

**PELICAN
BOOKS**

**MUSIC
IN ENGLAND**

ERIC BLOM



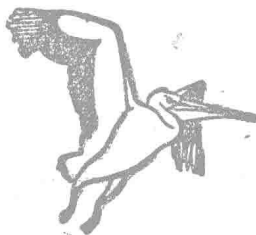
ONE

SHILLING

PELICAN BOOKS

MUSIC IN ENGLAND

BY
ERIC BLOM



PUBLISHED BY
PENGUIN BOOKS

HARMONDSWORTH MIDDLESEX ENGLAND
245 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK U.S.A.

Published in Pelican Books OCTOBER 1942

Reprinted JUNE 1943

Reprinted 1945

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN FOR PENGUIN BOOKS LIMITED
BY WYMAN AND SONS, LTD., LONDON, FAKENHAM AND READING

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER	
I. THE BEGINNINGS (...-1485)	11
II. TUDOR MUSIC BEFORE ELIZABETH (1485-1558)	19
III. THE ELIZABETHANS (1558-1603)	34
IV. THE EARLIER SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (1603-1660)	50
V. THE AGE OF PURCELL (1660-1710)	70
VI. HANDEL AND HIS INFLUENCE (1710-1760)	89
VII. THE LATER EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (1760-1800)	108
VIII. THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY (1801-1837)	127
IX. THE VICTORIAN ERA (1837-1880)	144
X. THE RENASCENCE (1880-1900)	163
XI. THE FOLK-MUSIC REVIVAL	182
XII. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY	188
INDEX	209

PELICAN BOOKS

Advisory Editors: H. L. BEALES, Reader in Economic History, University of London; W. E. WILLIAMS, Director, the Army Bureau of Current Affairs; Secretary, the British Institute of Adult Education.

MUSIC IN ENGLAND

BY

ERIC BLOM

(A107)



Richard Hall

THE AUTHOR

ERIC BLOM first became known as a writer on music in London in 1919, when he began to contribute analytical notes to the programmes of the Queen's Hall Symphony and Promenade Concerts.

In 1923 he was appointed London music critic to *The Manchester Guardian* and in 1931 he became music critic of *The Birmingham Post*, an appointment previously held by Ernest Newman and A. J. Sheldon. He took on the honorary editorship of the quarterly *Music & Letters* in 1937, in succession to its founder, A. H. Fox Strangways.

His name is familiar as that of a contributor to musical periodicals and to Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and he is known as an occasional broadcaster and as the author of several books on music, including *Step-children of Music* (a series of essays on neglected works), *The Limitations of Music: a Study in Aesthetics*, *The Romance of the Piano*, a volume on Mozart in Dent's *Master Musicians* series, edited by him, *Beethoven's Piano-forte Sonatas Discussed* and *A Musical Postbag* (a selection from his weekly *Birmingham Post* articles).

PELICAN BOOKS

MUSIC IN ENGLAND

BY
ERIC BLOM



PUBLISHED BY
PENGUIN BOOKS

HARMONDSWORTH MIDDLESEX ENGLAND
245 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK U.S.A.

Published in Pelican Books OCTOBER 1942

Reprinted JUNE 1943

Reprinted 1945

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN FOR PENGUIN BOOKS LIMITED
BY WYMAN AND SONS, LTD., LONDON, FAKENHAM AND READING

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
CHAPTER	
I. THE BEGINNINGS (...-1485)	11
II. TUDOR MUSIC BEFORE ELIZABETH (1485-1558)	19
III. THE ELIZABETHANS (1558-1603)	34
IV. THE EARLIER SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (1603-1660)	50
V. THE AGE OF PURCELL (1660-1710)	70
VI. HANDEL AND HIS INFLUENCE (1710-1760)	89
VII. THE LATER EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (1760-1800)	108
VIII. THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY (1801-1837)	127
IX. THE VICTORIAN ERA (1837-1880)	144
X. THE RENASCENCE (1880-1900)	163
XI. THE FOLK-MUSIC REVIVAL	182
XII. THE TWENTIETH CENTURY	188
INDEX	209

PREFACE

THIS book is not what scholars call a well-documented work. The reader will find in it no footnote references, no names of authorities and no bibliography. But this does not mean that its contents are not based on a great deal of reading and referring to the work of others, nor that the lack of detailed acknowledgment should be taken to indicate a want of gratitude for the information offered by them. These omissions are due solely to the necessity of saving space for the treatment of a vast subject in a small volume. In spite of the astonishing facts disclosed by a well-known limerick about the pelican's capacity, a "Pelican" is capable of accommodating no more than a certain specified amount, and it will be only too evident that I needed every line of space for my actual text.

My thanks must thus perforce be addressed to innumerable authors collectively. Having gone to true scholars only for my sources, however, I feel assured that they will be content to remain anonymous. After all, any author who gives us new information or ideas, or usefully summarizes facts for us, adds something to common intellectual property, and it is the glory of scholarship that this should be its own reward. I am, however, particularly and personally indebted to two authorities to whom I am anxious to express my thanks here: Professor Edward J. Dent, who read the MS. of the first six chapters, and Mr. A. H. Fox Strangways, who looked over chapter XI. They have both made useful corrections and invaluable suggestions. Professor Dent, indeed, has raised so many interesting points that I can only regret my inability to incorporate more than a fraction of them in my work. The temptation to use more of them was almost irresistible, but had I done so I could no longer have claimed the book as my own. Instead of a pelican it would have become something more like a magpie.

It may be asked why a title indicating that it deals with music in England, not with music in Britain, should have been

chosen. The answer may be suggested by another question. Would a book on music in Britain have been materially different? Scotland, Wales and Ireland have had, if we come to think of it, few musical activities independent of those of England. There are endless mutual influences, and England was often the debtor; but where this is so, as in the case of folksong, Scottish, Welsh and Irish aspects of the story will be found to enter into the discussion as a matter of course, even if it is kept mainly to the English scene. True, such phenomena as the early Welsh Bardic music and the more recent Eisteddfod movement in Wales, which have never affected English music in the least, had of necessity to be dismissed briefly; but on the whole little that was of equal significance anywhere in Great Britain has been wilfully ignored, because musical England could not ignore it in its time. The Scottish and Irish influences which affected musical Europe during the nineteenth century, though mainly in a literary way, had of course to be duly noticed in a discussion of English musical life.

I say "English musical life" rather than "English music" because this little book was not written with the intention of furnishing simply a history of English composers and their work. That would have been too much a matter for specialists, or at any rate for a specifically musical public, whose needs in this direction are amply supplied by at least two books on the subject: Ernest Walker's *History of Music in England* and Henry Davey's *History of English Music*, both of them works the reader who wishes to study English composition in greater detail may be recommended to look up. All that is attempted here is to set the English scene in which musical life throughout the centuries unfolded itself, not only through the activities of composers, but also those of performers, scholars and institutions. To provide that scene with an elaborately detailed background, however, would have been impossible in the small space at my disposal. Thus, while doing my best to show something of the social as well as the artistic conditions of each period, I have been compelled to take a broad knowledge of English history for granted in the reader. I have also assumed some slight acquaintance with musical terms, mainly because it is more offensive to those who know to be offered elementary instruction than annoying to those who do not to find one or two technicalities they do not understand. Popular musical literature has made it easy in recent times to acquire such an understanding, and those who are sufficiently interested in a musical subject will not hesitate to do so; but I do not

think that I have made my tale unreadable for those who wish to take a more superficial view of my subject.

It may be said, perhaps, that if my title is quite properly not "Music in Britain," it ought almost to have been "Music in London". But that cannot be helped. The reason is that music in this country has always been largely centralized in the capital, though not to so great an extent as French music has been in Paris. The large provincial festivals and the activities at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge are exceptions (duly taken into account), but on the whole it is true that musical conditions in London reflect those throughout the country, just as those prevailing all over England, properly discussed, are bound to throw light on certain aspects of musical life elsewhere in Great Britain. Many Italian and German towns, whether their music was supported by Courts, as at Mantua, Ferrara, Dresden or Mannheim, or by the municipality, as at Venice, Hamburg or Leipzig, have almost watertight little musical histories of their own; England has a single big one—how big the deficiencies of this small volume are only too likely to show—and its focal point is London. If our scene is laid there for the most part, the reason is that the most picturesque and fruitful episodes in English musical life were enacted there.

Dates of birth and death are not given in the text after the names of the personages discussed, but they will be found in the index. No attempt has been made to be consistent in quoting titles of old works. Where faulty or obsolete spelling seemed to add a touch of colour to the picture, it has been reproduced; elsewhere the wording has been modernized to avoid tiresome quaintness.

In conclusion, I affectionately dedicate this little book to all those who feel that they have been unjustly omitted from it. Among them are, in particular, the contemporary singers and instrumentalists, the inclusion of some of whom would have been more offensive than the omission of all.

December, 1941.

ERIC BLOM.



CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS (...-1485)

WE do not know when music became a consciously cultivated art in England, or indeed anywhere else, nor can we tell how it first shaped itself. What is certain is that remarkable developments must have gone on far beyond the reach of history. From immemorial times the people must have danced and sung, from its establishment in Britain the Christian Church must have chanted at least part of its liturgy, and sculptural and pictorial representations of musical instruments date from far earlier times than any extant music we know to have been played on them. Unfortunately for history music was for centuries transmitted merely by ear and by tradition, and even when some system of notation was in use, it long remained so inexact as to serve merely as a rough reminder of what was already known to the performers from aural teaching.

It is very uncertain at what period harmony, even of a crude sort, first occurred to musicians. The view has been asserted again and again that plainsong, which is not harmonized, represents all earlier music as a higher development of purely single-line melodic music preceding the "discovery" of harmony. It is just thinkable, of course, that such a simple fact as the pleasing effect of a coincidence of two or more notes did not strike anybody for centuries, just as the possibility of representing an eye otherwise than as seen from the front in a portrait shown in profile did not occur to the Egyptians. Incredible as it seems, it is a fact that the Egyptians painted not what they saw, but what they knew was there; and with a similar sort of preconception early musicians may have refused to notice what it was actually possible to hear, even if only by accident, but what was not recognized as legitimate. Any coincidental sound of two notes, indeed, may have been regarded, not as harmony, but as intolerable discord. Yet it seems unbelievable that harps, dulcimers, psalteries and other instruments capable of producing several notes at once should

have existed so long without ever bringing it home to their players that the sound of several strings together could be pleasant. On the whole it seems more likely that some sort of harmonized music was current long before plainsong was consolidated by St. Ambrose in the fourth century and by St. Gregory, the first Pope of that name, in the sixth. Plainsong may have been merely a special means of maintaining a sort of ecclesiastical tradition of purity opposed to a secular influence. Monody (i.e. pure melody) may have been the exclusive property of the Church, harmonized melody the "impure" luxury of the world. We have no direct evidence, but early pictures are preserved which appear to show the concerted playing on groups of varied instruments amounting almost to orchestras of a kind. A miniature in an eighth-century codex in the British Museum, for instance, shows King David playing on a rotta (a generic link between the lyre and the harp), surrounded by four cornett players and four other people apparently producing various percussive noises, including hand-clapping. The cornetts, being of different sizes and therefore producing notes of different pitch, suggest some kind of harmony, and percussion is unimaginable without regular rhythmic patterns. Moreover, dancing, which reaches back into the dimmest beginnings of history, is as inconceivable without such rhythmic patterns as it is without music itself. We should thus beware of taking it for granted that all early music resembled that of the Church, merely because the Church alone, having a monopoly of learning, had the means of preserving its musical traditions by written records.

Plainsong was introduced into England by St. Augustine, who was sent on his mission by Gregory I. and landed in Thanet in 597, hospitably received by Æthelbert, king of Kent, who offered the guests a dwelling-place at Canterbury, where Augustine became the first archbishop. Specialists affirm that the English plainsong tradition is the next-best after the Roman, because from the first the Britons sang much better than the French and the Germans, the latter of whom were notoriously bad.

According to the Venerable Bede, Roman liturgy remained confined to Kent for a long time: in his *Ecclesiastical History of England* he does not refer to its spread northwards until he reaches the year 669. He sang at the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, however, according to the practice of St. Peter's of Rome, as a boy of seven or eight in 680, he tells us, and he was later in charge of the music there. Bede, who

shows great concern lest the music in Church should deteriorate, as it continually threatened to do through excessive familiarity with some of its elements and through neglect of others, as well as through ever-intrusive secular influences, was clearly a considerable musician. So was Alfred the Great, who translated Bede's history from the Latin at the end of the ninth century and near the end of his own reign. It is tantalizing to be unable to form any definite conception of the music cultivated by such men outside the Church and of the influence such cultivation must have exercised on society. We know, however, that music did play an important part in social life, and since dancing did so too, we may be sure that metrical music co-existed with the measureless plainsong of the Church, the former being, so to speak, the counterpart of verse, the latter of prose. That some sort of harmony, too, was a feature at any rate of instrumental music has already been tentatively suggested.

In the Church no harmony, even of the most primitive kind, appeared until about the tenth century, when plainsong began to be sung by higher and lower voices at a distance of a fourth or fifth instead of in unison, at first probably by a sort of carelessness, merely because the voices habitually inclined to be used at different pitches. This led to the discovery that at certain points, especially in cadences, thirds and sixths, formerly regarded as more discordant than fourths and fifths, were actually more satisfying and mellifluous, and so gradually harmony became more pliable and was accepted by the Church for certain purposes, though plainsong has maintained itself as a special tradition to the present day.

These developments do not belong to English musical history in particular, but they had to be briefly discussed as part of it. This applies also to the modes—the musical scales which preceded our modern major and minor scales. They are often called Church or ecclesiastical modes, but this is misleading, as all music (including folksong, which still retains its modal character: see Chapter XI) was based on them. The modes can be quite easily determined on the keyboard of the piano if the following scales are played on the white keys only:

Starting from D for the Dorian mode;

“ “ E “ “ Phrygian mode;

“ “ F “ “ Lydian mode;

“ “ G “ “ Mixolydian mode.

To these four main tonalities were added what may be