

## Strauss in His Summer Home.

### A VISIT TO THE SYMPHONIC POET.

IN the "Berliner Lokal Anzeiger," Alfred Holzbock speaks of his visit to Richard Strauss in the latter's country home in Garmisch, Bavaria, as follows:—

One must follow a badly kept country road to reach the summer seat of Richard Strauss. Summer seat is hardly the proper term, though. The villa, which was built by Emanuel Seidel, of Munich, is situated at the base of the Klammer Mountains, away from the road, in a valley whose loveliness is not marred by the giant mountains, the Wendelstein and die Zugspitze, whose peaks, forever covered with snow, look down upon this quiet home of the composer. But "Richard the Fortunate," as he is frequently termed, does not care to have this bucolic retro looked upon as a country seat. I met him in his large garden, his right hand equipped with a pencil and his left holding a black note book.

"I'm just composing a little," said Strauss, who speaks the Bavarian dialect so gemuthlich when he feels happy and contented. And here in Garmisch the man who in Berlin, London, and Paris is the centre of jubilant ovations, feels most gemuthlich and contented.

"Here I am happiest, here, thanks to my dear wife, who is also a real intellectual comrade for me, and to my lovely boy, I experience that sweet peace which I long for and need. Here it is easiest for me to compose; here I take the greatest pleasure in my work, even during the winter. However, I compose almost everywhere; in my beautiful, cosy home and in the noisy international hotel, in my garden and on the railroad train; my sketch book is ever my companion which, while walking, riding, during my meals and while drinking, I always have with me. As soon as I think of a motive adapted for the theme with which I am occupied, it is immediately recorded in my inseparable companion, the sketch book. One of the most important melodies for my new opera came to me while was playing "Schafkopf" (a German card game) for which I have associated myself with the notabilities of Garmisch. The ideas which I jot down are really only 'pre-sketches,' which are then elaborated. But before I improvise even the smallest 'pre-sketch' for an opera, I occupy myself with and study the words of the book for at least six months.

"I let the plot fairly boil within me. The final details of the situations and the characters must be thoroughly elaborated within me, and then only do I allow the musical thoughts to take possession of me. The 'pre-sketches' become sketches. I then copy the sketches, then the material is elaborated. The piano score, which I alter and edit at least four times, is then written. This represents the work; that which follows, the entire score, the large orchestra tone colouring, I consider a recreation. The score I write at one stretch, without much effort, in my study, in which I work for twelve hours without interruption. Thus I am enabled to give the uniform character to a composition, and that, to my mind, is the principal thing. Heroin most of our composers err. If they were to take some piece of a Wagner drama or a Mozart finale they would be compelled to recognise with admiration the absolute uniformity between all the parts. It is like the summary or the extract from one piece. But many of our composers wish only to make a show with sporadic thoughts of melody, more or less prominent, and, above all, immediately conspicuous. Such a creation resembles a suit of clothing made of various

patches, some of which may be very pretty and of a bright colour, but which for all that is nothing more than patch-work."

At present the latest operatic work of the master, "Der Rosenkavalier," takes up his entire creative art. The most possible and impossible reports of this work of Strauss have been circulated. The composition is not called a musical drama, nor an opera, nor a comic opera, but is given the peculiar name of "Der Rosenkavalier, comedy for music."

"One might think," says Strauss, "that this term is meant to signify an entirely new musical stage genius. Such is not the case. I have merely endeavoured to adapt the music to the light and graceful character of the Hoffmanns-thal fiction."

The plot is laid during the time of the Empress Maria Theresa, in Vienna. The first scene begins with entertaining, cheerful audacity in the bed-chamber of the wife of the field-marshal, the Princess Werdenberg, beside whose couch Octavian, a young nobleman of pleasure, 17 years of age, of distinguished family, vows his tender love. This Octavian is a fascinating but well-behaved boy, a kind of Cherubino, whose rival on the field of love is the Baron Ochs v. Levereenan, a brutal parvenu in spite of his being an old aristocrat. These two are the principal figures in the comedy. During the early forenoon the Baron forces himself unexpectedly into the presence of his cousin, the Princess. In order not to expose the lady of his love, Octavian disguises himself as chambermaid, to whom the Baron at once makes love. Ochs v. Levereenan informs his cousin that he has condescended to become engaged to Sophie von Farnal, the daughter of a man rich, but only newly knighted. He requests the Princess to procure him a Rosenkavalier, i.e., an aristocratic suitor for himself, who, according to the custom, presents a rose to the intended bride in the name of the bridegroom. Octavian becomes the Rosenkavalier. The fiancée of the Baron, whose obtrusiveness is obnoxious to her, falls in love with the young suitor acting as proxy, who finally, in noble resentment, wounds the bridegroom, who continually molests the young girl. A ruse frees the young lady from her intended bridegroom. The Baron-bridegroom receives a loving epistle from the chambermaid—that is to say, the Rosenkavalier, Octavian. Octavian—chambermaid—and the bridegroom meet in a chamber reparee. The latter is fooled and unmasked. Baron Ochs departs with empty hands, and his one-time fiancée is led to the altar by the Rosenkavalier.

Referring to his composition, Richard Strauss said: "This fiction of Hoffmanns-thal retains the tone of the rococo in a delightful style, and it has been my object to transfer this tone to the style of music. Involuntarily, the spirit of Mozart arose before my mental vision, but I have, notwithstanding, remained true to myself. The orchestra is not as strong as in 'Salome' or 'Elektra,' but it is by no means treated according to the modern tendency, the object of which is to produce Mozart with a small orchestra. 'Der Rosenkavalier' is composed for full orchestra. Mozart's intentions, by the way, never had a weak orchestra in view. When an English patron of music once had one of his symphonies played with 100 violins, Mozart was filled with enthusiasm. I have not ignored the light and saucy cheerfulness of the fiction, though it never oversteps the bounds of all that is graceful and charm-

## Dramatic Criticism in Australia.

### SOME CANDID VIEWS.

(By J.B.R. in "The Booklover.")

We have lately heard much of artists in dramatic and musical spheres who have openly resented the criticism they have received from the Press. Most people, no doubt, smiled and murmured something to the effect that this public resentment is done for advertisement. It is a moot point whether the advertisement is altogether good. It seems unwise to take up arms against a newspaper-man. He always has the whip-hand, and is bound to have the last word. Actors, as a rule, have the good sense to shrug their shoulders at unjust criticism, and, although it hurts at times, they know that one man's opinion cannot influence the entire general public. Yet if the complaints that have been and are being raised against unfairness on the part of dramatic critics in Australia, could all be voiced at the same time—there would sound one mighty shout capable of reaching to the furthest side of this planet!

I use the expression "dramatic critics in Australia." It is an exaggeration—there are none. There is not one representative of the Press, whose criticisms have appeared in the past few years, of whom one can truthfully say: "Here is a man who knows his business!" The average critic here knows as much about acting and the construction of plays as a heathen Chinese. I can and will quote instances showing how utterly incompetent are some of the so-called "dramatic critics" on the Australian newspapers.

I was talking with one of these gentlemen a day or two after the production of a Shakespearean play by a well-known actor. The pressman was telling me what he had thought of the performance. He totally disagreed with the principal actor's reading of the leading character. His interpretation, my informant said, merely served to take every tradition connected with the play and bear it to pieces. He gave me examples of what he made me understand were outrageous faults in the acting of the part, and ended up by remarking: "Of course I didn't say that in my notice!" Now, what can be the value of a critique which is admittedly not an expression of the writer's ideas?

There is one paper in Australia, one that is read all over the continent, in which it appears that the sole desire of the dramatic critic thereof is to catch hold, as it were, of some physical defect in the player, something at any rate quite outside the sphere of his work, and hold it up to ridicule. How much better it would be if this paper omitted its alleged "Dramatic Column," or else confined itself to a criticism of the acting of plays instead of impertinent and vulgar personalities.

I remember another production of a Shakespearean play. Actors were in great demand, because, strange as it may seem they were then hard to get. Two of the principal comedy roles had to be

ing. The second act ends with a typical Viennese waltz, and the duet between the chambermaid—Octavian—and the Baron Ochs in the chamber reparee consists entirely of waltz motives. The "Rosenkavalier" is sung by a mezzo-soprano, and the Baron is a typical bass and buffo part. Besides six other larger solo parts, this 'comedy for music' contains 14 smaller solo parts. I have already finished two acts of this work, and the score of the final act has only to be elaborated. I hope surely that "Der Rosenkavalier" will be produced during the first half of the coming season, of course in the Dresden Hoftheater, under the conduction of my friend, Generalmusikdirektor Schuch."—"Musical America."

filled by quite third-rate men. Neither of them could speak the King's English, neither of them even pretended to worry over the lack of a "g" or an "h" in the words they spoke. Together they effectually ruined the production, besides hindering the work of the other members of the company. The alleged dramatic critics, however, with very few exceptions, hailed them as the finest exponents of their respective parts! Imagine a fellow-actor receiving a splendid criticism in the same notice of the play! How utterly valueless it becomes in face of the glowing remarks about the two comedy men! Incidentally, I might say that these two men seemed to have had an interesting career—one was a tobacconist, and the other a haberdasher.

I suppose it would not do for a critic to make an observation which is qualified in any way. One thing so apparent in their work here is the boldness with which they make the most outrageous mis-statements. Nor have they the slightest consideration for the difficulties under which an actor or actress has, at times, to play.

I have known an actress make her first appearance under a great strain, acting to a large audience when suffering from a bad attack of laryngitis. That she was playing under the most painful circumstances was patent to the least observant; yet one critic said of her that her voice was pleasing "although of a sore-throat order." Surely a kinder thing would have been to make some small reference to the affection that handicapped the lady, instead of putting it in the way mentioned.

The theatres in Australia, as a general rule, are much too large to act in comfortably; but no critic seems to recognise the strain upon the players, especially visiting artists, who are used to playing in more up-to-date and civilised play-houses. I have heard actors and actresses accused of their failure to "grip" an audience when the huge size of the theatre makes it almost an impossibility. The majority of critics in Australia give one the impression that they have been thinking of something else during the performance of the play they criticise. Their critiques are unfinished, uneven, irrelevant, and, in most cases, unfair. They are constantly "giving themselves away" by making statements which show that either they have not followed the play with any degree of attention, or that they have not sufficient intelligence to grasp what is being shown them. I fancy that dramatic criticism is a branch of journalism which receives very little consideration in the colonies, at any rate the poor stuff which is published under that head gives one the idea.

It is difficult to know just how far the opinions of the Press influence the man in the street; but, if the art of acting is to rise to any standard at all in Australia, it is about time the country produced a man capable of writing a criticism of what he sees which is honest, unprejudiced and intelligent. It really seems as though the glamour of notoriety attracts the average dramatic critic, making him write a great deal of barren verbiage, which he may think original, but which is, in reality, grotesque and inappropriate.

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