

GIVING CONCERTS AT THE FRONT IN FRANCE

Music the One Thing More Than All Others that Wounded Soldiers Seem to Crave, and Herbert Fryer, the English Pianist, Recounts His Experiences in Supplying it Last Summer—Work that Benefits Needy Musicians as Well as the Soldiers

By HERBERT FRYER

IT was my great privilege to have the opportunity of taking concert parties to the front in France during my recent vacation in Europe, a wonderful, unforgettable and unique experience, full of vivid and unusual impressions, many of which will last a lifetime.

These concerts are arranged in London by Lena Ashwell, one of our greatest stage favorites, being organized at the Three Arts Club and under the patronage of the Princess Victoria. Primarily the scheme is to give entertainment to the British soldiers in France (not in the trenches, as so many people rather ridiculously imagine, nor within a dangerous distance of the firing line, but in the base hospitals, camps, etc., in the Dieppe-to-Boulogne district, or the Havre-Rouen neighborhood), for they say, one and all, the thing for which they pine most of all is music.

Secondarily, and of almost equal importance, these concerts give engagements to a large number of artists, many of whom, as in all the countries where war now rages, are in very reduced circumstances, and although they only get "all expenses paid" and about twenty dollars a week (the maximum is twenty-five dollars, the minimum fifteen dollars) it does help many of them along, and this particularly during July, August and September, when things are always



Herbert Fryer, the English Pianist, and, on the Right, a View of One of the Concert Parties He Managed. In the Group Mr. Fryer May Be Identified by the Arrow

difficult for professional people. Of course, those of the artists who can afford to, give their services without recompense.

Now, before going further, I wish to state that all this is necessarily a costly affair (entailing artist fees, passage money, hotel bills, procuring of passports, etc.), and it takes about \$300 per week to keep one of these parties going, a party of seven or eight artists. For the sake of the men at the front, who have given up everything and are sacrificing their lives by the thousands for their country, as well as for our brothers and sisters in art, I would appeal to all my colleagues in the profession to assist me in this work by sending me a donation toward the Concerts at the Front Funds.

At this time it will be a most welcome Christmas present, from many who are not experiencing trying times in this

country to those who are having real struggles to keep the wolf from the door. This appeal is made both to the amateurs and professional musicians of the United States.

Three Concerts a Day

I went to France in the capacity of manager, pianist, accompanist, interpreter, program-maker, etc., and, as we gave an average of three concerts per day and sometimes four, and about seventy concerts in five weeks, it can be readily imagined that it was hard work for everybody concerned. I know that on some days I accompanied about fifty songs and violin or cello pieces, besides playing in trio numbers and in occasional solos, although the upright pianos were not often in a fit enough condition to allow me the latter pleasure. It was my duty to draw up the programs (slightly different for each concert) and to announce them, having previously introduced my artists to our audience.

The audience was composed of the following: Reinforcements (men waiting to go to the front), Red Cross ambulance drivers, Royal Army Medical Corps (doctors, nurses, stretcher-bearers, etc.), officers of all ranks, Canadians, Army Service Corps (those who look after supplies, horses, etc.), and most important of all, the wounded and convalescing invalids.

The majority of the concerts are given in the Y. M. C. A. huts, large wooden structures, holding from 300 to 600 persons, the rest being held in the beautiful hotels, casinos and theaters in France, all now converted into hospitals and convalescent homes. In these latter are given the concerts to the wounded, generally with the poor patients lined up in their beds, rows and rows of them—a most impressive sight. On one or two occasions, the weather being very beautiful and warm, we gave a concert in the open air, the beds being placed in rows, on a hill sloping down to an improvised platform, thus forming a delightful natural concert hall. From an acoustic point of view these concerts and the few that we gave under canvas, were extremely trying to the artists, and the fact that it was very windy made the conditions rather difficult, but also amusing sometimes.

If you could have seen the faces of these poor wounded fellows at the commencement of the concerts, when they felt scarcely able to be present at all, and then notice the change that came over them as the music took them out of themselves and transported them back to the old country and to their homes, you would realize what it means to them all (and also, incidentally, to the sound and healthy ones by relieving the often terrible monotony of the nerve-wearing life they are leading) and you would believe, with the doctors and nurses, that our music was often more beneficial than medicines and surgery.

We heard afterward that our concerts gave them something fresh to talk about and food for thought for days and we received appreciation and reward for our efforts at the end of each concert by such cheers as one could hear issued only from the throats of hundreds of soldiers. Cheers from a mass of 1000 British "Tommies" (the Canadians in particular have fine lungs!) are something not to be forgotten! To visit the wards, taking tobacco and cigarettes and maga-

zines, etc., was a delightful experience and one heard of miraculous escapes and thrilling and often awful adventures and of things that could not have been invented by the most vivid imagination.

Sort of Music Wanted

The music that was most constantly asked for was greatly varied in character, among that which was chosen being "Killarney," "Annie Laurie," "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes," "The Rosary," "No, John; No, John" (Somerset Folk Song), "The Moonlight Sonata," "Barcarolle" (Tales of Hoffmann), "The Old Brigade," "The Lost Chord," "Abide with Me," "Ave Maria" (Bach-Gounod) and many chorus songs which they knew or were gradually learning, such as "Tipperary," "Somewhere in France," "Till the Boys Come Home," etc. The Westminster Singers (male quartet) sang many delightful glees. Catches and humorous songs had a huge success. A cousin of mine, a Red Cross nurse, whom I met unexpectedly in a hospital one day, gave me some splendid verses, quite Kipling-esque, which were written by a private in the Third Worcestershire Regiment, entitled, "Balloo, Boulogne and Blighty," which I have set to music and which is now, I believe, being marched to by hundreds of the men. Balloo is the Tommies' equivalent for Bailleul and Blighty is what the Tommies in India call England, and it is now the regular name used by all the army men. The song is one of rejoicing in traveling back to "Blighty" from "Balloo" via Boulogne in a Red Cross train and a Red Cross ship.

As a contrast to the rush and bustle of the performers' part of all this, there were delightful tea parties in nurses' mess tents, between the afternoon concerts, and lunches and dinners (or rather late suppers) with the officers in their mess quarters, when there were mild speeches and after musical contributions by our hosts, for there is no lack of talent very often among the officers, and we had some wonderfully good recitations and humorous songs occasionally. One evening the Fifty-first Highland Division prepared a very pleasant surprise in the shape of Highland flings, reels and sword dances, done in most expert and picturesque fashion by members of the regiment.

In one camp I ran across three doctors, friends of mine from Harvard, and the next day they took me over the American Hospital and showed me a most marvelous X-Ray apparatus, and, most wonderful of all, specimens of the extraordinary facial surgery that is being performed, whereby men who are, at present, almost impossible to look upon, will be made presentable, by means of new noses, jaws, teeth, etc. The photograph accompanying these lines was taken one day when the party was on its way to Le Tréport from Dieppe in a Red Cross ambulance wagon, a journey of about twenty miles.

Bringing Home War's Terrors

We heard sometimes on paying a return visit to a camp, that several soldiers to whom we had performed had been killed or wounded since we had been there before (a matter of a week or two), which made us realize the terrors of this fearful war, particularly when one heard of men being killed with whom one had shaken hands.

I was told on good authority that the men in the trenches, under furious and deafening bursting of shells, etc., have been known to run a sweepstake on the chances of who would be left, unhit or alive, by a certain hour! This seems to us a callous proceeding, but perhaps it is a mercy that they can become so injured to the terror of modern warfare.

The Y. M. C. A. is doing a truly wonderful work with its huts and is bearing some share in the expenses of these concert tours. They now have eighty huts and tents in France.

More artists could be sent if funds permitted. May I once more make an appeal to all the readers of MUSICAL AMERICA to assist me by either direct donation or by collecting small amounts from pupils and friends, to whom this object can scarcely fail to appeal? Please send checks or bills to me, in care of MUSICAL AMERICA, or to me direct, 300 West Eighty-fifth Street, New York.

To further this scheme, I am giving short lecture-recitals in aid of the funds before musical clubs, societies, universities, colleges and schools, and about the middle of January I purpose giving a Chopin recital in Æolian Hall, New York, the proceeds to be entirely given to the Concerts at the Front Fund.

Mme. Blanche Arral, coloratura soprano, has been singing at the Orpheum, New Orleans. Included in her offerings were the Polonaise from "Mignon" and "Valse d'oiseau" of Varney.



Photo © Matzene

LEONORA ALLEN
Soprano

"Her upper tones are ravishingly beautiful!"
—Minneapolis Journal
"A voice of lovely quality, clear and even!"
—Post, Chicago

RE-ENGAGED for
MINNEAPOLIS SYMPHONY
SPRING TOUR

Address: UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MUSIC, Ann Arbor, Mich.