
LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From Mark Doran

I am grateful to Stewart R. Craggs for his kind comments ('Letters to the Editor', *Tempo* 227), and happy to say that I wholeheartedly endorse his other observations – to the extent, in fact, that I hope I may be permitted to amplify one of them.

For in mentioning that 'very recent BBC feature on Radio 3' which once again rehashed the myth concerning Walton's supposedly 'lost' score for *Battle of Britain*, Dr Craggs draws our attention to a programme (the 'Night Waves' broadcast of 22/9/03) whose uncomprehending and distorting treatment of a nowise complicated issue marked another in Radio 3's lengthening succession of low points.

To start with, listeners to this 10-minute item heard Lady Susanna Walton referred to as the composer's 'Italian wife' when she was, of course, born and brought up in Argentina, where Walton met her: evidently the knowledge that her recorded contribution to the programme was obtained by dialling an Italian telephone number was all the 'research' that was thought necessary in that direction.

Later on, Tony Palmer was given time to talk un-illuminatingly about something that he hadn't experienced ('Walton's score is in a true sense counterpoint to what you're seeing on the pictures – I imagine: I've never seen the two together...'), and misleadingly about something that he had (his '...at that moment – after the oil has splat [*sic?*] the front of the Spitfire – the sound suddenly disappears...' will have the interested listener searching through the film for something that does not actually occur in it).

After that, the programme went on to adorn its fantasy concerning this supposedly 'lost' score by telling us that the

Battle of [recte: *in*] *the Air* survived, and was worked up into a suite by Colin Matthews a generation later – albeit at rather slower tempi than Walton prescribed.

Yes, it's true: the people responsible for Radio 3's 'daily arts, culture and ideas strand' – an 'in-house' production, too, be it noted – are not merely so desperately out of their depth as to

think that Colin Matthews might have been permitted to fashion a multi-movement suite from a single film-musical cue, but are in fact so completely clueless musically that they can hear a performance of this suite (presumably the rather slack Carl Davis/LPO recording on EMI Classics 655585 [1986]) and actually believe its tempi to be something for which Matthews, as arranger, would be responsible!

How painful it is to see the organization that once employed figures of the intellectual and musical stature of Deryck Cooke, Hans Keller and Robert Simpson now reduced to churning out junk like this – put together by people who *don't know, won't find out, and can't be bothered to check*.

The questions simply cannot be 'ducked' any longer: Who are the people making such programmes? (Those implicated in this particular debacle include Paul Allen, Presenter; Ekeme Akalawu, Producer; and Mohit Bakaya, Series Editor.) Who are the people who give them the job? And who on earth are such programmes felt to be *for*? What, after all, is the value of 'accessibility' and 'ease of approach' when that to which the trusting public is given such obtrusively painless 'access' is stuffed with falsehood, inaccuracy and sheer nonsense? And – to focus again on this particular programme – why was it thought acceptable for an item about one of Walton's less well-known scores to be produced and broadcast without *any* of the nation's Walton experts – of whom I am not one – being allowed to contribute? Have those in charge at Radio 3 reached such a level of stupefaction that they genuinely believe 'anyone can do it'? Or is it merely another case of 'anything you can do, I can do cheaper'?

I submit that the above are cultural and ethical questions of importance to everyone who believes that life in modern Britain still possesses a cultural and ethical dimension. I also believe it is time for 'A Quarterly Review of Modern Music' to begin raising these questions in public: whenever I have tried privately to take up such matters with individuals on the BBC's staff, my complaints have been met with imbecilic unconcern.

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