

REPERTORY, MUSIC AND DRAMA

1200 Amateur Productions A Year

Amateur Operatic Societies are Flourishing in England—Famous English Critic Tells some Humorous Reminiscences—New Group of British Music Society for N.Z. Composers

AMATEUR operatic societies flourish with vigour in England, and leaving out of account repeat performances, anyone with the requisite energy, time, inclination and finance has the choice of 1200 different productions in a year. Even allowing for quite a considerable amount of duplication of effort by prominent amateurs who are members of more than one society, the total number engaged in making their own (and incidentally, everyone else's) fun must run into many thousands. This is all to the good and is an excellent counterblast to the talkies. It would be most interesting to have a statistical account of the combined activities of both amateur dramatic and amateur operatic societies of both England and New Zealand. In amateur opera alone the attention of one contributor to "Musical Opinion" has been concentrated. This contributor is none other than that lively, well-informed and experienced critic, "Factus," who, in the November issue of that excellent musical monthly indulges in some humorous reminiscences. He remembers, for example, specimens of tongue-tying resulting in the most ludicrous of stage spoonerisms, but only one, not in itself funny, which was kept up the whole evening. During an entire performance of "Ruddigore" Robin Oakapple persisted in calling Rose Maybud May Rosebud, even addressing her as May. In "Monsieur Beaucaire" he heard Beau Nash say it was "easier for a needle to go through the eye of a camel."

Of mishaps on the stage "Factus" calls several to mind. One leading lady who was supposed to break down in tears while a lot of girls danced round her jeering at her misfortune, was visibly affected, not with tears, but with laughter. The benevolent innkeeper, who defends her later, had a song to sing at this stage, but somehow he got mixed up with the crowd of screaming girls and could neither be seen nor heard nor could he see the conductor or hear the orchestra. "What am I to do?" he plaintively asked the heroine, "I can't get away from these

girls." "Factus" recalls a case where a leading character (whose real name in private life we will call Jones) was so late in one of his entries that the sole occupant of the stage had to go on gagging interminably. He kept it up for some time and then losing his self-control, he shouted plaintively to the wings, "Come on, Jones!"

WE all know the legendary story of the enthusiastic actor who blacked himself all over to play Othello. Here is one somewhat akin to it in real life. One of the best lady artists was playing the part of a forest maiden for a week. Owing to her ragged attire, she had to stain herself with "tan" rather more extensively than is usually the case. On the night "Factus" was present, he noticed that she arrived at the same time as he did, which gave her not more than a few minutes before her first appearance. But she duly entered all properly browned and he marvelled at her rapid make-up. After the performance, when she turned up to supper (to which he had been invited), restored to her natural colour, he asked how she managed so rapid a stage transformation. "Oh," she said, "I get up extra early every morning and stain myself, except for my face and hands, before going to business, as I have no time before the evening performance." "But what about business?" asked the puzzled "Factus." "Well," she replied, "long sleeves, high collar and thick stockings cover a lot."

KNOWLEDGE of circumstances is often useful to a critic. Here are two examples where criticism was wisely withheld. In the first instance a player of "Princess Ida," whose capabilities were well-known to the critic, gave the Oration in Act II very badly and indistinctly. Her singing was so good that in investigating the curious discrepancy "Factus" found out that the reason was she had that very afternoon had a front tooth out. Another very well-known player was cast for Robin Oakapple in "Ruddigore." He played with his accustomed ability in Act I, but his Sir Ruthven in Act II was marred by unwonted stiffness and immobility. "Factus" discovered later there was a good cause for this. He did not dare move because his pantaloons had split!

IF the British Music Society stands for anything its stands for music making among friends. In addition to the excellent concerts which are held under far pleasanter conditions than

obtain in the usual "public hall" functions, the Society promotes music-making groups, covering piano, vocal, stringed instruments, and gramophone interests. To this list of groups has been added one for the sole benefit of New Zealand composers, where not only "music creation" but also "try-out" among friends is sympathetically encouraged. The first of the new group gatherings held quite recently was a decided success. Of course the "dog" upon whom the creations of a dozen composers were tried out was not the snarling cur of some Continental concert hall or opera house, but an understanding and loyal friend that New Zealanders are capable of appreciating. The benefits of this initial experiment should be obvious to those who were responsible for the music itself. Any who failed to realise the short-comings of their works and did not return to their composing with an enlarged perspective will fall outright. The rest may reasonably take heart of grace and pursue their bent with a feeling that the effort is worth while.

OF the dozen composers represented, one only was a woman. This was what might have been expected since woman's part has ever been that of inspirer rather than that of creator of music. All musical history goes to prove that to be the case. The idea of a New Zealand school of music composers may seem far fetched to some traditionalists who still suffer from that fatal Teutonic complex which almost strangled British music last century; but, given due encouragement, our composers may some day hold their own with the foreigner. It is just as well to realise here and now that the achievement of this desired goal will depend solely upon the New Zealanders themselves. To many we British are still "a people without music." The numerous band of British composers whose splendid works are the glory of the present generation has so far failed to impress many of the musical mandarins of Europe, therefore the New Zealander, to be a success beyond the narrow limits of his own small Dominion, will need all the encouragement he can get. Publication and performance, so long denied budding composers, will have to be sponsored by the British Music Society and kindred bodies (if any such equivalent really does exist).

OUR growing culture and rapidly growing musical public calls for rational organisation. Having no musical past, we cannot, like at least one European country, live on that, therefore both the musicians and the musically-inclined will have to fall in line with the aims of the British Music Society, the chief of which is to stimulate private and public music-making under conditions that economically, culturally and artistically are best adapted to modern conditions.

BURGESS

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