

Hints on Building and Interpreting Song Programs, Proffered by Frank LaForge

Distinguished American Accompanist and Song Composer Recalls Sembrich's Ideas on Program-making — Matzenauer's Solution of Lieder Problem — Opposed to Women Singing Numbers Intended for Men—"Interpret Old Masters According to Their Human Quality"

FRANK LA FORGE is a great accompanist and one of the foremost American song composers. Also, he has ideas about song recital programs. Most accompanists have ideas about song recital programs. Sometimes one wishes, after the manner of Dr. Johnson, that these ideas were impossible. Singers, being as a class void of brains, incline to place fatal reliance on the advice of the suave creature who operates the keyboard while they dispense their beguiling noises. Accompanists are not always as brainless as most singers, but in the matter of musical judgment there is startlingly little to choose between them. Think of the stuff it was necessary to live through this past season! There may be debate as to the exact percentage due to the accompanist's advice, but his measure of guilt is probably large. Mr. La Forge's notions on the subject of programs differ from those of most of his colleagues by taking musical worth rather than superficial effectiveness as the starting point. He believes in great music, in contrast, in good English translations, in conceiving style on a human basis, in the curtailment of those privileges women have long enjoyed in appropriating to their own uses songs intended for men. All of which sounds obvious enough. But judged in the light of the average contemporary program it takes the likeness of a pearl of wisdom.

Mr. La Forge is accompanist to Mme. Matzenauer and that contralto's programs during the past winter were evidence of his co-operation. His theories are not the result of idle speculation. In the service of Mme. Sembrich he learned many things. That artist had an instinct and a genius for programs not to be encountered today. Much more went into their making than the ordinary person realized. Mr. La Forge relates that which probably few realize—that every song was selected as much with a view of key, variety as of contrast of mood. She carefully avoided two consecutive songs in the same tonality. Also she avoided, whenever possible, transpositions. She always did Brahms's "Wie Melodien" in its original D flat rather in C, as one generally hears it now. She followed a symphonic principle in arranging the individual numbers of groups in so far as concerned the emotional nature of a lyric. Fast movements alternated with slow ones and vice-versa. Some extremely beautiful things she would not sing publicly at all because they did not supply, as it were, a logical context. "But she would often sing them alone in her home," relates Mr. La Forge, "though when it became a question of public performance she never allowed herself to be swayed from her artistic principles which were immovable.

Matzenauer's Leider Substitutes

"On the New York program given by Mme. Matzenauer this year she endeavors to make up for the elimination of Schubert, Brahms, Schumann and others by giving the part of the program usually assigned these masters to Grieg and certain Russians—the best substitutes for the great classics. Most singers are as yet entirely unawake to the finest things there are in the Grieg list. Mme. Matzenauer sings them in English, as should be the case. No doubt one always loses something in a translation—something perhaps of the poetic flavor or the precision with which a composer has set a certain word to a certain note. Yet what is the good of preserving these things if an audience, unfamiliar with the particular foreign language, does not get the sense of the thing at all? At



Frank La Forge, Eminent American Accompanist and Song Composer

the Cincinnati Festival Mme. Matzenauer sang the Immolation Scene from the 'Götterdämmerung.' She used Ernest Newman's translation—admirable in all save a few details which she improved herself. Her singing of that, by the way, was overwhelmingly impressive and her English was free from any trace of foreign accent.

"One thing that I have always opposed in recitals is the practice of women singing songs—love songs and other things—obviously intended for men. It seems to be an unwritten law that women can sing men's love songs with perfect propriety, though one does not hear the contrary to any extent. Not only is it foolish but the song always sounds far better as originally intended. Women should avoid, for example, such an air of Handel's 'Care Selve' or the old Italian 'Amarilli.' What would we say to a man who should suddenly attempt to sing 'Ah, fors e lui'? But, for a woman to do 'Care Selve' is, when one comes to think of it, pretty nearly as foolish as it is she were to sing the 'Evening Star,' from 'Tannhäuser,' or Rodolfo aria from 'Bohème.' In the case of a very few, like the 'Lass With

the Delicate Air,' in which the colorature surpasses a man's powers some indulgence may be allowed. But this is an exceptional case.

Old Songs

"Speaking of old songs, I have never been able to see why artists think themselves bound to treat old sixteenth and seventeenth century airs like church music. When about to begin a song like 'Amarilli' a singer will lapse into a state of dreary solemnity and deliver the love song as if it were a hymn. We are told this is a matter of style. It is not. The people of that age were thoroughly as human as the ones of a more modern day. They should be interpreted according to their human quality. Not to do them so is to misinterpret them. It is as bad as the playing of certain Beethoven 'specialists' who are so afraid of humor in music that they miss the whole spirit of Beethoven—the musician above all others in whose music humor runs rampant. It is no wonder to me that some persons have a dread of these old classics. But the fault is entirely with the 'stylists.'"
H. F. P.

Mrs. Beach's "Song of Liberty" Expresses Spirit of the America of To-day

CONTRARY to the custom which has prevailed during the last twelve months in regard to reviewing patriotic songs in this journal, arrived at on account of their being generally worthless from a musical standpoint, I feel it a duty to bring to the attention of the readers of MUSICAL AMERICA a song that in the opinion of many who have seen it, as well as in my own, expresses America's feeling at this time more potently than any patriotic song that has come to my notice since last April. Patriotic and war songs have proved themselves to be, first, patriotic and then music; the number of them written since our entrance into the war is tremendous. Only a percentage of these has been published by various firms from New York to California and occasionally, failing that, by the composer him or herself, as the case may be. To review all of those sent to this journal on the page devoted each week to reviewing new music was obviously impossible, as it would have meant the elimination of reviews of other music and the reserving of the entire page each week for comment on patriotic and war songs. It was because of this that the ruling was made.

Mrs. Beach, who is respected by musicians all over the world to-day, has written a patriotic song, neither for personal gain nor for notoriety. Her song is called "A Song of Liberty" and the poem is by an American, whose gifts are familiar everywhere, Frank L. Stan-

"A SONG OF LIBERTY." By Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Op. 49. (Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt Co.)

ton. Music and text here have been happily joined and Mrs. Beach has ac-



Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, the Distinguished Composer, Who Has Expressed Our National Feeling in Her "A Song of Liberty"

complished a solid, remarkably direct song that will fire the hearts of audiences wherever it is sung. It is not a

cheap affair—Mrs. Beach does not indulge in that kind of thing—but a fine, healthy piece of diatonic writing, with something of the majesty and dignity in it that we find in the Prelude to the "Meistersinger," the melody being handled with a big sweep, the accompaniment managed so as to set it off to the greatest advantage. Here is a song that our concert artists may add to their programs, in so doing sounding the note of the hour. And with conviction in their hearts they can sing it and know that they are doing their "bit" in arousing their audience's patriotism, not by descending to the cheap and meretricious, but by maintaining a high standard in singing the patriotic expression of one of the best composers this country has ever produced, a woman who understands her craft, knows how to deliver her message, be it in peace or war, with loftiness of purpose and adherence to her high ideals. The song is issued for both high and low voices.

A. WALTER KRAMER.

W. L. Farnam to Be Organist of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in N. Y.

Another recitalist of the first rank is to be added to the organists of New York when W. Lynnwood Farnam comes to the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church on Sept. 1. He has been organist and choir-master of Emmanuel Church, Boston, for several years, and it is understood that considerable difficulty was experienced in inducing him to come to New York. Music-lovers may look forward to a distinct addition to the recitals of organ music for next season, as Mr. Farnam is said to be one of the finest recital organists in America. Mr. Farnam was heard here several years ago at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and last winter he gave a recital in the course of the annual convention of the American Guild of Organists.

Arthur Farwell to Lecture at University of California Summer Session

Arthur Farwell, the American composer and director of the Music School Settlement of New York, will leave New York on Sunday of next week to spend the summer in California. He has been engaged to give a series of lectures in Los Angeles during the summer course of the University of California. Mr. Farwell's subjects will be "History of Music," "Musical Appreciation" and "The Community Music Movement." This session lasts from June 24 to Aug. 3. Mr. Farwell will attend the "High Jinks" of the Bohemian Club of San Francisco. Mrs. Farwell and their son, Bryce, will accompany him on the Western trip.

J. C. Breil to Write Score for Big Historical Film

Joseph Carl Breil has closed a contract to write the score for a tremendous historical film, which has just been made in Florida. He will be general musical director for the company for a period of three years, according to the contract that he has just signed. The film will be produced in New York in the early fall, when Mr. Breil will conduct the première. He will also conduct the opening performances of it in all important cities.

Gala Benefit Concert to Be Given at Metropolitan

Announcement has been made of a gala concert to be held on Monday, June 10, at the Metropolitan Opera House, for the benefit of the National Committee of Music of the Department of Navy Recreation. Mme. Frances Alda, who is chairman of the arranging committee, has announced that five great tenors—Caruso, McCormack, Lazaro, Muratore and Martinelli—will appear, besides many other famous artists. The tickets will be at the regular opera prices, and the boxes are to be auctioned at a tea at the Ritz-Carlton on Thursday, June 6.

Musical Copyright for French

WASHINGTON, D. C., May 28.—In a proclamation under the copyright law of 1909 President Wilson to-day gave to citizens of France the right to copyright within the United States musical compositions by French composers and parts of musical instruments serving to reproduce mechanically musical compositions. France has extended similar rights to American citizens.

May Peterson Delights Camp Vail Men

May Peterson, Metropolitan soprano, and her accompanist, Francis Moore, spent the afternoon of May 23 at Camp Alfred Vail, N. J. Miss Peterson visited the aviation fields and the various departments of the Signal Corps camp. In the evening she sang for the soldiers.