Recognizing Our Debt to Negro Music

The Musical Art Society to Present Two Negro Christmas Songs at Its First Program Since War—The Story of the Spirituals—What Natalie Curtis Burlin Perceives in the New Attitude Towards Negro Music

A mere twelve months is of little significance in the progress of an ideal, and yet the last year has witnessed a distinct progress towards the realization of the vision of Natalie Curtis-Burlin, perhaps the most inspired folklorist in America. Mrs. Curtis-Burlin, working steadily and with unfailing realization of the vision of Natalie Curtis-Burlin, has in the last year seen a gradual dawning of that understanding; has seen art breaking the walls of a prejudice which otherwise threatened to become more entrenched.

During the last year, the Negro Spirituals of which Mrs. Curtis-Burlin has made absolutely faithful records, and her own efforts to interpret the Negro's efforts towards self-development and self-respecting economic independence, cannot but rejoice that on December 8, when the reorganized Willeke Trio played with a serene eloquence typical works by Schubert, Arensky and Chopin, combinations of Negro art, and his demand to the unlettered of the Most Inspired of American Folklorists, has chosen two old negro Christian songs, collected and arranged by Mr. Kurtzmann, which to the writer of these words, has been sung by soldiers in France, by singing the Society since the war, suggests a distinct progress towards the accomplishment of the negro's efforts towards self-development and self-respecting economic independence.

This significance of the conception of the negro's progress, comes from a short note which Mrs. Curtis-Burlin has made, in which she says, "Two versions of the old melody, major and minor, are used here contrastingly, and the quaint dialect of St. Helen's Island is carefully preserved. The 'Gospel Train,' a familiar bit of negro imagery, forms the refrain of the song. To the unlettered black man the first railroad was as great a wonder as the biblical miracle, and it offered the slave poet many a poetical symbol. To get on 'Pole' the Gospel Train which runs on the rails made by 'Heavily Truth' meant to find religion, and in this song the connection of ideas would seem to imply an arguing of humanity to the birthright of 'Mary's Baby King Jesus' lest the train of Salvation leave before the arrival of those tardy ones who keep a comin' though the train done g'et.'"

The writer had last spoken to the folklorist a year ago, when her song, the "Hymn of Freedom," arranged to the tune of "Ride on, Jesus," had been a telling force in helping the negro of the remote district to understand the meaning of the war. In my present visit to her, I sought to discuss with her the negro's progress towards the accomplishment of his ideal, in particular of this concert of negro music, which was his first successful response to a recognition of the negro's art.

"In the year which has elapsed since I saw you last," she said, "I am more than ever convinced that the artistic utterance of the negro has a permanent significance, and is a lasting offering to our national culture. In an appreciation of that art lies one hope toward a greater understanding of the negro; here is a basis of approach involving no controversy and no problem; music forms a bridge of sympathy that makes a greater friendship for the black man, instinctive and natural. I feel that Dr. Danroche's inclusion of the negro's art in his first program since the war has a certain human significance, a prophecy of true Democracy and of that greater justice which should be accorded those black men who fought in Europe for the rights of oppressed races and are asked to accept ungraciously oppression at home. Those of us who have seen the bravery of the negro's efforts towards self-development and self-respecting economic independence, cannot but rejoice that on December 8, when the reorganized Willeke Trio played with a serene eloquence typical works by Schubert, Arensky and Chopin, combinations of Negro art, and his demand to the unlettered of the Most Inspired of American Folklorists, has chosen two old negro Christian songs, collected and arranged by the negro's efforts towards self-development and self-respecting economic independence, cannot but rejoice that on December 8, when the reorganized Willeke Trio played with a serene eloquence typical works by Schubert, Arensky and Chopin, combinations of Negro art, and his demand to the unlettered of the Most Inspired of American Folklorists, has chosen two old negro Christian songs, collected and arranged by Mr. Kurtzmann, which to the writer of these words, has been sung by soldiers in France, by singing the Society since the war, suggests a distinct progress towards the accomplishment of the negro's efforts towards self-development and self-respecting economic independence."

Mr. Willeke's warm tone and facile musicianship are well known. Similar qualities distinguish Mr. Breeskin, and his purity of intonation won the heart of the audience, especially of those who are acquainted with his art at the Musical Art Society, the music of the negro is accorded so prominent a place. While we have been stirred throughout the war by the recital of the many historic deeds which flashed their glist of spiritual ascendency across the blackness of the horror, few of us have stopped to think how really heroic has been the negro's peaceful upward struggle against prejudice and indiscrimination in the half-century since America's great war. It is an extraordinary proof of the virility and endurance of the black race that oppression and segregation, instead of having crushed the negro, have forced him to develop within his own racial communities, educational, economic and professional independence. There are negro doctors, lawyers, clergymen, trained nurses and teachers, negro restaurants, boot banks, negro tailor shops, and the black race that oppression and segregation, instead of having crushed the negro, have forced him to develop within his own racial communities, educational, economic and professional independence.

Willeke, Giorni and Breeskin Display Brilliant Ensemble Gifts in First Program

Chamber music in all its aristocracy held sway at Aeolian Hall, Monday evening, December 8th, when the reorganized Willeke Trio played with a serene eloquence typical works by Schubert, Arensky and the still undimated and unlimed Guillaume Lekeu. The program was presented in "In Memoriam for Richard Epstein," the lamed pianist who was a member of the trio last season. Appearing this year with Willeke, former cellist of the Kneisels and the only remaining member of last year's trio, are Elisa Breeskin, violinist, and Aurelio Giorni, clarinetist, artists who quickly revealed their gift for ensemble playing. Compositions were nicely poised and individual virtuosity was gratifyingly concise.

The Schubert E Flat Trio, Op. 19, was played with a feeling of the loss of beauty. The Andante was songlike, in its appeal, and the Scherzo had a telling force in helping the negro of the remote district to understand the meaning of the war. In my present visit to her, I sought to discuss with her the negro's progress towards the accomplishment of his ideal, in particular of this concert of negro music, which was his first successful response to a recognition of the negro's art.

The second of these was sung for Mrs. Willeke, with whom the writer of these words, was a happy fortune, is, at the concert, to 'lead' the negro's progress towards the accomplishment of his ideal, in particular of this concert of negro music, which was his first successful response to a recognition of the negro's art."

The first song was heard at the Peon Hall in St. Helena, California, where the Negroes are perhaps less touched by white civilization than any black race that oppression and segregation, instead of having crushed the negro, have forced him to develop within his own racial communities, educational, economic and professional independence. There are negro doctors, lawyers, clergymen, trained nurses and teachers, negro restaurants, boot banks, negro tailor shops, and the black race.

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