

## EDITORIAL

'Our commitment is to nitty-gritty historical musicology'

READERS OF THE *Chronicle* may be excused, perhaps, if they feel that a fresh statement of editorial policy, so soon after that in *Research Chronicle* 14 (1978), seems somewhat otiose. There are several reasons, however, which impel us to produce one.

First, as from this issue the *Chronicle* will include reviews of selected books, possibly extensive in scope though not very numerous; and it is hoped in future issues also to introduce a 'Forum' section. The latter may be regarded as the successor of the correspondence column which has occasionally appeared in the *Chronicle* in the past, and will welcome readers' comments on current issues, whether or not raised by material published in the *Chronicle*, and brief announcements or queries. Departures such as these will need some justification if they are to be seen to fit into a coherent editorial policy. (In this issue there are also some minor changes in layout, but like those introduced in volumes 14 and 15 of the *Chronicle* these are mostly intended to tighten up existing style rather than to revolutionize it.)

Secondly, a discussion seems to be afoot at present, even if in a curiously muted way perhaps typical of such discussion in this country, about the nature of and justification for the various musicological journals published here; and we ought to be participating in it. Questions are raised, for example, by the full and in many respects exemplary account of British musicology in *Acta musicologica* 52 (1980), 38-67; points of interest have also been raised, less publicly, in connection with the establishment of *Early Music History*.

Most important of all, in our opinion, no statement of *Chronicle* policy has ever been made in terms of principle: our own previous comments in *Research Chronicle* 14, for example, were based only on practical criteria. It seems time now to treat more fundamental issues, because both the comments made about the *Chronicle* in the *Acta* article mentioned above, and the nature of some of the material often submitted to us for publication, suggest that the principles underlying our policy are not yet clearly enough understood. It seems to be widely believed, in fact, that the primary commitment of the *Chronicle* is to musicological documentation *per se*, rather than to music history, and that any acceptance by the *Chronicle* of narrative or discursive articles must therefore represent a loss of focus in editorial policy – even, perhaps, a neglect of our duty to musicology at large.

We believe, however, that to express our commitment in these terms is to confuse means and ends, and that it may reflect questionable assumptions about the relationship between interpretative history – musical or otherwise – and the documentary material, the 'facts', on which it is based. Indeed, to regard the raw material of history as sufficiently autonomous to be separated from subsequent interpretation seems to us to betray positivistic assumptions which, though no doubt widespread in Anglo-Saxon musicology, are at least arguable. In Dickens's *Hard Times*, Mr Gradgrind regarded facts as 'the one thing needful':

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'Now, what I want is, Facts...Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts...Stick to Facts, sir!'

No historian can ever have eschewed interpretation quite so radically as that; and Dickens in *Hard Times* is in any case not contrasting facts with interpretation, but with imagination, warmth and emotion. Still, the example may serve to illustrate the rigid loyalty to 'objective' raw material, rather than to 'subjective' interpretation, which clearly emerges in much nineteenth-century and later historical thought. We may (again, admittedly, out of context) quote the historian Ranke, whose famous ideal of history as things 'as they really happened' so much resembles the ideal of much modern musicological endeavour, from the preface to his *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker* (1824):

The strict presentation of the facts, contingent and unattractive though they may be, is undoubtedly the supreme law. After this, it seems to me, comes the exposition of the unity and progress of events.

A too enthusiastic adoption of this remark as a programme for action may, however, beg the vital question of the selection of the facts. The historian cannot take every event that ever occurred as his raw material: he must select his facts and in doing so reject some. The Recording Angel is the only historian who might be justified in thinking of recalling the past *in toto*, and for whom a positivistic interest in every single past event as significant in its own right would even be conceivable. For the rest of us, history, including the history of music, must be partial, and cannot even be fully objective: it is the construction of judgments, based on a careful selection and interpretation of appropriate (though always incomplete) primary evidence. The judgments which emerge depend heavily on the selection and the ordering of the facts, moreover, and we believe that the facts can never be autonomous. To publish facts or documents without considering, and therefore without controlling, the meaning that is willy-nilly thrown up by their publication, therefore risks distorting if not destroying any valid historical insights which they might have afforded. And, moreover, it may suggest that historical facts are readily and immediately available, when in reality they can emerge only after a process of careful argument and inference.

We believe, therefore, that the *Chronicle* cannot regard the publication of raw documentation as its primary duty, even if Thurston Dart's foreword to the first printing of *Research Chronicle* 1 (1961) may be interpreted as suggesting that it should do so: the meaning of the facts and documents we publish must always be clearly stated. What, then, is to be the justification for the *Chronicle*, and its distinctive contribution, when it is compared with other musicological journals, especially those in this country? We believe that, if the aims of the *Chronicle* are to remain as continuous as possible with its aims in the past, and if they are to be summed up in a single phrase, then we should say that the primary commitment and loyalty of the *Chronicle* must be to nitty-gritty historical musicology. This has, after all, always been its commitment. Moreover, the *Chronicle* is far less dependent upon commercial considerations than any other musicological journal in this *Land ohne Staatszuschüsse*: this seems to us the great merit in its economical style of production (which we believe, despite some opinion to the contrary, should not be upgraded), rather than any possibility it may afford to 'avoid the

appearance of finality'. We are therefore in a good position to accept articles supported by heavy documentation, lengthy appendices, or by complicated and specialized analytical material; and such articles will be assured of finding a natural home in the *Chronicle*. Since 1978 at least, indeed, no article has been rejected for being too long or complicated. Although we naturally hope that contributions will be well written, the characteristics we chiefly seek are originality and thrust rather than easy accessibility.

For these reasons, we have frequently in the past couple of years found ourselves asking potential contributors of chunks of raw documentation to consider submitting articles to which the documentation might serve as an appendix, or as appendices. We have done this not from any hubristic sense that the *Chronicle* should be totally self-contained as a journal, nor because we are in any way chary of specialized detailed knowledge, but in the belief that we can best serve the interests of historical musicology in this way. The same considerations have governed our acceptance or rejection of narrative articles; and it is to be hoped that this explanation may show more clearly than hitherto the true focus of the editorial policy at present operated in the *Chronicle*.

It will be seen, then, that we are more open than (on past form) *Music & Letters*, *The Music Review* and the *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* have normally been, to specialized professional musicology; on the other hand, we shall not normally wish to accept summaries of received knowledge of the type sometimes found in past volumes of the *Proceedings*; in particular, we are probably more easily able to consider lengthy contributions than any other English-language musicological journal. Moreover, we should point out that we have sought to make our standards of editing as high as possible. In these ways we hope to maximize our contribution to British and international musicology. The verdict as to whether this is being achieved, however, remains of course in the hands of our contributors and readers, and it is for their opinions that we now look: we shall welcome comments and ideas for the 'Forum' columns of future issues of the *Chronicle*.

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