

Chief of Claque Defends His Calling; Says Public Is Too Apathetic to Applaud

Hand-Clapping Brigades Are Indispensable in the Opera House, Declares Signor Margoles When Coaxed Into an Interview—Artists Crave Applause After Their Heavy Arias, He Explains—How the Professional Noise-Makers Come to the Rescue During the "Glorious High Note"—Claques a Nuisance? Why Even Czar Nicholas Didn't Complain!

By VERA BLOOM

FOR some time past the musical public has been playing a little game with itself. It has denied the existence of professional hand-clappers, in other words, the claque, and at the same time it demands that it be abolished! Now, anyone who has been to the opera, either as the crowning event of "seeing New York," or is an indispensable part of every audience, has heard that orchestrated symphony of applause that comes from all around the walls of the auditorium as if under the baton of a master conductor.

And hearing these thunderous or staccato palms, with which one must be born, and cannot hope to achieve, he asks the why and wherefore and learns from those who know that "it's the claque," and that it has become an indispensable organization to which the artists gladly and openly pay for so much a curtain call, with "bravos" extra!

Soon you join the rest of the press and public, and begin to denounce the claque, one-fourth because it is rather a nuisance, the other three-fourths because it is the general and easiest thing to do. Then you begin to rely on it. Instead of scattering your programs, wraps and opera glasses all over the floor by giving way to your feelings after a beautiful bit of singing, and showing the artist the recognition that he deserves, you learn to leave the applause to the claque. After all, you argue with yourself, what's the use? No ordinary mortal could ever hope to make so much noise, or do it so frenziedly.

Occasionally, when you can't hold back any longer, and applaud in the good old-fashioned way, all you get for your pains is a crushing, raised eyebrow stare from the regal lady in front of you, or an amazed gasp from the drab little person beside you, who doesn't see the boxholders clapping, and cannot imagine why you should be disturbing the peace. So it has become a regrettable fact that the opera audiences will not applaud, and the artists, to whom it is as much a part of the performance as the orchestra or the scenery, must pay professional hand-clappers to provide what the public should give in enthusiasm and recognition.

There have been countless tirades against the claque, and the poor claque has kept a reserved and resigned silence in return. But it seems only common justice to give them a chance to explain and try to justify themselves.

But I found that even wearing the white feather and openly carrying the flag of truce would not lead Mr. Margoles, the head of the claque, into an interview, until the influence and introduction of one of the opera's high officials was brought to bear. In fact, it was necessary to corner him in the farthest end of the lobby, and combine the wisdom of a serpent and the meekness of a dove, to persuade him to talk.

"Very well, then," he said, at last, with a weary gesture of resignation, "tell them the claque is the stimulant of the opera. Great artists, unlike you and I, cannot bear monotony. Their temperaments need applause and approbation, where we are satisfied to go on, year after year, doing our work because it's our duty or because we're paid for it.

Artists Demand Applause

"But no artist whose performance depends on the inspiration of the moment, can pour out his heart and soul for a whole evening, unless he hears some re-

"Now, there may only be one aria in the opera that is immensely popular, but the singer may have three or four others even harder to do. For these he cannot depend on the audience, but he must have the applause. Therefore, he depends on the claque to start it, and some of the audience is sure to join in.

"We have been criticized for applauding before the last note of a number has died away. But people do not understand that that is timed to help the artist. He takes a glorious high note, which he will hold as long as possible. But, not to have to think of finishing it,



The Artists Demand Applause—Therefore, the Claque

sponse from the house. Even an acrobat in the circus will refuse to do his 'turn' unless he knows that he will be applauded after each feat, to give him courage to do the next.

"It is the same here at the opera. The arias are the feats, and after the singer has finished one of these, he or she needs and must have encouragement to go on to the next. They are so used to applause at certain times during the course of an opera that it would throw them out entirely if they did not hear it, just as if they did not hear the usual orchestration."

Mr. Margoles paused. He looks, and no doubt he is, very tired. But he seemed entirely sincere and serious in what he said.

"The greater the artist the more he needs the applause, from the audience if he is sure of it, if not, from the claque. Even Jean de Reske, who carried people off their feet as no one else has ever done, had the claque waiting in readiness in case something should happen and the house would not applaud. He knew he could not finish the performance if he did not hear it at the usual points.

"The lesser artists always have the house well filled with friends, in other words a private claque. But on a gala night the audience is composed either of those who, having paid their hard-earned money to hear a great artist, wait critically for the best to happen, or those to whom the opera is only a way of spending the evening between dinner at Sherry's and supper at the Ritz, and who have not come to applaud.

or to worry about its ending weakly and leaving a disappointed silence before the house applauds, the claque is supposed to come in at just the moment that will be a perfect finale for the aria, and give the artist a chance to raise a crescendo of enthusiasm."

"Then, the men of the claque understand music, and really know the operas?" I asked.

Trained Hand Clappers

By this time the intermission was over, but luckily Mr. Margoles was not needed at the beginning of the act, so he continued: "Yes, most of them are sons of musicians or in some way connected with the opera, and they have been raised on music. Many of them have been coming to the Metropolitan since babyhood and they all know the operas by heart.

"More often than not it is the friends of the singers who break in at the wrong time, or else well-wishers who have never been inside an opera house before, who have bought tickets and have come to applaud for some special artist. Of course, whatever happens is blamed on the claque, just as if one uniform maker is a 'profiteer,' every other firm in that business is under suspicion."

"Have you ever had a chance to see what would happen without the claque?"

"Yes, Maurice Renaud, the most popular French baritone who ever came to America, and who is now at the front, always had an enormous ovation when he sang *Athanael* in 'Thais' with the help of the claque. One night he decided to try a performance without it, trusting to the audience to applaud. The first act went by to dead silence, the ones that followed were as quiet as a cemetery. The next day M. Renaud re-engaged the claque, for he had found he could not even sing his most famous rôle without it, the audience had waited in vain for its cues!

"All that is left to the artist to-day is applause. I remember, in the old days, when the audience would unhitch the horses from the singer's carriage, and pull it to the hotel. I have seen torchlight parades before a singer's window, and a whole audience stand in the street after the performance to serenade the artist! Before it was forbidden to pass flowers across the footlights, florists used to work at the theater, building huge structures of flowers that had to be wheeled on from the wings! It was nothing for a favorite prima donna to receive a hundred bouquets. Think of the enthusiasm

this aroused. Nowadays, the public even begrudges its applause. The claque will only be necessary so long as the public refuses to do its share."

In Old Madrid

"Was there as much feeling against it in Europe as here?"

"Not that I have seen," he declared, "except in Madrid, where the claque has become nothing but highwaymen and blackmailers, and where they hoot and whistle at the performers if they are not paid. It is the right of any opera-goer to applaud or to keep still—that is all we do here, and no one could say we have abused our privileges.

"I have sat near the ex-Czar in Petrograd, and he did not object to my applause. I have been in the very next box to President Poincaré and his staff at the Opéra in Paris, and there was not a word of complaint. They understand that the claque is the connecting link between the audience and the performers, and they have found it a necessity."

"Is it also a necessity at symphony concerts and recitals?" I inquired.

"Not so often. The symphony audience is a serious one, and there for one purpose, to enjoy the music. But the opera is a combination of music-lovers, sight-seers, and people who come to a

social event. As for recitals, the audience has only come for one artist, so it is not a question of having to applaud a whole cast. Then there are always many friends at a recital, either of the artist or of some composer on the program.

"But, after all, the real place of the claque is to act as a stimulant, as I said before, and it stimulates not only the singers but the audience as well."

There you have the case for the defense. And when you come to think of it, are not the "pluggers" from the music publishers, the "footers" at every football game, even the ushers at the theaters, who are always supposed to applaud at the vital points of the play, only camouflaged clagues?

The issue remains with the public. When it is ready once more to be genuinely enthusiastic and grateful to the artists who give their all every time they appear, the claque will cease to be of itself.

Music at the Rialto and Rivoli

Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Scheherazade" is being played by the orchestra at the Rialto Theater this week, under the alternate leadership of Hugo Riesenfeld and Nat W. Finston. Greek Evans, baritone, sings "A Son of the Desert Am I," by Walter A. Phillips. The orchestra is also giving the intermezzo from Mascagni's "L'Amico Fritz." Arthur Depew and George Crook play organ solos. At the Rivoli the Overture to Thomas's "Mignon" is being given, with Hugo Riesenfeld and Erno Rapee alternating as conductor. Two dancers from the Luigi Albertieri Ballet School, under the direction of Mr. Albertieri, interpret Paderewski's "Minuet." Winifred Marshall, soprano, sings the popular "Shadow Song" from "Dinorah." Firmin Swinne and Uda Waldrop are the organists.

OAKLAND, CAL.—Clarence Eddy, the organist, gave a recital recently at the First Presbyterian Church, scoring a remarkable success.

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