

Maurice Parker, comp., Sir Thomas Beecham Bart., C.H.: A Calendar of his Concert and Theatrical Performances
Published and distributed by the author. Available for £7.50 + £3.50 postage from Denham Ford, The Sir Thomas Beecham Society, 46, Wellington Avenue, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex SS0 9XB, England.

The continuing subtitle reads, "compiled by Maurice Parker, a Member of the Sir Thomas Beecham Society of the UK., with the assistance from some other Members of the British and American Beecham Societies." Acknowledgements a baker's dozen of Beecham Society members in the U.K. and U.S.A., plus broadcasting organizations (6) in Australia, the U.S.A., Canada, South Africa and England, opera houses (8) in Hungary, Germany, Argentina, England, and the U.S.A., orchestras (36) in the U.S.A., Norway, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Canada, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and England, the musical societies of the Montreal Festival, Ravinia Festival and the Royal Philharmonic, libraries (37) of the U.K. and U.S.A., the embassies of Austria, Mexico, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Mexico, the Joanna Beek concert agency in the Netherlands, Arthur Ridgewell and H.L. Dunthorne as individuals, and as newspaper sources the London Daily Express and the New York Times. Most importantly, Mr. Parker states in his brief introduction, "Unfortunately, for various reasons, archives were not always in existence and in those cases I have had to rely on newspaper advertisements and reviews. *Not all of Sir Thomas's musical activities were either advertised or reviewed, therefore it is possible that many may have been missed or the order of performance and content may be wrong.*" (Italics mine, D.H.)

The bulk of Mr. Parker's compilation consists of photo-offset publication direct from typescript not only of the Beecham concert and theatrical performances as stated in the main title, but of recording sessions as well. If we are to take the list of acknowledgements as complete and accurate, then we must note the omission from the author's source list of Michael Gray's Beecham - a Centenary Discography (Holmes & Meier, New York, 1979). Presumably, the recording session data has been derived chiefly from those published in its 1975 discography. The final 15 pages include personnel listings for the major orchestras with which Beecham was associated in England and the U.S.: Hallé (1899), New Symphony (1908), Beecham Symphony (1911), Royal Philharmonic (1915-1916), Hallé (1916), London Symphony (1925), Philadelphia Orchestra (1928-29), New York Philharmonic (1932), London Philharmonic (1933), Hallé (1935), Royal Philharmonic (1951), B.B.C. Symphony (1951), Chicago Symphony (1957), Royal Philharmonic (1959-60).

The main body of the Beecham calendar is divided into six sections: 1899-1914--the years of apprenticeship; 1914-20--the heyday of the Beecham Opera Company and associated enterprises during World War I, ending with the death of Sir Joseph Beecham in 1919, the financial collapse of the son's musical endeavors, and the subsequent retirement from the concert scene to reorganize and return to the fray, detailed in Section Three--1923-1932. Section Four--1932-1940 encompasses the glory days of Beecham's non-pariel London Philharmonic and the Covent Garden opera productions. The 1940-46 period takes in the amazing barnstorming years during World War II away from England, including a stretch of maniacal activity between 1940 and 1944 that saw Sir Thomas conducting 113 concerts with 40 different orchestras. The final period, 1946-60 are the years of the last Beecham orchestras, the Royal Philharmonic, with its prodigal concertizing and recording in the British Isles, not to mention the whirlwind American tours.

All this, as detailed by Mr. Parker, would seem to promise a veritable gold mine of information on the redoubtable Sir Thomas and the astounding wealth of concert and operatic repertoire he mastered over some sixty years. But there is a catch: there is no indexing either of composers or of principal performers and organizations. The typographical errors are legion--and some downright astonishing as sheer gibberish. In effect, the genuine Beecham buff intent on developing for himself or herself a meaningful picture of how Beecham's performing repertoire developed through the years, of which composers, individual works, or performers were fostered or passed over will have to work things out page for page with pencil and paper or mayhap, computer. It all adds up to a rough and ready assemblage of chronologically-ordered data, which in the instance of World War II activity in the U.S.A. is more than usually detailed and accurate, thanks to the earlier effort of Jack Gilmour. To get the most out of Mr. Parker's endeavors, one should have at hand not only Sir Thoas's autobiography, A Mingled Chime, but Alan Jefferson's Sir Thomas Beecham--a Centenary Tribute (World Records, London, 1979), and of course the Michael Gray discography. Mr. Parker has given us a wealth of raw material; but in its undeveloped state, I would recommend the present published format for specialists only.

--David Hall