

after all, there is nothing in this borrowing inconsistent with the name of "American opera." For is not the essence of American nationality internationality? This country is peopled by emigrants from all parts of Europe, and if we ever have a "national" opera, it is to be hoped it will be international—uniting Italian sensuousness and French piquancy and clearness of form with German harmonic depth, variety, and dramatic vigor and realism.

Like the opera, most of the members of the orchestra were originally imported, though the majority have become American citizens. The conductor, also, was born in Germany, but Mr. Thomas came to this country at so early an age, and his name has become so identified with the progress of music in America, that it would have been as impossible to find a man more appropriate from the national point of view as it would be from the point of view of competency and experience. The remaining factors of the complicated operatic organism are almost purely American. The scenery, which receives special attention, is all painted by well-known native artists; the majority of the ballet are Americans, and the same is true of the chorus. And in regard to the leading vocalists the rule has been more strictly adhered to, that they must be natives of this country.

It is this last clause in the constitution of the American Opera Company that will have to bear the brunt of criticism. Perhaps it would have been wiser to follow simply the successful example of Carl Rosa, and give opera in English without reference to the nationality of the singers. But in some respects this experiment would have been less interesting, and at any rate we shall now no longer be open to the reproach that we leave the recognition of American vocal talent entirely to foreigners. Some of the vocalists in the American Opera Company have had wide experience as opera singers, while others have been suddenly promoted from operetta to grand opera. Until they have become accustomed to their new sphere it is therefore but just to make allowance for inevitable shortcomings. No such allowance, however, need be made in the case of Mme. L'Allemand, who takes the part of *Katharine* in the "Taming of the Shrew," not only because she is an experienced opera singer, but because her *Katharine* is a most clever and fascinating impersonation. Her dark style of beauty, together with the taste shown in her make-up, enable her to look her part to perfection. The mingled surprise and indignation are in the early scenes depicted in her face as realistically as her sweet, piteous humility when she has been tamed. She embodies Professor Dowden's conception of the character: "*Katharine*, with all her indulged wilfulness and violence of temper, has no evil in her; in her home-enclosure she seems a formidable creature, but when caught away by the tempest of *Petruchio's* masculine force, the comparative weakness of her sex shows itself; she who has strength of her own, and has ascertained its limits, can recognize superior strength, and, once subdued, she is the least rebellious of subjects." Mme. L'Allemand's voice is somewhat guttural in its lowest notes, but in its upper register it is delightfully clear, rich, sweet, and flexible. Mr. Lee's *Petruchio* cannot be said to be characterized by a "tempest of masculine force." The humorous possibilities of the part, too, are much greater than they seem in his hands; yet he takes pains with it and sings it satisfactorily. Miss Bensch's *Bianca* is not a striking impersonation, but has its points of merit. Mr. Hamilton's *Baptista* is in one respect, and an important one, superior to any other rôle, viz., in distinct enunciation. Mr. Fessenden (*Lucentio*) and Mr. Stoddard (*Hortensio*) are well known to the

New York public, and scarcely anything needs to be said of them beyond remarking that their parts were well fitted to their capacities.

One of the most interesting features of the performance was the fact that Mr. Theodore Thomas made his first appearance in many years as an operatic conductor. From the circumstance that he has no superior as a concert conductor it does not follow that he is specially qualified to be a good operatic conductor. There are specialists in conducting, as in everything else. But there is a class of conductors who are equally able as concert and as opera directors, including Bülow, Jahn, and Hans Richter; and Mr. Thomas gave indubitable evidence on Monday evening that he belongs to this class. His method of conducting is as quiet as at a Philharmonic concert; for his rule is to do all the difficult work at the rehearsals, so that no frantic gesticulations are needed when the public performance is given. Under his command his admirable orchestra—which is of course the best that has ever been heard in opera in this country—brought out all the beauties and subtle details of the score with marvellous distinctness. The chorus, also, contains, perhaps, better vocal material than has ever been brought together here, and everywhere gave evidence of the most careful and intelligent training. The ballet made its appearance in a special divertissement arranged by M. Bibeyran to the delightful rompish music of Rubinstein's *Bal Masqué*.

By choosing Goetz's "Taming of the Shrew" for the initial performance, Mr. Thomas added, to the many debts of gratitude our audiences owe him, the opportunity to become acquainted with one of the most successful operas of modern times; but at the same time he imposed on his singers a task of extraordinary difficulty, for there is hardly a single work in the operatic repertory that makes at the same time so many demands on the singer's vocal attention and his duties as an actor. In some respects it is even more difficult than Wagner's "Meistersinger," which inspired it; for in Wagner's opera the words are so neatly fitted to the song, and the melodic current is so broad, that the singer is irresistibly carried along with it; whereas in Goetz's opera the words and music do not so necessarily amalgamate, nor is the musico-dramatic current so irresistible. This is indeed the weak point in the "Taming of the Shrew," that both as a whole and in most of its details the music does not reflect the spirit of the text. It is often too serious, not to say sombre, for so sprightly and humorous a dramatic substratum. But if Goetz lacks Wagner's sense of dramatic fitness and his stirring climaxes, he succeeds better in imitating his declamatory precision and vigor and his symphonic orchestral accompaniment. In the orchestra lies the chief strength of Goetz. Many of the numbers have great individual merit, and throughout the opera there is a subtle attention to details and an esprit worthy of a French composer. It is stated that Goetz at first wrote the score without drums and trombones, but added the trombones when the opera was produced in Vienna. Subsequently he seems to have also added the drums, for they were in use in Mr. Thomas's orchestra. Musical readers need hardly be told in conclusion that Hermann Goetz was, like Bizet, one of those gifted and promising opera composers who seem to be fated to die young. His opera was first produced in 1874 at Mannheim, when the composer was thirty-six years of age. Two years later he died, leaving an unfinished opera score, "*Francesca von Rimini*," which was afterward completed by a Herr Frank.

"THE MEISTERSINGER."

THE first production in America of what will some day be Wagner's most popular opera is

an event of historic significance. The performance itself, too, was of a very high order of merit, and therefore most enjoyable. In view of the fact that the German Opera Company, during their recent absence in Philadelphia, gave a performance every evening, it was to be feared that sufficient time would not remain to rehearse Wagner's comic opera properly. It is a work of extraordinary difficulty, as may be inferred from the fact that when it was first produced in Munich under Dr. Hans von Bülow, in 1868, eight months were devoted to its preparation, during which sixty-six rehearsals were held.

No wonder that a few days ago the last rehearsal of "Die Meistersinger" at the Metropolitan, which lasted eight hours, revealed a number of weak points. But it also revealed another thing—Herr Seidl's extraordinary genius as operatic conductor. Every weak point was "spotted" on this occasion—for he knows the whole score by heart—so that when it came to the public performance, the smoothness and animation of the ensemble was little short of a miracle, it being hardly necessary to make any allowance for the difficulty of the task, the limited number of rehearsals, and the unpropitious state of the atmosphere. Herr Seidl was deservedly and repeatedly called before the curtain, with the principals, after each act; for the enthusiasm of the audience was such as is only witnessed at a Wagnerian *première*; and a Wagnerian audience is sufficiently intelligent to recognize the supreme importance of having a conductor of Herr Seidl's energy and ability. Although we have heard "Die Meistersinger" more than a dozen times abroad, and although in Vienna and Munich, where the opera has been on the repertory for a number of years, some of the details are placed in a clearer light, yet for general animation we have never heard a performance superior, if equal, to Monday evening's; and this is in the first place due to Herr Seidl's thorough appreciation of Wagner's intentions. He put so much variety and "go" into his *tempi* that the performance never dragged for a moment; and although the necessary cuts were not so extensive as those made in some German cities, the opera lasted only four hours and twenty minutes, including waits.

Of the vocalists it must be said in general that they were equal to their tasks. Frau Kraus's *Eva* is one of her most satisfactory impersonations, and Herr Stritt's *Walter* is the best thing he has done here yet. Herr Staudigl sang *Pogner's* address nobly, and Herr Fischer was an impressive *Sachs*, though suffering from hoarseness, which prevented him from fully justifying the reputation he has secured in this rôle abroad. Brandt made as much as possible of the rôle of *Magdalena*, and the naive and sportive *David* was well acted and sung by Herr Krämer, the husband of Frau Krämer-Widl, who made his début on this occasion. The comic part of *Beckmesser* was in the hands of Herr Kemnitz, who, without over-acting, brought out the grotesque humor of his part in a realistic manner. Much praise must be awarded the chorus of apprentices and the general chorus for their contributions to the success of the performance. Even the immensely difficult comic choruses of cobblers, tailors, and bakers in the last act were well done. It should be stated that in this scene the chorus was strengthened by the voluntary coöperation of a number of the active members of several of our leading German societies whose enthusiasm for Wagner, and their desire to have him correctly appreciated by American audiences, led them to submit, without any other recompense, to the arduous labor of rehearsing.

To sum up: the indications are that "Die Meistersinger" will soon become a favorite of the New York public, and never again be allowed to be absent from the repertory.

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