

Music and Drama.

By BAYREUTH.

BOOKINGS.

(Dates Subject to Alteration.)

AUCKLAND—HIS MAJESTY'S

August 24 to September 7—Hamilton Dramatic Company.

THE OPERA HOUSE.

En Season—Fuller's Pictures.

WELLINGTON OPERA HOUSE.

August 16 to 25—Nettie Stewart.
August 30 to 31—Miss Harding Matthy.
September 2 to 10—J. C. Williamson.
Sept. 17 to Oct. 16—Allan Hamilton.
Sept. 25 to Nov. 13—J. C. Williamson.
Nov. 15 to Dec. 8—J. C. Williamson.
December 10 to 18—M. Branscombe.
Dec. 23 (for six weeks)—J. C. Williamson.

THEATRE ROYAL.

En Season—Fuller's Pictures.

PALMERSTON NORTH MUNICIPAL OPERA HOUSE.

1909.
Aug. 30 and 31—Julius Knight.
Sept. 1—Hayward's Pictures.
Sept. 2—Children's Ball, C. Williamson.
Sept. 7—Orchestral Concert.
Sept. 8—Hayward's Pictures.
Sept. 13—Taylor-Carrington Dramatic Co.
Sept. 15—Hayward's Pictures.
Sept. 21—Hayward's Association.
Sept. 22—Hayward's Pictures.
Sept. 23 and 24—Technical School.
Sept. 28—Hayward's Pictures.
Sept. 29 and 30—Jack and Jill Panto.
Oct. 5—Hayward's Pictures.
Oct. 6 and 7—J. C. Williamson.
Oct. 13 to 27—Hayward's Pictures.
Nov. 1 to 6—Hugh Ward Musical Comedy.
Nov. 20 to Dec. 1—Poltard Opera Co.
Dec. 9—Local Concert.
Dec. 27 to 29—Carter, the Magician.
1910.
Jan. 20 to 24—J. C. Williamson.
Feb. 14 and 15—Scarlet Troubadour.
March 28 to 31—Allan Hamilton.
April 21 and 22—Geo. Marlow.
May 19 and 20—J. C. Williamson.
June 4 to 6—Meynell and Gunn.
June 8 and 9—J. C. Williamson.
June 20 to 25—Fred. Gerstman Musical Comedy.
June 30 to July 2—Meynell and Gunn.
Aug. 18 and 19—J. C. Williamson.
Aug. 25 and 26—J. C. Williamson.
Sept. 30 to Oct. 1—J. C. Williamson.
Oct. 31 to Nov. 5—Allan Hamilton.
Nov. 10 and 11—J. C. Williamson.

The Newest Music.

NOVELTY never dies. The newest music is spoken of by the London press as emanating from Monsieur Debussy, whose opera, "Pelleas et Melisande," founded on Maeterlinck's beautiful and pathetic play, has lately been given in the metropolis. Debussy has had some vogue in England, thanks to Mr. Thomas Beecham, the conductor of the New Symphony Orchestra. Whilst the older bodies, like the London Symphony, Queen's Hall, and Philharmonic Orchestra, have only given casual prominence to living composers, Beecham has gone into the modern school of writers with whole-souled enthusiasm. Debussy and Frederick Delius (one of the most promising men of the day) has been brought prominently under the notice of the British musical public, together with a number of other composers, such as Landon, Ronald, and Granville Bantock.

After the performance of his now celebrated opera at Covent Garden, M. Debussy was interviewed by the Press. He has something very interesting to say, but before proceeding further it is necessary to look over the evolutions of the opera before we can get the composer into focus with more familiar names. The landmarks of the evolution of opera have been placed by original and fearless composers, and every one of them, as is the case in all branches of art, brought the art world, and then the general public, but slowly to his views. The first "opera" was the work of an Italian, the Florentine Monteverde. It was called "Orfeo," and the orchestra comprised only thirty-six instruments, which merely played a modest accompaniment to the singing.

The next step was taken by Rameau, whose orchestral score completed and emphasized the words, added new meaning to them, and even commented on them at length. Mozart went further still. The orchestra is no longer there to beautify, as it were, and sustain the lyrics; the music is part of the "action" itself, and often the main part. Beethoven, too, understood what "opera" should be, and in his "Fidelio" we have vague but interesting suggestions of what was to become that "symphonic opera" which was created by the genius of Berlioz and Wag-

ner. Those who have heard and understood "Tristan" or "Siegfried," for instance, must have realized the victorious force of the blow which the German giant dealt to the purely "melodic" opera so dear to the Italians.

The last stage in the evolution of the lyrical drama is represented by M. Debussy's "Pelleas et Melisande," which is almost as distant from Wagner's ideals as those are from the old Italian notion of opera. Indeed, the French composer is the creator of the "newest" music, which many already consider as the music of the future.

M. Claude Achille Debussy is the most talked-of French composer of the day. He is a broad-shouldered man of about forty-five years of age, with a strong, round face; dark, sunken eyes—stern, but not devoid of a gleam of humour—and a thoughtful brow, over which hangs thick, black, wavy hair. His dark beard is curly and pointed, and his heavy moustache throws a shadow over full and mobile lips. He reminds one of a musketeer of the days of Louis XIII., or of one of those healthy and jovial Dutch gentlemen whom Franz Hals painted so well.

Speaking of the production of "Pelleas et Melisande," to an interviewer, M. Debussy said: "It reminds me of the controversy seven years ago when my opera was produced in Paris at the Opera Comique

"As a rule," the composer continued in answer to a question about his music, "the public seems to make no distinction between music and song. According to the public, all that is not song is not music. My view is precisely the contrary. When one writes lyrical music one must not write songs, for the simple reason that the rhythm and the definite 'shape' of a song cannot adapt themselves to the sentiment and the atmosphere. If, in an opera, you deal on one hand with the music and on the other with the sentiment, thus making a distinction between the two, the result must needs be a failure. I know that my 'Pelleas et Melisande' has called forth more criticisms than any other work in recent years. I have been, and am still, accused of having forgotten to place any melody in my opera. (Here M. Debussy burst into good-humoured laughter.) The fact is, there is nothing else but melody in 'Pelleas.' Only, it is not cut, it is not divided into slices, according to the old—and absurd—rules of opera. My melody is intentionally uninterrupted, never ceasing, for it aims at reproducing life itself. I know it is impossible to hum or whistle an air from my opera after having heard it, and I am aware that the barrel organs will never adopt fragments from my music. Needless to say I am delighted at this thought. There are no songs in life. It has rhythm, atmosphere, and colour; but these, though always varying, go on for ever without pause."

"I sat at Covent Garden," I said, "next one who remarked that as Melisande appears alone near a lake at the opening of the first act she might 'give us a song.'"

"How could she?" the composer exclaimed. "She is exhausted and has lost her way in the forest. Did your neighbour really think that in these conditions Melisande could feel like shouting a pretty aria in three or four verses, not counting the 'encore'! In the fourth act I have been told that Pelleas, who is waiting for the woman he adores, in a sylvan haunt at night, and by a romantic fountain, ought really to burst into a thrilling love song. Those who make such suggestions have no imagination. Otherwise they would not expect my unfortunate young hero to supply them with a cavatina at a moment when his soul is impatient, fearful, and a prey to conflicting emotions. Music for the stage is not drawing-room music."

Are Choruses Necessary?

"Several English critics," I said, "have wondered whether you object to choruses. There are none to speak of in your lyric drama."

M. Debussy smiled. "I take no exception to them; on the contrary. But I had no occasion to put any in 'Pelleas.' Wagner, by the way, after he had completed the Tetralogy, resolved never to write a chorus again, and published a volume on their absurdity; but he filled 'Parsifal' with them. A chorus is a very

difficult thing to compose. It is the voice of a crowd; a voice that must be spontaneous and instinctive. Have you ever heard in any opera that strange and mighty voice?"

"What about one or two of the choruses in 'Carmen,' or the voice of the crowd in Charpentier's 'Louise'?" I suggested.

Here M. Debussy hesitated. "You cannot have the men on one side and the women on the other," he said at last, "singing the same words, in turns or together. The voice of the crowd is made up in a thousand different expressions and various shades of feeling. The musician must aim at giving an impression sudden and vivid, yet subtle and mysterious. Only an impression; never more than that."

"You are an impressionist, M. Debussy."

"I have been called the 'Whistler of music.'" And he added whimsically, "They have dubbed my friend Maeterlinck the 'Belgian Shakespeare.' People love such pompous names. This has not prevented Nordau from calling Maeterlinck degenerate, and many critics from considering me as a visionary or an 'apostle of oddity and self-advertisement.' So far as I am concerned, I can only say that my one engrossing ambition in music is to bring it as near as possible to a representation of life itself."

No Duets.

"Then that is why there are no duets in your 'Pelleas'?"

"Exactly. When two persons talk at the same time they cannot hear one another. Besides, it is not polite, and the one who interrupts should stop. I have never written a duet, and I never shall!"

M. Debussy, whose favourite composer is Bach, has already achieved much, and will no doubt achieve more in the future. He is a sincere, independent, and fearless artist. His sympathies are wide, and the aim he pursues is far from deficient in higher motives. It may be pronounced revolutionary or subversive, but his originality is genuine. The man who composed "Pelleas et Melisande" has not only done something new, he has done something well. His work is the latest, if not the final, stage in that dominating endeavour of the age in all forms of art to reproduce as closely and as faithfully as possible human life.

"A Modern Aspasia."

Mr H. Hamilton Fyfe, one of the more promising and struggling English playwrights of the present generation, has had a new play, entitled "A Modern Aspasia," produced by the London Stage Society. "The Daily Telegraph" does not give it a kind reception, for the reason that its dramatic critic is notoriously British. That is to say, it is impossible to get past his prejudices, and one of his prejudices is that plays dealing with sex questions ought to be banned. "Mr. H. Hamilton Fyfe's play, produced by the Stage Society, is interesting but uncomfortable. It starts a problem for which it offers no solution: it deals with some of the gravest elements of human nature, leading up to the most serious issues, and leaves them precisely where they were before the discussion began. This, of course, is precisely the method of the Socratic dialogue; but there is all the difference in the world between a philosophical discussion which can be perused at leisure and returned to again and again, and a stage piece which must make its effect at once, if at all, and which more likely than not is written from a partial and arbitrary point of view. Possibly the present generation does not read Charles Reade's novels, and is, therefore, not acquainted with one of the very best of them all, 'Griffith Gaunt.' In 'Griffith Gaunt' you have a hero, balanced, as it were, between two different kinds of women, to both of whom he is, in a sense, married. Katherine Gaunt, the legal wife, is the embodiment of haughty pride, passionate hate, and religious devotion. Mersey Vint is the incarnation of sweetness, humility, and tenderness. And the hero himself, who is thus tossed to and fro between opposite poles of love and devotion, is a brave, lusty, Englishman, mad in anger, mad in jealousy—in short, a sort of English Othello. Mr. Hamilton Fyfe's theme is precisely that of 'Griffith Gaunt,' but his characters are not so firmly drawn. Edward Meredith possesses as his wife, Muriel, a selfish, casual, easy-going woman, unwilling to bear the responsibilities of matrimony, utterly regardless of what her husband does in his times of leisure, so long as she is happy and contented. Edward Meredith

is by no means a Griffith Gaunt; his temperament does not offer the same excuses for his lapses as that of the hero of Charles Reade. But because his ideal of marriage is that of mother and children, he establishes Margaret Warren, a tender, innocent, domesticated creature, in a cottage in Surrey, where he has two children, adored by both mother and father. This double menage has been going on for some years when the play opens, but the arrival of an old friend and spiritual father, the Bishop of Patagonia, brings matters to a crisis. The cottage in Surrey is discovered, together with its occupants and when, in a subsequent act, the two women, Muriel and Margaret, confront one another, Meredith's double life stands revealed to the naked eye. Here is a man who practically has two wives to suit apparently opposite sides of his nature, one of whom he respects without loving, the other whom he loves without any great respect. What is to be done now that concealment is no longer possible? We turn to the Bishop of Patagonia to solve the problem for us. For all practical purposes he is as dumb as the oracle of Delphi. None of the others can offer a suggestion—not Edward Meredith, nor Muriel, nor a very foolish young man, Walter Bretherton, who calls himself her friend. So as there is nothing to be done, the only resource is to ring down the curtain, to shrug one's shoulders, and proclaim, as though it were a virtue, our helplessness."

Forthcoming Events—"The Breed of the Tresnams."

On Monday, September 6th, Mr. J. C. Williamson will present at H.M. Theatre, Auckland, Mr. Julius Knight and a fine supporting company in Dix and Sutherland's play, "The Breed of the Tresnams." The drama deals with a romantic period of English history in thoroughly romantic fashion, when Cavalier and Roundhead fought for supremacy. It runs through four acts, and the plot is said to be strong in tragic, emotional elements. Mr. Julius Knight will appear as the Royalist adventurer, Lieutenant Reresby, "The Rat." It is asserted that of all the varied things Mr. Knight has done in Australia, Reresby is the best of all. A complex rascal is this free lance and debonnaire soldier of fortune.

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