

This Awareness of Beauty: The Orchestral and Band Music of Healey Willan. By Keith W. Kinder. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014. xviii, 221 pp.

Giles Bryant's *Healey Willan Catalogue* (National Library of Canada, 1972) lists 784 items by the prolific Healey Willan (1880-1968), in seventeen categories, covering 211 pages. Category 3, "Orchestral and band music," occupying five of these pages, lists twenty-nine titles. This portion of the Willan repertoire forms the topic of Keith W. Kinder's study. Admitting that it "comprises a small part of [Willan's] total output," the author maintains the effort is "justified by its high quality" (xvii).

Besides three major orchestral compositions (a piano concerto and two symphonies) and a handful of shorter works that have enjoyed repeated performances, the repertoire includes a significant number of unfinished scores. Kinder has diligently examined everything of relevance in the Willan Fonds at Library and Archives Canada and elsewhere, including autograph sources and sketches. He wistfully comments on incomplete compositions: "it is difficult to surmise what this work might have been" (73), "one can only imagine..." (36), "...would almost certainly have attracted the interest of many conductors" (71).

But many of his observations on the cornerstones of the repertoire are equally off-putting. In his description of the *Overture to an Unwritten Comedy*, one reads: "The main purpose of this motive is to effect a modulation from D major to B-flat major in preparation for the B section, but before that happens the first transitional motive returns, transposed down a minor third, leading to a fermata that indicates the end of the A section." (44) Similar unilluminating remarks abound throughout. This author belongs apparently to the school that Bernard Shaw (in his music critic role) considered was more interested in parsing than in real analysis.

Most of Willan's vast output consists of songs, choral music, and works for organ solo. How did he become attracted to the concerted instrumental media, and how did he acquire the techniques to handle them? These questions are not dealt with in *This Awareness of Beauty*. His musical preparation concentrated on choral participation, organ playing, harmony, and counterpoint. In F.R.C. Clarke's *Healey Willan: Life and Music* (University of Toronto Press, 1983, 9-11), we learn that he attended many orchestral concerts in London in the first decades of the twentieth century, and was especially inspired by the conductor Arthur Nikisch's performances of the symphonies of Brahms and Tchaikowsky and the operas of Wagner. I recall Willan's reminiscences in his later years of having been privileged to sit in on Nikisch's rehearsals. As acknowledged both in Clarke's book and by Kinder, like other composers (Fauré and Borodin for example) he often called on specialists to assist him in scoring. Godfrey Ridout, Ettore Mazzoleni, Howard Cable, and Lucio Agostini, among others, have been mentioned in this connection.

Willan's characteristic music suggests an odd mix of influences: Byrd from the late sixteenth century, Handel from the early eighteenth, and Wagner from the late nineteenth. Those were the musical conventions he revered; he had no interest in advanced movements of the twentieth

century. Kinder connects some modern terms with specific passages, in an evident attempt to portray Willan as more au-courant. He wrongly refers to a two-bar excerpt from the *Centennial March* (67, ex. 3.14) as “polytonal”; it consists of a progression most moderately advanced harmony students would recognize as I - IV7 - II7 - V - I. The term “polytonal” recurs in a later citation of this same passage (159). A downward scale passing from one solo woodwind to another is (again wrongly) identified as “*Klangfarbenmelodie*” (130, ex. 5.61), a German term usually applied to Anton Webern’s scoring technique of assigning fragments of a theme to different solo timbres. Similarly exaggerated is the comment on the quoted opening of the unremarkable 36-bar Fugue in G minor for strings (59, ex. 3.7), pointing to its “chromaticism”: no altered scale-degrees are shown.

Kinder rouses slightly more interest when he attaches color words to his parsings: “delightful” (83), “glorious,” “spectacular” (102-3), “deliberately comical” (128). Such interjections are rare but do whet the musical appetite. However, it is in the chapter on the band works that the author’s enthusiasms emerge most strongly – and it is here that his book breaks valuable new ground. One of Willan’s best-known instrumental pieces, the *Royce Hall Suite* for concert band, composed in 1949, bears on its title page the indication “edited and scored by William Teague.” Teague, a staff arranger with the New York firm Associated Music Publishers, performed this assignment using written indications by the composer. Kinder has examined their correspondence, and uses it in presenting a bar-by-bar critique of the score, concluding with the judgement that a new instrumentation giving greater respect to Willan’s notes would greatly improve the *Suite*’s effectiveness. These pages are the most vivid in the book, and make one hope to one day hear a new version, perhaps prepared by Kinder, an experienced band director, himself.

This Awareness of Beauty is handsomely produced and is free of editorial and typographical blemishes. There is a generous allocation of musical examples, 175 in all, but they have not been subject to the same care. In ex. 3.2 (50), there are missing notes and accidentals in bars 3, 4, and 7. Missing accidentals are again found in ex. 2.1 (40), bars 3 and 8, in ex. 5.4 (96), and elsewhere. In ex. 3.4 (52-4), a twenty-eight-bar excerpt from the *Coronation March*, twenty bars show the Violin 1 part only, misleading since in the score these passages are for the whole string section, in harmony. Ex. 5.69 (135) delineates (with, again, missing accidentals in the brass chords) a favorite progression of this composer: the root-position minor triads on C, A flat, E, and C—a sequence of chords with roots four semitones apart. Willan used this as the Leitmotif of “tragic fate” (Clarke 127, ex. 109) in his opera *Deirdre* as well as in both symphonies, and I remember his comment that he “borrowed” it from Wagner.

While this publication, thoroughly and carefully done though it is, is unlikely to stimulate new interest in the major pieces of this repertoire, one is grateful for the detailed assessment of the band works, especially that enjoyable *Royce Hall Suite*.

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