

Stephen Foster, Who Composed "Old Folks at Home," Left Many Songs Unpublished, Says Daughter

By HARVEY B. GAUL

PITTSBURGH, PA., Aug. 24.—There has always been an air of mystery about the old Stephen Collins Foster homestead. It may have been the dirt, the broken windows or the poor, tired broken down fences that gave the house an air of visualized mystery. But the thing I had in mind was auricular for there were sounds of a tinkling piano. Could it be that the spirit of Stephen Foster was ouija-boarding a piano? And so it was that I decided to investigate. I walked up to the front door and a decrepit old man who proved to be the caretaker, answered the bell.

"Do you wish to see the museum?" he inquired. I saw the museum, but let us pass it by lightly and quickly as it is the saddest museum that was ever exposed to the human eye. Its meagerness and meanness were pathetic, and as an exhibition place, it was tragic. As it reflected discredit upon Pittsburgh, and as we have enough such, I wiped a ten-year-old particle of dust from my eye, thinking it was a tear, and inquired who was playing the piano. "That's Foster's daughter," answered the caretaker, "would you care to see her?"

When I said I should, I was told to sit down a moment. Presently, there was a sound of footsteps and as I looked up, in came an old lady of indescribable age. It was Mrs. Marion Welch, Stephen Foster's daughter; the one spoken of somewhere and affectionately as "Little Marion." "Come up-stairs to my music room," said she, "it is more pleasant up there. It is so hard to keep the downstairs clean, when you have but little money and the city won't do anything."

So I followed her up the stairs, and there under the eaves of an old Mansard roof was her "music room." It contained an old piano, an old picture, some old chairs and much old music.

"And are you too, musical?" I asked. "Am I musical?" was her response, "Why, I am a music teacher. I have taught all my life, for well over fifty years. You think I only look fifty years old now? I wish I were, as a matter of fact I am a bit past seventy, but never mind, I still feel young."

"And feeling young you know, is a matter of concords. Not that I haven't had plenty of discords—and some of them aren't resolved yet, but then the discords only make the concords sweeter. You want to know about my music teach-

ing? Well, I have always taught piano. My father gave me my first lessons; in fact, he taught me all the rudiments. And the rudiments in those days, were the same as to-day. He gave me my foundation, and to have had the foundation of Stephen Foster is something, is it not? So I teach what he taught me, plus what I have later achieved. No, I don't teach his music. People would think I was trying to perpetuate him and he doesn't need my puny help. Besides, I believe in an all-round education for my pupils. How many lessons do I give? It is the middle of Summer now, and most of my pupils are away. I only give three lessons a day. You think that is too many for an old lady. I have told you before that I am not old, and besides I love to teach. In the winter I have a large class of pupils, and they don't all come to me because I am the daughter of my father, for I have a little reputation of my own. Maybe it isn't very big, but nevertheless, it is entirely my own. Teaching with me isn't exactly a livelihood, nor yet a habit. I teach because I love to impart music."

I said something about her reference to "concords" and "discords," and asked if she also composed. "Yes, I compose. I have a whole trunk full of songs. Sometimes I write my own lyrics, but not often. Composition is the love of my life. Maybe I got it from my father and maybe—anyway I compose. There is hardly a night but what I sit down when the work is done and improvise for hours. Improvisation is such fun. Maybe it is as you say 'a disease,' but it is a most pleasant sickness. No, very few people know I compose. I don't try to market my compositions. Many of them aren't worth it. Do I have my father's gift of melody? I most decidedly have not! That is given to very few people. My father was a great genius, and I am but a poor scribbler. I would like to have you hear my compositions sometime when we both have more leisure."

I expressed my delight at the prospect, and then conversation drifted around from one phase of music to another, and something was said about church music. "I am an organist, too," said the charming old lady, "I have played the organ at old St. John's Church—yes, the one down there near the cross roads, for a great many years. I worked with Harry Ringwalt, do you know him? Yes, isn't he nice. He has done a fine work for Pittsburgh with his choral music. He and I worked together for a great many years. He taught the choir and I made the old box of whistles toot out 'Old Hundred.' It was such fun! I wouldn't give

up my organ recollections for anything in the world."

I asked her if she knew that Harold Vincent Milligan had just written the best book about her father that has been published, "Did he?" she said, "I never knew it. I don't know half of the things that are said about my father. I want to say this, however, that most of the things said about him are untrue. A great deal of stress is laid on the way he wrote. That is all nonsense. He wrote music and improvised music the same as anyone else. I don't want to say anything about the latter part of his life. It was full of tragedy. New York didn't treat him well. Many of his compositions were stolen or lost. I have quite a number in my trunk now that were never published. He was cheated time and time again, and that is the reason I don't send them to a publisher."

Fears Publishers

I said I knew several who were as honest as the day is long. "It makes no difference," she continued; "I couldn't trust any of them. If any publisher wishes the manuscripts he will have to come here and examine them in my room. I wouldn't let them out of my sight. They are too valuable to trust to the mails and the exigencies of some publisher's reader. Yes, I think there is money in them, and I know the public would like to sing them, but—well I guess I am a bit peculiar about them. People never treated my father right and he never treated himself right. There are pianos of his scattered all over Pittsburgh. At one time in his life, I knew him to have as many as five pianos in different parts of the city. As for manuscripts of his songs, they are scattered everywhere. There are people all over this country who claim to have, and undoubtedly have, songs in his handwriting. They should send them in to the museum. It would be fine for the city, and that is where they belong. People keep them as relics or maybe to make money, I don't know which, but they shouldn't keep the songs now that he has passed away."

I asked her if she knew Stephen Foster was "coming up" for the Pantheon of America's great ones, the Hall of Fame. "Of course, I know it," was her answer, "He should have been there long before now. Wasn't he our first great composer? Aren't his songs sung all over the world and in every language? Sometimes America neglects her geniuses. Yes, I am glad he will be awarded his niche. Better late than never, isn't it?"

And so I arose and prepared to go. "Come and see me again," was her farewell. "Everyone who comes here comes merely to see my father's trophies. I like to have folks come to see me. I wish I could see that new book about my father you spoke of." I told her that I would mention it in MUSICAL AMERICA, as I knew Harold Vincent Milligan took our paper, and could hardly wait until Saturday night to read it, and maybe he would send her a copy, as he would undoubtedly like to have one reader of the book who knew as much about the subject as he did.

Kriens Pupil Heard in Worthy Recital

ST. JOHNSBURY, VT., Aug. 9.—Marjorie Crampton, violinist, pupil of Christian Kriens, the New York violin teacher, was heard in an interesting recital with Sigrid Eklof, accompanist, under the auspices of the Girls' Community League on the evening of Aug. 6. Miss Crampton disclosed admirable technique and excellent tonal quality in works of Grieg, Tchaikovsky, Ambrosio, Kreisler, Bruch, Rubinstein and in a group of compositions by Christian Kriens, all of which she played charmingly. There was a large audience in attendance.

Mr. and Mrs. Meyn Give Musicale

Mr. and Mrs. Heinrich Meyn gave a musicale at "The Orchard," their summer home in the Catskills on Aug. 4. Mr. Meyn sang a group of French songs, among which were works of Foudrain, Thomas, Hillier and Chaminade. American composers who were represented on the program were Sidney Homer and Bruno Huhn. One of Grieg's piano numbers was played by Dr. Cornelius Rybner.

Ornstein to Play in Southern States and Havana

During the Christmas season, Leo Ornstein will be heard in Havana, and on his return he will play in one or two cities in the South. During the latter half of January and early in February he will tour cities of Texas, closing his Texas tour at Houston on Feb. 4. Two days later he will give a recital before the New Orleans Music Teachers' Association at New Orleans. This will be the beginning of an extensive Southern tour, which will be limited only by his having to return to New York on Feb. 24 and 26, when he will make his first appearances with the National Symphony Orchestra, under Willem Mengelberg.

Rosa Ponselle Will Divide Time Between Opera and Concert



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Rosa Ponselle, Dramatic Soprano of the Metropolitan

During the forthcoming season Rosa Ponselle of the Metropolitan will undertake the most comprehensive concert tour that she has so far attempted. Miss Ponselle's concert season, so far booked, opens on Oct. 8, at Worcester, Mass., where she has been engaged as one of the stars of the Autumn Festival. The tour also includes Columbus, Evansville, Chicago, Detroit, Nashville, and Tulsa, Okla. Miss Ponselle's time up to March 6, will then be taken up exclusively at the Metropolitan. On March 8, she will open her spring tour at Jacksonville, Fla., appearing in succession at Savannah, Atlanta, Montgomery, New York with the Rubinstein Club, Boston (two appearances), Washington, D. C., Toledo, Ohio, Yonkers, N. Y., New Haven, Waterbury, Conn., Bridgeport, Providence, R. I., and Springfield, Mass. On April 17, Miss Ponselle will return to the Metropolitan for a week of special performances and leave again late in April for her spring festival tour, which opens at Denver, Col.

Miss Ponselle has been engaged as the star of the Hays, Kan., May Festival, also re-engaged for Houston, Tex. At Columbus, Ohio, Chicago, Detroit and New Haven, Conn., Miss Ponselle will have the assistance in her concerts of her sister, Carmela Ponselle, mezzo-soprano.

Florence Macbeth, soprano of the Chicago Opera Association, has again been engaged by the Gloversville (N. Y.) Philharmonic Society. This will be the third appearance in the city.

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