English Opera

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Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 16, No. 361 (Mar. 1, 1873), pp. 8-9

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3352096>

Accessed: 29-12-2015 23:09 UTC

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remains for the ministrant to identify his note with the people's accompanied note of response. Few if any ears, it is to be hoped, there are so dull as to be *unable to learn* to take up a note from an organ, if that note lies near the prevailing speaking tone. It must be owned that there is some difficulty in this matter, but the real point of the difficulty lies in the difficulty not being recognized by those who have to surmount it. The man with imperfect ear has no inner test to help him to accuracy; if he would but take his quicker-eared friend's kindly word and firmly resolve to set a true G fast and firm in his ear—even though at the cost of hours of practice—the difficulty would surely in every case almost, quickly vanish. And who would begrudge a few hours' patient labour to be able to help, rather than interfere with, the one-note response of the people; one-note response helping surely to one-heart feeling.

J. POWELL METCALFE.

ENGLISH OPERA.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

ALL thinkers upon the condition of British Operatic art who, like ourselves, are old enough to remember the days of the "English Opera House," as it was termed, cannot but be struck with the manner in which this establishment was carried on year after year, in spite of the fact that frequently for months together an Opera was never heard within its walls. The theatre under the management of Mr. Arnold, although theoretically opened for the representation of strictly musical works, was practically devoted to what was likely to bring an audience; and we distinctly recollect that a drama entitled "The Evil Eye," was a highly attractive piece; that John Reeve, the low comedian of his time, was excessively funny in the character of *Zanie Kiebags*; and that the same actor, in a Farce, called "The Mummy" (which was moulded on the model of the more modern "Adelphi Screamer"), kept the audience in a roar of laughter from the rising to the falling of the curtain. Strangely enough, however, the original object for which the theatre was founded, could not be entirely lost sight of, for by the terms of the licence, it was compulsory to have a certain number of pieces of music in each act. This gave rise to the most absurd effects, for songs, duets, &c., were dragged in without meaning, simply to satisfy the conscience of the Lord Chamberlain. But their great hope was in *finales*: the act-drop scarcely ever fell without a number of people rushing in most unceremoniously (very often into a gentleman's drawing-room,) and bawling out some such nonsense as the following, which was set to music by the "arranger" of the establishment:

When morning beams,
We wake from dreams,
And off to hunt we go.
And, when it's o'er,
We drink and roar,
Hark forward, ho, yo ho!

Solos, too, as we have said, were constantly introduced, having so little to do with the situation in which they were sung, that the business of the scene was usually temporarily suspended, and a few words allusive to the subject of the song, written for the occasion, were spoken by the vocalist, as a "cue" for the orchestra. Thus a brigand, who had been pursued by troops into a mountain pass, would come forward, and, at the risk of being fired upon, sing a sentimental effusion, relating to his early days; a waiting-maid would unceremoniously walk into her mistress's room and, bidding her "listen," give a detailed account of her numerous wooers, and the manner in which she had treated them; and we have even seen a harp and milking-stool brought into a corn-field, in order that the suffering heroine (who unfortunately happened to be a vocalist) should sing a popular ballad to her own accompaniment.

Unquestionably these "musical pieces" (if such they might be called), would scarcely do much for the cultivation of creative operatic talent; but it must be remembered that the *idea* was thus kept alive—there was an English Opera House, if there were an English Opera to put in it; and if composers could not or would not write one, the lessee was always

enabled to fall back upon *Zanie Kiebags* and fill the house. Let those who regard these days with wonder recollect, however, that English Operas were given, and successfully too; and that from this period we may date a very decided growth in the taste for musical works by British composers. Loder's "Nourjahad," and John Barnett's "Mountain Sylph," to name only two of the many produced, attracted large audiences, and encouraged the belief that as long as there existed a home for such native productions, no difficulty would be found in procuring them. It may also be said that the cast of these operas was, as a rule, in the highest degree satisfactory. In the "Mountain Sylph," for instance, Miss Romer, Messrs. Wilson, and Henry Phillips formed a trio thoroughly competent to interpret the music entrusted to them; and although it must be confessed that Mr. Keeley, who played the part of *Christie*, however good as a comedian, could hardly be accepted as a vocalist, the public was good natured enough to laugh with him, instead of at him, because it was well understood that with a company so strangely mixed, the singers must be constantly encroaching upon the province of the actors, and the actors upon that of the singers.

But, apart from the works written especially for this establishment, it must be borne in mind that foreign operas in the English language were here presented, and this during the time when the fashionable lyrical establishment in the Haymarket was sealed to the general public, in consequence of the high rate of admission. Night after night, for example, was the house filled to hear Weber's "Der Freischütz," which in a short time became actually popular, even with the masses. Many other operas, too, of the highest class, by continental composers, were constantly given; and it is an indisputable fact that, in spite of the much vaunted rapid and universal spread of the art, better operatic music was to be found on the pianofortes of amateurs in those days than in the present.

With this truth before us, it is obviously absurd to account for the non-existence of an English Opera House, by the fact of there being no composers who can write for it. Those who watch the progress of musical events in this country, must know that for years the public has been carefully educated away from, instead of towards it. The Italian Opera, at first, only appealing to the aristocratic few, has now become a popular institution, and the nationality of lyrical works is so disguised, from the fact of one language only being used, that, save for the retention of some of the original titles in the bills (for a mercantile, and not an artistic reason), few persons can ever know to what words the music of an opera had been first allied. It will of course be seen that in endeavouring to prove how the exclusive use of the Italian tongue on the lyric stage in this country has gradually weaned the people from the desire to hear their native language sung by native vocalists, we are but echoing the sentiments of Mr. G. A. Macfarren, who, in an able paper in this journal on the evil influence of the Italian language upon music, has clearly pointed out the importance of the subject as affecting the progress of pure English art. Speaking of the manner in which composers' works are perverted in their meaning by translation, he says, "One might forgive this paramount injustice to a musician under either of two circumstances. Firstly, were the so-called translation into the native language of the executant, who would then be enabled to invest its performance with such natural impulse as is incompatible with the enunciation of a strange tongue; secondly, were the text rendered into the native language of the audience, who would thus be enabled more thoroughly to apprehend the musical purport than is possible through the aid of the English side of an opera libretto, or even through the preparatory help of school education." Here, indeed, the matter is stated so convincingly, that we might wonder what the veriest musical conservative could say against it. Were it possible to present foreign operas in their original language, and with a company of native vocalists, nothing could of course be more satisfactory; but to translate a German work, for instance, into Italian, and then have it sung by Swedish, French, German, or even English artists, is a manifest absurdity which, if art were regarded as it should be in this country, could scarcely be tolerated. Handel commenced his career in England by composing Italian operas, according to

the fashion of the time; but he soon discovered that to get at the heart of a nation he must write in its language; the result is that his Italian operas are forgotten, and his English works will live for ever. Strange, indeed, that a foreigner should teach us that our native tongue is as adaptable for the highest class of music as any other; and stranger still that we should have profited so little by the lesson; for although we did not think it necessary to translate "*Acis and Galatea*" into Italian before it could be presented to a refined British audience, it is certain that many English composers who have been bold enough to write an opera for performance before their countrymen and countrywomen, have been compelled either to set the music to Italian words, or to get it distorted from the original text into the recognized lyrical tongue, in order to gain admission for it into fashionable society. Better indeed is it that we should go back to the days of our old "*English Opera House*," even with such mongrel pieces as "*The Evil Eye*," and "*The Mummy*" as an occasional variety, than that we should be compelled to listen to German and French works—the language of which is as much an integral portion of their composition as it is of the "*Creation*" or the "*Messiah*,"—so thoroughly disguised by translation into Italian, that their own composers would scarcely know them. That a school of British lyrical art might grow from this there can scarcely be a doubt; for singers, as well as composers, would then be trained to adopt their mother tongue as a vehicle for musical expression. Let us then, instead of deploring the want of a National Establishment devoted to the works of native composers, endeavour to create a popular desire for its existence; and, as a preliminary step towards the formation of an English Opera, give the people a series of operas in English.

THE Reid Concert at Edinburgh has this year been unusually successful. Mr. Hallé's orchestra, with Madame Norman-Neruda as solo violinist, and Madlle. Nita Gaëtano and Mr. William Castle as principal vocalists, drew together a large audience, and a finer programme than that presented on the occasion could scarcely be imagined. The "*Introduction Pastorale, March and Minuet*," by the late founder of the Music Chair, General Reid, were, of course, included in the selection, according to custom, during the performance of which the whole audience remained standing. Beethoven's Symphony in B flat was finely given; and amongst the interesting works in the programme we may mention Bach's double Concerto for two violins—the executants being Madame Norman-Neruda and Herr Straus—which created quite a sensation with the audience. Two concerts were afterwards given, at which the Music Hall was as crowded as ever. The classical nature of the programmes at these performances reflected the highest credit upon those connected with the Festival; and the thanks of all are due to Professor Oakeley, who, although not perfectly recovered from his late severe accident, has displayed untiring zeal and energy in promoting the success of the enterprise.

A FESTIVAL, under the direction of Herr Kuhe, has also taken place at Brighton, which was highly gratifying in its results. Miss Virginia Gabriel's Cantata, "*Evangeline*," was perhaps scarcely worthy of being associated with the great works by which it was surrounded; but although inexperienced is shown in its general treatment, there are many melodious phrases scattered throughout, which were duly appreciated. Sir Michael Costa's "*Eli*," Sir W. Stérndale Bennett's "*Woman of Samaria*," Spohr's "*Last Judgment*," Mendelssohn's "*Elijah*," and Handel's "*Judas Maccabæus*," were included in the scheme, and Herr Kuhe's performance of some of the most classical pianoforte works has been a conspicuous feature in the concerts. Misses Edith Wynne and S. Ferrari, Mesdames Patey and Florence Lancia, Messrs. Vernon Rigby, Lewis Thomas, Santley, &c., have given valuable assistance in the vocal department, and the orchestra has been thoroughly efficient at every performance. The closing concert, which is announced to take place after our number has gone to press, is for the benefit of the director, Herr Kuhe.

CRYSTAL PALACE.

THE anniversary of the birth of Franz Schubert occurring on Friday the 31st January, the programme of the concert on the next day was chiefly devoted to his compositions. The Symphony in B flat (No. 5) is one of the treasures discovered by Mr. George Grove (who is now known not only as secretary and manager of the Crystal Palace, but as one of the ablest annotators upon the musical works performed there), and its presentation on this occasion for the first time in this country, excited the deepest curiosity. Certainly the Symphony is not one which, beautiful as it is throughout, would have placed the composer in the position he now occupies; but it is of the highest value as showing how largely he was influenced in his early days by a reverence for the works of Mozart and Haydn, the Minuet, especially, recalling most vividly that in Mozart's Symphony in G minor. The Finale is full of grace and animation, and in construction is the most important of all the movements. The instrumentation throughout is charming; and the effect upon the audience fully proved how thoroughly even the immature compositions of this writer have an interest for the general public. A part-song, "*Night in the Forest*," with accompaniment for four horns, and a hymn, "*O Lord our God*," were also heard for the first time, the former piece producing but little effect, in spite of some excellent writing; and the latter, with a full wind band accompaniment, having scarcely sufficient individuality of style to make it stand forth prominently from the many compositions of its class. In these two pieces and a part-song by the same composer, "*The Gondolier*" (not, however, a novelty) the singers were Messrs. H. Guy, Howells, Wadmore, Pope and Parker. The selection from Schubert's works also included the Overture to "*Rosamunde*," and the melodious Romance (the only solo in the incidental music to that drama) excellently sung by Madame Lemmens-Sherrington. Henselt's Pianoforte Concerto, remarkable not only for its intrinsic merit, but for its excessive difficulty, was played with admirable precision by Mr. Oscar Beringer, who elicited warm and deserved applause at the conclusion of each movement. The performance of Schumann's "*Paradise and the Peri*" on the 8th ult., again brought forward this composer's claims to a larger share of public attention and popular appreciation. These claims are urged from time to time by his admirers with a pertinacity which, if continued, might sooner or later deserve, if it did not ensure, success. Owing to the obvious beauty of many of his songs, and the constant and admirable exposition of his pianoforte pieces by Madame Schumann, his works are making such progress in the estimation of the public, that even his avowed detractors are obliged to admit the charm of his smaller pieces, making a stand, however, against the larger works, which, unfortunately, are less known. At this point matters may chance to remain, unless something be done towards presenting the greater compositions more frequently, and with a more careful preparation than usual. The most remarkable instance at the present day of bringing an abstruse work into popularity is exemplified in Bach's Passion. But it could only have been done by repeated performances at comparatively short intervals, and by a sacrifice of time seldom to be accomplished, in these railroad days. Should such means be applied to "*Paradise and the Peri*," the position which Schumann's works should properly take in the world of art would soon be settled. Amongst much that was highly commendable in the performance at the Crystal Palace, there were not wanting signs of hasty preparation. These were particularly noticeable in the accompaniments, which, as a rule, seemed loud and wanting in repose. Had the orchestral detail been brought out as Mr. Manns and his admirable orchestra have taught us to expect at their hands, the pleasure actually experienced would have been greatly enhanced. Against these difficulties the soloists struggled bravely, and succeeded in eliciting the approbation of an audience remarkably undemonstrative. Mme. Sherrington, absent from illness, was replaced at three days' notice by Miss Blanche Cole, whilst Miss Julia Elton did the same kind office for Mme. Patey, with scarcely twenty-four hours' notice, both these ladies acquitting themselves well. Miss Katherine Poyntz also filled a difficult part with true artistic feeling. But it is to Signor Folli we were indebted for a performance almost perfect, his fine voice resisting all attempts to overpower it, and his broad and dignified style telling with wonderful effect. Mr. Cummings was not heard altogether to advantage, the tenor part being in a great measure too low for him. What he did, however, was done well, as might be expected of one of the most artistic singers of the day. It is to be hoped that before the im-