

NOT CARUSO BUT McCORMACK MUSIC'S GREATEST MONEY-MAKER

Irish Tenor "Sings More, Earns, Spends and Saves More" than Any Other Artist—A Story to Every Song He Sings—His New York Home and His Art Collection

THERE are no "lonesome tunes" in Ireland. At least, there are none since John McCormack took the little wild flowers of poesy from the peat bogs where Tom Moore left them. The man from Athlone has gone singing to multitudes around the world. He is the first musician to surpass Caruso as a money getter here in America, the land of free-handed spending for old masters or live prima donnas, or whatever else it likes. Only the other day, says the New York Times, McCormack faced the greatest throng of his career out in San Francisco's 10,000-capacity municipal auditorium, that paid \$13,258 to hear him.

The famous figure of \$26,000 when Jenny Lind landed at Castle Garden was obtained by auction sale, and the Swedish nightingale's share of \$10,000 went to New York charities. Patti was dumb without a \$5,000 certified check. McCormack's starting fee is \$3,000, where Caruso's, modestly stated, is "at least \$2,500" in opera and much more outside. Across the continent, as at Shreveport, La., recently, a date from the Irish tenor pays the deficit in local treasuries left by less favored stars. It would interest some people to know whose deficits he paid with \$8,000 houses recently in Omaha and Milwaukee.

John McCormack sings more, earns, spends, and saves more, 'tis said, than any other captain, general or feminine Jeanne d'Arc of musical industry to-day. His managers, who helped to build up his great following, naturally don't tell all they know. But his present season looks like \$300,000 to shrewd observers on the outside. Last year McCormack made more money than anybody in "talking machine" records. It was \$134,000 then, and it will pass \$150,000 this year. As in Caruso's case, the piling up of penny profits from far-away places has come to overshadow even the dollars drawn from audiences here.

The highest number of song records sold is also McCormack's. Caruso gets 15 per cent on some; that is, he has his 50 cents whether it's a \$3 or \$5 sale. The Italian is the "hare" and McCormack is the "tortoise," whose 10 per cent flat rate rolls up top figures at the finish of the race. His "Sunshine of Your Smile" in thirty days caught \$120,000 ready cash, which meant for the singer \$12,000 for one song in one month. "I Hear You Calling Me" was the biggest record seller in any country at any time; issued five years ago, it is in as much demand now as the first season.

The Tenor's Youth

Like his hero in Handel's newly discovered air of the "Poor Irish Lad," McCormack started life without a fortune and has traveled far. There the resemblance stops. He does not "weep where nature smiles," nor do all his kinsfolk "lie beneath the sod." His Irish parents came from Sligo to Athlone in the valley of the Shannon, where the father worked in a woolen mill until the famous son took father and mother both to a fine place of their own at Greystones in the suburbs of Dublin. He has two sisters married over there, another a nurse in the chief city, and the youngest in school yet.

As usual among singing folk, there's a yarn that one of John's brothers had the better natural voice, but the fairies at birth didn't put the artistic impulse into that other fellow's soul. John McCormack just sang because the music was inside and it had to come out. He grew up in Athlone, a town of 15,000 population, all of whom might turn off an Irish tune upon occasion. Apocryphal, perhaps, is the story that he was suspended from a priest's school in Sligo because he would stay out nights, serenading on the lake. But the schoolboys there believed it.

There's another story that hasn't been told in America, according to one of the tenor's friends. "An old fiddler and a ballad singer," said this man—adding that Ireland is full of such odd characters—"stood on a street corner of a 'fair' day in Athlone selling 'twelve songs for a penny.' The 'kid' of 8 or 9 years heard and followed them. He was

learning to be a minstrel boy in Mullingar, two days away, when the family at last heard of him. John got no licking. They were glad enough to have him back home after they'd been dragging the Shannon for their boy. Perhaps they'd heard of your Charlie Ross. At any rate, that's when McCormack learned his first ballad," the speaker concluded, "and it was 'Molly Brannigan' that he sang when he came home." At 18 years the future tenor went up to Dublin to take examinations for the customs service. He lodged with an old college mate, Dr. Dalton, who took him to Vincent O'Brien, the organist. "Man, there's a fortune in that voice," said O'Brien; "don't think of any other career but a singer."

The song that reached the musician's heart was "Then You'll Remember Me," from Balfe's opera, "The Bohemian Girl." Thanks to these friends, the unknown youth was entered for the annual Feis Ceoil and carefully groomed for that contest. He carried off first prize with Handel's aria, "Tell Fair Irene," as so often since "The Snowy Breasted Pearl." This was his first ballad in America, too, at the Manhattan Opera House on a Sunday night in 1909, when Oscar Hammerstein was consul.

McCormack always had a curious feeling about a little incident that happened to him out in Australia. Long famous then, he had given a concert one night, when an old fellow in shabby clothes but with an air of refinement turned up at the stage door and, after handing a bit of paper to the tenor, disappeared. The note bore eight lines of verse, ending: "Back the faith of childhood bring—Minstrel Boy, I've heard you sing." Something in the man's face as he "beat it" away suggested that other minstrel whom the little John had once followed from Athlone to Mullingar.

McCormack, at any rate, got the idea that it was the old man from back in Ireland, and he believes so to this day. As an associate of his later career puts it, there's a story to every song. Take "The Irish Emigrant." When McCormack went a-courting in Dublin his future father-in-law, a busy man, used to join the Foley family party at the close of the evening and always ask for that old tune, to the words "I'm Sitting on the Stile, Mary." Every time the tenor repeats it he lives over the scene in that little Dublin parlor. "I've seen him come off the stage," said a man, "with tears in his eyes after the song, so that he couldn't take an encore."

Year's Study in Italy

When he first sang "Mother Machree" in Sacramento he broke down completely and would not finish. Yet his "effects" are not all impromptu. McCormack spent a year or more studying in Italy. "Not that the teaching is better," he once explained, "but I could live 500 years over there for what it costs for one year in New York."

His Milan maestro was Sabbatini. "Good old man that he was," said the pupil, "he told me, 'God placed your voice, it's best I leave it alone.'" The old schoolman put him over the high scales, saying, "That is the bridge you must cross." He made his first operatic appearance at a suburban theater near Genoa in Mascagni's "Amico Fritz." On his next chance, in "Trovatore," he opened his mouth for a top note that wouldn't come, but the orchestra noise covered it and the audience gave him an ovation. The following night he sang the note and got hardly a hand.

At his third opera, "Faust," in another small town, he walked off the stage in terror. An impresario explained to the Italians, who can be "the cruelest public in the world." The house was amused and flattered by the young man's fright, and when he came back their kindly attitude carried him through to the end.

In America generally, as here in New York, his audiences nowadays run often as high as 7000 persons, clamoring for the popular old songs. He has stuck to his guns in the matter of classic training, singing Mozart best, perhaps, and sometimes Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, always in English; even the Russian Rachmaninoff, or serious pieces by his American friends.

At his home in New York, overlooking Carnegie Hall and the approaches to Central Park, an interesting family

surrounds the big man of the concert stage. If the youngsters and their mother and aunt are out there are reminders of them at the entrance door. Marble busts of nine-year-old Cyril and seven-year-old Gwen are in the hallway, gazing in mild surprise at a housewarming "Romeo and Juliet" by the great Rodin. The children's sculptor, Mario Korbel, has also done McCormack in a brown study faithfully reproduced in bronze.

The Rembrandt Collection

There are paintings by Goldbeck of Mrs. McCormack, dark-haired, in a crimson gown at the door of the pink and gold drawing room, and life-size, all in white, in the studio. This last is the room of the Rembrandts. As you enter a ruddy-cheeked girl, Rembrandt's sister, smiles at you from the opposite wall in her headdress of tiny jewels, big earrings, soft collar, and dark gown. The old "Burgomaster," also called "The Rabbi," is alongside beyond a mantel that holds only a colossal antique enamel clock.

There's a reason for the Rembrandts. It's the children again. "Do you know," explained their father to a visitor the other day, "these youngsters already can talk to you about this 300-year-old little lady, and her brother who painted her, as familiarly as they speak of their cousins in Ireland. That's worth a lot to them. I count the pleasure we get from pictures like that as my interest on the money I'd otherwise put into bonds. We don't know what the war is going to do to some securities, but the value of the pictures is permanent and can't be touched."

Published reports said the "old masters" had caught McCormack's fancy to the tune of a quarter million or so. When the art dealers announced his purchases the tenor was pestered with questions as to the price. "One fellow," he recalled, "got quite angry because I wouldn't tell him, and said it was 'a semi-

public matter.' I told him that might be true, but the 'other half' was my own private business." These canvases were 15 to 20 in. high, and experts guessed their value around \$10,000 an inch.

Across the room from the two priceless heads of the collection hung one of Whistler's famous "Nocturnes," a river of gray, with distant shore and splashes of lights. The American's work was held for thirty years by an English family, who had now sold it overseas for perhaps \$30,000. To show the arrangement of soft tones, McCormack turned out all lights in the room but one, leaving in darkness his lawyer, who was at the moment preparing an application for American citizenship that the tenor filed with the courts over in Philadelphia a few days later.

There were other pictures; next to the "Burgomaster" a pair of quaint peasants by David Teniers, equally aged, and in a corner by Rembrandt's sister. Corot's "Bathing Nymphs," quoted at \$20,000 in the sale of Andrew Freedman's collection. In the hall was Blakelock's "Spring Rock Cove," with more by other artists, and in the dining room bright-flowered scenes from Ireland by Mary Carlisle and a landscape by J. F. Murphy.

America has been McCormack's home for three years continuously since the war, and he expects to be a citizen in two years more. The matter has been under consideration much longer than that, however, having been proposed when the tenor was in Washington during the Administration of former President Taft, who, indeed, offered to be his sponsor.

McCormack seriously hopes to retire from the stage by the time he's 40, and take an interest in public affairs—perhaps run for office—who knows? He might play the fiddle, for he is the possessor of Wieniawski's own Guarnerius; or even try literature, for he lately paid \$2,400 for Eugene Field's manuscript of "Little Boy Blue."

THE ART SUPPLEMENT KITTY CHEATHAM

IT is given to few artists as to Kitty Cheatham to read the signs of the times and to interpret them in spirit and in beauty. Reviewing the career of Miss Cheatham, who is the subject of the Art Supplement accompanying this week's issue of MUSICAL AMERICA, it will be recognized how infallibly this American woman has always served as a beacon light of the eternal verities, how completely she has been the revelator of the most pressing needs of the hour, how penetratingly she has discerned its messages and brought them home to those of lesser vision. To-day, in a crucial and awful hour, she understands the significance of matters as can only a great soul. She perceives in the present darkness the presage of a glorious and enduring light of resurrection, the universal travail that precedes the emergence of a new consciousness. It is not a time for the exploitation of the trivial and the superficial and Miss Cheatham is busy to-day with the labor of showing

forth the great issues of the hour.

To this end she has been collaborating with the moving spirits of the Community Chorus. From the start she recognized the tremendous significance of the forces embodied in this and from the start she affiliated herself with it. To her enthusiasm, to her example and incentive the whole movement, with its tremendous significance, owes vastly more than the average person realizes.

It is through Miss Cheatham that a number of the chorus's most famous songs—including the uplifting and illuminating national hymn "Our America," by Augusta Stetson—have been brought to Conductor Barnhart's attention. And Miss Cheatham has worked arduously with and for these people who sing for the joy, the sense of fraternity and the elevating happiness of co-operation, since the organization was founded. When the chorus presented the "Creation" at the New York Hippodrome recently Miss Cheatham not only took part in the oratorio, but delighted her hearers beforehand by relating some facts about Haydn and his masterwork and at another time during the evening impressed them by her singing of Mrs. Stetson's "Love's Lullaby." The solemn attention of the vast gathering was a wondrous tribute to the force of the message she declared.

MUSICAL ARTISTS HEARD ON "ALLEY FESTA" PROGRAMS

Kitty Cheatham, Thomas Chalmers and Yvonne de Tréville Appear in Allied Relief Benefit

MacDougal Alley, famous haunt of New York sculptors and artists, doffed its air of Old-World quiet on Thursday, June 6, and for five days became a Neapolitan street, adding, as a result, thousands of dollars to the coffers of the Allied Relief funds. Among the musical artists appearing at the "Alley Festa" were Thomas Chalmers, baritone of the Metropolitan Opera Company; Kitty Cheatham and Yvonne de Tréville. Mr. Chalmers and Miss Cheatham were heard on the opening night of the festa, "American night," when the proceeds went to American Red Cross work. The baritone gave three Italian arias, supplementing his offerings with several encores. Miss Cheatham introduced the new "Our America" hymn, music by Augusta C. Stetson, to the accompaniment of Sousa's Band, which was led by the March King. Mr. Chalmers gave his program first on the balcony of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney's studio, which had been transformed into a Venetian garden, and later for a group of invited

guests in a private apartment of the studio.

Yvonne de Tréville was the star of the festa on "French night," singing "The Bells of Rheims." The offering was so successful that every copy of the song had been disposed of by the Patriotic Song Committee an hour after Mlle. de Tréville's program was given. The singer added the "Star-Spangled Banner" to her offerings, gowned in a costume representing the flags of America and France.

Mayor Mitchel opened the festa with a stirring appeal for liberal contributions, both to the patriotic funds which the festa had been planned, and for the "Liberty" booth, which gathered in thousands of dollars for the loan during festa week.

Kind Words from Ohio

To the Editor of MUSICAL AMERICA:

The last issue of MUSICAL AMERICA has just arrived. I read with pleasure your splendid account of our third annual May festival. I wish to thank you most sincerely. Wishing MUSICAL AMERICA great success,

ERNEST HESSER,
Director of Music.

State Normal College,
Bowling Green, Ohio,
June 4, 1917.