

LONDON MEETINGS

20 March 2018

A year ago Dominic Combe presented a programme on musical shows staged in London during 1917. Such was the popularity of that occasion that it was natural that he should return this year with **London Revues and Musicals of 1918**. Seventeen shows were staged in that year, musical entertainments of one sort or another including operetta and revues, some lavish but others of the type that would become known as intimate revue: productions in small theatres with minimal props well suited to the austerity of the times. Dominic has identified original cast recordings from thirteen of these seventeen productions: *Bing Boys on Broadway*, *The Lilac Domino*, *Box o' Tricks*, *Flora, Tabs*, *Going Up*, *Tails Up*, *Soldier Boy*, *As You Were*, *Shanghai*, *Hullo America*, *The Officers' Mess* and *Buzz-Buzz*. As we have come to expect on these occasions, his findings were presented in an attractive booklet with details of plots and

performers, high definition photographs and a CD of recordings from the shows, largely by Columbia who seem to have dominated this particular market.

We would hear 16 of these records during a consistently entertaining evening. They included the wonderfully named Hippodrome Joy Babes in *Box o' Tricks* and the flying lesson (*Down! Up! Left! Right!*) from *Going Up*. Time travel was the theme of *As You Were* both backwards to *Ninon de l'Enclos*, the French courtesan and free thinker, and forwards, speculating on how we might all look in 2018; while *Buzz-Buzz* poked fun at rationing with *Coupons for Kisses* ('You have to have a coupon for everything you do'). At the outset we were reminded of the disparity between these cheerful productions and the horrors of what, by 1918, must have seemed an endless war. But the need for escapism and fun was more evident than ever and these shows provided it.

London Reporter

17 April 2018

For use with both ears as nature intended was the title of Bill Dudman's programme of stereo demonstration discs from the late 1950s onwards. Designed to illustrate how effective stereo recording could be, the first examples focussed on sounds: a fire station when the alarm goes off, a game of ping pong, a blacksmith's forge (those who know Bill may not be surprised to learn that this was recorded on the hoof!) and the contrasting sounds of an express and goods

train passing through Hayes Station. From America we enjoyed midnight on New Year's Eve in Times Square and the distinctive sounds of ten pin bowling, a locomotive, traffic and a New York ferry boat. Musically, we heard part of the *Capriccio Espagnol* first in mono and then stereo, Ansermet rehearsing the *Rite of Spring*, a little of Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* and Ronnie Aldrich and his two pianos with *Asia Minor*, all from Decca samplers. We were reminded of the contrasting

broadcasting styles of Jack DeManio and Robert Dougall in stereo promotions; and we enjoyed two examples of good quality early stereo: *12th Street Rag* played on a Belgian Street Organ and Hamp's Big Band with *Red Top*. Part 1 concluded with the American comedians Bob and Ray throwing a 'Stereo Spectacular', including rather good impressions of Peter Lorre and Boris Karloff.

Part 2 comprised selections from some of Bill's favourite stereo records. I'll

mention just four, all illustrating spectacular stereo sound: the *Thieving Magpie* overture (LSO/Gamba, 1961), the *Entry into Valhalla* from Das Rheingold (VPO/Solti, 1959), the *Tick Tack Polka* (VPO/Boskovsky, 1979) and the conclusion of Saint-Saëns' *Symphony No 3* (Philadelphia/Ormandy, 1980). Finally, and as an indicator of things to come, this refreshingly different programme ended with Big Ben chiming on a HiFi News test CD from 1989.

London Reporter

15 May 2018

Simon Heighes' programme was called **Getting High – The 'Supernatural' Male Voice**. Just to emphasise the point, Simon began by addressing us in falsetto – something which, if we happen to be male, we have probably all tried at one time or another.

He started with three solos from boy trebles: an anonymous Edinburgh choir boy singing on a 1903 cylinder, Ernest Lough in the 1920s and Simon himself recorded in 1972 when a mere slip of a lad. Next, Allegri's *Miserere* with its top Cs that suddenly have to be hit – a scary moment for the choir boy chosen to do it. We heard some of the famous 1963 recording from the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, featuring Roy Goodman. This section concluded with Connor Burrowes singing a surviving aria from Bach's lost St Mark Passion - grown up music for a boy to sing, as Simon put it.

In moving from boys to adults, the initial emphasis was on 'high' tenors (those singing at the top end of the tenor range)

and others singing falsetto. We heard a variety of both classical and popular pieces, too many to mention here though Sam Smith's *Writing's on the Wall* stood out as a contemporary example.

We then came to counter-tenors and the two names which have dominated the recent past: James Bowman – we heard an aria from *Rinaldo* – and, before that, Alfred Deller in a 1957 recording of the *Agnus Dei* from Bach's B Minor Mass: wonderful artistry and glorious singing. Finally, the last castrato: Alessandro Moreschi, recorded in 1902 sounding nervous and then again in 1904 sounding more confident: a gentle, elegant, effortless top register with power and colour.

This enthralling programme ended with a puzzle. Little seems to be known of Milner Verren, a music hall artist active in the late 19th/early 20th century. We heard a cylinder of him singing *The Playground in the Sky* and were left wondering: was he a woman in drag, or a boy or a male soprano? Does anyone know?

London Reporter