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An Analysis of Choral Tone

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LONDON OPERA HOUSE.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

DEAR SIR,—With Mr. Klein's article on the past season at the London Opera House (which appeared in the August number of the *Musical Times*) one must to a great extent agree, though one may differ from some of the reasons given for Mr. Hammerstein's failure to appeal to the London public. When Mr. Klein speaks of Mr. Hammerstein's want of business policy in 'challenging Covent Garden on its own ground' he is entirely in the right, considering that his artists were all far and away below the general level of those to be heard at the older House. It strikes one as well nigh beyond credence that the American impresario should claim (as he does) to have brought *thousands* of singers to their inheritance, by which it is reasonable to suppose that they have become celebrities on the operatic stage; and yet none of these thousands were forthcoming during any period of operatic performances at his theatre. One or two did excellent work, and with further study may achieve an enviable position later on; and though a laudable *ensemble* was often to be found, yet to imagine that the public in London would be induced to support such an enterprise at Covent Garden prices was surely the wildest of chimeras imaginable, and even at reduced figures they declined to respond. Seriously, Mr. Klein considers that English texts supply not merely Mr. Hammerstein's best but his one chance of success. With this I disagree. Permanent opera the London public does not want (as has been proved dozens, nay, scores of times) in any language. Would not it have had an all year round (almost) National Opera or Cosmopolitan Opera years and years ago had it so desired? Has not time and money been spent hopelessly in trying to induce Londoners to patronize that form of entertainment in the vernacular as in Italian, German, and French, with the best procurable performers and conductors of the first rank? Educate, educate, educate, is the perpetual cry, but the masses will have none of it in regard to opera, and prefer Telephone Girls, Runaway Girls, Sunshine Girls, &c., and it is quite useless to insist further on this state of things, as the number of the theatres that bring forward such effusions when the theatre season is in full swing sufficiently demonstrates. Covent Garden Opera is all Londoners can 'do with' for a limited season, which this year has been longer than usual owing to the attractions of the Russian Ballet. It is surely only necessary to mention the names of Carl Rosa and Charles Manners to bring to mind the heartbreaking work these two must have experienced for so many years, giving their energies, time, and money to try and educate Londoners in opera—and with what result?

Yours, &c.,

CLAUDE TREVOR.

PRESERVATION OF CHILDREN'S VOICES.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

SIR,—I frequently observe, with alarm, classes in vocal contests for girls 'under sixteen.' Between the ages of thirteen and sixteen is a critical period for female singers, because their voices are undergoing a process of change. They should therefore have a rest. Such classes, I fear, are likely to prove an inducement to over-sing just at the harmful time, with disaster in after years to the mature organ. In the last forty years I have seen many young singers 'go up like a rocket and come down like a stick' through disregard of this necessary precaution.

Yours truly,

W. H. BREARE.

AN ANALYSIS OF CHORAL TONE.

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

DEAR SIR,—The article by Mr. J. A. Rodgers, which appeared in your July issue, is not only interesting but highly instructive to those who study the tone and vocal characteristics of persons and choirs.

One portion of the article is to my mind open to discussion. Mr. Rodgers says: 'I purposely exclude the Three Choirs Festival from this comparative analysis, because its

constitution is unique. Salaried lay-clerks, presumably drawn from all districts, form the nucleus of this body; the contralto tone is stiffened by an amalgam of male alto quality.'

This statement is not only incorrect, but bestows praise where it is not due.

The choir probably numbers about 200, and of these the number of 'lay-clerks,' including male alto, would not exceed twenty-seven to thirty. During the period of rehearsals, which are held twice a week for about thirteen weeks, 'the nucleus of this body' only attend about seven rehearsals.

There is perhaps a great amount of truth in the statement that the sopranos unconsciously adopt the boy-chorister tone, but Mr. Rodgers would have found it very interesting, and possibly instructive, had he made a more exhaustive analysis of the whole choir and, again, the three independent choirs which go to form the whole.

Perhaps after September we may look forward to this.

Yours faithfully,

Worcester, July 29, 1912.

PERCY POTTER.

'ADESTE FIDELES.'

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MUSICAL TIMES.'

SIR,—The reviewer of Dr. Terry's 'Westminster Hymnal' suggests that the inclusion of the above hymn-tune among plainsong melodies is a slip on the part of the Doctor, and states that the composition is an English air first published in 1744 as 'Air Anglois.'

That date is only 168 years ago. In France, where there are many Noël's going back to the 13th century, it is thought that the tune is a very ancient one. Laroussi's 'Universal Dictionary,' published thirty-four years ago, speaks of it in the following terms:

'Ce morceau de plain-chant, complètement en dehors de la forme habituellement reçue pour ce genre de musique, nous a été transmis d'*âge en âge* par la tradition. Comme tous les chants populaires dont le souvenir se perpétue, il se recommande par une coupe nette et un rythme franc. De nos jours, tous les maîtres de chapelle de nos églises ont, plus ou moins, brodé sur ce thème; mais, à toutes ces variantes, si herceuses qu'elles soient, nous préférons, et de beaucoup, l'antique mélodie dans toute sa simplicité primitive.'

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

ADAM SCOTT.

[We believe our reviewer is correct in stating that the oldest known copy of the tune was published in 1744. Of course, it may have existed long before as a tradition.—ED., *M. T.*]

TEACHERS' METHODS.

Mr. Gaston de Mengel, of 17, Colville Square, London, W., sends us a letter, in which he comments on the reluctance of teachers to give up accustomed methods. He says:

'Is there any valid reason, apart from the weakness of human nature, and the inability to grasp a scientific exposition of the truth, that can justify teachers in not altering their methods of teaching at any point when they are shown something better?

'Do you think it would be possible to form a Society, which all professors of standing would be invited to join, for the purpose of examining and reporting upon new methods of teaching, whether general or dealing with special points, and from whatever source they come? Naturally, the members would have to be willing to call in the aid of experts in acoustics, mechanics, physiology, or whatever other branch of science was involved in the point under discussion, and to stand by their united decision.

'If any of your readers should think this a feasible scheme, I should be glad to communicate with them, with a view to meeting and discussing ways and means.'

[In an ideal community there would be no difficulty in carrying out this idea. But human nature, especially teachers' human nature, being what it is, we fear that it would be very difficult to arrive at unanimous conclusions. We are reminded of the eleven obstinate jurymen.—ED., *M. T.*]