

## HOW CAN WE MAKE OPERA AN AMERICAN INSTITUTION?

This Form of Art Must Have a Home Built by Direct Taxation or Popular Subscription—Project Would Have Better Chance in Cities Where Women Voters Could Force the Issue—American Impresario Essential, Also Native Singers and Opera in English

By DR. P. J. GRANT

IS opera practically possible in America? Yes and no.

Possible, if we regard music as one of life's necessities—just as necessary as food and drink and clothing. Impossible if we are to look upon it, as unfortunately we have done in the past, as the luxury of the rich, a society function where Mrs. Railroad Magnate and Mrs. Porkpacker can sit well forward in their boxes and display their rich jewels to the admiring or envious gaze of two or three thousand of already arrived, nearly arrived or on the way—a society function from which 90 per cent of the decent-minded American public are excluded—and I believe purposely so—by the posterous prices charged.

### Foreign Impresarios Detrimental

Opera will be impossible as long as we employ high priced foreign impresarios who speak scarcely two sentences of our language correctly, who are not in sympathy with either our ideals or our needs. Who, after a lot of high sounding buncombe addressed to the admiring gentlemen of the press about the "bea-u-tif-ful" American voices, offer the owners of these same American voices \$50 per week, while they cable an offer of \$1000 a night to an old lady whose voice flew up the flue aeons and aeons ago.

Many of these beautiful American voices were paid twice that amount for a single performance in Germany—prophets in Germany—the land of music, while here they are mere freaks. Admit it? No. They dare not. You see they are single units whom the foreign manager would trample into non-existence if they dared to open their mouths. Whereas united they could kick Mr. Foreign-Manager into that oblivion from which he never should have emerged.

### A Hypothetical Case

What would you say if to-morrow you found this advertisement in your morning papers:

"Wanted—General manager for the New York Central; must be a foreigner; one giving preference to foreigners preferred."

or

"Wanted—President for Yale University; must be foreigner."

or

"Wanted"—but why go on? These two are sufficient for my purpose. Can't you imagine what would happen, or rather can you? Can't you hear the howl go up, reaching from New York to San Francisco? In comparison King George's tea tax would be a mere episode. And suppose the foreigner did, through some freak of fortune or rather a sinister degenerate influence, secure some such commanding position and proceeded to oust competent Americans and fill their places with foreigners, insolently informing the public that it was a private concern and therefore none of their business. Would we stand for it? Perhaps we

have stood for a good many things, but hardly that.

### People Must Understand

Opera will be impossible as long as it is not given in the language of the people. You cannot persuade the great American public to take an interest in what it does not understand.

At the present time society goes, not because it cares a red cent for opera, but because it regards it as a social duty, or because it wishes to see or be seen. It is a part of its social slavery, not an intellectual treat; not a great humanizing work which brings it into closer touch with its fellow man and the beautiful things of life.

As such opera is a degradation, not an uplifting. Can you wonder that the decent-minded American will have nothing to do with it? Has nothing for it but contempt? And therefore as far as he is concerned it is a failure—does not exist?

### Patience Required

Is opera practically possible in America? I wish I could find a word strong and emphatic enough to express my abiding and absolute belief that it is. But before we can make it a success we must realize that the task ahead of us is not an easy one; in fact, it is a herculean one. It is a task that will require patience, more patience, and then some more.

And first there is a big obstacle which we must get out of the way; it is the word "art." It is a word I am fast coming to hate, not because of the word itself but because of the people who use it. They have been so engrossed with the letter that they have entirely lost sight of the spirit. They have made of it a perverted holy of holies whose light is too dazzling for the eyes of the common people, within whose sanctuary their unholy feet must not tread. They have set themselves up as prophets, whereas they are nothing more than monumental asses whose stubborn hoofs bar the road to progress.

### Music as Humanizing Force

Let us forget for the moment that music is an art. Let us try to look upon it as a great, big humanizing influence, an influence for better and holier things as necessary a part of life as food, drink and clothing and work. And let me say here that I have taken opera because it has the wider and more popular appeal.

But to get down to the practical side of the question. What must we do?

Well, before we can have opera we must provide it with a home, and that home must be the gift of the people either by direct taxation or popular subscription. It must not be the gift of a multimillionaire. Why not? Because from that moment the people's interest in it is killed, or if they have any it is a resentful interest that bodes ill for the opera house's success.

### Personal Sense of Ownership

But if John Smith or Tom Brown has given up his dollar freely or by taxation

it will be quite otherwise; proudly he will point it out to the stranger. "That's our opera house; they soaked me a couple of dollars for it, so I suppose a few of the bricks belong to me. Guess I'll have to go in some time and see what they're doing in there."

Can it be done? Well, let us see what they have done in Germany. There they have at least a hundred opera houses, most of them municipal and therefore built by public taxation. Let us take one of these as an example. The opera house at Cologne. I take Cologne because it is familiar to most American tourists. It has a population of about half a million and its opera house cost its people eight million marks, or nearly two million dollars.

### System in Cologne

There for nine months of the year—not for three or four nights of the week but every night of those nine months—opera is given at prices ranging for the best seats from \$1 to \$2, according to the opera given. A seat in the gallery will cost you a quarter; if you have sturdy legs and don't mind the standing—well, you can stand for 50 pfennings (12½ cents).

Impossible, you say? How can they give good opera or pay their artists decent wages? My dear reader, I have lived several years in Germany. I have seen opera performances in most of its cities and I have never seen a really bad performance. Haven't you the proof right here? Where do we get the artists for German opera if not from Germany?

As to the pay. The American tenor at Freiburg in Breisgau, a town of not quite 85,000 people, received a salary of \$6,000 for a season of eight months. Not so bad, eh?

### Opera Part of Normal Lives

You see opera in Germany is a normal part of the normal lives of normal people. They do not ask for the exotic any more than they would ask for caviar with every meal. They would see in the vocal pyrotechnics of Signor "Bullvoci" a blasphemy on art fit more for the monkey house than the stage of an artistic institution.

In Cologne I know one young American singer who was receiving a salary of 8000 marks (\$2,000). The director of one of our American opera houses offered her a thousand less than she was receiving in Germany.

In Cologne the director (he is also the head of the municipal play house) is engaged for a period of three years. If he wishes to be re-engaged he must show results, and he can only show results by employing the best material. He is not influenced by the social set. He is not responsible to them but to the people. He can keep down the deficit in no other way.

### Deficit of \$150,000

In Cologne the deficit is usually about \$150,000. The people pay this cheerfully and willingly because it is to them as much a municipal necessity as clean streets or a good police force.

You can go from busy, populous Cologne with its 500,000 souls to tiny Cottbus with its 50,000 and there you find one of the prettiest little opera houses you ever laid eyes on, with lounging room, billiard room and library for the use of the artists. "What," you exclaim, "grand opera and a grand opera house in a town of 50,000 inhabitants? What are you trying to give us?" Well, if you don't believe me ask Walker, a young American basso who began his career there.

Germany is three-fourths the size of Texas. It has about three-fourths of our

population and in wealth it does not begin to compare with us.

### In Hands of People

Here opera is a failure (and I do not except the Metropolitan); there it is a success. Why? Because in Germany opera is in the hands of the people and is of the soul of the people.

When shall we make a beginning? Not in New York. I am forced to—and regret to—believe. I know that most New Yorkers look upon their city as the only thing worth considering and the rest of the country is a mere and a negligible item. Well, there are many intelligent Americans who look upon New York as the tail, and a very mangy one at that. They ask you what great movement for the betterment of the people ever had its birth here.

### Women's Clubs' Opportunity

Of course it could be done if the organized Women's Clubs took the matter in hand and went about it in the right way.

Personally I think it would have a much better chance in a city where the women have the right to vote and could force the issue. It could be a combination municipal opera and play house where opera could be given three nights of the week and a stock company could present plays the other three.

It is essentially necessary that the director be an American, one who has a heartfelt belief that the American artist of to-day, if only given the proper chance and encouragement, is the equal of any artist in the world. Our actors, our painters, our sculptors, are. Why not our opera singers?

### Gain Offsets Loss

The opera must be given in English. I am perfectly willing to admit that it loses a great deal in translation; that the English language has not the smoothness of the French or liquidity of the Italian; but the loss will be far and away offset by the gain. The people will understand.

The majority of the singers must be American if not by birth at least by adoption. To meet the demands of the exotically inclined, the so-called great artists could be engaged for "guest" appearances.

Will it pay? In some ways immeasurably so. Financially I am afraid not, at least not at first. For the first three years we must expect a deficit, but we must have patience.

### An Economic Advantage

Every step upward of our people means less money spent on jails, saloons and police. Every legitimate means of enjoyment withdrawn from the people, whether it be public music in the parks or public baths, means so much more time for illegitimate pleasures, and therefore an increase of crime, and increase of crime means an increase of city expenses.

LUCILE  
**ORRELL**

'CELLIST

Management

R. E. JOHNSTON

1451 Broadway New York City



RODERICK WHITE

**GODDOWSKY** TOUR OF THE UNITED STATES  
KNABE PIANO USED

Exclusive Management FOSTER & DAVID  
500 Fifth Avenue, New York

MAUDE DOOLITTLE PIANIST—INSTRUCTION  
TUCKER 106 Morningside Drive, New York.  
10 YEARS AT OBERLIN CONSERVATORY Mgt. Charles Prescott Poore, 70 Fifth Avenue. 8905 Morning.

**MARY JORDAN**  
CONTRALTO

FOSTER & DAVID, 500 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

**OSCAR SAENGER**  
WILL RESUME TEACHING ON OCTOBER 1

**ALFRED D. SHAW**  
TENOR

CONCERT ORATORIO  
ADDRESS: 23 West 42nd STREET - - - NEW YORK

**DORA BECKER** VIOLINIST

Mgt. Charles Prescott Poore, 70 Fifth Ave., New York. Tel., 1568 Chelsea  
Personal Address. 18 Hedden Terrace, Newark, N. J. Tel., 1139 Waverly

**TEACHER OF VOICE** Pupils taught from the beginning to the final preparation for the concert or operatic stage.  
Address: L. LILLY, Secretary, 6 East 81st St., New York. Tel. 687 Lenox