

Managerial Secrets Confided By Charles L. Wagner, America's Only "Million-Dollar-a-Year" Impresario

His Spectacular Success Not Mere Luck, Explains Manager of Galli-Curci, McCormack and Other First Magnitude Artists in An Epigrammatic Interview—Stabilizing the Concert-Directing Business

SEVEN years ago there came to New York a tall slender, youngish looking man with greyish hair, a sense of humor which seemed to leak from his very eyes and a determination to make a place for himself in the great city. He had made a name for himself in a limited sort of way in the lyceum business out West and in order to learn something about the musical market he had managed one of the Western orchestras for one year.

Now New York is proverbially cold to the newcomer. It has little use for unknown quantities and its cordiality is usually confined to those who have already "arrived." So Charles L. Wagner, who more or less answers the description set forth in my opening sentence, spent several weeks keeping chairs warm in the ante-rooms of some of the best New York musical bureaus, waiting in vain for a manager who would have sufficient confidence in him to share his purse and office with him. Finally the opportunity came which developed him into business for himself. Today his office, the most commodious and handsomely appointed musical office in the metropolis, does about one million dollars worth of business a year. Most of the managers who had the chance of going fifty-fifty with the youngish-looking Westerner and who refrained would donate five years of their lives for another chance to join hands with him.

Today Mr. Wagner is president of the National Musical Managers Association. He manages the tours of John McCormack, Amelita Galli-Curci, Frances Alda, Charles Hackett and several other artists. Local managers who may not know him personally, come to his office with their hats in their hands as they would before some king or potentate, in fear and trembling, hoping that he will honor them by allowing his artists to appear under their auspices. And are received graciously!

This sudden rise to prominence and power makes of Mr. Wagner an interesting subject for examination. What have been his methods, what are the principles that have guided him in the conduct of his business which have brought him this success and power? These questions were in my mind when I chatted with him the other day over luncheon at one of New York's cafes. So much of our musical life is wrapped up in the head of this one man that I was anxious to have him tell me his story.

"There are no secret paths to success in the musical managing business," he told me. "What we need is more managers and fewer agents. The whole business can be stabilized only when it is controlled. Then it should be a regular business, employing regular business methods without reference to the blue sky."

"Nor is it purely a matter of luck, as some folks think. One of my friends intimated as much, once, when we were discussing the great success of John McCormack. I was told that I couldn't do it again. So I went out and got Galli-Curci. That was my answer."

"I don't believe in the manager who arrives at his office at 11 A. M., takes two hours for luncheon and goes golfing from three to four."

"In my own case it has been a matter of the hardest kind of hard work. To begin with, when I took John McCormack under my management I was convinced that he was the greatest singer the world had ever known and I set about convincing everybody else that I was right. I have tried to make local managers see that the coming of John McCormack to their cities is just as great an event there as the coming of the President of the United States and I am telling them so. And what is more, they are believing it. That's the kind of confidence it takes to win success in this work."

The conversation turned to some of the obstacles in the way of musical progress. "Too much bad advertising, or rather misleading advertising," he vouchsafed. "For instance, a tenor who had been on a season salary at the Metropolitan and



—Photo (C) Hosteller

Charles L. Wagner, the musical manager, in a characteristic pose. On the left Mr. Wagner is shown with Mme Galli-Curci. On the right he is bidding farewell to John McCormack



listed as 'among those present' was announced through the Southwest not long ago by a lyceum agency as a 'great Metropolitan tenor alternating with Caruso.'

"A soprano was announced in a Western town as the leading singer of the Chicago Opera Association and as having appeared with Galli-Curci in 'Traviata.' I looked her up, as the name was unfamiliar. She did appear, and had her name on the program. She had one of those little parts that gives the manager the chance to say to Galli-Curci, 'You see, you did not draw the entire \$5 admission; probably only \$4.75.' Yes, she had appeared and had rubbed flounces with Galli-Curci and Galli-Curci is authority for the statement that nobody ever rubbed flounces better with her. But that was no reason for announcing her as the leading singer of the Chicago Opera Association and trying to get \$250 for her engagement."

From here on our interview consisted chiefly of epigrams uttered with smiling ease by Mr. Wagner. I shall endeavor to set them forth exactly as he delivered them, without marring the effect with the intervening conversation.

German Lieders and Leaders

"Thank God the day of German *lieder* and so-called intellectual singers is past! German *lieder* did as much harm to the democracy of music as the German leaders did to the democracy of the world. I don't know just what an 'intellectual singer' is but I know that I don't manage any. Mine all have hearts and voices."

"I am glad to see the big orchestral wave crossing the continent. I think every course in the country should include an orchestral concert."

"You ask what I think about artists paying money to managers? Why not? You pay an expert lawyer for advice, a reputable physician to diagnose a case. My advice to the artist is to be sure that he is really consulting an expert manager. Personally I don't take money from artists, but I don't see anything wrong in others doing it, providing the artist is satisfied. Here is a plan I would suggest to all artists: let him advance a certain sum to these managers (not to me) for every five or ten contracts the managers produce. It would then become a business matter worth while."

"The public, of course, know the artists that I have managed successfully, but think of the numbers that I have not taken. A manager's ability to say 'No' is an important part of the work. It is so much easier to say 'Yes,' but to say 'No' when pressure and promises are offered requires more self-restraint than many managers can command."

"I believe in big box office attractions; that's why I put out the big Metropolitan Quartet with: Alda, Hackett, de Luca and Lazzari. I even suggested to Melba and Schumann-Heink a joint recital tour, with Frank La Forge as a shock absorber. It would be wonderful, so there is a tip for their managers."

"No artist is worth more than he will draw at the box office, not as much. You

can be a dignified Barnum, deliver the goods, make money, create musical excitement and help the cause artistically and financially."

"I can show one hundred places where John McCormack and Galli-Curci have 'paid the freight' so that the so-called 'intellectuals,' who evidently are a lot better than they sound, could appear and collect. All box office attractions, and this means 'artists de luxe' for only that kind will last and draw, can afford to make some sacrifices. I believe in courses but of sane and short-haired artists."

Decorating the Stage to Suit

"Another fool kind of manager, the local manager, is the one who wants to decorate the stage to suit the artists' temperament or eccentricities. Now you don't need a cow on a butter dish, nor a Polar bear on the ice pitcher. Then too some of them insist upon entertaining the artist while they are in their city. I never could do business with this class of manager; because they won't pay double price and its worth it to an artist to be entertained."

"The success of the present tendency to organize all managers depends upon the stability of the managers entirely. Personally, I am strong for it, even though I do not feel it will help my business any; but I want to do anything I can to help the musical cause in this country. I have found all the managers show a very big side in our association and I think we are going to accomplish something."

"I think the musical journals ought to be more careful in their recommendations of new artists and new managers. Our rule in the National Association, that a manager must be in good standing for one year, wouldn't be a bad cue for the musical journals. Two years ago a man in Des Moines announced an All American Course and at least two musical journals gave him editorials. Three months later they should have given him—well I won't tell you what, but they did not because the course fell down."

"American artists are always harder to manage. A little success and its very hard to communicate with them. You can talk but you can't communicate, and yet I am strong for the American artist."

Tax the Foreign Artist!

"I believe all foreign artists, who have been in this country from three to five years, getting our money, and have show no inclination to become one of us by taking out their American papers, should be taxed unmercifully, and suffered to pay much larger income taxes for them than for our own citizens whether born or adopted."

"Why should an artist be willing to sing at Covent Garden for half or less than he demands in the United States. I simply ask you why? Any singer that cuts his fee for Covent Garden in future must cut his fee for the United States if he expects to be managed from my office."

"Musical interests in most towns are too much divided. Everybody seems to be doing it. Very often if there is a good local manager he is not in sympathy with the club and vice versa. There must be a getting together of local interests as well as national interests."

"Personally I am trying to put music on a high business basis in each town, even when it is necessary to create a new management. I am never disloyal and I always stick to the local manager as long as I can. This season I am putting ten courses with Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs."

"I have tried to cultivate a sense of justice. In the case of disagreements I try to look from the other fellow's point of view."

Spirited Correspondence

"I am accused of writing fresh letters. Life is so serious that I believe in injecting a bit of spice and frivolity here and there. An artist once telegraphed me objecting to the small type which announced him in a joint recital. I wired back: 'If you play like a small type performer the public will think it's all right. If you play like a large type artist the public will soon discover it.'"

"A music club in a Western town wired for McCormack. They said they never paid more than \$1,000 for an artist. I replied 'Evidently you don't want the world's greatest singer.' 'We didn't know he was the world's greatest singer' they telegraphed. 'That's why I wrote it to you,' I replied."

"Last fall I had four artists on the road, a vocal quartet, and when they arrived in Denver they got a telegram from me which read 'Four artists on the road for one week and no kick. What's the matter? Is the peace drive on?'"

"Three hundred and twelve tenors were brought to my attention by admiring friends and teachers, last year, as 'second McCormacks'. There never will be a second anybody. I used to be in the China business. Whenever we received an assortment of China marked 'seconds' we always found it either glaze-cracked or warped."

"A woman came to me last year to exploit her daughter and she thought she was complimenting me when she said: 'I know you can sell a gold brick,' and I thought possibly the reason was because I never had."

"I have been accused of forcing in my artists. I never have forced them; my attractions speak for themselves, but I have some persuasive powers as a salesman."

"A manager can only sell an artist to a town once, the artist must get the return date, and only the really great artists can tour this country year after year."

Something Wrong in Kansas

"A man in Kansas, who has been running a course several years, and put-

(Continued on page 6)