

TWO IMPORTANT DÉBUTS MARK THE WEEK AT METROPOLITAN

Giovanni Martinelli Heard for First Time in "Bohème" and "Butterfly" — Mme. Arndt-Ober a Remarkable "Ortrud" in "Lohengrin" — A Splendid Performance of "The Magic Flute"

CONSIDERED from the purely artistic, as distinct from the social, point of view, the real beginning of the Metropolitan opera season took place on Wednesday evening of last week when the "Magic Flute" was given. Mozart's musical spring of eternal youth was one of last year's most imposing successes and again last week it attracted a vast audience and provoked no end of applause. With this as with certain other masterworks Mr. Gatti-Casazza has accomplished what his predecessors failed to do—he has established them as permanent components of the standard repertoire. In its scenic department the production is about as perfect as a modern stage spectacle can be made, and only in one or two details was last week's cast susceptible of improvement. And given in addition to such scenic and vocal factors so splendid an instrument as the Metropolitan orchestra and such a past master of the secrets of orchestral interpretation as Alfred Hertz the result becomes such as Mozart probably never pictured in his fondest dreams. Besides it was characteristic of Mr. Gatti's artistic judgment to present this typically German opera in the language in which it was written instead of the inappropriate Italian version in which New York had previously been forced to hear it when it heard it at all.

There was laughter aplenty last week over the humorous lines and situations of which Messrs. Goritz and Reiss and Miss Alten made such capital use, though the higher musical beauties of the representation called forth approval quite as emphatic.

Save for Lillian Eubank, an American mezzo-soprano who appeared as the *Second Lady*, and Carl Schlegel, a new baritone who was one of the lesser priests, the cast was devoid of unusual features. Judgment on the work of these newcomers must be withheld until they can be heard in rôles affording them solo opportunities. The ensembles of the three *Ladies* were, however, very beautifully sung, Vera Curtis and Lila Robeson being the remaining complements of the trio.

Little is left to be said of the *Pamina* of Mme. Destinn, the *Queen of the Night* of Frieda Hempel, the *Sarasro* of Carl Braun, the *Papageno* of Mr. Goritz, the *Sprecher* of Mr. Griswold, the *Monostatos* of Mr. Reiss and the *Papagena* of Bella Alten that has not repeatedly been written. All of them rose on this occasion to as high a level as they have ever attained during their Metropolitan careers. Almost poignant in the intensity of its beauty was Mme. Destinn's singing and it reached an unforgettable climax in "Ach! Ich Fühl es." The two florid airs of the *Queen* are often regarded as show pieces and treated as such. Miss Hempel sang them with coruscating brilliancy of execution but invested them at the same time with a broad dramatic accent that rightly belongs to them. Carl Braun, who is one of the greatest basses the Metropolitan has sheltered since Plançon, was never greater than last week while Mr. Griswold's singing of the *Sprecher's* lines was broad, noble and impressive.

Mr. Goritz was said to have been serious-

ly ill several days before the performance. Yet there was no trace of indisposition in the superb voice of this most versatile of baritones nor in the ebullience of his humor. It would be a pleasure to record a triumph commensurate with those of his colleagues for Mr. Urlus, the *Tamino*, but a sense of strict critical conscientiousness makes such a course impossible. The tenor was heard in the part last season and it was then observed that he did not fill its requirements as well as he did those of *Siegfried* or *Tristan*. This time he sang earnestly and with the manifest desire of imbuing the character with all the dramatic and emotional qualities which might be latent in it. Unfortunately he lacks the finish of style, the perfect vocal poise, the elegance and the polish of phrasing necessary to the singing of Mozart. Besides there are times when his beautiful voice takes on a decided throatiness in emission—a quality upon the absence of which his admirers congratulated themselves last year.

Concerning the rest of the performance there remains to be said only that the choruses were thrillingly sung (particularly the sublime "O Isis und Osiris") and that the orchestra under Mr. Hertz—who was applauded long and loudly when he first appeared—surpassed itself in the elasticity, delicacy and abundance of color with which it played its way through Mozart's translucent score.

"Bohème" Introduces Martinelli

"La Bohème" on Thursday evening of last week drew an exceptionally large gathering though Caruso did not figure in the cast. But the multitude was keyed up to a high pitch of expectancy because of the New York debut of Giovanni Martinelli, the young Italian tenor who had won golden opinions from all sorts of people in London and had consequently, as the fashion goes these days, been spoken of as a Caruso rival. A week ago he sang in Philadelphia and Philadelphia, as is their wont, emitted ecstatic echoes.

So it was preordained that a great popular reception awaited the young man at his Metropolitan introduction. Mr. Martinelli had every reason to expand with pride over an ovation for which even Caruso in his glory might have deigned to be thankful. After the "Racconto" there arose a veritable tempest of applause that continued long and was seasoned with strident bravos. At the end of the first act and even more at the close of the third protracted enthusiasm was rampant, while more tangible evidences thereof in the shape of wreaths, flowers and so forth put in an appearance. Estimated by externals the success of Mr. Martinelli was unqualified.

And indeed the young singer is the most valuable Italian tenor which the Metropolitan has gathered into its fold in a number of years. To be sure he seems unlikely to endanger the repute or the popularity to Caruso—judging, that is to say, from what he did last week. If the hysterically disposed would but stop momentarily to realize the dreadful burden of responsibility with which they overwhelm and crush their idols by unhappy distinctions of this kind they would pause in their stupid adulation. Its only effect is to chal-

lenge invidious comparisons which are inevitably harmful. However this may be it is certain that Mr. Martinelli did not exert as potent a spell over the discriminating as the verdicts of London and Philadelphia warranted. The future may reveal his capabilities in a far better light. Extenuating circumstances serving as a balm for possible disappointment were not wanting last week. Dire nervousness held sway over the tenor during a large part of the evening and he was apparently unable to gauge the size and acoustics of the house upon so short an acquaintance. Then, too, he had sung *Rodolfo* but once before (and that only a few days previously), while to complete his misfortunes he caught a cold in Baltimore and brought it with him to New York.

The voice which Martinelli disclosed is

METROPOLITAN OPERA CALENDAR

WEDNESDAY, November 26, Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor"; Mmes. Hempel, Mattfeld; Messrs. Cristalli (début), Amato. Conductor Mr. Polacco.

Thursday afternoon, November 27, Wagner's "Parsifal"; Mmes. Fremstad; Messrs. Jorn, Weil, Goritz, Witherspoon, Schlegel. Conductor, Mr. Hertz.

Thursday evening, November 27, Puccini's "Manon Lescaut"; Mmes. Bori, Duchêne; Messrs. Caruso, Scotti, Seguro. Conductor, Mr. Polacco.

Friday, November 28, Moussorgsky's "Boris Godunov"; Mmes. Ober, Breslau (début), Sparkes, Duchêne; Messrs. Didur, Althouse, Reiss. Conductor, Mr. Toscanini.

Saturday afternoon, November 29, Mozart's "Magic Flute"; Mmes. Destinn, Hempel; Messrs. Urlus, Braun, Goritz, Reiss, Griswold. Conductor, Mr. Hertz.

Monday evening, December 1, Wagner's "Lohengrin"; Mmes. Fremstad, Ober; Messrs. Urlus, Weil, Braun, Schlegel. Conductor, Mr. Hertz.

Wednesday evening, December 3, Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera"; Mmes. Destinn, Hempel, Matzenauer; Messrs. Caruso, Amato, Rothier, De Seguro. Conductor, Mr. Toscanini.

Thursday evening, December 4, Wagner's "Siegfried"; Mmes. Fremstad, Ober, Alten; Messrs. Urlus, Griswold, Reiss, Goritz, Ruysdael. Conductor, Mr. Hertz.

Friday evening, December 5, Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana"; Mmes. Destinn, Duchêne; Messrs. Cristalli, Gilly. Followed by Leoncavallo's "I Pagliacci"; Miss Bori; Messrs. Caruso, Amato. Conductor, Mr. Polacco.

Saturday afternoon, December 6, Offenbach's "Les Contes D'Hoffmann"; Mmes. Hempel, Alda (as Giulietta—her first appearance in the rôle), Bori, Maubourg, Duchêne; Messrs. Jörn, Gilly, Rothier, De Seguro, Didur, Reiss. Conductor, Mr. Polacco.

Saturday evening, December 6, Puccini's "Tosca" (benefit performance); Miss Farrar; Messrs. Martinelli, Scotti. Conductor, Mr. Toscanini.

sufficiently voluminous and of a marked youthful freshness. Possibly on future occasions it may reveal a greater susceptibility to warmth and passion than it did this time, and possibly, too, the tenor will eventually show that he can imbue his singing with a wider variety of color and dynamic gradation. He forced his tones several times at his debut and lapsed occasionally from the pitch.

All in all, Martinelli is a singer whose progress will be carefully watched and for whose presence operagoers may perhaps be devoutly thankful ere long. His stage presence is pleasing and his acting intelligent.

Lucrezia Bori graced the rôle of *Mini*, acting it with pathos and sympathetic understanding and surpassing in her vocal work anything she did last season. Her art is maturing and it was gratifying to note that the stridency which marred her upper register last year has disappeared. The other rôles were in familiar and capable hands. Bella Alten was *Musetta*, Mr. Scotti, *Marcello*, Mr. de Seguro, *Colline*, Mr. Didur, *Schaunard*. Mr. Polacco conducted with splendid authority and brought forth all the radiant hues and delicate details of this cleverly orchestrated score.

Mme. Arndt-Ober's Début in "Lohengrin"

For the past two or three years Mr. Gatti has been accustomed to inaugurate the Wagnerian season with one of the later

dramas. This time, however, he selected "Lohengrin" for the purpose and it was given before a very large audience on Friday evening of last week. Regarded as an entity the performance must be set down as one of the most dramatically eloquent that has been heard here in some time though it was open to criticism in certain of its specifically musical aspects. Much credit for the impetuous spirit and vitality of the proceedings is due the new stage manager, Franz Hörth, in whom the Metropolitan has apparently made a valuable acquisition.

But the dominant feature of the representation was the *Ortrud* of Margarete Arndt-Ober, the young mezzo-soprano from the Berlin Royal Opera, who on this occasion made her first appearance in America. A more commanding realization of Wagner's ideal than this *Ortrud* has not been witnessed upon the Metropolitan stage in many a year. Mme. Ober's triumph was superlative. A houseful of devout Wagnerites cast artistic etiquette to the winds in the second act long enough to blot out a few bars of *Elsa's* music with a perfect hurricane of applause after the newcomer had delivered *Ortrud's* invocation to her heathen gods. When the second curtain fell there were more thunderous plaudits mingled with cheers. It was the obvious desire of the audience to have Mme. Ober before the curtain alone. One or two other members of the cast felt differently about it, though, and effectually succeeded in depriving a great artist of such homage as rightly belonged to her.

By her vivid pantomimic delineation of irony, hauteur, scorn, disappointment and impotent rage in the opening act Mme. Ober quickly proved herself an actress of altogether exceptional penetration and insight. But in the second act she dominated from first to last. For magnificence of sweep, for stupendous potency of emotional utterance, for incisiveness of accent, for breadth and impassioned eloquence, for vitriolic asperity mingled with a grandeur truly regal this *Ortrud* is probably unsurpassed by any living impersonator of the character. Sensitive to every latent dramatic possibility of the part she emphasized details last week that illumine the action with a wealth of significance but to which most singers are oblivious. If any objection might be made it would be to a tendency to drive home obvious points too strongly.

Mme. Ober is a large woman and her voice matches her physical proportions in volume. Moreover it is a superb organ of true mezzo-soprano quality and of extensive compass. At times the singer was inclined to drive it at top pressure with the result of many tones sounding forced—a tendency due most likely to unfamiliarity with the acoustics of the house. Chameleon-like, Mme. Ober's voice changes color with every subtle modification of dramatic sentiment, and perfect is the only term that describes the clarity of her enunciation.

The splendor of the new singer's work may have eclipsed to some extent the achievements of the other participants though these were mostly admirable. Mr. Braun sang the *King's* music opulently and in Mr. Weil's *Telramund* Mme. Ober had a fitting companion to her *Ortrud*. Carl Schlegel was the *Herald*. His voice is not large but it is beautiful in quality and used with skill. Mr. Urlus, the *Lohengrin*, did some singing that was praiseworthy and some that was not. The *Elsa* was Mme. Fremstad, who has never fitted into the rôle as ideally as she does into *Isolde* or *Brünnhilde*. Plastically beautiful as it outwardly is, her impersonation seems too clearly sophisticated. Nor does the music suit her. Last week she was in exceptionally poor vocal form.

The choral portions of the opera were thrillingly sung and the work of the orchestra and Mr. Hertz a miracle of tonal loveliness and lofty poetic beauty.

Farrar and Martinelli in "Butterfly"

A full, fashionable, though not overcrowded house, greeted Geraldine Farrar's debut, this season, in "Madama Butterfly," which was produced last Monday night. Had it not been for the knowledge that a severe attack of bronchitis prevented Miss Farrar's opening the season in Massenet's "Manon," few would have realized, from the general excellence of her performance, that she had been indisposed.

Miss Farrar's *Cio Cio San* is an impersonation familiar to operagoers. In one respect her indisposition aided her because it forced her to reduce, to some extent, the exuberance of gesture with which she is accustomed to decorate this rôle, and which seems to reveal a somewhat mistaken conception of the Japanese woman of the period depicted.

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