

When the German Tongue Returned to the London Recital Platform

Ernest Newman, Great English Music Critic, Describes His Reaction to the Excitement of an Historical Occasion in Aeolian Hall

[Editor's Note: As this recent recital in London was the first occasion since the beginning of the war that the German language was used in the concert-halls of the English-speaking world, and inasmuch as the reviewer of this event is one of the greatest English critics, MUSICAL AMERICA reproduces in full the comment of the eminent writer. Mr. Newman wrote his review for the London Times, under the title, "For This Comic Relief, Much Thanks."

EVERYTHING would, no doubt, have gone much better at the Aeolian Hall on Saturday last if an intrepid London newspaper had not confused the faithful that morning by an article on songs and languages. When you are going into a fight, it helps a little to know what you are fighting for, or at all events to know your enemy when you see him; otherwise there is a chance of your hitting the wrong man, or of not hitting the right man hard enough or in the right place. Even a soldier in the cause of freedom (and of course no one but a soldier of freedom would go out on a fine Saturday afternoon to prevent other people from doing what he did not want to do) must have felt a slight paralysis creeping along his strong right arm as he read: "If these songs"—i. e., those to be sung by M. Mischa-Leon at that afternoon's recital—"cannot be sung in English without ridicule, it is, we have not the smallest doubt, because the original German is ridiculous too."

That argument is a multiple-edged weapon, and with one of the edges the proprietor of it is likely to cut himself. For the argument could equally well be applied to the songs and the language of any country. It is not because the original French of Verlaine and Baudelaire is ridiculous, but because even the best English version is bound to be more or less ridiculous, that we all listen contentedly to Debussy's and other French composers' songs in French. A little research would have shown the writer of last Saturday's article that among the German poets whose words M. Mischa-Leon was to sing (to settings by Schumann, Schubert and Wolf), were Goethe, Heine and Morike—poets who, in spite of their belonging to the German race, have not usually been classed (even by Englishmen before the war) as congenial idiots, or in any sense of the word "ridiculous."

Two Mistakes

Going into the fight, then, with a banner bearing so muddled a device, it was

not to be wondered at that the suppliers of last Saturday's charming entertainment in the Aeolian Hall made themselves more than a little ridiculous. It would not have mattered so much what they had said if only they had all agreed to say the same thing. Some of them were evidently under the impression that M. Mischa-Leon is a German. "Go back to Shermany!" shouted one patriot, in what seemed to my wondering ears a rather Chosen accent.

That was the first mistake. The second was in tackling M. Mischa-Leon at all. These things should always be thought out in advance. If you are going to shout a singer down, it is well to select a light lyrical tenor as your victim, or, in the alternative, to go in for a preliminary course of voice training. It is no use trying, as Saturday's comedy showed, to shout down a *tenor robusto* by means of the ordinary unskilled methods of voice production. I would back M. Mischa-Leon against any half-dozen of these conscientious objectors any day. And the objector should not only bring his voice with him; he should bring his ears as well; and he might agree with his fellow-objectors as to what their ears are to hear. Then they might avoid the absurdity, that made us all laugh on Saturday, of one patriot loudly urging M. Mischa-Leon to "sing in English"—implying that he could—while another urged him to speak English—implying that he couldn't.

The rejoinder of M. Mischa-Leon (whose English, by the way, is excellent) to the latter was conclusive. "I am speaking English," he said; "you go to Denmark and speak Danish half as good." The interrupter went down for the count of ten.

The Young Man in the Balcony

The comedy would not have been an English comedy, had not the comedians taken themselves with sentimental seriousness. An Englishman never does anything because he likes doing it or because it annoys him to see other people doing something else; he does it from a sense of duty; he is fulfilling a sacred trust. One gentleman protested against being "forced to listen to German;" and we had a heart-breaking vision of him having his ticket bought for him by brute force, and he being dragged to the Aeolian Hall in chains and held down in his seat for two hours, his wicked tormentors having cut off his legs to prevent his walking out when the singing began. It turned out, however, that he had really come of his own free will,

just to "protest," he thought that was his "duty."

But the crowning stroke of the comedy came from a young man in the balcony at the end of the proceedings, when, after half an hour's din, the conscientious objectors, seeing that ninety-nine out of a hundred people in the hall were against them, graciously decided to leave. Now there is only one thing more difficult than an effective stage entrance, and that is an effective exit. I thought of the passage in which George Meredith speaks sadly of the disadvantage of human beings after a quarrel in comparison with dogs. The dog's powers of expression are not exhausted even in retreat; he can still express hatred and contempt with his tail.

Having no tail, the gentleman in the gallery naturally wanted to make a parting speech—the poor human's substitute for a defiant cock of the tail as he walks away. He begged the audience to hear his last words before he went. I shall never forget the naive astonishment on his face when he was shouted down—he, who had come there to shout other people down! It had apparently never struck him that two could play at that game. That is the worst of teaching your opponents your technique. Failing to make himself heard, he melodramatically tore up his program and cast the offending fragments on the heads of the people below him. But the *beau geste* was not a success. These things should

always be rehearsed before a glass if the technique is not to look amateurish at the performance.

"The Dirty Thing"

The fun was renewed in a mild form after the recital. When we reached the street we were upbraided by an angry lady for listening to "the dirty German thing called music!" I can hardly believe the good lady imagined music to be a German invention, like the flute, and silver, and measles. I presume she must have heard of Tubal Cain and Saint Cecilia. What she meant to say, no doubt, was: "The dirty thing called German music." I felt like a hog returning from his vomit; but, there, what would you? We cannot all be civilized.

The outcome of the delightful little row in the hall was that M. Mischa-Leon sang better than I have ever known him to do. Was it not Macready who used to work up his temperature for a big scene by shaking a piece of scenery violently before he went on, or by having an altercation with the stage-hands? A better way, we now see, is to have a shindy with the audience. This method has the added advantage of raising the temperature of the audience too. In the old days the prima donna used to get her audience into tune with her by having her jewels stolen from her room at the hotel, or by being abducted by armed men in masks, or by getting yet another divorce the week before the concert. Did I not know most of the protagonists in Saturday's little drama so well, I might have been suspicious that it was all the work of some super-Press-Agent. Some day, no doubt, the technique of the business will be perfected by smart men who see the enormous possibilities of it. Meanwhile we must be grateful to the amateurs who provided Saturday's show for giving us not only an amusing but an instructive entertainment. The only pity is that the scene was not filmed. It would be a huge success at the picture-houses: "Making the World for Mobocracy."

EMINENT TRIO IN MAY DAY CONCERT

Bonci, Fitziu, Jacobsen and Jacobs' Forces Delight Huge Throng in Armory

Probably the most enthusiastic "demonstrations" on May Day were those which held throughout the gala concert arranged by the United Labor Education Committee at the Seventy-First Regiment Armory, when Bonci, Fitziu, Jacobsen and the Orchestral Society, conducted by Max Jacobs, provided an unforgettable feast for the thousands present.

Despite the cavernous depths of the Armory which make it hardly a favorable place for such concerts, the affair was eminently successful, due to the care with which the numbers were chosen. Alessandro Bonci, with smiling mien, and in most pleasurable mood, was the particular star of the occasion. His first offering was the "Cielo e Mar" Aria from "Gioconda," and when, in response to the clamors, he delivered "Donna e Mobile" his conquest was complete. A second group included Neapolitan songs comprising Sinigaglia's Serenata, Rossini's "La Promessa" and Leoncavallo's "Vieni Amor Mio" with the addition of innumerable encores, to which his accompanist, Umberto Martucci, supplied distinguished support.

Mme. Fitziu's work was also followed by echo-awakening applause and her aria from "Herodiade," as well as Leroux's "Nil" and Massenet's "Elegie," to both of which Jacobsen gave fine obligatos, were made welcome. To Sascha Jacob-

sen went also an ovation for his fine interpretation of Bruch's Violin Concerto in G Minor, his several encores, and his obligato.

Under Mr. Jacobs, the Orchestral Society offered some admirable readings of Tchaikovsky's "1812" Overture, Smetana's "Maldau," Humperdinck's Dream Pantomime from "Hansel and Gretel," Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" and, finally, the Bacchanale from "Samson and Delilah." The affair was one of distinct comradeship; in response to hearty and delighted applause, the artists gave of their best, presenting as extras, never-failing favorites. F. R. G.

Greta Masson Will Sing With Nahan Franko Orchestra at Willow Grove, Pa.

Greta Masson, the New York soprano, has been engaged as soloist with Nahan Franko's Orchestra for the week of May 16 at Willow Grove Park, Pa. Miss Masson will appear daily. She recently scored in a concert in Cleveland, where her singing won the favorable notice of the leading critics, and also won a noteworthy success in recital at Vassar College on April 21, Prof. George C. Gow writing her a letter of congratulation after the recital.

WASHINGTON, D. C.—The Washington College of Music has given to Washington music lovers several excellent concerts recently. At its annual Red Cross benefit in the auditorium of the Central High School the college orchestra and the following took part: Sarah Becker, Durwood Bowersox, Nell Caley, Rena Greenberg, Lois Goddard, Raymond Monaghan, Clara Young, Mrs. M. R. Goldman, William Santelmann, Mrs. W. W. Deal, Arsenio Ralon, Havel G. Wood and Lois Stuntz. In a recital of merit Marguerite Carter, violinist, and Weldon Carter, pianist, offered a program.

Many Choral Organizations Giving HARRIET WARE'S WORKS

"DANCE THE ROMAICA"

Three times this Season by the

St. Cecilia Society of New York, Victor Harris, Conductor.
Chaminade Club, Brooklyn, Emma Richardson Custer, Director.
Fifth Ave. Week Celebration (Special Request), St. Cecilia Society

"FAIRY BARK"

St. Cecilia Society of New York (December Concert).
Beethoven Society of New York (Spring Concert),
Louis Koemmenich, Director.

Harold Flammer, Inc., Publishers

56 West 45th Street

New York



HAROLD BAUER

MASTER PIANIST NOW BOOKING 1920-1921

In America All Season

Management: Metropolitan Musical Bureau

33 West 42nd St., New York City

MASON & HAMLIN PIANO