

# MOVIES DISCARD RAGTIME FOR SYMPHONIC MUSIC

Photoplay Theaters Which Began with a Piano and a Drum Now Serve Patrons with Excellent Orchestral Organ Programs—First Innovation Was the Pipe Organ

By JOHN ALAN HAUGHTON

There is no phase of music in which the development for the better has been so meteoric and yet so steady as in the moving-picture house. Hardly more than a decade ago motion picture houses were regarded more or less as permanent side-shows, but we now have attractive and substantial theaters, faultless as regards architecture and comfort, theaters built exclusively for the screen drama. It is natural that as the mechanical side of the pictures improved and the best dramatic stars no longer disdain to act upon the screen that the type of patron also improved, the theatergoer who had enjoyed the drama on Broadway was interested in seeing his favorite star on the screen. Also the popular screen-actor with little or no stage experience came to a place of prominence in his own field.

Consequently, the mechanism, the drama and the building having improved and a more cultivated class having become patrons of the picture-drama, it was necessary that the music improve also. Pioneers among movie-fans have had sad recollections of the lugubrious upright piano and the reiterated "Humoresque," the Sextet from "Lucia" and "Traumerei," with or without sudden and strange transitions in between.

The most startling innovation was the pipe-organ. There is some doubt as to where the innovation was made and the exact date. According to Rollo Maitland, organist at the Stanley Theater, Philadelphia, organ accompaniment was used at the Wanamaker store in that city in 1908 for a photoplay of "Paul Revere's Ride." In 1911, motion picture theaters in San Francisco already had pipe organs, but it was not until the next year that New York followed suit, when the Fourteenth Street Theater installed an organ. At the present day it is a foregone conclusion that all the new motion-picture houses have large pipe-organs, and in the case of theaters adapted for this style of entertainment the organ is perhaps the line of demarcation. The significance of this from the point of view of the musician is enormous. Heretofore the field for the organist has been exceedingly small, but with the advent of the pipe-organ into the movie-house it has been tremendously broadened, and the pay in proportion, so that many excellent organists have given up church positions for the more remunerative movie-theater.

### New Type of Playing

Curiously enough, a new and higher type of organ playing has also arisen to meet the wider need of the theater. Mere technique, a knowledge of registration no longer suffice, nor is ability to accompany as large an asset as heretofore. Mr. Maitland, in an article in a recent number of *The Console*, says: "A really capable photoplay organist should possess more than ordinary musicianship. He should be able to play the organ in a legitimate manner, have a knowledge of harmony, compositions for other instruments, also a sense of tone and knowledge of registration." And this, of a performer in a movie-house where, ten years ago, no more was demanded than a piano and an indefinite flow of ragtime and popular numbers! Does it not give pause to the thinking musician? Alfred Robyn and Firmin Swinnin at the Rialto and Arthur Depew and Ralph Brigham at the Strand preside over instruments which equal any in New York churches.

But the organ is not the only musical newcomer in the photoplay house. Al-



Oscar Spirescu, Conductor at the Strand Theater, New York

most as unforeseen is the orchestra, not merely a few instruments such as one finds ordinarily in the theater, but a band of trained musicians under an efficient conductor. In short, an orchestra capable of playing a Beethoven Symphony.

The first attempt at an orchestra in a movie theater was probably that at the Regent Theater on 116th Street, New York City, some time about 1912. Associated in this theater were Sam Rothapel, now manager of the Rialto, and Carl Edouardo, now musical director at the Strand. Mr. Edouardo conceived the idea of having a small orchestra of about ten members play an overture to the picture. The men were grouped around a fountain on the stage, and, as Mr. Edouardo directed, a spotlight was thrown on him. The first number played was the overture to "William Tell."

Naturally, the next step was to have a regular musical accompaniment to the picture. As this could not be done at will by the orchestra, as in the case of the single pianist, it was necessary to arrange it beforehand in the form of a sort of continuous music-scenario which should correspond with the scenes on the screen. S. M. Berg, who was identified with the Regent Theater, claims the idea as his.

In preparing the music-scenario the film is given a preliminary showing and is timed with a stop-watch. The music is then adapted from every conceivable source. The spaces are filled in by the director, and in feature films leading motives are composed for the principal characters. In some cases these themes reach a high state of development. In order to facilitate the work of the musical director, publishers make catalogues of music covering every possible dramatic situation. These numbers are not always original and in some cases they are composed especially for the publisher.

### Growth of the Orchestra

The orchestra has developed from the ten men at the Regent to the complete symphony orchestra at the Strand and the Rialto. As a natural result of having an orchestra of such proportions, the conductors were unwilling to remain merely an accompaniment to the picture, hence the symphony concerts which were

New Type of Accompaniments Calls for Excellent Musicianship and Special Form of Composition—Give Carl Edouardo of New York Credit for Establishing First Orchestra in a Motion Picture House

inaugurated at the Strand in May, 1914. These concerts by an orchestra of fifty, under the direction of Oscar Spirescu, have a large following, and besides giving the best of the lighter symphony music feature works by American composers and have excellent soloists. Hugo Riesenfeld at the Rialto has forty-seven men under his baton and gives educational symphony concerts for children at which the programs are made up of melodious works by the best composers and each number is explained, before being played, by Sigmund Spaeth of the *Evening Mail*. It is easily seen how absolutely unlimited is the educational value of these concerts.

But to come back to the orchestra as accompaniment to the pictures. Originally we had the piano (and often with a drum) and mostly ragtime. Now we have the symphony orchestra and, in consequence, symphony music with a modicum of ragtime when the picture-scene demands it.

At the Rialto, the week of Dec. 17, the feature-film was "The Devil Stone" with Geraldine Farrar as the star. There was elaborate thematic development, veritable "leitmotif" easily recognizable and highly characteristic. Especially noticeable ones were the "Curse" and the "Origin of the Stone." Much of the music was original, but there were used excerpts from a suite of Grieg, the same composer's "Sigurd Jorsalfar," two numbers by Cristiaan Kriens and even a number from Méhul's "Joseph." At the



Photo by Arnold Genthe

Hugo Riesenfeld, Conductor of the Rialto Symphony Orchestra

Strand, for a film of Russian war pictures, the prominent musical number was Sibelius' "Finlandia." For "The Cinderella Man," a lighter drama, numbers by Chaminade and Thomé, besides popular music.

At the Broadway Theater, formerly a legitimate house, Harry Hopkins is musical director, presiding over an orchestra of twenty men and a three-manual organ. The recent feature-film was a somewhat melodramatic affair, requiring a wide range of music. German's "Henry VIII Suite," composed for Sir Henry Irving's production of the play, was used, Chopin's Funeral March, Delibes's

"Coppelia" and Dvorak's "New World Symphony."

The movie theater has indeed progressed musically at a rate which is startling even in this land of general rapidity.

## MUSIC VITAL FACTOR IN BOSTON SCHOOL ELECTION

Defeat of Two Reactionary Members Assures City's Return to Modern Music Course

BOSTON, Dec. 22.—Under the chairmanship of Joseph Lee, the Boston Board of Education about two years ago made a vital change in teaching music in the schools. Briefly stated, it consisted in substituting rote singing for instruction in reading in the lower grades of the grammar schools, this at a time when practically all cities were enriching their courses in theory. Mr. Lee, who has been nine years a member of the board, and Mr. Kenny, running as nominees of the Public School Association, have just been defeated for election, Dec. 18, by R. J. Lane, and M. H. Corcoran, who made an especial attack on the retrograde step in school music, Mr. Corcoran in particular speaking at his rallies in favor of returning to a more modern course.

While other factors entered into the contest, such as dissatisfaction of teachers with their salaries and the alleged disfavor of the chairman for women teachers; the peculiar social conditions in Boston, where the private school is "the thing"; the alleged domination of the small board of five, still the citizens must be understood to have rebuked the revolutionary step in music teaching since an issue was made of it. The Boston experiment attracted wide attention from supervisors all over the country and has been universally condemned.

F. E. D.

## Children's Community Chorus Gives Its First Concert in Lakewood

LAKEWOOD, N. J., Dec. 20.—The first concert of the Children's Community Chorus, Helen Knox Spain, conductor, was given on the afternoon of Dec. 8. The chorus was assisted by Flavia Smullen, soprano, and a platoon of the Junior Coast Artillery. Miss Smullen sang numbers by Nevin and Geibel and also incidental solos with the chorus.

## Olive Nevin Heard in New England

Olive Nevin, soprano, has returned from a short tour of New England. On Dec. 8 she sang for the benefit of the Red Cross at Pittsfield, Mass. Later she gave a recital in Steinert Hall, Boston, together with Frances Nevin. After her return to New York, Miss Nevin appeared before the Salamagundi Club in the studio of William Cornwall. At all of these recitals Julia Kasanoff was accompanist.



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