

Music and Drama.

By BAYREUTH.

BOOKINGS.

(Dates subject to alteration.)

AUCKLAND PICTURE SHOWS.

The Lyric Theatre, Symonds Street—Nightly.
Royal Albert Hall, Albert Street—Nightly.

Ragtime and Turkey Trot Music.

FROM time to time American ragtime and turkey-trot music is debated in all its aspects, and recently much heated argument has centred around the question whether it is good or bad for the people. While it has been vigorously denounced in high quarters, distinguished, or at least able, apologists have not been wanting for the ear-tickling ragtime. One correspondent in an American musical journal avers that the public undoubtedly needs some form of primitive music, but he is not sure whether that need is best filled by ragtime. "What is the condition in other countries?" he says. "They have no ragtime. Are the masses, therefore, without any music at all? No, they have a higher standard, that is all. . . . They have the same 'dead line' between popular and artistic music, but the popular music is raised to a higher level, because there is no non-progressive and non-elevating element like ragtime in it." Continuing in this strain, the writer sums up the position which ragtime occupies in his country by saying that "it positively hinders a musically uncluttered person in gaining an appreciation of higher music."

The arguments the correspondent makes against ragtime are questionable. In the first place it is doubtful if the popular music of other countries is one whit better, or more elevated from an art point of view, than the American peculiar form of syncopated rhythm, commonly known as ragtime. "La Paloma," and music of that order, played by the Italian and Spanish peasants on their eternal guitar and mandolin, may be of a more romantic cast, but it is certainly heard with as much abhorrence by the musically cultivated Spaniard or Italian as is ragtime by the American art connoisseur. But there is an aspect of the ragtime question which has been somewhat overlooked by the numerous people who have taken part in its debate. And that is its evolution as a distinct national form. Of course the musical classicist will vigorously scout the idea of ragtime being in the nature of a distinct national form from which better things might one day evolve. Nevertheless, this form of American music is alive and real, and anything in the nature of even a beginning of a distinct colour or school in its music is of vital importance to every community, especially to countries young in art such as Australasia and America. Marshall Hall, of Melbourne, is a strong advocate for distinctive music in colour, form, and "programme" from our composers, and he has little hope for worthy Australian additions to the world's musical literature till such time as our musicians shall imbue their compositions with an individuality that shall come to be known as "Australian."

Coon Songs in Germany.

It is something in favour of American ragtime to know that it has penetrated to Germany, the stronghold of musical classicism, where the American coon songs have taken a grip on the popular fancy. In this connection the following paragraph occurs in a leader in the London "Musical News" of a few months ago on "Is Musical Taste Decaying in Germany?":—

"It is certainly very sad that ragtime should be preferred to Chopin, and that Leo Fall should be more appreciated than Wagner, but still there is nothing very new or very serious about the fact. The circles which really enjoy such light forms of music are not the circles which are truly musical. When a man once appreciates fine music, the lighter manifestations of what for want of a better term is called music simply passes him by; if he were to consider it seriously, it would disgust him, but, as it is, he looks upon it merely as amusement for an idle moment. He can never feel the mad enthusiasm for it which non-musical minds experience. Even in these instances, however, the

vogue is but ephemeral; newcomers thrust out old-stagers. This type of mind is pretty universal, and obtains in Germany as much as elsewhere, but we do not infer from that that German musical taste is on the down-grade. There, as elsewhere, it is left to the few to keep the flag of classical art flying."

Futurist Music and the Critics.

The topic of conversation in English musical circles recently has been Arnold Schonberg's futurist compositions. They have, to say the least, created a mild furor, and not a little bewilderment. The critics have had some very hard things to say about the new music. Appended are some extracts:—

"The Times."—An essay on dissonance. . . . It was like a poem in Tibetan; not one single soul in the room could possibly have understood it at a first hearing. . . . The listener was like a dweller in Flatland straining his mind to understand the ways of that mysterious occupant of three dimensions, man. As far, however, as it was possible to transcend one's limitations, the music seemed to be a study in textures. . . . At the conclusion, half the audience hissed. That seems a too decisive judgment, for after all they may turn out to be wrong; the other half applauded more vehemently than the case warranted, for it could hardly have been from understanding.

"Daily Telegraph."—There is much that is literally shocking. One felt, however, that there is a lot of deliberate logic in these pieces. . . . It is music well put together; form and contrast—two big things—are there, "ugliness" galore, "beauty" starved to death, sheer technical skill unsurpassed. It is a "human document," bewildering enough, it is true, but human, and immensely personal to the writer himself.

"Morning Post."—It is best described as nature music. The key to the understanding of this "music" is an acquaintance with open-air life, preferably in that part of the world where there are large quantities of live stock. The sounds they would add to those of nature are faithfully reproduced. . . . It is the reproduction of the sounds of nature in their crudest form. Modern intellect it is generally supposed has advanced beyond mere elementary noises; Herr Schonberg has not.

"Daily Mail."—Herr Schonberg seems to start where Herr Richard Strauss ends. The bleating sheep, the bellowing cattle, and cracking whips of the sacrificial procession in "Electra" are celestial harmonies when compared with the tortured, yet infinitely subtle, discords of these orchestral pieces.

"Daily Express."—Mr Schonberg's pianoforte music is like a bad dream; his orchestral music is little short of a nightmare. It recalls memories of the incongruous combinations that so troubled the sleep of the Lord Chancellor in "Iolanthe."

The programme explained that "it contains the experience of his emotional life." They are certainly very mixed emotions. On the whole, one wonders whether in Mr Schonberg music has not at last unearthed a humorist?

Adventures of a Prima Donna.

Madame Melba, after 14 months spent in Australia, has returned to England, where she has started on a concert tour. Interviewed by the "Daily News," the famous prima donna gave some of her experiences. "I had a splendid time," she said. "The people seemed to like me; they crammed and banged and fought for tickets. In fact, over 1000 of them waited from 4 o'clock in the morning to get seats, and when they were admitted (much earlier than usual) the management lent them a grand piano to while away the time of waiting. They gave an impromptu concert, and sang very well, too. We discovered quite a good tenor among them, and he's now being trained.

"They were very enthusiastic, and lowered flowers from the gallery on string!

"Australian audiences are more unconventional than English ones. The people at Sydney gave me a gold bowl and my Melbourne friends made me a present of a gold loving cup."

Mme. Melba had more than one exciting adventure. One day she set out by motor-car from Albany to Melbourne (roughly 2500 miles) to try and beat the train.

A Wonderful Road.

"I shudder at the recollection of it," she said. "We got lost in fogs and mists, and the road was terrible; I was jolted from one end of the car to the other. Every time we asked what the road ahead was like, we were told that we had just got over the best part, and there was ever so much worse to come.

"The provisions ran out, and when we got home I had hysterics, and the chauffeur had to go to bed and stay there for two days."

On another occasion, "for the sake of diversion," Mme. Melba visited a dam in course of construction, and undertook a journey in a "flying box"—a rough car which crosses a chasm, in this case 600ft deep. "I just lay in the bottom and screamed," said the prima donna, with a shudder. "It was horrible."

Who Was Mr. Hamlet?

To be brief: Hamlet was the guy that made the sobriquet famous. From early boyhood Ham was a loud thinker and often annoyed the family by thinking in his sleep. When he grew up he developed the habit of talking while the audience slept.

It seems Hamlet's father was kinging it over all the brunettes in Denmark just before the curtain went up, and from all reports he was a perfectly complete and satisfactory king, never paying so much attention to the queen as to arouse public sentiment. But one afternoon, while the king was out in the shed fixing up the gas-metre, some hateful person slipped up and dropped a match into the job. His Majesty made a rye face, but there were no bartenders near to ratify the royal desire, so without even waiting to say anything famous the king joined the Eternal Hasbeens.

The queen felt real bad about this, and it took all the under parties, matinees, etc., that could be arranged

to drown her sorrow. However, when it (the sorrow) finally went down for the third time, she fared forth again on the choppy sea of matrimony, this time with the demised king's brother as the skipper.

When Hamlet heard of this his princely Angora became decidedly rampant, and he immediately accused his mamma and the new king of jobbing the erstwhile Greatest Mark in Denmark. The new king said it was no such thing, and that the Big Noise had cashed in from eating diseased tinned meat and soft-shell crabs. This seemed reasonable enough to satisfy the coroner, anyhow. But all this made no impression upon the sultry Dauc, who was being visited at more than fashionable late hours by a fellow that gave his name as Mr. Ghost, and who said he could only get out at nights, because he had to work all day hooking awells.

One night he came in just as Hamlet was killing a welsch rabbit, and when he had told all he knew Hamlet thought he had evidence enough to go ahead. If the solicitor for the defence had only been wise he would have contended that Hamlet ate the rabbit before he said he saw the ghost.

But to go on, when Hamlet's offactory nerve vised him up to the fact that there was "something wrong in the State of Denmark," he developed a terrible grouch, evolved countless yards of blank verse on the perfidity of women, beginning with the immortal line, "Women are but true as their complexions," and then proceeded to neglect, scorn and also just plain throw down his erstwhile lady love, Ophelia.

Ophelia had just begun to think about getting measured for a crown, and when the prince suddenly took another tack, the lady was chagrined and otherwiso peeved. As a result she became more and more light-headed as time went on, until finally she had nothing on her mind but her coiffure, and even that some one else had reared from childhood. Her favourite pastime was to go out and pick seaweed for her lover, but flowers always reminded Hamlet of his florist bill, and he refused to wear any

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