

JULY, 1901

Vol. 24. No. 7. $\qquad$ Whole No. 283

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WHICH IS THE GREATEST OF MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS ?

Av enterprising English journalist, Mr. Frederick Dolman, has lately made an attempt to discover what is the concensus of expert musical opinion as to the greatest achievement in music, and with this end in view he has obtained opinions from some of the most distinguished composers and interpreters of music. Among these are M. Jean de Reszke, Sir Alexander MacKenzie, Madame Albani, Dr. Frederic H. Cowen, Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Walter Parratt, Mr. Ben Davies, and Miss Clara Butt.

The opinion of Sir Walter Parratt, the organist of St. George's Chapel Royal, Windsor, is given and commented on as follows:
"' In varying moods I should give you dif-
ferent answers. Beethoven's C-minor Symphony, Bach's B-minor Mass, Brahm's "Schieksalied," even a far-off Palestrina would each at the psychological moment stir me most deeply.' The 'far-off Palestrina,' it may be added, lived through the greater part of the sixteenth century and is sometimes referred to as 'Princeps Musicæ'; whilst the three works specially mentioned by Sir Walter were written at long intervals from each other during the past two centuries. Bach's Mass in B-minor dates from about 1734, but with the rest of this master's work had to wait many years before its genius was appreciated. Brahm's 'Schiekslied' was composed some years before his death in 1894."
M. Jean de Reszke states that his favorite composition is the prelude to "Parsifal," one of the latest of Wagner's scores. Wagner and Beethoven appeal with equal strength to

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Sir Alexander MacKenzie, who since the death of Sir Arthur Sullivan is commonly regarded as the first of living English composers. He says:
'The first three movements of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony have always appeared to me to be the highest achievement in purely instrumental music. In answering your question, however, I find it difficult to ignore opera, and in this art Wagner's 'Meistersinger' holds the first place in my estimation." Mme. Albani agrees with several other artists in choosing a song from "The Messiah" - "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth"-as "the most musicianly, melodious and expressive."

Frau Lilli Lehmann, the famour German soprano, will sing in the United States from October to March in recitals.

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## T

 HE RAG-TIME OCTOPUS.The resolutions passed at the recent convention of the American Federation of Musicians declaring war on rag-time, which, according to President Weber, "has put the standard of music in this country to the lowest ebb,"' has been the subject of innumerable criticisms and editorials in the daily and musical press during the past month. To quote Mr. Weber further:
" The public taste is becoming spoiled. It is the duty of the musician to fix the musical standard and it is our purpose to eliminate 'rag-time' from that standard, We have often tried to suppress this hashy stuff, but no concerted action has ever been taken until now."

It will be interesting to learn how the Federation is going to "suppress" this musical insanity. Within a recent period observers have noted that rag-time has been dying a natural death. The attention now lavished on it by this eminent body of players is destined, however, to give it new life.

The popularity of rag-time reflects, unfortunately, the public taste. There is no getting behind this fact. Water will not rise higher than its source. In politics, hundreds of thousands of good citizens want a clean and honest administration, but the majority, apparently, on election day desire otherwise. So in the matter of musical esthetics. There are millions of people who want good music, at least music of a higher standard than ragtime, but the demands of the majority-as reflected in the sale of rag-time publications and the demand for such compositions in the music halls-would indicate that the public taste is not only " becoming spoiled," as Mr. Weber puts it, but is already spoiled beyond redemption.

Rag-time has in very truth had a demora'izing effect upon the country, and, personally, we would be glad to see it shelved for all time. But we are catholic in our tastes, and rather sympathize with the broad views of Wm. H. Sherwood, the eminent pianist, as recently expressed, when he says:
' I myself do not see why people who have a great deal of care and trouble and little joy cannot be allowed to amuse themselves in their own way. If people want to be amused and find enjoyment in rag-time, why should they not be permitted to enjoy it?

There is truth and soulfulness, to a certain extent, in rag-time. It is new and original-important factors in popularity.
"Although I have been educated to play and appreciate music of probably a higher class, I still do not wish to depreciate the merits of rag-time. It has great originality in rhythms and accents. It can present airs in far more variegated rhythms and catchy accents than classical music, and that is what makes for popularity.
' Rag-time has its merits in cheering people up. Should we in music always play the most ponderous essays by classical masters, or in literature devote ourselves to serious works and tragedies, or on the stage to see only the most serious dramas, excluding comedies and and farces?
' If we should do one, we should do the other. And since humor is recognized as a necessary part of literature and comedies are worthy of a place on the stage, so rag-time should be given a place in music, where it fulfills the office of amusement better than any other kind."

Indeed the more we go into the question, the more we realize that rag-time has assumed a somewhat national phase. So much so that in some of our foreign possessions, as well as in other countries, the residents have come to consider "A Hot Time" and a few other Ethiopean "raggers' as national anthems. As a prominent writer cleverly puts it: The whimsicalities, the weaknesses, the very depravities of a people are reflected in their national music. If the music has not the human and fallible quality, it misses the point altogether. We should be very far from saying that the rag-time is a representative of the American character, but it does represent one phase of it-the cheerful, restless, loosejointed, no-account side, which must not be forgotten in making up the estimate. "Unkempt, disreputable, vast," the American has the rag-time in him at the same time that his
soul echoes with the symphonies of the very worlds in their spheres. We need not expect, perhaps for a hundred years, the musical compositions that shall express both the grandeur and the triflingness of the American spirit. Nevertheless, as a beginning, we might perhaps properly ask of these critical musicians who condemn a weakness of the popular taste a few really meritorious compositions along the lines that trouble them so much.

There is, however a bright side to the ragtime affliction. For instance, why should not some American composer do as much for ragtime as Liszt did for the Gipsy jigs of Hungary? This kind of music illustrates the characteristics of the people and could be developed in some such way. No doubt the current rag-time ditties which have a negro foundation, whether or not the original compositions of negros, are intrinsically inferior to the Hungarian czardas or the Bohemian melodies upon which are based some of the best of Dvorak's delightful compositions.

Nevertheless, why not work along evolutionary lines and dignify by a classical clothing what is now a source of anguish? We have, unfortunately, a national weakness for "resoluting' against the numberless evils in political and social, and now musical life-in other words, we apparently prefer (on paper) to destroy than to build up. This is not progression. It does not remedy a wrongif a wrong exists.

O

## OPERA PLANS.

Before sailing away for his summer vacation in Europehis first vacation in many years -Mr. Maurice Grau gave out some information about next winter's season of opera. This information was positive as regards the dates and the duration of the season, but rather vague so far as the constitution of the company is concerned. The entire season is to consist of twenty-six weeks, divided into three periods. The first, covering eleven weeks, will begin at Montreal, Canada, Oct. 7th, and will take the company across the continent to San Francisco. The second, also of eleven weeks, will be the New York season at the Metropolitan Opera House, commencing on Dec. 23d. The third, of four weeks' duration, will take in Boston, Chicago, and two other cities.
The company-in all probability-will be
made up about as follows: Sopranos: Mmes Calve, Eames, Gadski, Sembrich, either Ternina or Nordica, Susan Strong and Fritzi Scheff; contraltos: Schumann-Heink,Olitzka and Carrie Bridewell; tenors: Van Dyck, Tamagno, Dippel, Salignac and Saleza; baritones: Scotti, Campanari, Bispham, Gilbert and a Wagnerian singer-Van Rooy in all likelihood; bassos: Plancon, Edouard de Reszke, Blass and Journet.

Operas that may be expected in addition to those that are fixtures in the repertoire include Verdi's "Otello," Rossini's " William Tell," Mozart's "Magic Flute," Meyerbeer's "Prophet," some works in which Calve has not appeared heretofore, and one or two of
the older Italian school, with Sembrich as the prima donna.

Arthur Nikisch is making a triumphal tour through France with the Berlin Philharmonic. He has been decorated by the French government. He is said to earn in Europe more than any other conductor received, and his income from Berlin and Leipsic is more than $\$ 25,000$ a year.
Ernest Mitchell, Mme. Melba's brother, who is now at the front in South Africa, is to make his professional debut this summer. He is a tenor and has studied in Italy and Germany.

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MPADEREWSKI'S "MANRU."
" Manru,'" M. Paderewski's long-expected opera, was produced on the 29th ult. at the Dresden Opera House, under the most auspicious circumstances. The libretto by Dr. Alfred Nossig has an underlying thought, similar to that dramatically treated in late years by Hauptmann in "Die Versunkene Glocke" and by Richepin in "Le Chemineau." It represents the old yet ever new conflict between the artistic nature and the trammels of domestic order and social form. The artistic nature in the present case is Manru, a gipsy, who has left his people and abandoned his nomadic life for Ulana, a Galician peasant girl. They marry and live together in a forest of the Tatra mountains, shunned by the peasants of the neighboring village. For a while the happiness the man finds by the side of his wife and child suffices him. Then the roving spirit comes over him again, and his former
gipsy kin happening to pass his way, he irresistibly follows the impulse to join them once more. Ulana implores him in vain to return, and in despair she drowns herself; while Manru is thrown headlong over a precipice by a disappointed rival, whom he had superseded as gipsy chief and had also supplanted in the affections of Asas, a Tzigane maiden.

The subject gives ample scope for national coloring, and in setting the libretto to music M. Paderewski has first and foremost created a distinctly Polish work, in which the musical characteristics of his nationality are brilliantly set forth. The score is individual, healthy, and essentially musical. The vocal part is melodious and dramatic, according to the requirements of the situation. The choral portions and ensembles are treated with a master hand, while the instrumentation is a veritable surprise in a first work, so much would it seem to indicate the fruit of ripe experience. Some of the orchestral effects are striking and novel, while throughout they are dictated by rare skill and unerring taste. A national dance scene brings the first act to a spirited close. A long and beautiful love duet worked up to a most exciting climax finishes the second act, while the third, with its intoxicating gipsy scenes, is, to say the least, in no way inferior to the other two. Herr Anthes, Herr Scheidemantel, and Fraulein Krull, the last a novice, filled their re-
spective parts admirably, though the chief honors of a more than usually fine performance fell to the conductor, General-Musicdirector Schuch. The reception of the new opera was enthusiastic to the highest degree, the artists being recalled again and again by an audience that filled the house.

THE story which comes across the water that Mascagni is to tour the United States next season with an orchestra of eighty play ers, receiving ten thousand dollars a week, would indicate, says "Music Trade Review, that the composer of "Cavalleria Rusticana"' is of the opinion, like some others in Europe, that we are behind the age, musically, in this country and need enlightenment. The fate of other European orchestras-notably Winderstein's and Strauss'-which have crossed the ocean to find that their superiors existed here, should have been a lesson worth taking to heart, at least by the promoters and backers of such an enterprise. Meanwhile cable reports have it that arrangements have been definitely consummated. We somehow doubt these reports.

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