

Cooper? Most likely, yes – we are not going to let him off that easily! But this edition may be his last major publication in the field, unless he has other plans for us.

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Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, *Symphony in A Minor Opus 8: With the Earlier Finales and Idyll Opus 44*. Edited by John L. Snyder. Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, N060 (Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 2013). xv + 343 pp.

Recent scholars have gone to great lengths to dispel the perception of late nineteenth-century British musical culture as a barren wasteland. As well as a more nuanced study of the oeuvre of British composers during this period, scholars have explored the complex relationship between British music and the publishing industry, societal development, gender, domestic life, pedagogical methods and colonial expansion.¹ The music of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912), a famous and popular composer on both sides of the Atlantic in his day, sheds light on the role of black composers in British and American society at the turn of the twentieth century and highlights some of the pedagogical approaches to learning the art of composition at London's Royal College of Music.

The son of a Sierra Leonean migrant, Coleridge-Taylor was born in Holborn on 15 August 1875. He studied violin and composition at Royal College of Music between 1890 and 1897. His most famous work, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, was premiered to great acclaim on 11 November 1898 and continued to be regularly performed until after the Second World War.² Coleridge-Taylor was one of the participants at the first Pan-African Conference (London, 1900); that same year *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* received its American premiere in Boston. In Washington DC, in 1901, the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Choral Society was founded 'for the purpose of performing Coleridge-Taylor's music, with a particular goal of doing so with entirely black forces under the composer's direction' (p. viii). He was praised by Edward Elgar as by 'far and away the cleverest fellow going amongst the young men' and by members of the New York Philharmonic as the 'African Mahler';³ and contemporary reviews of Coleridge-Taylor's works were generally positive.⁴

¹ On these topics refer to the *Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain* book series, edited by Bennett Zon and published by Routledge.

² For more on this subject see Geoffrey Self, *The Hiawatha Man: The Life and Work of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 74–9, 94–7 and 103–8.

³ The phrase 'African Mahler' is discussed in W.C. Berwick Sayers, *Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Musician: His Life and Letters* (London: Cassel, 1915; repr., Chicago: Afro-Am Press, 1969), 238–43.

⁴ Percy M. Young, ed., *Letters to Nimrod: Edward Elgar to August Jaeger 1897–1908* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1965), 3–4.

John L. Snyder introduces us to Coleridge-Taylor's only symphony, written for the 1895–96 season while he was a student at the Royal College of Music under the supervision of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924). Prior to a 2006 recording made by the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, the symphony is only known to have been performed three times (p. ix).⁵ The edition is based on autograph scores and parts held in the Royal College of Music Library and the British Library, as well as a copyist's score housed in the Free Library of Philadelphia (p. 189). The introductory essay begins with a discussion of Coleridge-Taylor's fame in his lifetime and his subsequent disappearance from the repertory. Surprisingly little of his music has been performed or recorded since the 1950s. The editor provides an extensive biographical account of the composer's life, paying particular attention to his composition studies at the Royal College of Music, alongside Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, and to his visits to the United States. There he was, according to Geoffrey Self, viewed as a champion of the African American cause, receiving attention that stopped 'little short of deification'.⁶

A detailed description of the symphony follows, which includes the performance and reception history of the work as well as an entertaining anecdote about Stanford accidentally spilling tea over his student's copy of the score, thus shedding light on Stanford's amiable character. The accompanying essay raises awareness of life as a student of composition at the Royal College of Music in the late nineteenth century, describing both the compositional approach of Coleridge-Taylor and the teaching methods of Stanford. Of particular interest is the fact that 'the RCM orchestra was fairly available for readings of student composition', a phenomenon that budding composition students today can only envy (p. xi).

One of the many strengths of this edition is the author's meticulous assessment of the symphony's fourth movement. To briefly summarize: the first three movements were first performed in public on 6 March 1896.⁷ The fourth movement did not follow until three months later and was subsequently revised, possibly on Stanford's insistence, at least twice and possibly up to four times more (pp. x–xi). Three versions of the fourth movement survive and all are contained within this edition, along with a highly informative overview of the musical features of each. The third version of the finale (labelled IVc) is included in the main score and the two earlier versions (IVa and IVb) can be found in the appendix alongside the *Idyll*, an adaption of the symphony's second movement that was published in 1901. This edition is the first to include all such supplementary material and therefore provides an opportunity for the scholar and performer to gain an insight into Coleridge-Taylor's compositional approach and his struggles over how to place the symphony in a cyclic form.

The critical report begins with a thorough survey of the relevant sources and, where appropriate, the relationship between Coleridge-Taylor's hand-written score and individual parts. This subject is further enhanced by a discussion of subsequent revisions made by the composer, the most extensive of which occur in the

⁵ For a recording of the work see Frederic Cohen, *Symphony No. 6 in E Major, "The Idyllic"*, and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, *Symphony in A Minor*, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Douglas Bostock, The British Symphonic Collection, vol. 15 (Classico ClassCD 684, 2006).

⁶ Geoffrey Self, *The Hiawatha Man*, 145.

⁷ The first performance featured Gustav von Holst on trombone and Ralph Vaughan Williams on triangle.

first movement. The author's editorial approach conforms to what one might expect in an edition of this nature. Considerable attention to detail has been paid to the complexities surrounding metre and rhythm, in particular the unusual duple-metre time signature found in the first movement, and also the organization of the quintuple metre in the third movement. Snyder covers some of the editorial issues relating to the contrabassoon and timpani – instruments that are often overlooked by scholars. For instance, in the case of the timpani part he points out that several passages would have likely been unplayable in early twentieth-century Britain owing to the lack of pedal timpani in the country at that time.

This publication by A-R Editions as part of their Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries series provides a welcome addition to our growing appreciation and understanding of British symphonic music at the turn of the twentieth century. In this high-minded period, in which symphonic works by the great German masters such as Beethoven, Brahms and Schubert were viewed almost in religious terms, there was little sustained interest in the symphonies of young British composers, especially those written by persons of colour. Unfortunately, this meant that Coleridge-Taylor's *Symphony in A Minor* quickly disappeared into oblivion. On 24 August 2021 the symphony was performed at the BBC Proms by the Chineke! Orchestra, Britain's only majority Black and ethnically diverse orchestra, under the baton of Kalena Bovell. Further high-calibre performances of this nature and well-researched editions such as this one are therefore needed in order to raise awareness of such previously marginalized composers, the diversity of the works they wrote and the challenges they faced in the process.

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