

What Will the Music of 2024 A. D. Be Like?

Recent Advances Suggest Startling Possibilities for the Future—When Transmission of Pictures by Telegraphy Is Perfected Opera in Every Home Will Be Feasible—Single Keyboard Piano May Be Scrapped—Revolutionary Murmurs Threaten Present Notation System and Top-Heavy Orchestra

TEN DECADES from now—in 2024 A. D.—what sort of music will people be playing? How will melody be delivered to your home—in the form of scores, records, rolls or in that intangible form, the long-distance radio wave? What new instruments of the orchestra will have been invented? How many keys and keyboards will the piano of that day have? Will key signatures have been forgotten and the musical staff increased in size, to make room for eighth-tones? And will major and minor be as dead as the modes of the Greeks?—How many divisions of the human voice will be in style? Will our great-great-grandchildren listen to mezzo-tenors and super-sopranos? What forms of outrage and violent death will be the subject of librettos? And will there be nightly photo-music-drama broadcast to every village?

These possibilities occur to most folk who speculate on the future. If any of Beethoven's contemporaries were to come back exactly a century later and listen to a concert by one of the "modern" groups, what would be his impressions? We are not so sure that Beethoven himself would be so startled, for he was a modern in his day—and one that stood alone, speaking his own language. But ideas have changed enormously from Brahms to Scriabin.

We can picture Schubert sauntering into a recital of Schönberg's music, peering jovially through his glasses, his stock disarranged. After a moment of confusion, he would doubtless say: "But, of course, the players are tuning up! These modern conductors are so exact that they beat time for this process." Mendelssohn would never recognize some of the modern "songs without words." And as he listened to a radio recital, the Beethoven that once frightened Bonn with his gigantic and temperamental humors would pound his knee and roar: "They used to call my Rasoumovsky Quartets advanced!"

Ether-Tones of the Future

This contrast is sharp, but a great change has come within the last score of years. Is it too much to expect a greater one in five times that period? A hundred years from now the salons of magnificent private houses will be flooded by the touch of a button with divine tones. The marvels of that time will include very probably the mass performance of some great choral work by groups of singers and instrumentalists in many cities. Europe and America may join in the "Missa Solemnis" or the Mozart Requiem. The clumsy beginnings of the telegraphed photograph promise a future development for the sending of visual opera along with the music over the wires or through the air.

Will all this, if it comes to pass, lessen the demand for the services of artists? We do not believe it will prove a substitute for the musician and dancer in the flesh—rather it will demand his cooperation. The result will be very likely a great gain in the profits of a performance. The limits of space will be broken down, and the artist will perform to a vast body of millions of hearers!

Many inconveniences which the touring artist now has to suffer will no doubt be eliminated. It will not be necessary to travel great distances: the strain of the concert tour will be dispensed with. The changes in living habits and daily regimen that make these trips trying even to the seasoned performer will be dispensed with. Artists may not even have to leave their homes, to endure the artificialities of the concert platform.

The compositions of the future will probably exploit much more subtle tonal combinations than do those of today. The tendency is now plainly in that direction, and has been for some time. The increase

of chromatism through the music of Schumann, Chopin, Wagner, Scriabin and moderns such as Stravinsky is a progressive one. Schools of composition founded on a formula, like that of Debussy, decrease instead of extend the variety of tonalism, despite the genius of the individual, and are therefore *cul-de-sacs* in this progress.

Whether the device of quarter-tones will come into general favor is problematic. The difficulties of performing such intervals on our present instruments are very great, and in the case of the piano

defect in the present scale is its limitations in the writing of accidentals. The old rigid systems of key signatures were happy solutions, so far as they went; but when the conception of endless modulation came in (Wagner gave it a considerable "boost"), it rendered them really useless. The key signature had to change with every few measures, and this was extremely confusing.

Many modern composers write entirely without these signatures, to all purposes in the Key of C Major. The consequent peppering of the staff with complicated

together. The strings to this day keep something of this function. The tendency during the last fifty years has been to pile up the subsidiary instruments—the brass with Wagner, the heaven-knows-what-not with Strauss. The result has sometimes been a muddy color, a thick melange of sound.

There is no doubt about it: beginning with Tchaikovsky, the music of the present has become steadily more percussive. That is the primitive stage, not the high estate, of music. If that of the future is to include still more of this element—as the newcomers seek to persuade us—then the strange, blatant harmonies, the crunches, groans and pulsations, must be bound with the strong glue of the lyrical, else music as such will decay. It is the test we apply to present modernist works—the great distinction of Stravinsky being that he achieves lyricism with devices that would have made our forefathers writhe.

It seems that to secure this end, the predominance of the strings must be restored either by increasing them, or by decreasing the whole orchestra proportionally. The fact that the small ensemble has grown into greater popularity within several decades—the wind ensemble undergoing a renaissance—indicates that the modernist is realizing that his effects can be made most surely with an economy of means. The giant orchestras of today may be regarded a century hence with something of the curiosity that we now bestow on Berlioz's ideal ensemble including 240 strings and thirty grand pianos.

Music Dramas of an Aeon Hence

The opera, one may be tempted to believe, will always be—the opera! It flaunts its brazen indiscretions in the face of the chaster forms of music, and everybody continues to love it. There is no reason to think that its theatrical element will be sacrificed to the musical. The first is its very life-blood. When Gluck and Wagner set out to idealize the union of the two, it was usually the musical member of the family that had to change her ways to suit the bad-mannered libretto. In opera, as elsewhere, the play's the thing!

What of the future? The original Richard, it may be confidently said, "started something" when he taught the voices not to know what the orchestra is doing! The great increase in harmonic complexity has all but sounded the death-knell of melody, until we have a way of referring to it as something to be ashamed of! The mediocre composer is able to cover up his lack in this respect by overlaying his thin tunes with thick layers of stuff. To compare music with painting, he has ceased to learn how to draw and spends all his time in mixing and remixing colors. We can imagine the music drama of the future as getting back to firm ground somewhere. The theory that two and two make five,—that a complex combination of bad, indifferent or loathsome melodic parts sounding at the same time makes a mysterious beauty—is absurd.

As to plots? The opera libretto ought to reflect life as it is, with due artistic re-arrangement. As that is growing more and more mechanical, the drama will deal in engines that both crush and comfort. Heroines will accomplish their cheerful vengeance on dastardly baritones by means of the newly-discovered death ray. *Tosca* may give up her dagger in favor of a high-powered explosive, and *Isolde* will certainly mix a swift and certain microbe in her fateful cup. *Lucrezia Borgia*, unless we are mistaken, will specialize in the hookworm. *Mad Lucy* will suffer from *dementia praecox*, or depressive melancholia, instead of the comfortable old vague form of lunacy, and a revision of the libretto will surely include a consultation of psychoanalysts—for comic relief. *Turiddu* will die of tetanus from uncauterized ear-bite, and *Radames* be lethal-gassed.

When that day dawns, who can picture the thrills of the opera subscriber?
R. M. KNERR.



OPERA OF THE FUTURE

In the Music That Will Be Listened to a Hundred Years from Now Great Changes in Form and Content Must Be Expected. Viafora Here Embodies His Idea of the Dramatic Action of a Lyric Play in That Advanced Age, When "Super-Sopranos" Will Sing and All Kinds of "Modern" Machinery Will Be Used on the Opera Stage. The Scene Represents a Mezzo-Baritone Accomplishing His Villainous Designs Upon the Defenseless Heroine by the Use of a Super-Anaesthetic, Instead of the Clumsy Daggers and Poison That Are Now the Fashion!

it is impossible to do so without a specially devised keyboard. From abroad come reports of a new piano that has been made to surmount this difficulty. It has red keys between the customary white and black to supply the additional quarter-tones. Here is a revolution indeed! The whole system of piano teaching, of fingering, of technic, will have to be revised, if this piano of 176 keys comes into general use. At the same time, it is said to be a very practicable keyboard, which does not impose any difficulties on the hand which cannot be met. Other inventors are working along similar lines and perhaps, in time, our pianos may have two or even three keyboards, somewhat like those of the organ, but so arranged that an infinite number of tonal divisions will be possible.

In the case of stringed instruments, changes in number, length and quality of strings may be made; the relative size of the bow may be altered, or some artificial device to facilitate "stopping" be introduced. In the case of valved instruments, corresponding changes will have to be made, these almost certainly increasing the size and complexity of these pieces.

A New Art of Scoring

The present system of musical notation will be revised or extended without a doubt. It is, in fact, antiquated as it stands today. This will, however, not be so momentous a matter as it seems, for such revisions have taken place periodically in the history of music. The great

signs of chromatism has, as one English authority recently remarked, made it impossible to read notes in groups, but only one by one. One solution would be to increase the lines in the staff, doing away with sharps and flats.

More Flexible Notation Wanted

The same difficulty appears in modern scores with regard to time signatures. These change with disconcerting regularity in the modern orchestral work, and it is something of an endurance test that the conductor performs in changing the beat in such works as "Sacre du Printemps" or "The Planets." The solution might be in the adoption of a *standard* measure of a set number of beats, a new arrangement of the values of notes, so that a whole-note, for instance, would always be given one or two beats. It would then be necessary to invent a much greater variety of fractional notes, perhaps with a system of numbering to replace the old convention of the dotted note. Certainly the state of music today clamors for a more flexible notation—with single units for both pitch and tone.

As for the orchestra of the future, that is something of a vexing question! Without pretending to be a sybil, we can venture a belief that its present quantitative development is a misstep in its true evolution. The orchestra took shape around the unit of the string quartet, the other tones being somewhat in the nature of an "embellishment." That is, one choir of instruments originally stood out—as it were, cementing the whole to-