

THE OPERA OF THE WORLD'S MUSICAL CAPITAL

Mrs. Alma A. Rogers' Impression of the Magnificent Performances in Vienna's Imperial Opera House



GUSTAV MAHLER WHO LEAVES THE HOFOPER TO GO TO THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE OF NEW YORK AT A SALARY OF \$80,000 DOLLARS PER YEAR



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE NEW CONDUCTOR OF THE VIENNA OPERA TAKEN SEVERAL YEARS AGO, THOUGH HE STILL APPEARS VERY YOUTHFUL

BY ALMA A. ROGERS.

THE operatic season opened in Vienna, August 18, with a magnificent performance of Verdi's "Aida" in the Hofopertheater, which is to say the Imperial opera-house. The large and gilded auditorium was packed with the sort of audience usually described as fashionable, but it was also intensely musical, and the singers were received with an enthusiasm that found voice in many bravos and innumerable curtain-calls. But to my unphilosophic eyes the staging was more remarkable than the singing. In fact as to the latter, I have heard quite as good, and better, but imagination fails to realize stage effects more dazzlingly gorgeous, more historically representative, more minute in detail or more perfect in completeness.

To begin with, the area of the stage is immense. It seemed as if the Marquise and the Empress might all be set down there bodily, with room for Portland's vaudeville in the wings, and the courtesy of shrink somewhat through the distasteful effect of familiarity, but that was the way it looked the first night. Between 400 and 500 people were upon the stage in the grand public scene when the victorious general of the King makes his triumphal return, Ethiopian captives trailing in a parade, and the spoils of battle borne aloft. Half a dozen soldiers did not mean an army here, nor two or three standards the colors of the troops. On the contrary, the legion marched and counter-marched, with helmets burnished, a forest of spears flashing, until the centuries slipped away, and I was no longer gazing at a pageant, but actually one of the spectators to welcome home the conquering hero!

players is alone conspicuous over the wall and creates a weird fantasy of magic fiddlers.

Mahler, the \$80,000 Conductor.

Each night since the brilliant opening, opera has been given and the course will run with but few interruptions to the end of June. Only the highest classical compositions are permitted in the Hofoper. In fact, Gustav Mahler, the celebrated conductor whom American money has captured—he has just lately signed a contract for 400,000 crowns (\$80,000) per year with Manager Conrad of the Metropolitan—has partly made his record on his stand for the classical. The lavish and artistic staging also belongs to his credit.

Wagner, Verdi, Meyerbeer, Mozart, Leoncavallo, Mascagni, Saint Saens, Massenet, Offenbach, Puccini, Bizet, Weber, Donizetti, Thomas Gounod are represented by their best work on the imperial stage, with occasionally some composer of more local note who has not yet won his world's crown.

Wagner seems to be the reigning favorite, as a week rarely goes by without one or more music dramas of that master. Several times during the year an entire Ring of the Nibelungen is given on alternate nights. This, as is well known, consists of four operas, carrying the story in successive steps—beginning with the Nibelungen, which the poet has called the trilogy of the Ring; the Valkyrie, Siegfried and the Götterdämmerung. Splendor of presentation is carried to its climax in these dramatic stage poems.

Stately Edifice.

The building which is the home of so much magnificence is a very beautiful and imposing structure in French Renaissance. The open loggia in the facade is richly painted with graceful figures, and a row of statues, typifying music and the dance, fill the archway. The richness of the exterior is more than duplicated in the interior, where grand staircases rise from a wide vestibule, opening at the first flight upon a lovely colonnade in which are more exquisite frescoes, white marble nymphs and a bas relief of the present Emperor, Franz Joseph.

Unlike the American theater, with its high-pitched galleries at the extreme end of the auditorium, the seats in the Hofoper are arranged in a semicircle, the remainder, excepting the third and fourth galleries, contain from two to three rows of seats. On the second floor, the center of the semicircle, is the Imperial box, plainly fitted up in crimson, and containing a dozen or more chairs. Above the crimson canopy which surmounts it is a large gilded crown of state.

Back-Breaking Seats.

The artistic effect of the semicircular galleries is very satisfying, but a single night's experience of sitting in them is mortifying to the flesh. Which is to say, they break your back. In order to see the stage, one is forced to lean forward on the cushioned rail which runs in front, with the spinal column pitched at about 45 degrees. By the time you sit through a five-hour opera like "Meisteringers," a merely mortal being, one unaccustomed to the musical frenzy and accustomed to the American comfort even on row 23 of the gallery, begins to wish that Wagner had telescoped the first two acts into one, and that His Imperial Majesty would order an acuter pitch to the floor. The only really comfortable seats outside of the parquette are those in the center of the house, directly facing the stage. But people come just the same, and one of the surprising things is to see many women in the galleries, occupying standing room only. Whether they are students, forced to sacrifice themselves to their purses, or merely music-lovers, I know not, but in either case their endurance is amazing.

Ham Sandwiches and Music.

Leaving the auditorium between acts and walking in the halls is customary, and very restful; but scarcely to be admitted is the practice of passing refreshments—actually cakes, sandwiches and

liquids—among the people who remain during intermission. Upon my first evening I was astonished to see the couple next me—and they were very decent young people—return at the warning bell with half-consumed ham sandwiches in their hands, which they finished leisurely while the next act was in progress. But this is mentioned merely as an incident, and must not be confounded into the rule. As such it would be unjust and misleading.

Another custom of a Viennese audience is the very general habit of carrying the book of the opera and often the score. With shows gilded to the rail in front in my hands. The full enjoyment of every act the chief artists are called out by more clapping and enthusiastic bravo. The industrious conning of the opera, however, seems to me a technicality that properly belongs at home. It may have no other value than that it is my opinion, but when I see "Hamlet" played I want the book in my hand and am dipped in seas of lovely color, the grand opera is a complex process, due to many other items than either words or music alone. The play of human nature, the gallantry, the wit, the wit, the charm, is conveyed by so many subtle touches of manner and pose and action and color and mass that words do not mean so much in the total impression as light and shade.

What It Costs.

Before leaving this white and gold and crimson auditorium, whose stage curtain is dipped in seas of lovely color, the American question occurs: "What does it cost?" Well, it is not cheap. For that matter there is nothing cheap in Vienna, at least when an American is the purchaser of a thing. The price of a seat in the Hofoper is a complex process, due to many other items than either words or music alone. The play of human nature, the gallantry, the wit, the wit, the charm, is conveyed by so many subtle touches of manner and pose and action and color and mass that words do not mean so much in the total impression as light and shade.

Decorous Always.

Happily the American peanut gallery is conspicuous by its absence. From the pit to the fifth and highest semi-circle the decorum is perfect. Boys are never seen unattended, there is no hooting for the performance to begin, and the exquisite crases and bridgrooms and brides and all the attendant rode to and from the church on wheels completely hidden with flowers. The bride's wheel was all in orange blossoms with white ribbons. The bridegroom's was entwined with greenery brightened up with crimson roses and plinks.

WIEN HOFOPERNTHEATER.

The special patronage of the Emperor, paternal institutions of a monarchy having no parallel in our Republic I have been at some pains to secure exact data concerning the system of management of the royal opera.

The building, of which a good view is given, was erected by the government, which also pays the salaries of directors, artists and employees. The post of upper director, or intendant, is a very honorable one and is at present filled by Prince von Montenuov.

Next to him is the musical director, a sort of general manager, who conducts the orchestra and engages the artists. Under him again is a business manager. There are always three or four conductors, who relieve one another.

Contracts with the musical director and singers are made for a term of five years. In case of breaking a contract

the artist must pay a penalty commensurate with his salary, the amount imposed being within the discretion of the management. The salary of the musical director is 48,000 kronen. A handsome suite of apartments in the opera house also falls to him, and after ten years' service a pension of about two-thirds of his salary. Gustav Mahler can well afford to pay his penalty and lose the pension, as he goes to the Metropolitan for ten years.

The artists, of which altogether there are about 26 stars, receive from 24,000 to 50,000 kronen yearly. A list of the three leading artists and salaries runs thus: Fraulein Kurts, soprano, at 55,000 kronen; Herr Slezak, tenor, 48,000 kronen; Herr Demuth, basso, 36,000 kronen. The regular chorus numbers about 30, with several hundred auxiliaries.

The variety of music presented requires many different types of voice, the light coloratura of an old school opera being

quite helpless in the heavy Wagnerian roles, which make tremendous demands on the artist. And much as we moderns adore Wagner, no musical ear can be oblivious to the charm of music made when pure beauty was the ideal of the composer, and yet the magician Wagner appeared to transform it into a dramatic language. Mozart and Haydn wrote for beauty's sake alone and were not concerned with either the abyssal heights or depths of human nature. I heard "Don Giovanni" shortly after the back-breaking experience of the "Meisteringers," and the contrast was striking. Under the crystal-pure melodies of Mozart, which swelled and caroled and trilled like ecstatic bird songs in a leafy wood in Spring—a joy to sense, a relief to nerves. It may be that an unusually fine cast of artists had something to do with it, and perhaps the mood was just right. The stage settings, too, were a picture to delight the eye, scarlet being exquisitely wrought into the chief motif of the color scheme, in perfect accord with the Venetian scenes.

Surely there will always be a place in

course. Beginning with violets with the soup, they will change to lilies of the valley with the fish. Then come bouchees or pates with hyacinths, a relve with cornflowers, plinks with the sherbet, roses with the roast and orchids or sweet peas with the sweets.

A favorite decoration of the table in Paris is a serpentine mirror, which mirrors the table and forms a canopy over it on wire trelliswork dotted over with tiny electric lamps of every imaginable hue. Miniature fruit trees were grouped on the tables about fish ponds full of real water with real live goldfish swimming about.

EUROPE'S LOVE OF FLOWERS.

EUROPE spends millions every year for flowers. Flowers are an indispensable feature of every social occasion, and the French government has used them extravagantly of late as adornments of public festivities.

One of the most expensive features of getting married in France is the florist's bill. The man in the case celebrates his engagement by sending a basket decorated with lace and ribbon to his fiancée. If he does not possess a wealthy he may get out of the obligation for \$20 or 30, but the case is cited of a hobo who spent \$300 for a bouquet and grouped around it four others at \$1200 apiece.

There is also a legend of an Australian of vast wealth who spent \$5000 on a basket of orchids and plinks for his engagement gift, and another of a girl of the Hungarian nobility, who received a bouquet made up entirely of Alpine flowers, which cost \$4000. One flower in it had cost a search of five weeks through the higher valleys of the mountains.

The Schemes of Colonel Clay

Continued From Page 4.

Pleardet, who was a customer of ours, brought in a good check for \$300, signed by a first-rate name, and asked us to pay it in on her behalf to Darby, Drummond & Rothenberg's, and to open a London account with them for her. We did so, and received in reply a check book.

THE SKUNK'S DIVORCE.

BY DOLORES.

A widowed skunk and a cigarette. Once in a shady New York saloon. Said the skunk to "Forlorn I wander alone, Beroff of joy." In a courtly tone. The gay cigarette her grief consoled. The widow his flattering words rejoiced. And they were wed. But the honeymoon had not yet passed when one afternoon The skunk, more sad than ever before, Betook herself to Judge Sreeshnow's door.

"Dear Madame, why do you come this way?"

"Your Honor, for a divorce I pray."

"You seek a divorce from Cigarette? Why, your wedding bells are ringing yet! Has your husband been unkind to you? Does he beat you? Has he proved unfaithful?"

"No, your Honor, he does not beat me! Kind and loving he tries to treat me. As a husband Cigarette's grand."

"All but his breath—that I cannot stand."

"His breath? 'Tis bad; but I thought a Could hold her own."

"Well, I can't. I'm stuck Out of house and home."

"Alas! Alas! Things have come to a desperate pass. When a breath attains the fearful power To drive a skunk from her wedding door, Madame, you have my deep sympathy. Take your divorce. I set you free."

The Jail for Him.

Chicago Evening Journal.

Talk about "sweet sorrow" A young New Yorker only smiled when a judge sentenced him to six months in jail for writing 1000 love letters to a girl of a year to an unwilling married woman.

the world for music born of beauty. And since the complexities of the human mind require diversity to yield satisfaction, it seems to me that the standard of taste should be most catholic, admitting into the circle of appreciation all excellences of every age and school, nor should Wagner devotees permit themselves to fall into a rut. No one of us can travel on a tight rope to the shrine of art.

The new conductor who takes the place of Mahler at the Hofoper is Felix Weingartner. He does not appear, however, until January first, and the baton in the meantime is in the hands of his assistant. On the night of "Don Giovanni" Mahler conducted, and his appearance each time was greeted with warm applause. The body of the Viennese are sorry to lose him. During the relative of the opera he accompanied alone on a spinet. The effect was very quiet and pleasing.

Francis Richter.

Just a word to the friends of Francis Richter. He attends opera about once a week, and has so far listened to Verdi's "Aida" and "Otello," Meyerbeer's "Prophet," Mozart's "Magic Flute," a delightful creation, by the way, and "Don Giovanni" and the "Meisteringers." The "Merry Widow," a light comic opera, which has made a great popular success and is now hearing its five hundredth performance, was next seen for purposes of contrast. But for this another theater must be visited. He will also attend the great dramas of Shakespeare, Schiller and others, which are given in German at the Imperial playhouse devoted to the drama—the Hofburg Theater, one of the architectural features of the beautiful Ringstrasse, Vienna's world-famous street.

"What would he be worth as a conjurer, anyway, if he couldn't substitute one envelope for another between the table and the fireplace without you noticing it? And Colonel Clay, you must remember, is a prince among conjurers."

"Well, it's a comfort to know we've identified our man and the woman who was with him," Sir Charles said, with a slight sigh of relief. "The next thing will be, of course, you'll follow them up on these clues in England and arrest them?"

The commissary shrugged his shoulders. "Arrest them?" he exclaimed, much amused. "Ah, monsieur, but you are sanguine! No officer of justice has ever succeeded in arresting Le Colonel Caoutchouc, as we call him in French. He is as slippery as an eel, that man. He wriggles through our fingers. Suppose even we caught him, what could we prove? I ask you. Nobody who has seen him once can ever swear to him again in his next impersonation. He is impavable, this good Colonel. On the day when I arrested him, I assure you, monsieur, I shall consider myself the smartest police officer in Europe."

"Well, I shall catch him yet," Sir Charles answered, and relapsed into silence.

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as I learn from the number, by telegram from London," the commissary put in. "Also, that on the same day on which your check was cashed, Mme. Pleardet, in London, withdrew her balance."

"But how did the fellow get me to sign the check?" Sir Charles cried. "How did he manage the card trick?"

"The commissary produced a similar card from his pocket. "Was that the sort of thing?" he asked.

"Precisely! A facsimile."

"I thought so. Well, our Colonel, I had bought a packet of such cards, intended for admission to a religious function, at a shop in the Quai Massena. He cut out the center, and, see here—" The commissary turned it over and showed a piece of paper pasted neatly over the back; this he tore off, and there, concealed behind it, lay a folded check, with only the place where the signature should be written showing through on the face which the Beer had presented to us. "I call that a neat trick," the commissary remarked, with professional enjoyment of a really good reception.

"But he burned the envelope before my eyes!" Sir Charles exclaimed. "Pooh!" the commissary answered.