

Alastair Mitchell and Alan Poulton (eds). *A Chronicle of First Broadcast Performances of Musical Works in the United Kingdom, 1923–1996*

Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2001

ISBN 1 85928 239 3. xvi + 798pp., 9 black and white plates.

The BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC) on the outskirts of Reading, England, is a treasure trove of information for scholars of British music, drama, comedy and technology—indeed, for anyone with an interest in British social history of the twentieth century. Dating back to the earliest days of British radio in the 1920s, the Centre's holdings have enabled many crucial BBC studies and histories such as Jennifer Doctor's *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music*

(Cambridge: CUP, 2000). The Centre hosts researchers on innumerable diverse topics, from those studying individual composers, musicians, singers, actors and so on, to those whose interests lie in Britain's technological history. To all comers, the staff are attentive and the morning tea ritual a pleasant diversion from the rigours of research.

A Chronicle of First Broadcast Performances of Musical Works in the United Kingdom 1923–1996 is one of the latest publications derived from this extensive and significant resource. This book lists broadcasts of first performances of musical works chronologically, giving information on the date of the broadcast, the composer, the title, performers and conductor; all neatly laid out and kind to the eye. (At only one leaf shy of 800 pages, it could be argued that the large font and excessive space for the many short items is far too kind; a two-column format would probably have reduced the size—and the cost—of the volume by at least one third, without any appreciable loss of readability.) For vocal and choral works, authors' and translators' names have been listed where possible, and the location of the performance is also often provided. The substantial index is of composers and their works. Nine black and white plates of leading BBC conductors, composers and performers, including the BBC Symphony Orchestra about 1930, with all players' names given, enhance this substantial volume, although it is hard to fathom why or how the illustrations were chosen, especially as they are placed together as an insert and thus separated from their relevant entries (and only one picture actually comes from the BBC archives).

Based upon the Programme-as-Broadcast (P-as-B) daily programme log of what actually went to air, rather than other less reliable sources, such as the *Radio Times* programme guide, the text makes available information which enables assessment of the broadcast prominence of particular composers, performers and works. As such, it makes possible an overarching view of the scope of broadcast music and musicians for more than seventy years of BBC activity. Broadcasts by commercial stations (either radio or television) are beyond the scope of the volume.

Notwithstanding its significance in clearly presenting extensive primary source material, *A Chronicle of First Broadcast Performances* is not without its problems. Although at first glance this is a straightforward work, closer inspection leads the reader to question both its title and its methodology. The title states that the work is a listing of 'first broadcast performances,' that is, broadcasts of performances that are not necessarily the work's premiere. The preface (and the dust-jacket blurb) notes that the entries are for 'broadcasts of first performances of musical works in the United Kingdom' (p. vii)—a different proposition entirely. Later in a very short section headed 'Methodology,' we are told that 'All entries can be assumed to be world premières,' unless they include a particular designation such as FBP (first broadcast performance, as distinct from a première), FMP (first performance in modern times), UKFP (first performance in the UK), and so on (p. x). Confusion deepens when the preface says, 'Entries are confined to first performances broadcast by the BBC,' and the authors draw attention to the first *broadcast* performance of Handel's *Messiah* (December 1924), but then exclude this from the listing. Perhaps it is really supposed to be a list of contemporary works after all, until one finds works by, for example, Johann Friedrich Bach and Haydn listed in 1926, J.S. Bach in 1936, and Handel and Salieri in 1985. There must be many hundreds of madrigals, anthems, dance suites and the like, in fact, most of the early music repertoire, that

have been broadcast by the BBC and would fit their category UKFBP ('first broadcast performance in the UK'), but seem to be missing from this chronicle.

The basis upon which the authors deem a work's broadcast to be its premiere is also unclear. We are only told that the information is based on the P-as-B daily programme log. Presumably, then, errors are the fault of this record, and not of the authors? A quick cross-reference exercise based upon quintessentially English (if not quintessentially BBC) composer Gerald Finzi, using Stephen Banfield's classic study was instructive.¹ *In Terra Pax* and *Seven Part Songs* were given correctly in Mitchell and Poulton's listing, but Finzi's *Introit* was a first broadcast performance (on 8 November 1933—its premiere was on 31 January 1933) as was *Let us Garlands Bring* (premiere on 12 October 1942, first broadcast performance six days later). Neither is designated as such in the list. The FBP (premiere?) of five songs from *Earth and Air and Rain* in 1937 does not appear, which puzzled us until we saw the note that the listing only includes complete works. (Having said this, there are some parts of works, such as 'The Rainbow,' No. 2 of Britten's *Three Two-Part Songs*, and the Rondo from John Field's Piano Concerto No.5, that do get in.) In using this text, then, one constantly has the feeling that there is some important distinction between the works included and those being excluded that one is missing. Some of the entries are not even for live performances, begging the question of the relevance of dates. Many works are played from transcription tapes of foreign concerts, often months after their original performance which may or may not itself have been a premiere in that country. Several works, too, are listed as being played from a commercial recording, for example Britten's *The Plough Boy* broadcast on 28 December 1947, and his *I will give my love an apple* on 2 June 1966.

As the inconsistencies in capitalisation of these two examples show, the final text is in serious need of a copy edit. Page 103 has the word *mens'* with a misplaced possessive (page 132 has *womens'*); the leading apostrophe in *'cello* is on occasion reversed—as is an end-quote mark on page 462—or missing, while the full word *violoncello* appears on pages 446 and 558; colons, commas and italics are scattered haphazardly; the abbreviations *transl.* (pp. 216, 231, 298, 508) and *trans* (without a stop) make an appearance, even though the list of abbreviations gives *trans.* as the one they are using for 'translated by' (also on page 38, *trans.* is used where surely *transcr.* is meant). The index is, unfortunately, particularly useful for identifying inconsistencies, a brief glance finding the following variations in nomenclature:

[orch. Gordon Jacob]	(incidental music)	(arr., from FSA, vol 1)
(orch. Arthur Santas)	(Incidental music)	(arr. from FSA, vol. 3)
[Arr. Donald Tovey]	[Incidental music]	(FSA Vol 4)
(arr. Hindmarsh)	[Incidental Music]	(arr., from FSA, vol. vi)
arr. P. Hindmarsh	Incidental music	(arr. from FSA, vol.6)

It is possible that there is a reason for the differences, but none was immediately obvious. And talking of the index, there is only one, an index to composers, with a list of works under each. This is fine, as far as it goes, but there is a wealth of other information in the book which is far more difficult to draw from the chronological lists without the help of an index. One thinks particularly of performers, especially conductors and soloists. Imagine what valuable

¹ Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997).

insights might have arisen from such a comprehensive index of this, and one that would have taken only the same amount of effort to produce as the composer index.

In addition to this, the dust jacket suggests that the book will be useful in enabling us to ‘gauge the trends in twentieth-century British musical life, and the role of the BBC in their promotion.’ This is certainly true, but would it not have been better to include some of this analysis in a slightly expanded introduction? Even a brief count of the number of works by some of Britain’s more prominent composers would have saved the reader from the chore of adding them up from the index.

This resource is undeniably useful, but it is also limited. Further, if, as one suspects, the mammoth task of cross-referencing P-as-B records with other sources has not been carried out in a systematic fashion, the text may also be misleading or, on occasion, simply incorrect. Certainly, while answering some specific questions, it raises many more. It will be a valuable scholarly resource for many—but it should be used with caution.



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