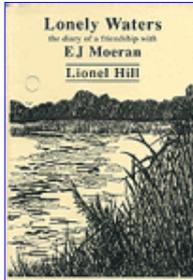




### Moeran's Writing

This page links you to articles and letters written by Moeran himself, all published within his lifetime.

Jack Moeran was quite a letter writer. Without these preserved documents Lionel Hill's excellent memoir "[Lonely Waters, the diary of a friendship with E J Moeran](#)" (*below*) would probably not have been written. As it is, however, we have a fascinating insight into the opinions of Moeran on a wide range of musical subjects, as well as his own compositional progress. A further publication, the article by Geoffrey Self in the magazine 'British Music' ([Volume 16, 1994](#)) quotes newly discovered letters and postcards written between February 1931 and December 1941 to the singer George Parker.



But Moeran's private letters are not the only source of insight into his way of thinking. He wrote a number of articles for publications such as the Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society and Countrygoer, which will see the light of day again here. One such article is the fascinating Folk Songs and some Traditional Singers in East Anglia, which was published in Countrygoer in 1946 and details the origins and development of Moeran's interest in traditional folk song and singers.

There are also the letters written to and published by newspapers and magazines, and it was with two of these that this section opened. The first appears to be written in response to the news that Elgar was 'at it again', but actually concentrates on folk song and its influence on a variety of composers. The second, to the Telegraph, discusses the Proms and the BBC's handling of contemporary British music.

Another tack is a brief questionnaire which Moeran completed in 1949 on "The Composer and Society" which offers some insight into Moeran's social thinking and desire for more assistance for British music. I've also linked here to the Symphony sleeve notes by Moeran that have been on the site for some time.

### letters

[Elgar and The Public](#) (1933)

[The BBC and British Music](#) (1934)

### articles

[John Ireland as Teacher](#) (1931)

[Sleevenotes to Symphony](#) (1942)

[Article on Leslie Heward](#) (1943)

[British Music and the BBC](#) (1946)

[Folk Songs and some Traditional Singers in East Anglia](#) (1946)

[Some Folk Singing of Today](#) (excerpt) (1948)

[The Composer and Society](#) (1950)

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Letter to The Musical Times, 1933

### 'Elgar and the Public'

SIR -

I was extremely interested in Mr.C.W.Orr's<sup>1</sup> article in the January number of The Musical Times, and while I am able whole-heartedly to share his enthusiasm for Elgar at his best, I feel bound to point out certain historical inaccuracies among his remarks.

The folk-song rage did not take place after the war, as Mr.Orr states, but before 1914, and it largely manifested itself in the excellent series of concerts given by Mr.H.Balfour Gardiner<sup>2</sup> and the late F.B.Ellis<sup>3</sup>, and with which were ultimately associated at that time the activities of the Oriana Madrigal Society. The post-war period, in fact, had no bearing whatever on the revival of folk-song in this country and its application to symphonic art. Mr.Orr says that 'Parties of enthusiasts went back to the land,' carefully noting down the effusions of rustics 'to be worked up into English Suites,etc.' This is a statement which simply will not bear investigation. In the first place, practically the whole of English folk-song had been noted long before. (Vide the published journals of the Folk-Song Society.) The immediate outcome was such works as 'Brigg Fair' by Delius, Vaughan Williams' Norfolk Rhapsodies<sup>4</sup>, and numerous works by Grainger, Holst, Butterworth and others. Secondly, at the period of which Mr.Orr writes, new works by British composers, with one notable exception, were conspicuous by their absence from folk-song influences. Thirdly, by this time, save for rare and isolated instances, spontaneous folk-singing on the part of country people had died out. The idiom of folk-song in British music is for the moment submerged beneath a wave of unpopularity, possibly because, despite our national wealth of melodies, we have not yet produced a Haydn or a Mussorgsky. English folk-song, as is that of any nation, is apt to become exceedingly dull when it is handled by musicians who, with the best intentions, possess more technical resource than inspiration, and who, by virtue of their surroundings, their sophistication and their respectability, have never experienced the feeling which gave birth to this kind of music. Even so, there exists already at least one really important achievement which owes its existence directly to the influence of folk-song, and that is the supremely beautiful 'Pastoral' Symphony of Vaughan Williams. I have an unbounded admiration for this work, and also for Elgar's Second Symphony, which owes nothing whatever to primitive music. It is surely possible to wax enthusiastic over 'Tristan' and 'Parsifal', without decrying the chamber music and concertos of Brahms, which are soaked in the good vintage of folk-song, and to appraise Tchaikovsky's symphonies without detracting from those of Borodin and Balakirev. Mr.Orr, himself a composer of some distinguished songs, is of all people one of the very last who can afford to sneer at those musicians who have spent much time and money in searching out and noting down our tunes of the countryside, which on their own merits are surely worthy of preservation from the oblivion into which they must otherwise have fallen.

I, too, remember the first performance of Elgar's 'Falstaff'<sup>5</sup>, as I was one of the few enthusiasts who was present at Queen's Hall, and I was shocked at the rows of empty seats on that occasion<sup>6</sup>. It was difficult to square this with the public acclamation with which repeated performances of the First Symphony and the Violin Concerto had been hailed only a short time before.

In conclusion, let me express the hope that the recent report that Sir Edward Elgar is 'at it again', after nine years of silence, and is writing a large work, may prove to be true, and that he may succeed in adding yet another masterpiece to an honourable series<sup>7</sup>.

Yours, etc.,

E.J.Moeran  
11, Constitution Hill,  
Ipswich. **8**

Notes:

- 1 - C.W.Orr, British composer 1893-1976
- 2 - Henry Balfour Gardiner 1877-1950. English composer and also patron of new British music 1912-1913 with an interest in Bax, Holst and Percy Grainger in particular.
- 3 - H.Bevis Ellis, composer, killed in the First World War.
- 4 - Three Norfolk Rhapsodies were written - only No.1 has survived.
- 5 - 'Falstaff' : first London performance was at the Queen's Hall on Nov.3rd 1913.
- 6 - See Kennedy: Portrait of Elgar' Chapter 11: 'Full Orchestra'. Walter Legge rebukes London for producing (quote) " only a beggarly row of half-empty benches".
- 7 - The Third Symphony, unfinished at Elgar's death in 1934, reconstructed Anthony Payne 1998.

The idiom of folk-song in British music is for the moment submerged beneath a wave of unpopularity, possibly because, despite our national wealth of melodies, we have not yet produced a Haydn or a Mussorgsky...

8 - Letter undated, but probably January or February 1933.

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## The Daily Telegraph

Letter to the Daily Telegraph: January 27th 1934

### The B.B.C. and British Music

Mr. E.J.Moeran writes to comment on the B.B.C.'s recent concerts of British music, and on our article arising therefrom, of last Saturday. He says:

"It is easy to criticise, and, after all, the B.B.C. deserves praise for what it has done, But I heartily agree that we ought to get back to the old system at the 'Proms'.

"Works that prove their merit at the 'Proms' should be repeated at the winter symphony concerts - but not segregated.

"With one line of argument I distinctly do not agree, and that is the suggestion that the fact of a man's being a professor at the R.A.M. or R.C.M. entitles his works to a hearing at Queen's Hall. In the dreadful old days the Philharmonic used automatically to produce whatever orchestral stuff the bigwigs of the Academy and the College turned out. We don't want the B.B.C. to land us back into that.

"It was a pity an opportunity was not found to include something by Jacob, and I should have liked to hear something by Finzi, Rubbra and Elizabeth Maconchy, who seem to claim attention more than anyone else of that generation. It is high time Miss Maconchy's fine work, 'The Land', was heard again.

"A serious omission from the programme was the name of Edward German. He is interesting historically, apart from the value of his music. In the 1890s, when others were purveying second-hand Brahms, German was producing symphonies and suites with a distinctly English flavour and original character.

"Peter Warlock should have been given a place. He was our outstanding song-writer since the Tudors. I should have represented Cyril Scott by his piano concerto; it is Scott at his high-water mark, and is not widely enough known."

### Notes

Gerald Finzi, English composer 1901-1956

Edmund Rubbra, English composer 1901-1986

Elizabeth Maconchy, English composer d.1990

Edward German, English composer, famous for his opera 'Merrie England'.

In the dreadful old days the Philharmonic used automatically to produce whatever orchestral stuff the bigwigs of the Academy and the College turned out...



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"John Ireland as Teacher"  
by E J Moeran

This article by Moeran, published in 1931, whilst ostensibly about John Ireland, Moeran's composition tutor in the early 1920's at the Royal College of Music, also offers a rare and fascinating insight to Moeran's own ideas and attitudes towards composition.

...without polyphony nothing can be complete, and any attempt to break away from it has invariably ended in a blind alley...



I lived and worked for a time in a Kentish village. One day I was feeling very pleased with myself, having composed a pianoforte piece that I liked. I was playing it over when my landlord, the village grocer, looked in on me.

"You made that all up yourself, did you?" he asked, and added rather sorrowfully, "Ah, I wish I could do that; but you see, I never had the education."

I should mention that my good friend's knowledge of music amounted to precisely NIL. He was one of those who even had to be told when the National Anthem was being played.

It is undoubtedly a fact that there are some people who imagine that musical composition can be taught, even in the same way that a knowledge of languages, chemistry, mathematics, hairdressing, home-coping and countless other subjects can be hammered into the receptive brain of any willing pupil by a skilled teacher. Also there are many who believe that given enthusiasm and a first-rate professor of composition, any intelligent musician may become a composer if he works sufficiently hard. Hence, unfortunately, the existence of so much of that type of music which is known as 'Capellmeister' music

In this sense, John Ireland, in spite of the title of this essay, is not a teacher of composition. This is one of his virtues. He is a very wise adviser and an acute critic, both of his own work and of that of others, and he succeeds in instilling into his pupils that blessed principal of self-criticism. Moreover, he possesses an uncanny knack of immediately and accurately probing the aesthetic content of what is put before him, thus arriving at the state of mind which gave it birth, and understanding its underlying mood and aims. It is here that his sympathy is aroused, for he has the faculty of understanding the music from the pupil's point of view, and his wide experience then steps in to suggest the solution of difficulties, and not only the technical ones.

These are not the qualities of an academic teacher of composition, who is accustomed to dole out weekly lessons of forty minutes' duration to all sorts and conditions of students. Ireland is not a mere machine whose brains may be purchased at so much an hour. I recollect one session - this is a better word than 'lesson' in this case - which lasted for about an hour, then continued for another half-hour after tea. At this point Ireland advised me to go home and work at the problem concerned with while our discussion was still fresh in my mind, and to bring it back to him later in the evening for a final talk.

Ireland does not believe that any standardised technique can be taught. "Every composer must make his own technique," is his dictum. At the same time he is a firm believer in the strict study of counterpoint, and, much to my surprise and sorrow, I found myself expected to spend many weary hours, struggling with cantus firmus, and its embellishments in all the species. I state emphatically that I am glad of all this today, for I have come to realise that only by this means can a subconscious sense of harmony, melody, and rhythm be acquired.



Ireland and Moeran, 1922

Genuine harmony arises out of counterpoint, for it implies contrary motion among the parts; otherwise it is no longer harmony, but faux-bourdon. Moreover there can be no rhythm without melody, otherwise it descends to mere metre, which is not music. On the other hand melody, divorced from harmony and rhythm, descends into a meandering succession of fragmentary ideas, bearing little relation one to another, and totally lacking organic unity. Thus it is that the greatest music, from Palestrina and Vittoria down through Beethoven and Wagner and the present day, has been polyphonic. For without polyphony nothing can be complete, and any attempt to break away from it has invariably ended in a blind alley.

I mentioned just now that first of all I was surprised at Ireland's insistence on counterpoint, but I hope I have grown a little wiser than I was just over eleven years ago when I commenced work with him, and I feel unbounded gratitude for having been encouraged to do the drudgery. I deliberately use the word encouraged, for Ireland has no interest in work done which is not worth while, and it is by the lucidity of his argument that he expounds to his pupils the logic of doing something that hitherto may have seemed futile, and the task, distasteful as it may appear at the time, is undertaken with the sure sense that there is a real reason for doing it, and doing it to the best of one's ability. Personally, I have always been so lazy that it would

have been nearly impossible to induce me to go to the trouble of working a single counterpoint exercise, had I not been encouraged to believe in some very definite value in so doing.

Ireland's remarkable individuality in his own work does not hinder him from observing and fostering unity of style in the work of his pupils, even though it may be very different from his own. He will not tolerate the slightest falling off or failing in continuity. He has no use for padding in any form, and he does not consider a piece of work done until the minutest detail has been scrutinised again, down to the last semiquaver rest and the smallest mark of phrasing and dynamics. "What about that sforzando?" he will ask. "Have you thought carefully about it?"

His own mastery of form has been evolved in the wake of some hard thinking and deep experience the results of which, apart from his creative work, bear fruit in the guidance which he is able to give to those who study with him. For him, form does not necessarily imply a dry-as-dust formula of first and second subjects, double bars and so on. He enjoins his pupils to look ahead and plan.

I took him one day the exposition of a movement in sonata form. "This is most exciting," he said. "But the question is, will you be able to go one better before the end? Otherwise you will have an anticlimax."

Here again, Ireland is emphasizing one of the *raison d'être* of the heritage which has come down to us from the old masters. All the music which has escaped consignment to the shelf has been inherently logical. Music, without logical continuity and shape, is lifeless from its inception.

As for instrumentation, Ireland holds that the true principles thereof are not necessarily to be found in text-books, but they eventually come about in relation to the music ("Every composer must make his own technique"). It is essential, however, to understand the true nature and character of each individual instrument, apart from its compass and technical resources. This is only knowledge that can be gained by listening to concerted music, but it is when the beginner sets forth on his own first full score that the experienced adventurer is able to guide his faltering steps. It is here that Ireland's psychological sense, in getting to the rock-bottom in what the pupil is making for, enables to put his finger on the weaknesses and, by means of his considered suggestion, to point out the right road to take to over-come them.

I have tried here to show that John Ireland is an exceptional counsellor for those fortunate enough to work under his teaching. When all is said and done, it is the fact that he is the very antithesis of the so-called teacher of composition that is the secret of his success. He gives unstintingly of his very best to those who come under him, and behind that keen intelligence that brings to bear on their work and its many aspects and problems his pupils soon discover a very human personality and a very warm friend.

E J Moeran  
MMR  
March 1931

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## music: orchestral

## Symphony SleeveNotes

Moeran's own sleeve notes from the HMV recording of the Symphony released in 1943:

Published

Novello, 1942

Recordings

[Ulster Orch., Handley](#)  
(1987, CD)

New Philharmonia of  
London,  
Sir Adrian Boult,  
Lyrita SRCS 70  
(1975, LP)

English Sinfonia,  
Neville Dilkes  
(1973, LP)

Hallé Orch,  
Leslie Heward,  
(1942, 78s, reissued on  
Dutton CDAX 8001)

Reviews

Further Writing

[W H Mellers' attack](#)

Audio

[At Moeran.com:](#)  
[1st movt. opening](#)

[Available from Amazon](#)

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This symphony was completed early in 1937 and received its first performance at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert at Queen's Hall, London on 13th January 1938 under the conductorship of Leslie Heward. It may be said to owe its inspiration to the natural surroundings in which it was planned and written. The greater part of the work was carried out among the mountains and seaboard of Co. Kerry, but the material of the second movement was conceived around the sand-dunes and marshes of East Norfolk. It is not 'programme music'- i.e. there is no story or sequence of events attached to it and, moreover, it adheres strictly to its form. It is scored for a moderate sized orchestra (double wood-wind).

I Allegro.

The Symphony opens without any preamble with the principal subject of the first movement, given out by the violins. In the fourth bar of this there is a figure of four semiquavers which subsequently plays an important part. Special notice may be taken of the downward leaps at the end of the theme. Presently there appears a fanfare-like motive on the horns, with which is combined the first subject fortissimo on strings. This very soon reaches a slight climax, ending with the downward leap. The music gradually quietens and slows down, a good deal being heard of the semiquaver figure, and we arrive in B major for the second subject. This is a long-drawn-out tune of lyrical character. It continues unbroken almost to the double bar, just previous to which part of the first subject is alluded to on solo violin and horn.

The development is ushered in by the semiquaver figure on a clarinet. The tempo becomes Allegro molto, the pace is set by a rhythmic figure on the strings, over which the semiquaver figure, now inverted, is treated at some length on the wood-wind, later in combination with the first subject in augmentation on bassoons and horns. There is a big climax leading to what amounts to the return and recapitulation. This is brief and quiet, the component parts of the first and second subjects and the horn fanfare being dovetailed in succession contrapuntally.

A lengthy coda concludes the movement, during which the rhythmic figure from the double bar assumes importance on the brass, and the inverted semi-quaver figure now augmented to crotchets is further developed by a solo horn over string accompaniment.

11 Lento.

The slow movement, which is in B minor, is based entirely on four motives which are given out at the start in quick succession. The first is an undulating one on cellos and basses, the second follows immediately on low flutes and bassoons, the third in canon on all four wood-wind sections, and finally a three-bar motive on divided cellos. The foregoing material occupies the first seventeen bars. These four motives are subsequently developed and combined in various ways until the second of them gradually attains final supremacy in what may be described as a variation of it in the form of a broad twelve-bar melody, appearing unostentatiously first of all on cellos and basses against running thirds on the wood-wind. This is repeated on violas, cellos and horn, a climax is led up to by the fourth motive, in which the first is thundered out by brass and wood-wind in combination with the tail-end of the second on drums and brass instruments. The music quietens, and once more the broad melodic variation of the second motive comes back into its own, played by the upper strings with the first motive in the bass. The movement closes with a brief glimpse of the third motive on the clarinets.

III Vivace.

The key is D major, the sunlight is let in, and there is a spring-like contrast to the wintry proceedings of the slow movement. The construction is so simple that detailed analysis would be superfluous. The main ingredients are the long oboe tune with which the movement commences, and the subsequent broader melody for strings with its appendage of a dancing or, more truly, jumping motive on wood-wind instruments. Eventually, a burst of sharp crescendo chords on the brass leads up to a sudden brief climax, after which the first oboe is left over and hangs on to recall a fragment of his original subject over mysterious murmurings on muted violas and cellos, and the movement comes to an end, 'snuffed out', as it were, by a passing cloud.

IV Lento - Allegro molto.

The Finale is preceded by a slow introduction of twenty-four bars in which the downward leap from the beginning of the Symphony is much in evidence. The germ of the second subject of the Finale is heard on the horns and there is a serene and peaceful melody on the strings which provides complete contrast to the sudden wild mood of the ensuing Allegro molto.

Here the tempo becomes a quick three-in-a-bar, and violas give out the first subject proper, which is in the rhythm of a triple jig. This is worked up to a climax on all the strings, underneath which the trombones come in with a short passage of sharp rising

"It may be said to owe its inspiration to the natural surroundings in which it was planned and written"

Real Audio

From the 1973 recording by Neville Dilkes and the English Sinfonietta, the opening of the first movement:

[Allegro \(1'01"\)](#)



chords of the sixth, at the close of which the downward leap appears for the last time, to be swept aside by the subsidiary first subject. This is a soaring motive on violins and violas treated canonically with its second half on cellos, basses and tuba, which last-mentioned instrument now makes its first appearance in the Symphony.

A rhythmic bridge passage makes way for a climax in which the jig-like first subject is heard in two forms of augmentation, first on horns against staccato chords and then further stretched out on trombones against rushing scales on the strings and wind. Another climax heralds the second subject, given out on oboes and bassoon over a monotonous pedal figure on drums, harp and basses. This alternates with a broad, march-like theme for strings and an attendant canon for horns and basses, but eventually tails off on violins and violas, the concluding harmonic progression forming the germ on which is built up a long, rushing string passage. Over this appears first the jig-like tune, then a persistent development of the subsidiary first subject, which now assumes ascendancy. Presently the second subject makes several tentative experiments and eventually, after what has been a combination of working out and return from preceding material, appears in its final recapitulatory position, now in seven-four time.

The tempo slackens and the coda or, more properly, the epilogue, takes place for forty bars, all of which, except the last two, are on the tonic pedal of G.

Here there is quiet retrospection of the march-like theme on the violas, introduced by its attendant canon on the upper wood-wind. The semiquaver figure from the first movement is recalled in its inverted form, a final crescendo leads to the conclusion, and the Symphony ends with a series of six crashing chords.

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Leslie Heward  
by E J Moeran

Leslie Heward not only conducted the premiere performance of Moeran's Symphony in G Minor but was also responsible for the first recording of the work in 1942, a magnificent performance, and the first recording ever sponsored by the British Council. This was transferred to CD on Dutton CDAX 8001, a disc sadly out of print, though existing stocks may still be found - [try here](#).

*"His enthusiasm for unfamiliar music was matched by the quickness of his perception in getting to the root of it"*

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It was shortly after the 1918 armistice that I first heard the name of Leslie Heward. I was re-visiting the Royal College of Music after four years' absence and I asked a former fellow-student, who had lately joined the teaching staff, whom had they there among the students, if anyone at all, who showed outstanding promise. He replied: "There is a lad called Leslie Heward who is brilliant, but he never appears to do any work". I think that what was implied was that his natural ability was so phenomenal that he seemed to take anything in his stride without effort.

I am unlikely to forget my first meeting with him. This was at Bristol in the 1920s. An opera season was running there in which he was one of the conductors. Staying on a holiday in Somerset, I had gone over to Bristol to hear a performance of 'Parsifal'. In an hotel near the theatre, where I had repaired for an early dinner before the show. I ran into some friends of mine, members of the orchestra. With them was Heward, and they introduced me to him before hurrying off to take their places. He was not conducting that night. Neither did I go near the opera, but in his company I

very soon forgot all about it. The Knights of the Grail must have grown old and Kundry turned a humble penitent before I suddenly realised the original object of my coming into Bristol that evening.

During the next few years I saw little of Leslie, but I remember encountering him after a performance of 'Petruška', at which he had stopped in at a moment's notice to play the brilliant and difficult piano part. On another occasion he was dressed up to play the concertina on the stage in 'The Boatswain's Mate'. It was in 1929 that I began to know him as a composer. He was certainly versatile and seemed to bear out what had been said about him that day at the R.C.M. At that time I was living in Maida Vale, and there I had a room with two Bechstein pianos in it. I had recently executed a small commission by writing a song for the director of a leasing firm of wine merchants in the West End. An unexpected honorarium was provided for me by the arrival of two vans in Priory Road, and I found myself with a completely stocked cellar, including some of the choicest of French wines, with a liberal allowance thrown in of side-issues of various assortments. Accordingly, I set about giving a series of weekly mid-morning parties, and to these I invited composer friends to come and try out their works on the two Bechsteins. Leslie came along with some of his manuscripts, including the first sketches of his 'Nocturne' for small orchestra. It, was at these gatherings that he showed yet another side of his versatility, and that was his uncanny facility in not only reading at sight at the piano, but making to sound logical the most higgledy-piggledy manuscript full scores imaginable, and these often written out in faint pencil. His enthusiasm for unfamiliar music was matched by the quickness of his perception in getting to the root of it.

This enthusiasm was to bear fruit in later years when he became conductor of the B.B.C. Midland Orchestra. He inaugurated there the famous Friday programmes, in which he included a vast amount of out-of-the-way music, old and new, British and foreign.

Fortunate indeed was the inexperienced composer the initial performance of whose work was in Leslie's hand. His immediate grasp of the minutest details was thorough and unshakable. He was always ready beforehand with suggestions of adjustments and improvements of a practical nature which could enhance the effectiveness of the music. His care in this respect was superlative, and he would put himself to infinite trouble to ensure the best result. In my own case, he ones sat up half the night at Birmingham doctoring the score and parts we had taken home after a rehearsal at which the piece had not sounded entirely as I had hoped it would when I wrote it. Occasionally he would even make considerable re-adjustments to the script on the spot, when actually directing a rehearsal; in this he possessed a knack of explaining what was aimed at to the players concerned, with such lucidity that there could be no mistake, even after trying out the passage several times in different ways. In the matter of interpretation, Leslie's instinct was unfailingly right, even if at times it led him to adopt tempi or dynamics which were slightly at variance with the original intention when the work was composed. He had that rare gift of getting right inside a composition and re-creating it in performance in such a way that new aspects, which had only existed dimly in the composer's mind, would stand out and take their logical shape.

It is the fate of a conductor holding an appointment in this country that if he himself also happens to be a composer, he is expected to abnegate himself in the latter capacity. As regards executive artists in general, this would seem to be an admirable principle, at any rate in the case of singers, the majority of whom display in their programmes a paucity of erudition commensurate only with their musical intelligence. However, it may have been partly Leslie's habitual modesty which led him to keep himself in the background as a composer. If that were so, it is a pity that nothing further came of the sole performance which took place in London of



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any major work of his.

This was some ten years ago when he conducted his suite, 'Quodlibet' at a B.B.C. Sunday evening symphony concert. Those few of us who were present to hear it in the studio were unanimous in our opinion that this was music with a message of its own, of striking originality, and carried out with consummate technical virtuosity. So far as I know, the suite has never been played in public before a London audience; an attempt to have it included in the scheme of the 1936 Norwich Festival failed. The mere fact that a man is known and accepted primarily as a conductor seems to militate against his eligibility as a composer.

Leslie Heward has left behind him among his friends the memory of the most lovable personality among English musicians of his generation. This memory will remain, and many will be this reminiscences of him that will be conjured up, so long as his old associates still find themselves meeting together. It is to be hoped that his music will not be allowed to lie permanently neglected, and that there too will be found something which will keep his memory alive for future generations.

From 'Leslie Heward A Memorial Tribute' (1897-1943). P. 37-40.



## British Music and the BBC

by E J Moeran

The splendid work on behalf of British music done by the BBC has not had its counterpart in every branch of music...

A genuine renaissance has come about in the field of modern British orchestral music. The BBC untrammelled by box office considerations, is in a position to present adequately complex and unfamiliar orchestral works, thoroughly rehearsed, in such a manner that they may become known to the public.

Musicians, and composers in particular, owe much to the BBC. On the outbreak of war there was a hiatus in the broadcasting of good music which lasted, fortunately, only for a short time. The authorities soon realised that first-class music was a real necessity.

For those who took the trouble to tune into foreign wavelengths it was noticeable that, with the exception of France, England alone - "the land without music" - maintained a consistently high level of orchestral music, both in quantity and quality. German broadcasting was almost entirely given over to political propaganda, or to martial music blared out by military bands.

Prior to the Battle of France in 1940, Paris maintained its outside relays of public symphony concerts, but in England, at a time when conditions for orchestral music-making was precarious, the BBC Symphony Orchestra upheld a policy of performing not only the classics but the music of to-day, both British and foreign.



The BBC Symphony Orchestra has undoubtedly done more than any other concern in awakening in music lovers a keen stimulation for the music of their own land. This is proved by the fact that the gramophone companies have found it worth while to record and market the works of Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Bliss, Walton, and others.

After all, these companies are not public philanthropic societies; they could not be expected to incur the enormous expense of manufacturing such records unless it were reasonably supposed that purchasers would be forthcoming.

In pre-broadcasting days, the literature of modern symphonic music was virtually a closed book to those living far from the few towns possessing, or regularly visited by, a first-class orchestra. Broadcasting has made it possible for this wider public to discover new beauties, hitherto undreamt of.

A careful analysis of BBC programmes will show that a very fair share of the programmes is invariably allotted to native productions, at any rate, as far as orchestral music is concerned.

The Regional stations, too, have done well in this respect. There were certain works suitable for these programmes which were in danger of dropping out of the general repertory altogether. Ian Whyte, in charge of the BBC Scottish Orchestra, frequently reminds us that Stanford was no mean writer for the orchestra. In a lesser degree this would apply to Whyte's compatriots, Mackenzie and Hamish MacCuna, whose music also may be heard from time to time broadcast from Glasgow

### Outstanding

At Manchester the BBC Northern Orchestra is handicapped by having to play in a studio with poor acoustics. Nevertheless, Charles Groves manages to perform programmes of the greatest interest. Since his appointment as conductor of this orchestra, he has staunchly championed the cause of native music. His recent performance of Edward Rubbra's Fourth Symphony was an event of outstanding importance.

At Birmingham, when the war broke out, the Midland Regional Orchestra was dispersed to other activities. Previously, that great conductor, the late Leslie Heward, made a musical history with his Friday broadcast concerts. Probably a greater variety of music, old and new, familiar and

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unfamiliar, was packed into the programmes than in any other series of regular concerts which were ever given in this country.

Where else, for example, has anybody heard a Sinfonie Singuliere by Franz Berwald, the Swedish composer born in 1796, the 150th anniversary of whose birth is being celebrated this year by his countrymen? Where else the pianoforte concerto by the contemporary Czech, Arthur Willner?

It may have been forgotten that the BBC saved the Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts at a time when, owing to financial difficulties, they were at the point of lapsing altogether. It was bold policy, too, to carry on these concerts during the war, and subsequently at Albert Hall after Queen's Hall was bombed in 1941. The Prom programmes still continued to uphold the cause of British music. The annual list of novelties by native composers has always been one of the main features.

At a time when there was an exceptionally large population of foreign visitors in London, serving in the forces, or engaged in war activities, it was good policy to display modern British music. The BBC certainly seized this opportunity as regards contemporary composers, or near contemporaries, such as Elgar, Delius, and Holst. There has, however, been an unaccountable neglect at the Proms of the great English masters of the past.

It is a thousand pities that foreign visitors should have been afforded practically no acquaintance with the music of Purcell, who is not only England's greatest composer but one of the supreme masters of all time, save through the famous Trumpet Voluntary, which has since turned out to have been the work, not of Purcell, but of one Nathaniel Clark.

The Albert Hall, in spite of its echo, lends itself admirably to the sound of a large body of stringed instruments, especially in music which is fairly slow-moving, and which demands the utmost sonority. The Chaconne of Purcell certainly would sound impressive in this building.

The effect of the magnificent String Fantasies of Byrd would be superb played by the full complement of the strings of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. There is probably no body of string players in the world that could surpass them in this sort of music.

The splendid work on behalf of British music done by the BBC has not had its counterpart in every branch of music. Certainly the BBC Chorus, and the smaller company of singers under Leslie Woodgate, have done fine work in the presentation of compositions, sacred and secular, from the Elizabethan Madrigal to present day choral music. But in the field of chamber music, piano music, and, above all, in that of song, there has been a lamentable failure.

#### Golden Age

How many listeners are familiar with the Ayres of Dowland, Campion, Jones, Rossiter, John Danyel, Tobias Hume, or, on fact, any of that band of Apollos of the Golden Age of English music?

To return to more recent times, Peter Warlock has been described as the greatest song-writer since Purcell. He has published over 100 songs; yet he is known to the public only by some half-dozen "chestnuts" which are repeated with sickening regularity. The same might be said of John Ireland, undoubtedly the most considerable English song-writer alive and active to-day. It is continually dinned into us that Ireland wrote "Sea Fever," and one or two other songs.

Concerning his more important output, including the song-cycles "Marigold," "The Land of Lost Content," the Thomas Hardy poems, or the Harold Monro Rhapsody for voice and piano - all of them works which should be taking their rightful place as classics of twentieth-century song, the outside listening world is kept in almost complete ignorance.

John Ireland has also produced a large body of extremely original and thoroughly pianistic keyboard music. It seems extraordinary that the BBC keeps us in the dark as to this side of Ireland's creative activity; but possibly not quiet so extraordinary when we find that this neglect also applies to the piano music of other British composers such as Bax, Frank Bridge, Howells and Alan Bush.

Singers are a much maligned race; they are said to be lacking in expertise and erudition.



However, it is not altogether singers and instrumentalists who are to blame here. There have been far too many cases in which those who have wished to broadcast contemporary British work have not been allowed to do so. It would seem that in this department of the BBC there is room for more erudition and enterprise on the part of the directive.

We are now awaiting the promised addition to broadcasting of an extra wavelength [the Third Programme, now Radio 3]. Let us hope that when that happy event comes to pass the programme standard of music in the smaller forms may be improved, and may bear comparison with the excellent fare provided in the orchestral and choral broadcasts.

After all, in music as in painting or poetry, it is not size that counts. A. E. Housman's "Shropshire Lad" has become accepted as a classic. Yet the longest by far of these poems

consists of 76 lines, while the majority of them are made up of less than half-a-dozen four or five-line stanzas.

The songs of Hugo Wolf remain, while the vast and bulky symphonies of his contemporaries, Raff and Rubinstein, which once took the world by storm, are now almost completely forgotten. And one poem alone, "Heraclitus," a verse translation of a mere eight lines, has conferred immortality on the name of William Johnson Cory so long as the English language may remain.

from Cavalcade  
June 8, 1946  
(date? - my copy of text almost illegible here)

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From "Countrygoer", Autumn 1946, Issue No. 7

**"Folk Songs and some Traditional Singers in East Anglia"  
by E. J. Moeran**

In the years immediately preceding the first world war, there took place in London some remarkable choral and orchestral concerts at which the programmes consisted largely of British music. They were held due to the generosity and enterprise of H. Balfour Gardiner, and at them there were given many first performances of the works of such composers and Holst, Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax and Percy Grainger, names at that time quite unfamiliar to the general musical public. Having just left school, I had come to London as a student at the Royal College of Music; apart from a certain amount of Stanford and Elgar, I knew nothing of the renaissance that had been taking place in music in this country. So one winter's evening, when I had been to St. Paul's Cathedral intending to hear Bach's Passion music and failed to obtain a seat there, feeling in the mood for any music rather than none at all, I went to the Queen's Hall where there was a Balfour Gardiner concert, prepared to be bored stiff. On the contrary, I was so filled with enthusiasm, and so much moved by some of the music I heard that night, that from then on I made a point of missing no more of these concerts.

Among other works I heard was a Rhapsody of Vaughan Williams, based on songs recently collected in Norfolk by this composer. It was my first experience of a serious orchestral composition actually based on English folk-song, and it caused a profound effect on my outlook as a young student of musical composition. This, and many other works which I encountered at these concerts, though not all based on actual folk-music, seemed to me to express the very spirit of the English countryside as I then knew it. My home at this time was in Norfolk, where my father was a vicar of a country parish, so I determined to lose no time in rescuing from oblivion any further folk-songs that remained undiscovered.

Accordingly, when I was home the following week-end, I tackled the senior member of the church choir after Sunday evening service. He mentioned a song called "The Dark Eyed Sailor", but nothing would induce him to sing it on a Sunday. I found afterwards that I never could persuade anybody else, even some hard-boiled reprobate, to perform for me on a Sunday, at least not in Norfolk and Suffolk. As for this "Dark-eyed Sailor", I was able to write it down, together with other old songs, on Monday: this was actually the first song I "collected" as a boy. True, it was not an entirely new discovery, but it was encouraging to me, and started my ball rolling.

I soon found that in the part of the county where I was living at the time, there was not much spontaneous singing of the old songs still going on. In any case, the 1914 war intervened to put a stop to my activities for the time being. As most of what I heard had been sung to me by elderly men, who assured me old songs were fast dying out, by the time the war was over I assumed there was no more to be had, and did not immediately make any serious efforts at collecting folk songs.

However, when I was visiting East Norfolk in the autumn of 1921 I received from a folk-song enthusiast, not himself a musician with the necessary knack of committing tunes to paper, an S.O.S. for me to come at once to Stalham. It turned out that accidentally he had overheard an old road-mender singing softly to himself as he was breaking stones. Thus I met the late Bob Miller, known for miles around the country as "Jolt". Bob admitted that he knew a few "old 'uns", but he insisted that he had not really been singing, but just "a-tuning over to himself". However, he was only too willing to sing to me under proper conditions and suggested my spending the evening with him in the Catfield "White Hart" or the "Windmill" at Sutton.

Old Jolt dearly loved conviviality, and was always at his best in company; he knew it, and liked an audience. In fact, he was incapable of remembering anything at all a deus. He required the atmosphere of a room full of kindred souls who would listen with appreciation, and he expected his full share of applause. At the same time he was a keen listener when somebody else held the floor in song or story. Anything in the way of interruption and he would wither the offender with the glance of an autocrat. He gave me many very interesting songs, some of which were hitherto unpublished.

There seems little doubt that the traditional singers unconsciously adapt their tunes to their own personal fancy and singing idiom. Jolt was one who liked a tune with a wide tessitura. Also, he was fond of the drop of a major sixth; it occurred frequently in his songs.

Bob Miller was an old bachelor of absolute integrity, but it delighted him, especially late in the evening, to take on the semblance of a disreputable character, and it was invariably just before closing time when he would come out with something to suit his rakish humour. He had several scandalous ditties.

This singer, by his enthusiasm and personality, opened the way to a series of convivial evenings at which I soon found out that the art of folk singing, in this corner of Norfolk at any rate, was still flourishing in the 1920's.

...one evening Jolt had stopped dead halfway through a song and, in spite of shouts of encouragement from the assembled company, "Go you on, old Bob, you're a' doing", he refused to sing another note. "No, I ain't a goin' on," he said, "he ain't a' writin' on it down in his book"...

MP3 Audio



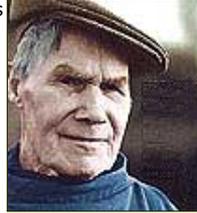
"The Dark-eyed Sailor", sung by Jack Clark (pictured) on Moeran's [1947 radio recording](#), with a short programme announcement at the end. (1.95 MB)

[The Dark Eyed Sailor](#)



About the third occasion on which I was at one of these gatherings, Jolt greeted me with an introduction: "Here's Harry: he've come over from Hickling purpose to sing to you tonight." Thus it was that I first met Harry Cox, still in his prime today, and probably unique in England as a folk-singer, presenting his songs with true artistry in a style which has almost disappeared. The Cox's have been musicians and singers for generations, and Harry has such a prodigious memory that, apart from his large repertory of songs handed down through the family, he is capable of hearing, on no more than three or four separate occasions, a song of a dozen or more verses, and remembering it permanently.

#### Moeran and Harry Cox



In November 1947 Moeran took a BBC field recording unit out to Norfolk to record traditional folksingers for broadcast on the Third Programme.

[Harry Cox \(Real Audio\)](#)  
[Harry Cox \(MP3\)](#)

These public-house sing-songs, or "frolics" in local parlance, led to opportunities of meeting and hearing many other songsters. They also led to a friendly rivalry on the part of some of them as to who could contribute the most songs to my collection. Even if a song was one already known, or possibly not a folk-song at all, I found it expedient to pretend to be noting it, in order not to cause offence. For one evening Jolt had stopped dead halfway through a song and, in spite of shouts of encouragement from the assembled company, "Go you on, old Bob, you're a' doing", he refused to sing another note. "No, I ain't a goin' on," he said, "he ain't a' writin' on it down in his book."

Naturally, I heard many songs that were not traditional; these were mostly examples of the Victorian ballad epoch. The people who sang had little idea of what was the nature of a folk-song. Perhaps the most surprising appearance of an old song that was not a folk-song was when a greybeard, wearing ear-rings, who hitherto had always sat silent, suddenly announced that he was about to entertain the company with a song. "That's a rare old-un," he said turning to me, "I'll lay you hain't heard it afore." I was somewhat startled when the song turned out to be "Rule Britannia", and still more so when the whole gathering not only sat it through, but solemnly joined in the chorus after each verse.

As for the actual folk-songs, it is difficult to single out many of them as belonging exclusively to any one part of England. At the same time, I found a few that certainly have not been known to occur away from Norfolk. There are certain tunes, too, which in one variant or another, are commonly used for many different songs. Such a one is the second of these "Highwayman" tunes I heard on the same evening. The first one, of a rather curious tonality, was probably one peculiar to the particular singer who supplied it. Later in the evening, Harry Cox capped it with his own version, but with a tune used for a number of other widely different songs.

It seems likely that the spontaneous singing of old songs when men foregather on Saturday nights has now died out.

Until the advent of the radio, it held on in certain isolated districts, in particular where there was a sprinkling among the population of those who annually used to follow the herring. It was customary to sing at sea in the fishing fleet, and until comparatively recently it was still possible to visit many an inn within easy reach of Great Yarmouth, and while away an evening with a sing-song of the real old songs. If you travel further along the Norfolk coast, no matter how remote the place seemed, you would encounter a little of the kind. It was the proud boast of the late Bob Cox, Harry's father, that he would go to sea for the herring fishing season, sing two songs every night aboard, and never repeat himself.

In this account of some of my experiences of English folk-singing, I have not been concerned with the artificial revival of the art. In other words, with those who set about the teaching of folk-songs in schools, or the organising of garden fetes, etc., at which folk-songs are sometimes performed in the highly sophisticated manner of those who have never heard a real traditional singer. Well-intentioned as these efforts may be, they evolve something quite apart from the art of those who have it in their bones, handed down from father to son. It is unfortunate, too, that up to the present the verbal text of nearly all published collections of English folk-songs bears about the same resemblance to the genuine article as does Thomas Bowlder's version to the authentic Shakespeare. It is to be hoped that some day this may be remedied by a complete edition of the country's heritage in song, in which nothing worth while is glossed over or left out for reasons of squeamishness or timidity.

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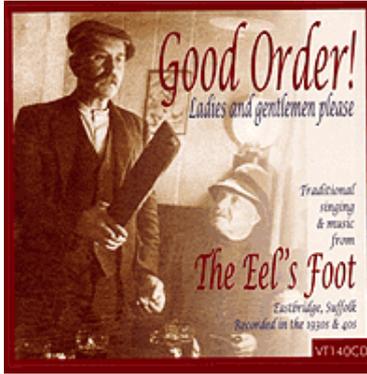


Good Order!  
Ladies and Gentlemen please

This CD (VT 140 CD), released by Veteran in December 2000, is based on restoration of two BBC radio programmes recorded either side of the Second world War in The Eel's Foot, Eastbridge, Suffolk - capturing the pub's atmosphere marvellously.

The first set of recordings was made in 1939 by A L Lloyd, the second in 1947 for a programme made by Moeran exploring the folk-singing of East Anglia which also included music from a pub in Norfolk. Veteran have used a mixture of BBC archive acetate discs and recordings held by the National Sound Archive.

The sound quality has benefited from careful restoration, though there is some clear difference between the two recordings, with the later part significantly cleaner, and the CD presents brilliantly an audio portrait of the pub folk-singing of the time. This is surely the closest we will ever come to hearing what Moeran referred to as a 'frolic', and which first kindled his interest in collecting folk music around England and Ireland.



'frolic', and which first kindled his interest in collecting folk music around England and Ireland. Interestingly, the sleeve notes state: "This is a joint production between Theberton and Eastbridge Community Council and Veteran [Records]. It is a millennium project with the aim of celebrating the unique singing tradition recorded by the BBC at the Eel's Foot by the production of the CD and the staging of a village concert...a copy of this CD is to be given free to each household in the village"

For more information and to order a copy of the CD, visit the [Veteran website](#). I am grateful to John Howson at Veteran for permission to include audio from the CD on this site.

Disc Prices from Veteran:

Uk & Eire - £12.99 including P+P  
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Rest of the World - £14.49 including air mail

Comment

Writing in Volume III of the Penguin Music Magazine in 1947 in an article on the then new BBC Third Programme, "Music On The Air", Stanley Bayliss commented:

"In a recent issue of *Music Magazine* E J Moeran introduced some recordings of folk-singers recently made in Norfolk. This was a most interesting broadcast, but not altogether an enjoyable one. It proved that collectors like Mr Moeran have been faithful and accurate in noting down these traditional congs; but let me confess that I found the timbre of the voices of all the singers extremely raucous and almost unbearably ugly."

I wonder if Mr Bayliss would have preferred the Suffolk singers?

From the Sleeve notes:

The Eel's Foot

The Eel's Foot in Eastbridge, just like the Ship at Blaxhall, will go down in traditional music history as one of the great singing pubs of East Anglia. Its singers were visited over the years by many collectors but it was the evenings recorded by the BBC in 1939, instigated by folksong scholar A. L. Lloyd and in the 1947 visit arranged by the Irish [*sic*] composer E. J. Moeran, that captured the true spirit of a Saturday night's singing in such a remote, rural pub.

The pub was in the Ginger family for seven years and the Morling family for over forty years. Eileen Morling, who is now in her eightieth year, kept the pub with her husband Stan from 1945 to 1958. She was at the 1939 recording, aged nineteen, and of course was the landlady when the 1947 recording was done. She remembered that the producer, Maurice Brown, asked her not to spread the word about that visit, but the word got out and the pub was crowded.

She described what went on Saturday nights:

"Everyone would arrive and they all had their own chairs, then at eight the dart board would be taken down and order would be called by Phil Lumpkin with a crib pegging board being banged on the table and they used to go around the room, 'sing, say or pay', and if you didn't sing you had to give a little forfeit of some sort. Then they would sing the whole evening until ten o'clock

This is surely the closest we will ever come to hearing what Moeran referred to as a 'frolic'...

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"The Dark-eyed Sailor", credited by Moeran in his [1946 article](#) as the first song he ever collected, is sung by Jack Clark (pictured) on the 1947 recording, with a short programme announcement at the end. (1.95 MB)

[The Dark Eyed Sailor](#)



because you had to close on time in those days. Then there would be stepdancing: I believe Jumbo danced and Eric Stollery could stepdance.. Some of them wouldn't always come out 'cause they weren't regular pub goers. Some like Percy Denny were regulars and others just came on a Saturday for the singing. Velvet used to come from Leiston, then Mrs Howard, she used to also come on dart matches. When the BBC came in '47 the pub was packed and I was so proud. We didn't tell anyone but everyone knew and they all turned up early and they just let every one sing ordinarily. They treated everybody really well and gave them all free beer. What you heard was how it was. That was a lovely night but that was just a beer house in those days and Stan had to go out to work but I had Philip to help me. Everyone were so pleased; they were thrilled to bits to think the BBC came to our little pub."

#### Real Audio

Sleevenotes on Moeran

The opening announcement to the Moeran-recorded section of the disc.

[Introduction \(1'00"\)](#)



E J Moeran submitted articles to many learned publications and in December 1948 he had a piece published in the Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society entitled 'Some Folk Singing of Today'. In his introduction he mentioned [an article he had written some eighteen months before](#) for a quarterly journal where he had stated that it seemed likely that the spontaneous singing of old songs, when men foregathered on Saturday nights, had now died out. He continued:

"Last autumn I was asked by the British Broadcasting Corporation to make investigations in East Anglia with a view to obtaining authentic recordings of traditional singers. I visited my old haunts in East Norfolk and to my surprise, I found that not only were many of my old friends living, hale and hearty, but that they were still having sing-songs on their own in local pubs.

"I was also told of a remote pub in Suffolk where singing took place, and there I found the same thing happening. One of the singers there was a man of about fifty who learned his songs from his father. The latter was also present, singing in the quavering and asthmatic tones of old age, but it was only recently that he had allowed the young man of fifty, his son Jumbo to 'perform in public,' for he was determined that he must acquire the true traditional style, uncontaminated by outside influences, before so doing.

"In this Suffolk pub it is literally 'performance in public'. Every Saturday night the company, male and female, assemble in a low-ceilinged room, and through a haze of smoke from strong shag tobacco the chairman can be seen presiding over the sing-song (or 'frolic' in local parlance) calling in turn for a contribution on those of the company he sees fit to honour. He maintains absolute discipline; talking must cease during the singing of a song, and he has such a personality that he succeeds in producing conditions like those in Wigmore Hall during a quartet recital.

"There is dancing too, and proceedings always begin with a series of clog dances, danced on a wooden table to the accompaniment of a melodeon; a grotesque performance, inasmuch as the dancer has to bend nearly double because of the lowness of the ceiling

"Two weeks after my preliminary trip I went again with a recording van. The singers seemed quite excited about it and were out to do their very best. The engineers, for the most part, arranged things in such a way that all the men had to do was sit and sing and carry on as usual."



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Extract from "Hinrichsen's Musical Year Book 1949-50"

"The Composer and Society":  
replies to a questionnaire by Robert L. Jacobs

1. What do you think is the minimum income a composer needs in order to live in such a way that he can do justice to his art?

*Mr. Moeran remarked that it was purely an individual matter that a composer may need luxury, as Wagner did, or "do just as well in a dingy bed-sitting room or...in a caravan or houseboat", and that accordingly the question was unanswerable.*

2. Do you think it is possible to earn this sum by composing?  
3. If not, what is the most suitable way for a composer to supplement his income?

*"...Some job as a keeper of a level-crossing on a branch line, with only four or five trains daily and a good cottage thrown in," replied Mr. Moeran: but if the composer preferred "the bustle of town life", then musical criticism.*

4. Do you think the State or any other institution should do more for composers (e.g. subsidize individuals, promote performances, commission works, etc.) and if so, how?

*Mr. Moeran suggested reducing entertainment tax at concerts in which "either a certain amount of time is devoted to British music or...a major British work performed", and furthermore making the entry and right to earn fees of a foreign artist conditional upon his performing a proportion of British music. He also felt that a Ministry of Fine Arts, provided it could be kept free of party politics, might do good.*

5. Have you any specific advice to give to young people who wish to earn their living by composing?

*"Study the technique necessary to compose incidental music".*

...Some job as a keeper of a level-crossing on a branch line, with only four or five trains daily and a good cottage thrown in...

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