

BOOKSHELF

SORABJI: A Critical Celebration edited by Paul Rapoport, Scolar Press (now Ashgate), 1992 (reprinted with corrections 1994); xvi, 512pp illus. £49.50 hardback ISBN 0 85967 923 3

Intrigued readers of Brian Inglis' biographical article on Sorabji in *News* 69 (March 1996) should need no further encouragement to explore this important book, first published in the composer's centenary year and subsequently reprinted two years ago. It is the first volume devoted to this enigmatic musical figure, and will remain a key reference source for all future Sorabji scholarship.

Most of the contributors knew the composer personally, and all have played significant roles in the preservation and propagation of his music and prose writings. The articles have been collected together in three parts, the first of which aims to introduce Sorabji and his artistic world to new listeners and potential devotees (for this is a composer who does inspire devotion - rather like his friend Philip Heseltine and the older figure they both passionately admired, Frederick Delius) and includes an invaluable "Complete Provisional" Catalogue of Sorabji's compositions, compiled by editor Paul Rapoport.

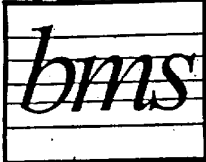
The second part of the book includes a substantial selection of Sorabji's prose writings, covering both his own music and the contemporary music of his day, much of it British. Included are an edited selection, about 20%, of Sorabji's voluminous correspondence with Heseltine, written between 1913 and 1922; a chapter focusing on his articles on contemporary composers published in the newspapers *The New Age* and *The New English Weekly* from 1924-1945; and some significant excerpts from his two published books, *Around Music* (1932) and *Mi contra fa* (1947). Active as a music critic from the early twenties until the end of the second world war, Sorabji consistently attracted readers through the idiosyncratic nature of his writing, which now seems rather over-influenced by his personal and artistic self-absorption (tending to extravagances of praise and denigration) but retains much interest.

Part Three is given to discussion of Sorabji's music, or at least that small portion, mainly for solo piano, which has been performed to date from his vast catalogue, most of which remains in manuscript unpublished and unperformed. The most substantial article, the only one attempting an analytical exploration of its subject, is that by pianist Michael Habermann on Sorabji's piano music, a chapter derived from Habermann's doctoral dissertation on the Nocturnes for solo piano, in particular *Le Jardin Parf.éné*. This needs to be read ideally with scores and recordings to hand, and opens, in context, a modest doorway to future generations of musical researchers. Additionally, there is included a transcript of discussions between pianist Geoffrey Douglas Madge and Paul Rapoport on the problems of performing the massive *Opus Clavicembalisticum* (Madge gave the second complete performance of the work, some fifty years after the composer's first performance), and a comprehensive register of performances of Sorabji's works - or at least those given by the few performers officially sanctioned to do so by the composer from 1920 to 1991.

This indispensable volume concludes with a thorough bibliography, and appendices outlining respectively the texts of Sorabji's vocal music; available recordings, including the unique private tape recordings made by the composer himself in the 1960s; and the nature and work of the Sorabji Music Archive founded in 1988 and administered by Sorabji's literary executor, composer Alistair Hinton. © John Talbot, 1996.

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