

## STRAUSS CENTER OF TEMPEST THAT SHOOK VIENNA OPERA

Conspiracy Against Directorship of the Famous Composer-Conductor Arouses Bitter Controversy—Amicable Adjustment Finally Reached—American Tenor in Première of d'Albert's "Dead Eyes"—Operatic and Concert Festivals in the Austrian Capital

Vienna, May 22, 1919.

THE Operntheater has passed through a crisis. In April a movement was started in its orchestra, later was joined by the ballet and the technical employees, and finally by the majority of the singers, a sort of conspiracy against the directorship of Richard Strauss, who, in conjunction with Franz Schalk, was to assume the artistic leadership for six months of the year. The orchestra's chief objection consisted in the circumstance that Strauss planned to give concerts in the opera house and in concert halls with this famous body of musicians, which constitutes the Philharmonic Orchestra, and as which it desired no other than its chosen leader, Felix Weingartner. Previous to the last of the season's Philharmonic concerts, at the Saturday afternoon rehearsal, the members, through their president, expressed their thanks to their popular conductor to whom, they were well aware, they owed their present high artistic standing. This was meant as a public manifestation of their attitude in the Strauss affair.

The arguments brought by the Operntheater to bear against the engagement of Strauss were that he was too expensive, that he had failed as opera director in Berlin, that he planned to give concerts with the orchestra—which feared that this might impair the opera's own business—and that he intended discharging certain members of the company (had, indeed, it was rumored, already set up a sort of "black list") and that at the last performance of "Electra" at the Operntheater under his lead serious differences had arisen. Finally it was advanced that the members of the opera company desired only one director and feared that the double management of Strauss-Schalk would lead in artistic and administrative regard to all sorts of complications.

It must be interpolated here that Schalk took no share in the movement and was, as a matter of fact, opposed to it. The affair gave rise to a great deal of agitated controversy, the general public and the press rising in arms against the stand taken in the opera house, and the fear being expressed that Strauss, though bound by contract, would now refuse to come to Vienna, and that at a time when the sorely tried city's reputation as a great center of musical art was needed more than ever to attract visitors.

Fortunately the matter took a favorable turn and Richard Strauss arrived here at the appointed time, May 15, and, in the course of a week's stay, in conjunction with Schalk, arranged the program of operatic performances for the coming winter. He will return in August to conduct the rehearsals for his opera, "The Woman Without a Shadow," the première of which is to take place on Oct. 1, as he does not wish to begin his work at the Operntheater—this is to be per contract on Dec. 15—with a composition of his own. He has stated that he has no intention of giving orchestral concerts outside the Opera House, and projects only an occasional song recital.

The future of the Operntheater, formerly subvented by the court, was for a time uncertain; but the German-Austrian government has now decided to assume the costs arising from its management. A series of special festival performances, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the handsome structure which has been the home of Vienna opera for half a century, began on the 15th with a performance of Gluck's "Alceste." The operas to be given could not be arranged chronologically owing to difficulties of cast and technical obstacles, classic and modern works alternating, with an occasional



Scene from the Prelude to "Dead Eyes" at the Volksoper in Vienna. Mme. Bartsch-Jones, the Blind Heroine, at the Extreme Left. The Opera Had Its Vienna Première This Season

ballet evening interspersed to afford the singers needful rest. As conductors, Kienzl, Korngold, Pfitzner, Richard Strauss and Weingartner officiate in compositions of their own. Of older composers Beethoven and Mozart are on the program, while Mahler's Eighth Symphony will form the conclusion of the series at about Whitsuntide.

A departure in the history of the Vienna Opera House, in keeping with present social conditions, was the recent production there of "Fidelio" for workmen exclusively. The distribution of the admission tickets was in the hands of the various labor organizations, which defrayed the costs. Negotiations are under way for a regular order of such performances.

### American Tenor in D'Albert's Opera

During the past winter the Volksoper afforded its patrons musical treats in a long succession of older and newer works. D'Albert's opera, "Dead Eyes," was produced for a first time, the part of *Galba* being sung by the young American tenor Harry Schurmann, who, though bound by contract to a third winter in Prague, succeeded in following an urgent call to the Volksoper in Vienna last September. Mr. Schurmann, who is an unusually versatile singer, was kept very busy during the entire season, added to his repertoire the part of *Siegfried* in the "Ring of the Nibelungen," and will sing *Tristan* on the final evening of a special Wagner Cycle to begin at the close of this month.

I called on Mr. Schurmann recently at his cozy studio flat for a little chat in English. His pretty little actress wife opened the door in response to my ring, and in some embarrassment showed me the singer in an adjoining room perched on the top of a high ladder—which he need not climb for his high C—busy with tacking thick brown paper over a large window in the ceiling. I readily understood that skylights, joy that they may be to a painter, must to a singer, kept to late hours in the glare of footlights, be decidedly disturbing in these early morning hours of springtime. But Mr. Schurmann, after a week's vain search for a domicile, so hard to find in the present crowded condition of the city, was delighted to secure even what was not wholly desirable, and after exhibiting a number of interesting photographs and artist trophies, pointed with decidedly more pride to a small patent gas range in the tiny kitchen and to a fireless cooker, indispensable objects in the prevailing absence of coal. They allowed of the pleasing conjecture that there was something to cook.

At the third Gesellschaft's concert, Bach's Passion Music to the Evangelist St. John was produced in splendid form under the spirited lead of Franz Schalk. The singer of *Christ*, Rudolf Moest of the Operntheater, gave a noble rendering of the part. He did not live to hear the praises accorded him; a tragic fate ordained that they be spoken at his newly made grave. Death, which has made such sad havoc among the basses and baritones of the Operntheater, overtook him suddenly while on the way home.

During Easter week the Matthew Pas-

sion was, as annually the case, on the program of the Gesellschaft. Early in March Franz Schrecker and his Philharmonic Choir, assisted by the orchestra of the Concertverein, gave an excellent production of Berlioz's Requiem. It was evident that the large, representative audience fully enjoyed the rare treat. The music of the famous French composer no longer contains anything startling, now that it has paled in the light of the ultra-moderns, and it is hard to believe that in his time it called forth violently contending opinions.

### Festival Concerts

Without any special occasion a series of festival Beethoven, Brahms and Bruckner concerts was planned for the present month, and some of these have already taken place, to sold-out houses, it is needless to add. That the Concertverein should have chosen Bruckner is not to be wondered at, since the leader of its orchestra, Ferdinand Löwe, is this composer's ardent disciple. The compositions selected were the Eighth and the Ninth Symphony, the F Minor Mass, the choruses for male voices and the String Quartet, thus affording a pleasing variety. Löwe conducts a Bruckner symphony without turning the leaves of the score before him, has for years known him by heart, and interprets him with loving enthusiasm to every one's understanding. Löwe has recently been elected director of the Vienna Conservatory of Music.

At Moriz Rosenthal's second piano recital an etude by Stransky, a novelty, displayed the pianist's marvelous command of technique. The closing number of the regular program—encores were, of course, stormily demanded—was a humorous by Rosenthal himself, graceful arabesques woven around familiar waltz themes by Johann Strauss.

Dr. Victor Ebenstein is a most meritorious young pianist, and at his concert on April 15, in the Middle Concerthaus Saal, furnished ample proof thereof in a long program including his own Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme, which displayed genuine talent, and was most favorably received. Dr. Ebenstein is of the Leschetizky school, and was a pupil of the master's chief assistant, Frau Malvine Brée.

### Girl Pianist's Success

Very near the close of the season, and at a Sunday noon concert supplementary to the regular order of Philharmonic concerts, a new pianist from Budapest was introduced in Vienna, Lily von Kovach, a youthful pupil of Ernst Dohnanyi. This marked an exceptional occurrence in the history of the Philharmonic concerts, from which soloists have been banished in a sort of religious fear that the solemnity of the musical productions would be desecrated by the seductive glitter of virtuosity; and it came to pass that what had been vainly desired by so many brilliant lights fell into the hands of a child prodigy, a marvel in her way, with a roundness of tone and a surprising maturity of conception, combined with exactitude of rhythm and technique of a high order. In the C

Minor Concerto by Beethoven her amazingly powerful touch vied successfully with the brilliance of the orchestra, though in Liszt's Hungarian Symphony it lacked somewhat in rhythmic fire. But the youthful artist scored a decided success. The splendid orchestra excelled, as usual. It attained its greatest height in the Overture to "Tannhäuser," and had to rise in response to the applause. Its popular leader, Weingartner, scored a special triumph.

A song recital by Eric Schmedes of the Operntheater was invested with special interest from the circumstance that the youthful débutante who appeared with him was his daughter, Dagmar. The girlish singer, in height nearly approaching the majestic stature of her father, possesses an alto voice of pleasing quality, but still a trifle in the rough. However, this but added to the naturalness and charm with which she rendered some melancholy strains by Brahms, whose "Solitary Tear" ran down such a rosy cheek, and Tchaikovsky's "Plaint for Vanished Happiness," which proceeded from such girlish lips. Father and daughter united voices in a duet from "Samson et Delila."

### Opera Stars in Recital

Two other opera favorites, Selma Kurz and Leo Slezak, joined their brilliant forces at a recent concert, to the delight of their hearers, in the long-missed sweetness of the first duet in "Bohème," after each artist had given solo numbers by Bizet, Meyerbeer, and others. Two weeks later, again in the large hall of the Concerthaus, Slezak sang with another partner, a young beginner, Grete Neumann, who, after overcoming her first embarrassment, revealed a finely cultivated voice of pronounced dramatic quality, and withal of unusual softness and pliability. On the same occasion another child prodigy, little Erna Rubenstein, created a downright sensation with her playing of the Violin Concerto by Glazounow, investing the difficult work with such absolute certainty, wonderful tone and warmth of expression, as to reveal the marvel of little Erika Morini repeated. In a later concert of her own this impression was but strengthened.

What is it that lives in the souls of these children whom nature has thus favored? Rudolf Serkin is still another of them. The small man's talent has long been beyond doubt, though evidenced in his case more in regard to technique than expression, in polished runs and easy command of the most difficult chord passages, as shown at his recent concert in the C Major Concerto by Mozart, the two cadenzas in which were of his own composition, and betrayed a very considerable knowledge of polyphonic piano setting, besides a keen sense for effect. The other sensation of the evening was the conductor of the orchestra, Georg Szell, who, himself once a child prodigy at ten years of age, conducted orchestral works of his own composition.

Continuing my account of specially interesting song recitals, I have to allude to that of Alfred Julius Boruttau, one of the past Hofoper, who for five winters was prevented from pursuing his artistic career by military duty. In a varied program, beginning with six religious songs by Beethoven, continuing with Hugo Wolf, and quaint ditties by older composers, 1650 to 1818, and concluding with a series of Norse and Danish folk songs, some of these translated and rearranged by himself, the singer showed his finished art, both in dramatic and humorous delivery, and the flexibility of his voice, a pleasing tenor with baritone coloring. Herr Boruttau is president of the Oratorio Society, is a singing teacher of high rank, a specialist in the formation of voices, and the inventor of a system of his own which he has promised to explain for the benefit of MUSICAL AMERICA. The accompanist of the evening was Professor Hans Wagner, who is doing active and excellent work in the Oratorio Society.

From Prague there comes the news that at a recent session of the National Assembly a motion was made for the introduction of public singing examinations, competitions to take place each spring at some theater, the productions to be accompanied by orchestra, in order that in this manner suitable performers might be obtained for opera and operetta. The examiners are to be appointed by the Ministry of Education and salaried from public funds, the competition to be open to such singers as had applied in time and paid the requisite fee. This would appear to be an excellent method for efficient singers, otherwise often prevented by unfavorable circumstances from getting a proper hearing.

In the "Theater an der Wein," famous for the first performance there of Mo-

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