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Handel's first oratorio, "Messiah", was first performed in 1741 at a church in Dublin. It was a great success and was performed in many other churches and public houses. It was also performed in the theatres of London and other cities. The success of "Messiah" led to the commissioning of other oratorios by Handel, such as "Israel in Egypt" and "Saul".

J. FAIRHURST, 1970

4th March : Town Hall, Birmingham.

Concert of Works by Handel, Dickinson and Elgar, given by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra conducted by Maurice Handford, with Simon Preston as soloist.

Peter Dickinson's "Transformations" received its first Birmingham performance at the C.B.S.O. on 4th March. This work was a commission by the Feeney Trust in 1970, and was first performed at the opening concert of the Cheltenham Festival that year. The work is a "Hommage to Satie", and indeed reflects the sort of mood that Satie was trying to create. This raises an interesting point : the composer insists that this is a serious work, yet its very nature, and its compositional procedures led the audience to regard it as somewhat light-hearted. The composer may continue to insist on the serious nature of the work, but the music itself says otherwise; the audience's reaction very definitely proved this. I am tempted to wonder whether the "serious" label is Peter Dickinson with tongue in cheek - in true Satie spirit.

The music itself proved to be a most enjoyable experience; the performance was good and well received. I was particularly impressed by a very good use of percussion - so often a favourite toy played with by modern composers who do not realise the art of percussion writing. The work also shows that the composer has a good sense of movement and climax, the second allegro section was particularly impressive and displayed some well contrasted orchestral colours. It was interesting to note that the opening chords (separated by chords on the celesta) and the chords of the central chorale were extremely "organ-like" : - a "lapsed organist" at work on the orchestral line !

The Dickinson work was preceded in the programme by Handel's Organ Concerto op 7 No. 1, the second half being devoted to a performance of Elgar's first symphony. The orchestra, conducted by Maurice Handford, gave a good rendering of this work, although Handford's sense of expression was a trifle wooden and the performance was not as good as I would have liked. Overall, though, this was a good performance by the C.B.S.O. of a sensibly balanced programme.

PETER FAIRHURST