

"The Bohemian Girl"

On Monday, February 15, a specially arranged radio version of Balfe's popular opera, "The Bohemian Girl," will be presented from 2YA by Harison Cook and company. In the following article Mr. Cook, in reminiscent vein, tells readers something of the history of the opera, and outlines its plot.

IF in order to ascertain the most popular opera in Great Britain, a plebiscite were taken, Balfe's "Bohemian Girl" would be found at the head of the list, with all other operas far behind in the number of votes. In fact so popular was this opera that practically every English opera company played it every Saturday night, and by half-past four or five o'clock long waiting queues stretched from the theatre far down the street, and the theatre was certain to be filled at the "early doors."

Many and many a time Charles Manners, the managing director of the Moody-Manners Opera Co., after the performance of this popular opera, went in front of the curtain and told the delighted audience that the "old Boh. Girl" paid the salaries of his company and kept them "on the road." Again, it was before a performance of this opera that the late Walter Van Noorden, managing director of the Carl Rosa Opera Co., walking past the long queues waiting outside the theatre, was heard to say in mournful tones, "Losing money again this week," and when questioned regarding the truth of this remark, wrung his hands and said, "Look at them. I'll have to turn hundreds away."

After its first production in English at Drury Lane, London, it was produced in Italy as "La Zingara," in Hamburg as "La Gitana," in Vienna as "Die Zigeunerin," and in Paris as "La Bohemienne." The Paris production gained for Balfe the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

The musical numbers of the "Bohemian Girl" have been called "a string of melodic pearls." Who does not know the soprano song, "I dream that I dwell in Marble Halls" or the equally famous tenor song, "When Other Lips"?

An interesting story regarding the latter song is told thus by Haddon:—

"Balfe wrote six or seven settings of the words before he hit on the final form of "When other lips." He had tried, and tried, and tried again for the "right" melody. Late one night a cab drove up to a friend's door, and a mighty peal of the bell startled the household. His friend, recognising Balfe's voice outside, went down and opened the door. Balfe rushed in, waving a roll of music over his head, and calling out, "I've got it! I've got it! I've got it!" He ran upstairs to the drawing-room, sat down at the piano and awoke the surprised echoes of the night with the now-renowned melody."

The version of "The Bohemian Girl" to be given from 2YA on Monday, February 15, has been specially arranged for "the air." The favourite musical numbers have all been retained, and will, with the connecting dialogue, be found in their proper sequence, thus maintaining the complete plot.

And now for the story. Arline, daughter of Count Arnheim, Governor of Presburg, when six years old was gored by a wild stag and saved from death only by the prompt action of Thaddeus, a proscribed Polish officer, who, to escape his pursuers, had assumed the disguise of a member of the Gypsy tribe, headed by Devilshoof, which happened to be in the vicinity at the time.

The Count's gratitude prompted him to invite the Gypsies to a fete which was in progress on his estate, but unfortunately the refusal by Thaddeus and Devilshoof to drink the health of the Emperor of Austria caused them to be attacked by the Count's followers. Devilshoof helped Thaddeus to escape, but was himself secured and imprisoned in the castle. He, however, contrived to make his escape and, in revenge,

bore away with him the young Arline, who grew up in the tribe as a gypsy.

The radio version of the opera begins 12 years after the stealing of Arline. The tribe is on its way to the annual fair at Presburg, and we find them encamped on the outskirts of that town. Florestein, a foppish cousin of Arline, has imbibed more than his fair share of wine and, as he comes out of the inn, is robbed by the gypsies of all his belongings, including a valuable diamond medallion. The Queen of the Gypsies arrives and orders the restoration to him of his property, but Devilshoof makes off with the medallion, and the gypsies and Florestein go their several ways.

Arline now wakes from sleep and, coming from her tent, is joined by Thaddeus, to whom she relates a dream she has had, and then asks him to solve the mystery of the scar on her arm. He tells her of her early life, then throws himself at her feet and bathes her hand with kisses.

THE Queen, who also loves Thaddeus, finds them and demands that Thaddeus shall choose between them. Thaddeus declares for Arline and, on the arrival of the rest of the tribe, the Queen, with very bad grace, marries them according to the customs of the tribe. The tribe now departs, leaving the Queen to sing of unrequited love and then to lay the blame for what has occurred upon Devilshoof, from whom she demands the medallion he stole from Florestein.

The scene now changes to the public square of Presburg, where the fair is in progress. The gypsies are all assembled, and Florestein, while endeavouring to flirt with Arline, discovers his medallion which has, for revenge, been placed around her neck by the jealous Queen. He thereupon accuses Arline of its theft, and she is conveyed to the Hall of Justice.

In the next scene we find Count Arnheim, seated at his table, sadly gazing upon a portrait of his long-lost child and meditating, in song, upon his grief. His reverie is interrupted by the entrance of Florestein with Arline and her guards. The Count refuses to believe her guilty of the theft, but declares that he must deliver her into the hands of Justice, whereupon she draws a dagger, and is about to stab herself when the Count grasps her arm and, in doing so, notices the scar upon it. Her explanation of the scar and the timely entrance of Thaddeus with his explanation prove to the Count that she is his lost daughter, and Arline finds herself clasped in her father's arms.

The last scene (Concluded on page 21.)



Harison Cook and Phyllis Archibald in "The Bohemian Girl" during the Carl Rosa opera season at the Garrick Theatre, London.

Cast:

Arline (daughter of Count Arnheim) ... Gretta Stark
 Queen of the Gypsies ... Christina Young
 Thaddeus (a proscribed Pole) ... Richard Maunder
 Florestein (a nephew of the Count) ... Hamilton Harris
 Count Arnheim (Governor of Presburg) and Devilshoof (Chief of the Gypsies) Harison Cook
 Narrator: Daisy Basham