



Mr. Delius's 'Dance of Life'

The Musical Times, Vol. 49, No. 780. (Feb. 1, 1908), p. 111.

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ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC.

A performance of Verdi's opera 'Falstaff' was given at His Majesty's Theatre on January 21. It is regrettable that the operatic public of this country has never taken to this work, although connoisseurs consider it to be one of the masterpieces of its composer. It has been left for the Royal Academy and the Royal College to provide musicians with a chance of hearing the opera. The performance on this occasion was an artistic success that bore witness to our national executive capacity. The chief honours were carried off by Miss Alice Moffat, who sang and acted vivaciously as Mistress Ford. We may hope for a brilliant future for this young artist. Mr. Arthur Wynn was a humorous Falstaff, Mr. Robert Chignell worked hard as Ford, Miss Frances Ireland was a roguish Dame Quickly, and Miss Gladys M. Honey was an agreeable Anne. The difficult ensemble sections were given with great effect.

The orchestra was excellent both in constitution and ability. Sir Charles Stanford conducted, and the stage management was under the capable charge of Mr. Richard Temple. For many reasons it is a matter for regret that all this skill and trouble should be expended over only one performance.

'APOLLO AND THE SEAMAN.'

What was variously described as 'an illuminated symphony' and as 'a dramatic symphony with choral epilogue' was performed at the Queen's Hall on January 20. The event was anticipated with great interest, because of the novel conditions under which the joint work of poet and musician was to be performed. The poem with which the music is associated is by Mr. Herbert Trench, and is entitled 'Apollo and the Seaman.' It is a work of great merit, albeit by no means easy to follow without much brooding. Its subject-matter deals in parables with the loss of the ship Immortality, and its philosophy affords cold comfort as to the destiny of the individual man and the race. But there is a ray of hope in the thought that after all what has been once may be again. If Apollo could destroy that which he had designed and built, he may yet again create. The ideas of the poem, many of which are of undoubted beauty, are unfolded in the form of an interview between Apollo and a Seaman.

The novelty of the mode of presentation was that the hall was darkened—save for the brilliant exit notices and some stray light from the orchestra. A large screen, festooned at the sides, hid the performers partially and the conductor completely. Then in instalments the words of the poem were thrown in dazzling white letters on a black ground. Meanwhile for an hour or more a stream of music flowed from the partly-visible orchestra. The music was by Mr. Joseph Holbrooke, and it aptly displayed the characteristics of his style—*independence*, remarkable fluency, occasional striking power and dubious congruity. The unquestioned implication of the idea of placing the poem stanza by stanza before the audience simultaneously with the music, was that the music would enforce the varying underlying moods of the poem. That Mr. Holbrooke sometimes succeeded in thus welding idea and sound is gratefully conceded, but in other passages the divorce seemed so singularly complete as to induce a belief that the lantern-slides had gone astray. No doubt it is a gain to the symphonist to escape from the fetters of the rhythms forged by syllabic accents, and to be free to employ every conception and colour that the called-for expression induces. This being so, it does not seem clear why it was decided to set the words of the epilogue to actual vocal music; the result was rather an anti-climax. In this connection it is only fair at once to say that the male-voice choir of about 150 singers had been gathered together only four days before the performance, the previous arrangements for a choir having regrettably fallen through. Honour is due to Mr. Allen Gill and the members of his Alexandra Palace Choir for the generous aid they afforded at the last moment.

On the whole, it may be said that the experiment, with all its deficient results, favoured a belief that, with greater experience, combined poetry and music may be impressively produced in a darkened auditorium. But the poem must be either easy to comprehend or be well known, and the music must be always deepening the meaning of the text.

Besides the above work a setting by Mr. W. H. Bell of another poem, 'The Shepherd,' also by Mr. Trench, was performed, but without the words being displayed. We were left therefore to judge the composition as abstract music, and as such it is gratifying to be able to say that many beautiful ideas, charmingly orchestrated, were revealed. Mr. Bell conducted his own work and was heartily recalled.

Another item was a song, again written by Mr. Trench and composed by Mr. Holbrooke, sung by Miss Ada Forrest.

Mr. Holbrooke's complex symphony was conducted with much skill by Mr. Thomas Beecham. The New Symphony Orchestra, which is one of the latest and best of Metropolitan musical organizations, showed its first-rate capacity on this occasion. A repetition of the performance was announced to take place on January 27.

MR. DELIUS'S 'DANCE OF LIFE.'

At the concert of the London Symphony Orchestra given at the Royal Albert Hall on January 19, was performed a symphonic poem by Mr. Frederick Delius entitled 'A Dance of Life.' The title 'Life's dance,' written on the autograph score, more truly suggests, however, the true character of the piece, the aim of the composer evidently being to depict some of the vicissitudes common to earthly existence. The work would appear to be a revised version of a symphonic poem called 'The dance goes on,' which was performed at a concert of Mr. Delius's works at the old St. James's Hall on May 30, 1899. Whether this be so or not, the composition heard at the Albert Hall is strong and significant music that attests to exceptional talent. It is laid out for a very large orchestra, and the part-writing is most complex. The two principal subjects are a dance motive, and a love theme which exerts great influence. The episodic matter is rationally introduced, and although the dissonances are at times extreme, a masterful purpose is always felt. The work was remarkably well rendered under the skilful direction of Mr. Arbos.

ENGLISH OPERA.

A brief season of opera in English was given by the Carl Rosa Company, in conjunction with Mr. Frank Rendle, at Covent Garden, from December 26 to January 11. The performances were remarkable for an excellence of ensemble that gave them artistic distinction, but the attendances in point of numbers were disappointing.

One of the most interesting events of the season was the revival, on January 3, of Goring Thomas's 'Esmeralda,' originally produced by the late Carl Rosa at Drury Lane Theatre on Easter Monday (March 26), 1883. The melodic charm and grace of the music, combined with the interest of the libretto,—based on Victor Hugo's well-known novel—must have caused some of the audience to wonder why the opera has been so long neglected. The name-part was vivaciously played by Miss Elizabeth Burgess; Mr. W. Wheatley sang pleasingly as the amorous and faithful Captain of the Guard, Mr. Arthur Winckworth avoided excess of melodramatic wickedness as the infatuated Priest, and Mr. Charles Victor sang well as the Hunchback. The other parts were adequately sustained, and the freshness of tone and intelligence of the choristers went far to secure the success achieved. Mr. Eugene Goossens conducted.

Two other performances are worthy of notice—Mozart's 'Marriage of Figaro' and Nicolai's 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' given respectively on January 1 and 2. In the former work Madame Lucile Hill appeared as the Duchess, Miss Burgess as Suzanna, and Miss Doris Woodall gave a particularly captivating embodiment of Cherubino. The important Figaro was vivaciously personated by Mr. Charles Victor, and other parts were efficiently sustained by Messrs. Winckworth, Clendon and Felton. Equally praiseworthy was the interpretation on the succeeding evening of Nicolai's 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' in which Mr. Winckworth gave a humorous reading of Sir John Falstaff, the Misses Burgess, Woodall and Ina Hill severally provided captivating presentations of Mistress Ford, Mistress Page and 'Sweet Anne Page,' and Messrs. Clendon, Victor, Arthur Hyde and