

City's Summer Music Problem Solved at Last

Success of Popular-Priced Concerts Which Filled Madison Square Garden Leads to Outdoor Opera at City College Stadium

THINK of dog-days concerts where they listen to whole symphonies and look annoyed if you whisper! Strange as it may seem, that condition actually existed but recently, and it was one of the phenomena, expressed in the shape of the Civic Orchestral Society's concerts at Madison Square Garden, which came to an end last Tuesday, that will make the present Summer unique in the city's musical history. The other, which has not yet taken place, will be the open-air opera performances at the City College Stadium planned for Sept. 18 and 21.

The reason why the Madison Square concerts are unique is that they have been successful. Put forward in the name of good music for the masses, they not only filled their part of the contract, but inspired the public to do its share in a manner that Summer concerts of the present generation—not to go back to the days of Theodore Thomas and Seidl for whatever one could find—have never been able to approach.

Several of the concerts have brought out audiences whose numbers set new records of attendance for concerts whose programs held no factitious values. The seating capacity of the Garden, as arranged for the concerts, was said to be 8,000. For two of the concerts there were not enough seats for all those who applied, while for two others the seating capacity came very near being exhausted. When you get something like 8,000 persons at a concert in New York it means something!

The Madison Square Garden concerts have been unique for another thing, that they established themselves as permanent. It is true that this year only fifteen concerts were given, instead of the proposed twenty. In a sense that approximates conditions that have prevailed in other gallant attempts to give Summer concerts, namely, that the season had to be given up before its conclusion. But in this case the early closing was decided upon in the interests of getting a fresh and unhampered start next year. There has been a deficit. There is always a deficit in orchestral concerts. But it has not been so large as to discourage attempts to try the thing over again. Every one connected with the organization says the concerts will be resumed next year. Otto H. Kahn, one of the principal financial backers, is convinced the concerts have demonstrated their fitness to survive and has intimated his willingness to do his share.

Oscar Hammerstein, a member of the opposite camp, who attended every concert faithfully after the opening night, has given his blessing to the project and says it will be even stronger next year. With this feeling of confidence and success in the air, it seems scarcely to be doubted that competent authorities have made up their minds that Summer symphony concerts are hereafter to be a permanent feature of New York life.

It was Oscar Hammerstein who, on the night Mme. Gadski donated her services as soloist and more than a thousand persons were turned away after the hall was filled, gave one diagnosis of success in his usual terse but expressive way.

"There is no greater bargain hunter," he said, laying one finger aside his nose and looking around the crowded hall, "than the American music-lover."

He referred to the fact that the audience realized it was hearing a fine orchestra and a celebrated opera star at moving-picture prices. And right there lies another point wherein these concerts have been different from what we have hitherto known. They have exhibited famous singers, whose regular fees would make any thought of their services out of the question, appearing as volunteer soloists without pay. This was an unprecedented recognition of the worth and dignity of the work.

The aspects from which the concerts have been unique have not yet been exhausted, however. There still remains the fact that they were artistically worth

while. And this has unquestionably been the principal factor of their appeal. People went there because they had been told they would hear good music well played, and they continued to go because they found out what they had been told was true.

The orchestra consisted of eighty-six men and it was as good an orchestra as has ever been heard here as far as its personnel went, because its members could be, and were, selected from the ranks of the Philharmonic Society, the Symphony Society of New York and the Metropolitan Opera House orchestras, those organizations being disbanded for

are talking to a native Englishman, you find yourself listening to one who talks English with a German accent. Occasionally upon this accent the rising inflection of the Englishman is superimposed, and the combination is very fetching.

"Probably the thing a musician would feel most grateful for in these Summer concerts," he said when the discussion began, "is that he is working with an audience that wants to be present and hear music. You can feel sure nobody in your audience has been dragged there, because it is not at all fashionable to come to a Summer concert, and there is



Walter
Henry
Rothwell

the Summer. No such body of men has been got together for Summer music in the city before. It was an expensive orchestra and when the guarantors agreed to engage so many men of such calibre they gave the best proof of their good faith in pursuing their object.

Furthermore, a high-class man was secured as conductor. In Walter Henry Rothwell, a young Englishman who had been brought up musically in Germany and Austria and had been a disciple of Mahler, the concerts secured the services of a serious and talented musician. He had been known in this country as conductor for Henry W. Savage's production of "Parsifal" and as the head of the St. Paul Symphony Orchestra for seven years. There is no doubt that his conducting was a decided factor in the success of the concerts.

It may be interesting to hear from Mr. Rothwell himself an account of his ideas as to what his concerts meant and some of the problems he faced. He talked on this subject one noontime just after the orchestra had finished one of the single rehearsals that were available for each concert.

He is of the nervous, energetic type of man, agreeable in manner and gratefully lacking in the difficulty of self-expression that handicaps some musicians. What strikes you at once about him is the peculiarity that, although you know you

little to be done in the way of showing off clothes.

"With this feeling about our audiences, we think we are right in offering them only music of the best grade, and we have resisted all pressure brought to bear in the line of making the music too 'popular.' Such a fine orchestra as has been assembled cannot be wasted. We must play only music that is worthy of it, and people can get all the other kind they want elsewhere, anyway.

"But it has been very difficult to adjust the programs. Next time I do it I am going to try and have a good, reliable weather expert on my staff. It always seems to happen that on the evenings we decide to play a full symphony the weather turns most oppressively hot, and when we decide as a result to go a little easier next time it immediately becomes cool and pleasant.

"Then people do not realize the difficulties we face in the mechanics of the hall. I receive letters asking me why we do not play, for instance, Debussy's 'L'Après-midi d'un faune.' That would be entirely out of place in the huge spaces of the Garden. It is the finest kind of Brussels lace work, and it would have to be torn to pieces in the effort to get the audience to hear it. We have to keep in mind that we are decorative painters, not miniaturists. We cannot play Mozart, whose music falls to pieces in your hand

if you handle it roughly. I have found that Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is about the limit we can go in delicacy, and I have my doubts whether even that, when we played it, came through entirely successfully.

"One of the interesting things about these concerts is that they are reaching a new class, the men who do not go to concerts in the Winter. I think we are making converts to music. Many men are left alone in the city by their families in the Summer, and many more come here on business, and these men have no place to go in the evenings. Lots of them have come here and found it pleasant.

"As far as the musical tastes of our audiences go, let me tell you a secret: Audiences are the same everywhere. They like the same things and always respond to the same things in the same way. I am sure if we collected an audience which had never heard music before and gave them several concerts, we would find them indistinguishable in their likes from any other audience. All audiences like Wagner, Tchaikowsky, and Grieg, and like the same compositions of these men. They all like the 'Pathétique' Symphony and Beethoven's Fifth.

"And they all feel the same way about those for whom they do not care so much. For instance, their attitude toward Brahms is always the same. They are willing to take off their hats to him for his great genius, but they will pass him by with their hats in their hands."

The Civic Orchestral Society was organized as the result of the efforts of Miss Martha Maynard, who had been interested in similar work for some time. She got together a number of wealthy and influential persons who were willing to underwrite the concerts. These guarantors included Mrs. William Douglas Sloane, William K. Vanderbilt, Henry Walters, Jacob Schiff, Charles Sabin, Mrs. E. S. Harkness, Mrs. E. H. Harriman, George Baker, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., A. D. Juilliard, Mrs. H. McK. Twombly, Miss Anne Morgan, John Flagler, Miss Annie Burr Jennings, Felix Warburg, James Byrne, Mrs. Willard D. Straight, Adolph Lewisohn, I. N. Seligman, Clarence H. Mackay, Mrs. Philip Lydig, Mrs. T. L. Chadbourne, Jr., Mrs. John H. Hammond, Dr. John Munn, Mrs. Charles Ditson, Charles Lanier, William C. McCune, Albert Wiggin, Mrs. Hugh Auchincloss, Miss Katherine Dreier, Dunlevy Milbank, Otto H. Kahn, and William Delavan Baldwin.

The opera performances are to be given at the City College Stadium for the benefit of the fund under which the orchestra will be continued next season. Again the Metropolitan Opera Company artists have come forward and volunteered their services, though this time, instead of several individual singers, there will be the complete casts of three operas.

The first performance will occur on the evening of Sept. 18. Wagner's "Die Walkure" will be sung. Artur Bodanzky will conduct and the artists who will take part include Mme. Melanie Kurt, Mme. Margarete Matzenauer, and Maude Fay, with Johannes Sembach and Carl Braun.

"Cavalleria Rusticana" and "Pagliacci" will be sung on the following Thursday evening, and among those who will appear will be Mme. Gadski and Miss Fitzij, and Messrs. Luca Botta and Amato. Arnold Conti will conduct.

The out-door opera, given under the light of the calcium at night, will be new to New York on such a scale. The stadium will not be enlarged. The stage, with specially constructed acoustic devices installed during similar performances at the Yale Bowl last Spring, will be set in front of the present grandstands and then the audiences will see Wagner's heroes and heroines and the more intense ones of the Italian composers acting out their stories by the aid of moonlight.

Thus will another new event in a unique Summer of "music for the people" in New York be brought to pass.