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"Le Donne Curiose," Melodramma Giocoso in Three Acts by Emilio Usiglio

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E. USIGLIO'S COMIC OPERA "LE DONNE CURIOSE."*

SIGNOR EMILIO USIGLIO, the composer of this charming work, may be said to have revived in Italy, during the last few years, comic opera or *melodramma giocoso*, in the best acceptance of the term. *Melodramma giocoso* is a form of comic opera peculiar to Italy, for, while it has nothing in common with *burlesque* even of the best type, such as Sullivan's "Mikado," it is quite distinct from French comic opera—of which Auber's "Fra Diavolo," and, among more recent works, Delibes's "Le Roi l'a dit," are luminous examples—as it is distinct from the German *Singspiel*, from the more advanced and highly polyphonic school to which Goetz's "Taming of the Shrew" belongs, and from serio-comic opera, such as Sullivan's "The Yeomen of the Guard." The nearest approach to it out of Italy is, perhaps, Nicolai's "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and this is probably the reason why this last-mentioned work is the only comic opera of Northern origin which has really taken root in Italy. The finest specimen of Italian *melodramma giocoso* ever written is, of course, Rossini's "Barbiere," and it is indeed necessary to hear it, and, I may add, see it on an Italian stage, performed by a good *ensemble*, in order to appreciate its true *vis comica*, which is almost entirely lost in the traditional and conventional, nay, at times, intolerably heavy, performances of this *chef d'œuvre* out of Italy. After Rossini, comic opera in Italy found distinguished exponents in L. Ricci, who, jointly with his brother, wrote the well-known Opera "Crispino la Comare"; in Petrella, whose most successful effort was "Le Precauzioni"; in Pedrotti, who produced "Tutti in Maschera," and in others, all of whom, in their own way and in their own style, maintained the best traditions of Rossini's school—viz., grace, elegance, and natural *entrain* in action and music alike.

But, as elsewhere, so also in Italy, comic opera had subsequently to yield its place to a perfect invasion of French "opéra bouffe," with all its vulgar and demoralising tendencies, and for some time *melodramma giocoso* disappeared almost entirely from the Italian stage. It was Signor Usiglio who, in his "Educazione di Sorrento," made the first determined, laudable, and highly successful effort to vindicate the claims of legitimate comic opera, and so to recover the lost ground. He was followed by Signor de Giosa, whose "Napoli di Carnevale" was performed some years ago in all the principal cities of Italy; and quite recently Signor Usiglio has taken a further step in the right direction by producing at the Costanzi, the leading theatre in Rome, his latest work, "Le Donne Curiose," which has now also been performed, and under the composer's direction, at the new Politeama of Pisa.

The libretto of "Le Donne Curiose" is adapted from Goldoni's well-known comedy of the same name, the scene being laid in Venice at the time of the Carnival, about the middle of the last century. The dramatic action, spread over three acts, may be briefly stated to consist in this—that a number of jealous Venetian ladies, suspicious of the true character of the Carnival festivities planned by their husbands and lovers at their club called "Amicizia," and indignant at being shut out from that "temple of ease and luxury," lay a plot to enter the club secretly, under cover of night, and to surprise the members at their Carnival banquet. They find a willing tool in *Trivella*, the club servant, a *factotum* in the style of Figaro. Led by him, and disguised by mask and domino, they suddenly burst into the banquet-hall. The assembled members are at first horrified at seeing their sacred precincts invaded by the other sex, but gallantly admit their defeat at the hands of the fair ladies, who, in their turn, having proved their husbands and lovers true, vow never to be jealous or inquisitive again.

The action, of which the above is a mere outline, is, of course, interspersed with various scenes in which the plot is worked out, and the leading characters are given scope to exhibit their sentiments of love and jealousy. The effect of the whole is heightened by the well known and characteristic surroundings of Venice, and the spirited

manner in which Signor Usiglio has treated his subject is admirably adapted to keep up the interest and excitement. The opera is preceded by an overture in due form, and throughout the opera itself recitative takes the place of spoken dialogue. The airs are light and graceful, and the vocal and instrumental parts are, on the whole, well balanced, the orchestration being full and effective without being heavy. The local colouring, though here and there somewhat too elaborate, is skilful and, in some scenes, decidedly original, especially in the Gondola scene when the masked ladies meet in the Piazza under the windows of the Club and induce *Trivella* to give up the keys and lead them to the banquet-hall. Signor Usiglio, moreover, infuses his own individuality into the performance, which he conducts with characteristic spirit and vivacity; and for the display of these he could certainly not have chosen a better subject than Goldoni's "Donne Curiose." There are many other plays by the same writer, which, replete with comic incidents and sparkling with wit and humour, as for instance "Il Ventaglio," lend themselves admirably to effective musical treatment; and English as well as Italian composers will find in Goldoni an inexhaustible store of precious material for reviving comic opera in its true and best sense.

OBITUARY.

ALOYS HENNES, whose sudden death on the 8th ult.—caused by a fall from a window at his residence—is reported from Berlin, was a conscientious and able worker in the practical sphere of our art. Born at Aix-la-Chapelle on September 8, 1827, he received a good general education, and eventually, less from inclination than in order to escape the alternative of joining the priesthood, he entered the Prussian postal service as one of its minor officials. Entirely self-taught, he had much to unlearn when, quitting an uncongenial atmosphere at the age of twenty-four, he entered the Cologne Conservatorium, where for two years he diligently pursued his studies under Reinecke, who took a special interest in the young man's progress. Hennes, after various changes of residence, finally established himself as a teacher at Wiesbaden, where he resided for a number of years. In 1863 he published his "Klavier Unterrichtsbriefe," which has run through twenty-five German editions, and has been translated, amongst other languages, into English under the title of "A New Method for the Piano." In 1872 the deceased musician, whose useful career has come to so sudden a termination, took up his abode at Berlin, where of late years he had been a professor at the Scharwenka'sche Conservatorium. He composed several pianoforte pieces and numerous songs. Some interesting details concerning his early career and professional struggles will be found in a small volume entitled "Therese Hennes and her musical education, a biographical sketch, written by her father," which has been translated by Mr. H. Mannheimer.

MUSIC IN DUBLIN.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

THE Dublin University Choral Society gave its last Concert for the season on the evening of the 13th ult., in the Dining Hall of Trinity College, which was filled to its utmost capacity. The first part of the Concert consisted of Dr. Ferdinand Hiller's legendary Cantata "Lurline," a work that suited the Society's choir to perfection; and the performance was, on the whole, the best given by the University Choral Society during the present season. Miss Lucy Ashton Hackett, who undertook the songs of the malignant water fay, acquitted herself to admiration, and Mr. Drummond Hamilton was no less satisfactory in the tenor music of the fisher boy. On this occasion the services of a band were dispensed with, the accompaniments being performed on a pianoforte, American organ, and harp by Drs. Gater and José and Madame Priscilla Frost respectively.

Sir Robert Stewart's enjoyable "Committee" Cantata, for male voices, opened the second part, and discovered a breadth of tone and style in the male voices that was highly creditable to so comparatively small a body. Professor

* "Le Donne Curiose," *Melodramma Giocoso* in three Acts. (E. Sonzogno, Milan.)