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**Fancies and Phantasies.**



OUR advertising columns to-day contain an interesting announcement. It will be seen that the Musicians' Company, responding to the suggestion of one of its members, Mr. W. W. Cobbett, has instituted a musical competition which gives to native composers the opportunity of making a bid for the revival of our old-time British supremacy in the art of writing concerted music for strings. It existed at the time the last charter was granted to the Musicians' Company in 1603, compositions known as "Fancies" being then practised by the many English gentlemen who possessed a "chest of viols," and to an extent which indicates a state of musical culture scarcely paralleled in any other part of Europe. That it was short-lived is not surprising. The best energies of our countrymen were diverted into other channels, we have

since fulfilled our destiny, and our island nation has become a great world power. But let us not forget that the music composed in Elizabethan and Jacobean days has led to developments of signal importance not only to British but to universal art. After song pure and simple came the music for viols, first the "In Nomine," which was practically a treatment of the old Church plainsong for viols, in 4, 5, and 6 parts, and suggested no doubt by the descant which the organists of the period wove round the melodies as they were sung in church. Then, as the technique of the performers advanced, came an increased feeling for freedom on the part of the composers, the figuration became more elaborate, fanciful subjects were taken instead of the plainsong, and the "Fancies" came into being, with movements more developed and freer in form. Afterwards came the instruments of the violin family, which ousted the viols, and then, successively, the String Trio, the Suite, the Sonata, and the perfected String Quartet.

The music of the earlier "Fancies" was good, solid, contrapuntal stuff, perhaps a little too ascetic in character for our modern ears, owing to the use of the old modes. But when John Jenkins appeared on the scene its character was altered, and the monotony broken up by the introduction of short slow movements, followed by brisk Allegros; lighter harmonic combinations prevailed, and if they did not move King Charles to nod his head and tap his foot to the same extent as the French music of the period, broken numbers of the "Fancies," founded on popular dance measure, went towards the making of the Suite. Jenkins was a very prolific composer, pouring out these, historically speaking, admirable compositions with the frequency and spontaneousness of a Schubert. After him came Purcell, with his splendid string sonatas; truly the world went well then with the British composer.

And now it is proposed by the Musicians' Company to bring into existence, or rather to endeavour to bring into life a new Art Form which, once established, shall be applicable to any short piece of chamber music, not to the String Quartet alone, and which shall win acceptance from a public that is not ripe for the appreciation of works lasting from 30 to 40 minutes in performance. Twelve minutes, the maximum length assigned to the "Phantasies," is the average time occupied by a performance of a concert overture, and there is no reason why such a form should not exist in connection with the chamber as well as the orchestra.

The choice of the word "Phantasy," so near akin to "Fancy," might lead some to think that a revival of archaic forms and archaic feeling is aimed at, than which nothing could be further from the intention of the Musicians' Company. Undoubtedly the winning composition is likely to be simple in its lines, and free from the Bravura and Virtuoso passages which belong to modern music, but if so it will be because such a style is native to the composer, and not because it is imposed upon him. What is really of moment is that the quartet should be well laid out, in the manner of the old masters, for *tone*, and the injunction that all the parts should be conversational and of equal importance is given partly to that end. It is sought to strike a blow at the convention which gives to one of the violins a rôle so much less important than the others that the words "playing second fiddle" have passed into the language as a badge of inferiority, and that for the second violin part a performer of less technical acquirement is thought sufficient. Again, had the word been spelt "Fantasie," an equally false impression might have been