us the greatest emotional thrill through his art. The works of a vast number of

[5] One wonders which pieces Brian was thinking of: perhaps the atmospheric *Barlumi* (1917), *Maschere che Passano* (1918), or the comic *Omaggi* (1920).
[6] Not so – a substantial amount of pre-1918 work, including the early unnumbered symphonies *Sinfonia del mare* and *Sinfonie del silenzio e de la morte*, has survived.
[7] *Faust*, Part One, scene 19, ll. 3459–60.
[8] For a profile of McEwen *cf. Havergal Brian on Music*, Volume One: *British Music*, edited by Malcolm MacDonald, Toccata Press, London, 1986, pp. 51–53.

composers have disappeared because they had too little inspiration to keep them alive. From the *Flying Dutchman* onward to *Parsifal*, Wagner's exploring mind entered into a world never before revealed to a composer. It is all the more marvellous that he could sustain his inspiration at white heat for hours. Very few great composers since Wagner have entered this same world of wonder – and those who have cannot remain long on so high a plane.

Strauss in his operas and symphonic works, Schönberg in his *Gurrelieder*, Elgar in *Gerontius*, Bruckner and Mahler in their symphonies, are the most important instances, since Wagner, of composers having been fortunate enough to enter again into this coveted and secret world of clairvoyance. Curiously enough, all the above composers show unmistakeable Wagner influences in their inspiration and technique. Who can sit through a performance of an opera by the later Wagner without being thrilled by that ecstasy we call emotion? After the somewhat Wagnerian *Gurrelieder* Schönberg felt he must not write such music again. The wond'rous[9] beauty of his own work apparently frightened him. He sought other paths, and though we have followed him, and listened to him with sympathetic attitude, we find we are now offered wonderful slick workmanship which appears like the modern Robot – superbly clever, but without the divine spark.[10] The same shyness to create music of emotional appeal is to be found in certain groups of composers in every country. Busoni's neo-classicism – a far different quality from Schönberg's – contains this hard,

[9] Brian's spelling.

[10] The word 'Robot' had only existed for ten years; it had been introduced by the Czech dramatist Karel Čapek in his 1920 play *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*), first translated into English 1923, though he credited his brother, the artist Josef Čapek, with the actual coinage (from the Czech *robota*, toil or labour). No actual autonomous artificial humanoid had yet been produced, though one was to be developed by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation in the 1930s. On the other hand the term swiftly gained currency and was already being used in science-fiction magazines in the late 1920s. The apparently negative assessment of Schoenberg's later works here, in 1930, does not chime with what Brian was writing about the *Five Orchestral Pieces* in 1931 or the *Variations for Orchestra* in 1933: *cf.* pp. 119 and 120–22, below.

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