

**Bernarr Rainbow On Music
Memoirs and Selected Writings**

**Introductions by Gordon Cox & Charles Plummeridge,
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Bernarr Rainbow was invited to the very first meeting of what was eventually to become *CTCC*. A sympathetic article of his had just appeared in *Choir and Organ*. Although he had never previously met any of those present at that meeting, when he was asked if he would consent to become president of the new organisation, he simply said: "I would be honoured." And that was it. Thereafter, he devoted himself tirelessly to getting things going.

Bernarr Rainbow's adhesion to the cause was a great fillip to the Campaign in those early days, for he was a man with a distinguished academic background. In particular, his studies on the choral tradition and his unrivalled knowledge of how things once were conferred automatic authority on his views on more recent developments in the world of church music.

Whether Bulletin readers are already acquainted with *The Choral Revival in the Anglican Church 1839 – 72* or his *magnum opus, Music in Educational Thought and Practice: A Survey from 800BC* or whether they are simply curious, they will find these memoirs and selected writings furnishing much food for thought – and much delight as well.

The book begins with his memoirs, entitled *A Salute to Life*. Peter Dickinson encouraged him to start on these in the months leading up to his death, thinking the writing of them would help to take his mind off his illness. They are full of interest, and wonderful anecdotes abound. For instance, he tells us his father was a journeyman cabinet-maker. During his apprenticeship, he helped to carve the new choir stalls for Peterborough Cathedral. So, it is no great surprise to learn that Bernarr Rainbow was a chorister in the two churches which figure in his early childhood. By the age of eight, he tells us, he could readily play at sight. He goes on to tell us about his schools, his job working in the Map Branch of HM Land Registry, his continuing music studies and, eventually, his wartime service in the army. He records one incident in the Italian city of Capua where he had been sent. Wandering into an imposing church on one of the town's squares in his time off, he saw a priest going about his sacerdotal duties and decided to approach him. But "having as yet little or no Italian," he writes, "I recklessly thought of trying something simple in Latin. How, I wondered, should one say, 'Good afternoon' in Latin?" He decided on "Pax vobiscum.", adding: "In Anglia, pulsator organorum sum. Organum hic videre volo." After the war, he details his career in music, including his appointment as organist at High Wycombe Parish Church, his appointment to St Mark's College, Chelsea and his subsequent scholarly studies. The account concludes in the 1970s. Although it is a pity that a full biography was never completed, what we have is already testament to a very great man.

The rest of the book brings together a wide variety of Rainbow's articles which appeared over the years in various journals, some with rather limited circulation. It is useful to have them in this handy compendium. There is a biography of John Curwen, whose Tonic Sol-fa method of teaching children to sight-read music, spread round the world. There are also sections devoted to historical research in music education, school music abroad, music in nineteenth-century England, music teaching methods and nineteenth-century musical life in London. The reader is quickly drawn into whatever is under discussion. However, it is the section on church music which is most likely to capture the interest of Campaign members.

Readers will need no help to alight upon items of particular interest to them, but here are a couple of things which caught my attention and seem to me of relevance to what the Campaign is about: *The Times* marvelled on a performance given in 1857 "at the Crystal Palace, in the Handel Festival orchestra, by between 2,000 and 3,000 children, boys and girls, from various schools, in which the [Curwen Sol-fa] system had been taught." The young singers were an instant success. Demands on every side called for a repetition of the concert. But Curwen was firm. "Except for the children themselves," he declared, "everyone concerned with the concert was worn out. As for the children, too much exhibition was not good for them." Indeed, indeed! And our cathedral choirs are there to provide fitting accompaniment to the worship – not to provide an entrée to stardom courtesy of the recording industry.

"The amazing growth in the scope of music teaching in our schools since 1960 has had the unfortunate result of endangering the fine tradition of choral singing and squeezing aural training out of the curriculum in all too many instances. That these changes took place against the shadowy background of such social manifestations as the rise of 'mass culture', 'elitism', and 'radical chic' considerably increased their impact." And in a footnote to these remarks: "The known case of a London headmaster who disbanded his school choir as an undesirably elitist activity deserves to be recorded. One wonders if the football team was abolished, for the same reason."

"In the article, *Count Leo Tolstoy: Music Teacher*, we read of how in the summer of 1861, one of the peasant boys on his estate clambered into a cart and "began to sing a melancholy folksong with great feeling. When the other boys laughed at this performance, he shouted back at them in an assumed grown-up voice and went on with his song. Soon other boys joined him in the cart and began to sing the chorus. Tolstoy observed that they were instinctively able to harmonise the tune, singing in thirds and sixths with the original singer. Before long, all the children were singing – though not all with the same natural aptitude. Tolstoy decided to build upon that foundation.