THE MUSIC AMERICA BUYS: WHAT THE NEW YORK SEASON OFFERS IN MANY FIELDS: BY NATALIE CURTIS

The cosmopolitanism of New York City is perhaps in nothing more clearly demonstrated than in its musical life. It is still an external life for the most part—we do not make music ourselves in our homes, but we go to hear others make it for us in concert-hall and opera house. Yet as we are a young nation whose energies had first to be concentrated upon material things, the present period of assimilation is necessary as a process of fertilization before we can hope for a healthy growth in self-expression.

That we want music is evident from the fact that such institutions as the opera and the symphony orchestras which abound are to a great extent subsidized by the Government, are here maintained through the voluntary contributions of private citizens whose generosity makes possible the production of art works of permanent educational value. The people of New York support no fewer than five symphony orchestras: The orchestra of the Philharmonic Society, the oldest orchestral organization in this country of which Joseph Stransky is now conductor; the New York Symphony Orchestra, founded by Dr. Leopold Damrosch and now conducted by his son, Walter; the Russian Symphony Orchestra, led by Modest Altschuler, organized to introduce to this country works by Russian composers; the Volpe Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Arnold Volpe, under whose baton young orchestral players attain a thorough training that fits them for work in the larger orchestras later on—not many years ago most of our orchestral musicians had to be imported directly from Europe); and the People’s Symphony Orchestra, which under the devoted leadership of Franz X. Arens, offers concerts to students and workers at prices ranging from fifteen to fifty cents. The Boston Symphony Orchestra visits New York regularly, giving ten subscription concerts each season, and Chicago, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh have in past years also sent their orchestras. Then there is of course the orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera House, which plays in concert every Sunday night.

All this means comparison, competition and growth, and though it shows the restless, novelty-seeking, nervous tendencies of our civic life, it also proves that there is here a real demand for orchestral music and that New York is become a musical center whose cachet is worth having. That there is room and even indeed a temporary need for such a variety of orchestral music is due to the ambitious spirit of enterprise characteristic of American life in general, and
also to the cosmopolitanism of the city whose audiences include so many different nationalities. For instance, the advent of Titta Ruffo, the Italian baritone, at the Opera House, packs the galleries and standing room (as on nights when Caruso sings) with vociferous Italians whose loud cries of "bravo" and "bis" proclaim their nationality. On Wagner nights these same galleries are filled with serious Germans who promptly silence any outburst of applause and listen with studious intensity in the darkened hall through a long evening beginning at seven-thirty and ending at midnight.

The audience at the Russian Symphony Concerts is of course largely Russian; the concerts of the Volpe Orchestra are performed almost exclusively to a highly musical and enthusiastic Jewish public (Anton Seidl used to say that without the generous support of the cultured and music-loving Jews of New York, we could never so quickly have attained a musical growth); while at a recent concert of the Philharmonic Orchestra at which the popular Irish tenor, John McCormack, was soloist and Stanford's Irish Symphony was performed, the house was crowded with the sons and daughters of Erin.

It is precisely this great variety of experience offered by a season in New York that makes the musical life of this city so rich in interest. We import music from everywhere, and concerts are now within the means of all classes. And if we leave the more conventional environment of the opera house and concert-halls and seek music in humbler corners, we shall find down town in the Syrian quarter the one-stringed Arabian rhabab and the Persian lute and zither playing melodies wafted hither from Egypt and the East, and we shall discover at the other end of the city, in uttermost Harlem, a truly remarkable Negro orchestra of one hundred and twenty-five musicians called the Clef Club, made up of banjos, mandolins and guitars of all shapes and sizes, and reinforced by the usual stringed instruments of the orchestra to whose irresistible, rhythmic, "rag-time" swing much syncopated accentuation is lent by drums and by the surprisingly effective and original addition of ten upright pianos, back to back in pairs, treated simply as part of the orchestra. These colored musicians perform their own compositions, playing and often singing in good four-part harmony at the same time. The skill and precision of their performance, combined with the impulsive, intuitive musical feeling natural to the Negro, make the concerts of this Club (organized by the Negroes themselves for their own colored audiences) comparable in the combination of folk-spirit and musical ability to the playing of the Hungarian bands that toured Europe and American so successfully.
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The noble old Philharmonic Society which was founded in eighteen hundred and forty-four (by curious coincidence, the same year as the founding of the Philharmonic in Vienna) and which has numbered some of the greatest orchestral leaders among its conductors, Theodore Thomas, Anton Seidl, Gustav Mahler and many others, enters this year on a new phase of its long career. Last winter a generous bequest to the Philharmonic of half a million dollars was made by the late Joseph Pulitzer on the condition that the Society procure a thousand new members, each subscribing ten dollars a year. In a few months the membership list numbered more than a thousand and is still growing—a fine tribute to the city's pride in its oldest orchestra—and many New Yorkers look forward to the time when an increase in this fund, through new donations, may make the Philharmonic Society permanently free from all financial limitations in carrying out its artistic aims. The reorganization of the orchestra under the late Gustav Mahler and the daily rehearsals have borne fruit, and though no band in New York has yet attained the finish of the incomparable Boston Symphony Orchestra, such perfection is the goal.

The prospectus of this notable Society embraces as formerly sixteen "pairs" of concerts on Thursday evenings and Friday afternoons and eight popular concerts on Sunday afternoons. That a taste for good music is constantly increasing among us is evident from the fact that the Sunday concert as a regular institution is growing amazingly in frequency and popularity, showing that the people who work during the week really like concert-going as a form of instructive relaxation. And when we realize that concerts of the high standard of the Philharmonic are financially within the reach of all (three dollars will purchase a subscription ticket for the eight Sunday concerts) we see that in a city avowedly commercial in its aims, there is yet enough love of art among its public-spirited richer citizens to make possible, through large individual subscriptions, the maintaining of a great orchestra that can give the whole people the best in music at rates which everybody can afford.

THE art of program building in which Mr. Walter Damrosch is a master is exemplified not only by the concerts of the New York Symphony Society but also by a most attractive and instructive prospectus of the six Concerts for Young People given by the Symphony Orchestra on Saturday afternoons in Carnegie Hall. Mr. Damrosch in his transcontinental orchestral tours has carried good music all over the United States. He is also well known throughout the country as a lecturer, and his explanatory words
Olive Fremstad, the great Brunhilde of today.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera House.
THE LOVELY GERALDINE FARRAR
AS MIMI IN "LA BOHÈME."
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera House.

AMATO AS BARNABA,
IN "LA GIACONDA."
Bori, the New Spanish Prima Donna, as Manon Lescaut.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera House.
accompanying the Concerts for Young People make these matinées of distinct educational worth to the hundreds of schoolchildren who crowd the auditorium. It is a delightful sight when the bleak walls of Carnegie Hall are turned into a background for what seems like a magnified "Children's Hour," when be-ribboned heads and eager little faces peer over the plush railings of the galleries, and school-teachers marshall their flocks to the seats that are subscribed for year by year. Perhaps in another decade or so these little listeners may be able to impart to their own children at home a more intelligent love for music, for these concerts aim to appeal to the mind as well as to the impressions of the American child.

Besides the musical enterprises that make for the culture and refinement of our citizens, there are educational organizations of distinctly humanitarian and sociological character like the People's Choral Union founded by Frank Damrosch, where no examination is required and every one may learn sight-singing and join the great chorus which includes hundreds of working men and women and has branches in different parts of the city. Then there are the Music School Settlements under David Mannes, one in the Russian Jewish quarter of East Third Street, and another for colored people in the "Black Belt" of Harlem. These schools aim to appeal through music to the higher nature of children who would otherwise be on the streets. The work has grown to include adults also, and it has been stated that of all settlement work none comes much closer to the hearts and homes of the people than this center for music.

It is a long way from the Settlement School to the Opera of New York, which still remains a luxury, as the productions are magnificent and elaborate, the standard high, and the cost of presentation great. The performances at the Metropolitan Opera House are indeed among the most brilliant in the world, and perhaps nowhere else, except possibly in London, can there be heard so great a variety of operas of all schools sung in the original languages by so many celebrated artists of different nationalities. It is encouraging to note however that each year the percentage of English-speaking singers bearing Anglo-Saxon names increases on the list of artists. It is no longer necessary for the American singer to claim to be "Signor," "Mademoiselle," or "Madame," as in the old days, and though the opera company contains French, German, Italian and Slavic artists, the American, as an American, is constantly coming more and more to the fore.

As last season, so this winter a work will be sung in English, the "Cyrano de Bergerac" by Walter Damrosch, who received the inspiration for his new opera from Richard Mansfield's spirited per-
formance of Rostand’s play. Another work to be heard here for the first time will be “Le Chemineau,” a modern French opera by Le-roux, but the greatest event of the year will be the first performance here of “Boris Godounoff,” an historical drama of the Russian people by Russia’s great composer Moussorgsky. Kurt Schindler, whose illuminative lecture on “Boris Godounoff” will be repeated later in the season, ranks this opera as prophetic of a new development in music, placing Moussorgsky with Beethoven, Gluck and Wagner among the “seers,” and comparing “Boris Godounoff” dramatically to “Julius Cæsar” and “Macbeth.”

In contrast to the poignant realism of this music-drama is the elaborate revival of Mozart’s “Magic Flute,” an opera which is a very garden of fancy, wherein all the joy and magic of dreams and the charm of an eternal childhood bloom in the artist’s message of beauty.

Added to the regular Metropolitan subscription series are five performances of French opera by the Chicago-Philadelphia Opera Company on Tuesday evenings, thus giving New York seven performances of opera a week, including Saturday matinées. The opera singers are also heard in concert on Sunday nights.

ALTHOUGH we are promised many excellent concert singers this season as well as pianists and soloists of other kinds, it is the violinists who claim most of our attention, for a very constellation of stars will offer us a rare opportunity for study and comparison. First, there is Ysaye, the great Belgian, who makes his reappearance here after an absence of eight years. He was tumultuously welcomed at his opening concert in November by an audience that exhausted the capacity of Carnegie Hall. And the art of Ysaye justifies this following. It is supreme art, for the violinist today stands at the summit of his achievement, and his power is that of the recreative genius who makes an art-work live anew as one imagines that it must have lived in the dream of the composer. Ysaye chose for his opening program the pure music of the old masters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and led us back to Vitali, Veracini, Geminiani and Mozart. At once the listener felt the poise and power of the artist who could limn with such reserve and with such unerring delicacy and beauty the chaste and severe outlines of these older works, and yet breathe into the classic forms that shining warmth that makes their grace and dignity alive. The laughing sunlight of Mozart never seemed to call more clearly across the years than when the violinist’s fingers woke again those perfect melodies that must forever be the joy of listening mankind. But
it was in the “Chaconne” by Vitali that Ysaye rose to his greatest height. This number, played to the accompaniment of the organ, was a marvel of sustained heroic beauty; its nobility, intensity and devotional fire made one think involuntarily of Browning, and of the “wonderful Dead, who have passed through the body and gone, but were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their new.”

Fritz Kreisler is perhaps the only other violinist of today who stands on a level with Ysaye, and he fully equals the Belgian in intellectual grasp and lofty musicianship. It is many years since Kreisler made his debut at one of Anton Seidl’s concerts in Steinway Hall as a boy prodigy, and his art has steadily grown. The breadth, sincerity and dignity of his playing proclaim the master.

Then we have also with us this season Mischa Elman, whose dazzling technique and brilliant virtuosity have made him a sensational favorite, and the young Russian, Efrem Zimbalist, who repeats this winter his successes of last season. Miss Maud Powell, well known throughout the country, Louis Persinger, a new-comer, Bonarios Grimson, who makes his debut this season, Albert Spalding, Miss Irma Seydel, David Mannes, Henry Schmidt and others appear on the roll of violinists who will be heard in concert here this season.

Chamber-music will be represented of course by the Kneisel, Flonzaley and Olive Mead quartets, by the Margulies trio, the Barrère ensemble, and the Sonata Recitals of Mr. and Mrs. David Mannes, as well as by other combinations of artists.

The Christmas season now upon us would not seem complete without the annual performance of “The Messiah” by the Oratorio Society, which sings this year under a new conductor, Louis Koemenich, though its purpose, the production of religious works, remains the same. The Society for Musical Art, a highly specialized choir of eighty professional singers under Frank Damrosch, will also give a Christmas program on December seventeenth, and an Easter program in March.

Each Chorus in New York has its own special function. Yet of all the musical enterprises in this city there is none that fills a more important place in the development of an understanding of music, or that shows greater vitality than the Schola Cantorum of New York, a new organization which is an outgrowth of the MacDowell Chorus founded by Kurt Schindler a few years ago. This institution not only gives to the public concerts of rare music of all periods and schools not to be heard elsewhere and sung in the original languages, but also through its great chorus of two
hundred and fifty chosen voices it offers to the people the opportunity to perform themselves this music according to the highest artistic standard. This organization fills a long-felt want in this city, for it at last supplies New York with a large and carefully selected mixed chorus remarkable for beauty of tone and systematic training and available for coöperation with any of our orchestras.

Though the chorus membership includes amateurs, professionals and students, the standard is so high that only those with pronounced ability and with very good voices are accepted as members. Some of the rich music-lovers in New York whose beautiful voices have been carefully trained at great expense find in this chorus a serious field for the use of a talent which might otherwise have been but a pleasure to a few friends, and there is perhaps nothing more strikingly convincing of the value of the chorus to its amateur members than the cheerful renunciation of dinners and opera boxes on rehearsal night. Side by side with the fashionable woman one sees the struggling student or the aspiring young professional whose ability may promise an opportunity for some small solo at the concert. It is this democratic welding of all classes in work for a common aim that forms one of the most valuable features of the chorus.

This institution is striking its roots deep into the city’s life; it has organized a small choir of madrigal singers picked from the best voices in the chorus and open to engagements for private concerts and drawing rooms; and also it aims to establish annex choruses in the settlements, and offers to its members and the public a course of six morning lectures given at the Hotel Plaza.

The Schola Cantorum of New York bears a name associated with the cultivation of choral music from the very beginning of the art in early Christian times, and it is hoped that in this new country the old historic title may find worthy life. Certainly nothing could be more comprehensive than one of the avowed aims of the young Schola, “the founding of an educational center for the growth and appreciation of choral music which, as a democratic form of art, should be of the same recognized importance in this country that it is in Europe.” This institution is so vital and so energetic that it seems certain to grow; and it will be an important factor in our development, for we shall only attain to self-expression in art as in all other things, through “learning by doing.”