

- REVIEW -

Delius and the Sound of Place

Daniel M. Grimley
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332 pp.

It is often interesting to see how the musicological perspective in one cultural field directs much of the treatment of its subjects. This may include, and equally exclude, the scholarly research undertaken in other countries, isolating the problems to some extent from an international perspective.

Little has been written on Frederick Delius elsewhere than in the English-speaking countries, although Delius was an internationalist in a true sense. Born in Bradford to German parents, his schooling took place in Yorkshire and on the outskirts of London. In 1884 he was sent to Solana Grove, Florida, in order to work as an orange planter; here he had his first compositional training from Thomas F. Ward. After a period in Danville, Virginia, he returned to Europe in 1886, in order to study music in Leipzig. The international sphere at the Royal Conservatoire fostered Delius' interest in other countries and their cultures, and he became an avid traveller to Scandinavia. In 1888 he moved to Paris, leading an excessive life, before settling in the artistic colony of Grez-sur-Loing near Fontainebleau in 1897 with the painter Jelka Rosen, his future wife.

Although largely adopted by the British musical circles, Delius strongly stressed that he was not a British composer. When scholars try to tackle the international perspectives on Delius, they face the demanding task of incorporating his diverse strands of interests. Optimally, one should have a fluent knowledge of all cultures involved. Christopher Palmer's pioneering *Delius: Portrait of a Cosmopolitan* (1976) clearly shows these aspects, although having to do with many gaps in research. For example, he was not able to deal deeply with the cultural life at Leipzig in that period, and the records of the Leipzig Conservatoire in particular.

Daniel Grimley's approach is rather different from Palmer's. He largely relates to some specific subjects, lending them more space and depth than most previous research could offer. Three chapters discuss Delius' short stay in the United States and the music emanating from that period, including the *Florida Suite*, *The Magic Fountain*, *Koanga*, the orchestral variations *Appalachia* (not to be confused with the earlier orchestral 'American Rhapsody' of the same title), and *Sea Drift*. One chapter is devoted to Delius's interest in Scandinavia, focusing particularly on *The Song of the High Hills*. Two chapters are related to the long period at Grez-sur-Loing; works discussed in these chapters are *A Village Romeo and Juliet*, *Brigg Fair*, and the Double Concerto. Each of these chapters offers deep insights into the music and their gestation, at times founded several decades earlier by experiences elsewhere.

For Grimley, Delius responded most intensely to 'place, both real and imagined', both historic and aesthetic (p. 1). Rather than contenting himself by referring to the obvious connections associated with several of his compositions, Grimley strongly refers to individual research on original works – this includes an in-depth study of sketches and compositional structures, and the discussion of aspects sociological, psychological and philosophical. His approach to the music is evidenced by a statement fairly early on in the book: "Place" hence has little to do with the questions of origin, style, and nationhood raised by much of Delius's prior reception, even less with attempts to bury his work, physically or fictively, in the grounds of inherited legacies and traditions' (p. 28). This is currently a scholarly approach trying to overcome any solely historiographic musicology, resulting in individual studies of deep insight into the tiniest details, but—and this can become a major drawback—leaving out what is so important in music: the context, both historical and musical, practical and 'world-spanning'. Few scholars nowadays attempt to explore the particularities of a composer as related to others, thus stating the individual compositional solutions as unique. The more we explore the musical world of any time, the more we realise that there are very strong inter-relations between even the more remote parts thereof, and how similar or different solutions to some musical problems may have been solved by two individuals at exactly the same time.

The book is in some sections a splendid, if somewhat too theoretical study of some of Delius' music. Yet even if we do not want the topic of 'place' to be understood just geographically, some compositions are simply missing. The Leipzig period, most formative indeed and, to some extent, even preparing the foundation for his later residency at Grez-sur-Loing, is ignored altogether, although it was the basis for the composer's interest in Scandinavia. From these student days stem the first 'Scandinavian' compositions, and the matter of foreign (and native) languages would have been of essential importance in Leipzig. Not only did Delius form bonds with Sinding, Grieg, and other Scandinavians during this time, he was also deeply involved in diverse ways of 'cultural transfer' as it is called in German musicology.

The study of the writings of Nietzsche and other German literature would easily have been fostered while in Leipzig, as would a lively exchange with literary, artistic, and musical circles. This might easily have led Grimley to an excursion of the languages used by Delius in his compositions. It has frequently been a matter of concern as to how one tackles the question of German or English language in, for example, *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe*, *Fennimore und Gerda*, and the *Messe des Lebens*, all of which were first published in Germany and Austria, and also, premiered in Germany. They all were composed at Grez-sur-Loing, as was the 'nocturne' *Paris*. (The dismissal of this composition as an 'urban piece' just similar to Elgar's *Cockaigne* or Vaughan Williams's *London Symphony* [p. 184] betrays the author's disinterest in that work.) And although Delius must have been socialising with numerous personalities of artistic renown during the nine years at Paris, this 'place' is not reflected in Grimley's book—rather, he refers to Lionel Carley's far too short *Delius: The Paris Years* (1975). Only very occasionally do we find more elaborate references to the composer's continental contacts, for example in the discussion of some reviews relating to the first performance of *Sea Drift* (pp. 146-7). Some of the very few references to German culture are strongly misleading: Max Schillings, who became Max von Schillings in 1912, has been incorrectly named on p. 145, referring to 1906; nor was Schillings an impresario but a renowned conductor, music director of the Stuttgart Royal Opera from 1908, and later, director of the Berlin State Opera. The deplorable lack of research in

libraries and archives in Germany and France is a severe drawback to the publication which, in spite of its huge merits, cannot fully justify its title. The poor index is certainly not worthy of any CUP product.

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