

✓ Bernard Van Dieren: *SIX SKETCHES, OP. 4a; TOCCATA; TEMA CON VARIAZIONE*. Eiluned Davies, Piano. British Music Society BMS 402 (cassette).

The life of Bernard Van Dieren had much about it that seemed to be the epitome of the dilettante as starving artist. Born in Rotterdam in 1884, his education prepared him for a career in science and indeed his first occupation was as an assistant in a research laboratory. In addition to playing the violin, the young Dutchman was a skilful artist (an aspect of his abilities which can be seen in his beautifully laid out and penned autograph scores) and he also had considerable literary abilities. Indeed, it was as a journalist that Van Dieren first came to England. His earliest known compositions date from the years 1907-08, but little of that work seems to have survived. His subsequent output, though unknown and neglected even during his lifetime, was substantial and included large scaled choral and orchestral works as well as songs and music for solo instruments. His early musical style is atonal and would seem to show the influence of the Schoenberg of the *Klavierstücke, Op. 11*. His later compositions are more tonal and it is interesting that in listening to his music the name Sorabji came spontaneously to mind. 'Interesting', because the connection between these two neglected composers extends beyond any similarity in sound world when one learns that Sorabji was also the author of a work on Van Dieren and his music.

The scores of *Toccata* and of the *Tema Con Variazione* have recently been published in the *Journal of the British Music Society* (Volume 5, 1983, pages 36 and 46).

Eiluned Davies is a pianist of considerable experience who has long been an exponent of the works of British composers. She has contributed two articles on the Music of Grace Williams to this magazine (see *Welsh Music*, Vol. 5, No. 9, page 22 and Vol. 6, No. 4, page 18). More

importantly, where the music on this record is concerned, the pianist was a student of Van Dieren's wife Frida and had also played for the composer himself.

The *Six Sketches, Op. 4a*, was composed in 1910-11 and is an early work. Even so it is predated by three substantial compositions: an *Elegy for Orchestra with Cello-Obbligato*, *Balsazar for Chorus and Orchestra* and *Beatrice and Cenci* an orchestral epilogue to Shelley's *The Cenci*. The composition of the *Toccata* followed the *Sketches* and is designated as *Opus 4b*. It was completed in May 1912 and was composed, or at least written out, with neither time signature nor barlines. The final work on this record is much later and dates from 1927. This *Tema Con Variazione*, dedicated to Sir Arthur Bliss is tonal and is an immediately attractive piece of music that is predominantly joyful in nature. One particularly interesting aspect of the music is the way in which the cascades of notes scattered around chordal progressions during the last two variations sound like proto be-bop of thirty years later.

The performances to be heard on this recording are notable for their clarity and attractive pianism. And even though a glance at the scores shows that there is yet more feeling to be drawn out of this music we are in Eiluned Davies's debt for introducing these works to a wider audience. We are also in debt to the British Music Society for what is, I believe (a tight reviewing deadline has resulted in my being able to do less checking on the state of Van Dieren's discography than I would have wished), to be amongst the first of Van Dieren's music to have been recorded.

IFAN PAYNE.