

"BELLS" BEST WORK OF RACHMANINOFF

First Performance in America, by Philadelphia Orchestra and Chorus, a Noteworthy One

Third Piano Concerto, by Rachmaninoff; Second Piano Concerto, by Rachmaninoff; "The Bells," by Rachmaninoff

Yesterday was Rachmaninoff Day at the concert of the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Academy of Music, for the program consisted of only two numbers, both by the great Russian composer, and in the first of them he appeared as soloist. However, great as Mr. Rachmaninoff showed himself to be as a performer, and his playing had everything of virtuosity, temperament and general all-round artistry that a performance could possibly have, it was as a creative artist that he won the highest laurels.

The third symphony, "The Bells," set to a transcription of the words of the poem by Edgar Allan Poe, stands forth as unquestionably the finest composition of his that has yet been heard in this city. The music fits the words, or rather the spirit, of the original as closely as the artistic personality of the composer blends with that of the poet. In this the work is one of the highest class, not taking into consideration the wonderful workmanship which is manifest in every measure, the intimate knowledge of the possibilities and the limitations of both the orchestra and the voices and the wondrously effective orchestration.

A brief analysis of the relation of the poem to the music and the remarkable points of similarity of artistic feeling of both composer and poet appeared in these columns yesterday, and therefore it is not necessary now to go into these details. The composition is a real symphony, and it is the only choral work in its kind, as far as the general musical public, which follows the symphonic lines in all four movements with the voices as well as with the instruments.

But it is its musical values and its technical workmanship which give the great value of the music, and this is the thing, and this alone, which will determine the ultimate success of the composition, which seems at first hearing to be a gigantic work. Knowledge in there in abundance, but it is always subordinated to the musical effect to be achieved.

The work is full of the finest musical ideas imaginable, and the very best of these are those of the three movements, which concern us in this connection, as far as the general musical public is concerned. It was an unexpected thing that the audience sat so quietly and so attentively, and that the performance was so well understood as to whether the movement had been finished and whether it was the right time to applaud, but even after this doubt was removed, there still in silence, a more eloquent tribute to the genius that had inspired the more than the most triumphant applause could have been.

This is only one of the many points of similarity of artistic feeling which the composer and poet have in mind from beginning to end. The orchestra was free, by the strength and power of its performance, to give the public a sense of the quality of the work, and in a large degree for the public performance under Mr. Stokowski.

The orchestra also did exceedingly well. Miss Hinkle has the best kind of a voice for singing with a large orchestra, and several exceptional choruses and timbre that makes it stand out from any of all the instruments of the orchestra. Mr. Arthur Haddlet has also a fine voice, although a little more powerful might have been desirable and a little more clearness of intonation. Mr. Patton, the baritone, made a most favorable impression. His enunciation was far the most clear of any of the soloists and his power, tone quality and manner of singing left little to be desired.

Mr. Stokowski did one of the finest bits of conducting that he has yet done in this city. Always at his best in the production of great choral compositions, he is especially in rapport with the involved and complicated score from end to end. The result of this combination of fortunate circumstances was a magnificent performance and one well worthy of the genius of the composition.

The first number on the program was the third piano concerto by Mr. Rachmaninoff, the one in D minor, which Mr. Cortet recently played with the Philadelphia Orchestra. A certain great writer once said "compositions are ephemeral," and so they would be in this case. Mr. Rachmaninoff, in his reading of the concerto, took the entire work at a much more rapid tempo than did Mr. Cortet, but, strangely enough, this did not result in a gain in brilliancy for the Cortet reading was more brilliant than that of the composer. This is evident from his playing of it that Mr. Rachmaninoff does not have the composition as a brilliant work. As he played it, it follows the modern Heubeles and Heubeles in their violin concertos, in that it is almost a symphony with an obligato for the solo instrument, whereas Mr. Cortet treated the work as a piano concerto pure and simple. The two readings were those of a great pianist and of a great composer, respectively.

An audience well worthy of the occasion was present, every seat being taken and the orchestra pit as well being filled. Mr. Rachmaninoff was received with the usual respect which he has with the concertgoers, when Mr. Stokowski finished that he rose from the seat in which he heard the work and acknowledge the applause.

THE CRITIC TALKS TO MUSIC LOVERS

Weekly Comment on Things Musical in Discriminating Philadelphia

THE performance of Henry Hadley's new opera, "Cassara's Night," by the Metropolitan Opera Co. in this city last Tuesday evening, brought us again for at least the several hundredth time the somewhat questionable practicality of grand opera in English. One of the great losses of the city, and by several other performances of opera in our own theatre, within the last five or ten years is the necessity for an adequate libretto.

Without going into the merits or otherwise of the libretto, which Mr. Hadley has set to music in his latest work, the matter of a fine and, above all, a really poetic libretto, is of more importance than anything else at the present stage of American operatic development. Curiously enough, much of the American music that has been offered for the grand operatic stage by the present generation is good enough, but in many cases its real merits have been largely obscured or at best nullified by the libretto.

The reason that a libretto is more important than the music to American opera is that we have no real operatic traditions. We are not accustomed to hearing everyday phrases and commonplaces sung instead of poetry, and the first impulse of the fun-loving American public upon hearing such things is an apparent incongruity to them.

THIS was just what happened on Tuesday night in a number of situations which were anything but humorous from the dramatic standpoint, and quite naturally the laughter, which at that time was hardly more than a ripple of amusement, entirely spoiled the stage situation. The most dramatic occurrence was at the death of Mandion, when the situation naturally had been allowed to fall to the ground. Perhaps here the situation might have been better by the declaration of these words instead of hearing them sung. It occurred again when Cassara was about to enter the scene, but here there was no time to do more than the libretto.

However, for a long time to come, the libretto of grand opera in English will have to be in a predicament that where there is any question of the commonness of the poetic form of speech should be used. At least this will save the situation, for we are accustomed to hearing this form in song and otherwise.

It is not that the libretto of the operas in English are any worse than many of the librettos in Italian or French, for some of the things have been presented in both languages, but the Italian and the French we are accustomed to hearing these things sung, and from years and generations of association with the things, we are not anything strange in it. We are not, however, so accustomed to hearing such things in English as the Americans do in this country.

WE AMERICANS are an eminently practical people, and it will probably be a long time before we have a plain narrative expressed vocally in the libretto. When this time comes we are not to be surprised to find that it is under the most ridiculous absurdities such as commonly occur in the French and Italian operas without a smile, but that time is not yet.

But, while we have not an operatic tradition of our own, we find it easy to adopt one. Many who are Americans in all that the word implies, and who stand what is being said on the stage in a foreign tongue, and it sounds all right and they are nothing funny in it. But not the same thoughts into everyday English and there are comparatively few of them who could keep quiet.

Therefore, the first need of a successful grand opera in English is a first-class poetic libretto. We have the composers who can set it to music which will compare favorably with many of the European operas which we have heard in the last few years, but the limitations of our operatic experience as a nation must be taken into consideration in using a language with which all are familiar, but under circumstances which are decidedly strange.

And, incidentally, while American operatic composers are on the lookout for a suitable libretto, why don't they look for one at Longfellow's "The Spanish Student"? Here is a fine work, in one of the great masters of English and containing all the elements of a grand opera, including a high-class showing affair at the close, while the fifty standard of the poetry is indicated by the fact that the "Stars of the Summer Night," "All Are Sleeping, Weary Hearts," "The Miller, Don Juan," "Good Night, Good Night," "Beloved," and some other wonderful lyrics are taken from this play.

THE writer of this column wishes to acknowledge hereby the receipt of a large number of letters calling attention to a slip, which occurred in the Boston Symphony concert given last Tuesday afternoon, when the program included a paper, "The Spanish Student." Here is a fine work, in one of the great masters of English and containing all the elements of a grand opera, including a high-class showing affair at the close, while the fifty standard of the poetry is indicated by the fact that the "Stars of the Summer Night," "All Are Sleeping, Weary Hearts," "The Miller, Don Juan," "Good Night, Good Night," "Beloved," and some other wonderful lyrics are taken from this play.

IT IS seldom indeed that a musician can take the works of another composer and be changing them in any way, make a decided improvement in them. Bennett has done many wonderful things with some of Johann Sebastian Bach's music, wonderful in more ways than one, but there are many people who think that he has utterly failed to improve it in any way. On the other hand, Bennett's idea was neither to improve nor, incidentally, for Bach in a manner



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works of the older Italian violin composers, and have given them a beauty which surely they never possessed in their original form. The latest piece of work which Mr. Kreisler has shown to us in Philadelphia is his orchestration of the Violin A minor concerto in which he shows ability as an orchestrator almost equal to his work as a violinist. By this act of the orchestra and some modernization of the harmonies in certain important places, Mr. Kreisler has put this concerto in the front rank of violin concertos, where it had been for years relegated to the darkness. And he has done it as he has done all the others, without touching the musical ideas of the original composer. The soul of the work is still Vieux's; only the dress is new.

COMING MUSICAL EVENTS

The concert by the Philadelphia Orchestra and Chorus at the Academy of Music, Tuesday evening, February 2, 1920, will feature the following program: "The Bells," by Rachmaninoff; "The Spanish Student," by Longfellow; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett.

The next concert of the New York Symphony Orchestra will be held at the Academy of Music, Tuesday evening, February 2, 1920, and will feature the following program: "The Spanish Student," by Longfellow; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett.

On Monday evening, February 2, at 8 o'clock, the Philadelphia Orchestra will give its first performance of the "Spanish Student" by Longfellow. The program will also include "The Miller, Don Juan" by Bennett, "Good Night, Good Night" by Bennett, and "Beloved" by Bennett.

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The Philadelphia Opera Society will give its first performance of the "Spanish Student" by Longfellow at the Academy of Music, Tuesday evening, February 2, 1920, and will feature the following program: "The Spanish Student," by Longfellow; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett.

Henry Cortet, tenor, will give his second annual recital before the University of Pennsylvania, Tuesday evening, February 2, 1920, and will feature the following program: "The Spanish Student," by Longfellow; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett.

The Philadelphia Music Club will give its first concert of the season at the Academy of Music, Tuesday evening, February 2, 1920, and will feature the following program: "The Spanish Student," by Longfellow; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett; "The Miller, Don Juan," by Bennett; "Good Night, Good Night," by Bennett; "Beloved," by Bennett.

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