

TEMPO

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CHELTENHAM PAST AND FUTURE

The 21st birthday of the Cheltenham Festival provided the right opportunity for the retrospective programme that has often been suggested, and for a history of the festival since it began in 1945 (*The Cheltenham Festival*, by Frank Howes, O.U.P., 6/-). Out of the 199 first performances of those twenty years there have of course been relatively few durable works. A reasonable estimate is an average of one a year, and it would be unrealistic to expect more, given Cheltenham's special aims.

Whether the proportion of good works to mediocre or bad ones would have been different if the festival had pursued a more 'progressive' policy, as it has often been urged to do, is very uncertain. The mediocre might only have been more difficult to recognize. Nevertheless there is much to be said for such a policy (as well, admittedly, as much against). Certainly Mr. Howes is opposed to it, declaring that the festival "must remain representative of all schools of thought actively engaged in composition". This is admirably fair, but is not necessarily the best way of serving the cause of British music, nor the best thing for the festival's success with the public. Mr. Howes comments on the festival's "failure to bring visitors from all over the country", which rather weakens the force of this distinction he draws between Cheltenham on the one hand and Darmstadt and Donaueschingen on the other, which, in his words, "appeal only to initiates". Since the festival in its present form has not proved the tourist attraction that was hoped for, the committee might well debate the case for trying something more like the Darmstadt pattern, giving preference to the more 'advanced' English works, and performing them in a context of works of similar persuasion from abroad.

This would be hard on our more conservative composers, but it would provide something that is lacking and much needed in England, a public platform for the music of the European avantgarde, and it might by so doing help to dispel the belief widely held abroad in circles of contemporary music that England and her composers are of very marginal interest, and hopelessly behind the times—partly by showing this to be not entirely true, and partly by making it still less so, as it undoubtedly would do. Such a proposal would of course meet strenuous and understandable opposition from a good many musical quarters in England, and the realization of it would require far bigger subsidies for the festival both from the Arts Council and from Cheltenham corporation. But both might find it a surprisingly worthwhile investment—the one in an influx of foreign visitors, the other in an increased reciprocal interest from abroad in our music and musical activity.