

Review: Alfredo Catalani's Opera "Loreley"

Author(s): C. P. S.

Review by: C. P. S.

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in a thoroughly artistic manner, modulating his voice so as to weave the narrative into the orchestral accompaniment most effectively; his closing lines were followed by a burst of applause.

The talented Conductor of the Choral Union, Mr. Carl Dreschler-Hamilton, deserves the highest praise for the excellent performance of the chorus. He also deserves special commendation for the work he has done towards founding a Scotch resident orchestra. The accompaniments were well played by a band drawn almost entirely from musicians resident in Edinburgh and Glasgow. It is to be hoped that this is a step in the direction of supplying a much felt want.

The "Dream of Jubal" was preceded by Wagner's "Tannhäuser" Overture and Goring Thomas's "Sun Worshippers," both of which were well performed.

ALFREDO CATALANI'S OPERA "LORELEY."*

THE composer of this new opera is the accomplished and distinguished professor of composition in the Conservatoire of Milan, to which important and envied post he was elected some years ago, upon the death of Ponchielli. Professor Catalani has, within the last ten years, produced three operas, "Elda," "Dejanire," and "Edmea," each of which, in its turn, achieved great and deserved success on the leading Italian stages. It was in "Elda," the first of these works, that he treated the legend of "Loreley," which the author of the libretto, Signor d'Ormeville, transplanted for that purpose from the Rhine to Scandinavia, the intention of both the composer and the dramatic poet being, probably, to present in a novel form a subject which, in the shape of songs, cantata, opera, and otherwise, had already been handled by at least a score of composers, among whom figure conspicuously Mendelssohn, Lachner, Schumann, Schubert, Liszt, Bruch, and others. Professor Catalani, however, possesses in an eminent degree the characteristic of so many great artists and musicians—that of never being satisfied with his own work; he was not improbably also moved by a conscientious scruple that, after all, *Elda*, the Scandinavian maiden, was something of a travesty of the fascinating Rhenish original, who could well afford to stand on her own merits; at all events, and albeit "Elda" had been accorded a most flattering reception when produced at Turin, he withdrew the opera; nor would he rest until he had entirely re-modelled and re-written it, thus restoring "Loreley" to her legitimate position. In this task he was assisted by Signor Zanardini, the author of the new libretto, and the result is the opera "Loreley," which was produced at the Teatro Regio of Turin during the recent winter season.

Among Italian cities, Turin holds, from a musical point of view, an almost unique position, which is perhaps shared only by Bologna. It is in these two cities that Wagner's operas, both in their entirety and in selections performed at Concerts, have long taken root, and are appreciated by earnest, intelligent, and musically-educated audiences, which offer a striking contrast to the more impulsive, somewhat turbulent, and frequently uncharitable public of Milan, as exemplified by the recent more or less stormy performances of Bizet's "Pêcheurs des Perles," following upon the indifferent reception of Wagner's "Meistersinger" at the Scala. Hence a genuine success scored at the Teatro Regio of Turin or the Teatro Comunale of Bologna is a far more crucial test than an enthusiastic ovation or the wholesale and hasty condemnation of the Scala. In the case of "Loreley," at Turin, Professor Catalani laboured, moreover, under the initial disadvantage of following close upon a very brilliant series of performances of "Lohengrin," so much so that the first production of "Loreley," at which the audience held back and suspended its judgment, was pronounced but a qualified success, and it was only after repeated hearings that the opera vindicated its merits and in the end achieved a great triumph. The principal characters of the opera are five in number: *Rudolph*, Margrave of Biberich (bass); *Anna of Rehber*, his niece (mezzo-soprano); *Walter*, lord of Oberwesel (tenor); *Loreley*, an orphan (soprano),

and *Herrmann*, the warrior-bard of the golden lyre (baritone), besides a host of choral masses, composed of the *Margrave's* retinue, bards, knights, pages, archers, fishermen, peasants, nymphs, and spirits. The following may serve as a rapid sketch of the drama, the scene of which is, of course, laid on the banks of the Rhine.

The first act opens with a pastoral scene in which fishermen, peasants, and archers discuss the great event which is approaching—the marriage of *Walter* and *Anna*. A bevy of old women predict that the marriage will not be a happy one, and that something ominous is impending; they are, however, silenced by the rest of the crowd, which disperses at the bidding of *Herrmann*, the bard of the golden lyre. *Herrmann*, seeing young *Walter* approach, asks him why, on the eve of his wedding, he looks so anxious and depressed; whereupon the young lord of Oberwesel confides to the *Bard* that he will marry *Anna of Rehberg* because he has pledged his word, but that for some time he has been deeply in love with *Loreley*, a poor and innocent orphan girl, who returns his love. The *Bard* advises his young friend to conquer his passion and to be true to his betrothed.

At this juncture *Loreley* herself appears, and, seeing *Walter's* agitation, wrings from him the confession that he is pledged to marry *Anna*, and that the wedding day is at hand. *Loreley*, beside herself with anguish and despair, clings to *Walter*, who, however, repels her; and she faints with a shriek and falls to the ground. At this point a violent storm bursts; and when the clouds are clearing, the scene reveals a rocky inlet, formed by the waters of the Rhine, in which water-nymphs and spirits of the air alternately sing their plaintive strains. *Loreley*, sitting on the edge of the famous rock which bears her name, broods revenge, and appeals to the spirits for power to punish her faithless lover; and they promise to endow her with irresistible beauty, which will allure and entrap him, if she will swear to wed the Rhine. She swears, and throws herself into the arms of her bridegroom—the river; immediately afterwards re-appearing on the rock in transcendent beauty, clad in a star-spangled garment of flaming red.

The second act introduces *Anna*, the promised bride, joyous and happy, preparing for the wedding. The marriage procession is formed; and, on its way to the chapel, passes along the terrace of the *Margrave Rudolph's* castle, from which the *Loreley* rock can be seen. Suddenly, a stroke of lightning disturbs the procession; *Walter*, turning towards the fatal rock, sees *Loreley* in all her beauty, bidding him to come. The fascination is irresistible. He leaves his bride; the procession breaks up in consternation; the bride faints away in horror and despair; the *Margrave* and the *Bard* vow vengeance; but *Walter*, in a trance, follows *Loreley*, who, after alluring him along the banks of the river, suddenly plunges and disappears in the water.

The third and last act opens with the funeral procession of *Anna*, who could not survive her grief and despair. *Walter*, having learned her sad end, is present to pay her his last tribute; but is indignantly repelled by the mourning *Margrave* and his retinue. Forsaken by all, he is on the point of taking his own life, when *Loreley* once more appears on the rock. He sees her; hastens to her; she comes to meet him. The sweet remembrance of their first love once more unites them, and she falls into his arms; when the nymphs rise out of the water to remind her that she is no longer on earth, but herself a nymph wedded to the Rhine. *Walter*, seeing all hope gone, throws himself into the river; and *Loreley*, realising her awful fate, sinks lifeless on the rock.

The dramatic action, which is all the more effective because it is concentrated in three acts instead of being spread, as is often the case in the operas of the day, over four and even five, may be said to recall here and there scenes from such operas as Puccini's "Le Villi," Lortzing's "Undine," and even "Tannhäuser"; but reminiscences such as these might be multiplied indefinitely, and they spring up naturally and necessarily in every work treating of a kindred subject. The libretto, by Signori d'Ormeville and Zanardini, is one of undoubted dramatic and poetical merit, and has furnished Professor Catalani with ample opportunity for displaying his powers as a lyric-dramatic composer. As such, he has a pronounced tendency to write in the minor key, which imparts to his

* "Loreley." G. Ricordi & Co., Milan, 1890.

style a peculiarly plaintive, often mournful character; but this, too, is strictly in harmony with the subject of "Loreley," and is, moreover, relieved by the refined taste, the abundance of pathetic melody, and the scholarly workmanship in which he excels. These constitute, indeed, the most prominent merits of the score, and go far to make up for an occasional want of dash and impassioned grandeur.

Among the most noteworthy features of the score may be mentioned the graceful prelude of the opera, constructed on the leading theme of the second scene of the first act—viz., *Loreley's* appeal to the nymphs and her vow to wed the Rhine; the duet for tenor and baritone (*Walter* and the *Bard*) in the first act, the duet between *Walter* and *Loreley* "Da che tutta mi son data all' ebbrezza dell' amor," and the second scene (*Loreley's* vow) already referred to. In the second act may be noticed more especially *Anna's* air (mezzo-soprano) "Amor celeste, ebbrezza e pena," the "Ave Maria," the wedding march, and the grand *Finale*, which, in the sudden appearance of *Loreley* during the marriage procession, and *Walter's* betrayal of his bride, marks the climax of the opera. This concerted piece is an excellent specimen of polyphonic writing, and is only somewhat marred by the long harangues of the *Bard*, a tedious and superfluous personage, whose part might with advantage be curtailed or dispensed with. The third act is decidedly the best, so far as musical structure and originality of treatment are concerned. This applies more particularly to the funeral march for chorus and orchestra, which marks quite a new departure from the beaten track of similar compositions; to the graceful and fantastic "dance of the nymphs"—though this seems a contradiction in terms—which has already been separately produced at orchestral concerts; and to the final duet between *Walter* and *Loreley*, in which the fantastic and poetical subjects which it is meant to portray are admirably blended.

The opera was most efficiently conducted by Signor Mareschori, one of the leading Italian conductors of the day, who contributed in an eminent degree to the success which attended its production in Turin, where, only the other day, he was presented with a handsome testimonial by the spirited and enterprising Committee of the Teatro Regio, anxious to attest their recognition of his services in bringing the winter season to a close with two such masterworks as "Lohengrin" and "Loreley."

C. P. S.

MUSIC IN SCHOOLS, &c.

THE new Code for State-aided schools recently issued by the Education Department makes considerable changes in the mode of determining the amounts of the grants to be given for general subjects. The much-abused system of "payments by results" is nearly, but not entirely abandoned. No alterations, however, are made in the method of distributing the music grant, which is still to be given at the rate of one shilling per child per annum for "satisfactory" singing by note, and sixpence for "satisfactory" singing by ear. The grant, therefore, continues to be a payment for results without regard to the method employed or to the peculiar difficulties that may beset one school as compared with another. A paragraph contributed by one of those London correspondents whose omniscience strikes awe in the provincial mind, has been going the round of the papers, announcing that the long strife between the Tonic Sol-fa and the old notations now bids fair to cease, because of the clause of the Code that says: "It is hoped that at some future time the relation of the two systems will be shown to Standards V. and upwards." This clause has been in the Code for six or seven years.

That vocal music cannot be so generally and successfully cultivated in our great public schools as it is in Board Schools is as much owing to nature's inexorable laws as to the indifference or helplessness of the powers that be who have to work under outside pressure. The average age, at *entrance*, of boys at public schools that have no junior or preparatory departments is about thirteen. At this age, and a little later, boys' voices are neither "flesh, fowl, nor good red herring," and, although Sir Morell Mackenzie maintains that with care voices may be practised with impunity right through the period of the break, the

most experienced teachers feel not only that nothing can be done, but that nothing should be attempted in the way of singing at this period. Vocal music should, therefore, be taught thoroughly in the junior and preparatory schools. But a preparatory school exists only as a feeder to the public schools. What encouragement to the study of music do the upper schools give to the lower? Practically, none at all. The entrance examinations completely ignore music. It comes, therefore, that the great majority of boys enter public schools knowing little or nothing about music in any form. Notwithstanding these discouragements, music is making some way. At Harrow, for instance, where Mr. Eaton Fanning has charge of the music, a great concession has recently been made in allowing the choral class to have its lesson in the ordinary school hours, and as part of the ordinary school routine. In this way about fifty boys, selected from the lower forms, out of the 600 boys in the school, come under Mr. Fanning. But the boys throughout the school learn by ear in an unsystematic way many of the songs that are peculiar to Harrow; songs that have become traditions of the place, and to an old boy one of the most touching reminders of his school life. To say the least of it, therefore, vocal music at Harrow has kept alive healthy sentiments and popularised music to a most remarkable extent, even if it has not stimulated artistic execution. But whatever may be lacking in the vocal music from the art point of view is made up for by the results of the cultivation of the instrumental music that forms another specialty of Harrow school life. About seventy boys are learning the pianoforte, thirty odd the violoncello and various other orchestral instruments. Concertos, symphonies, and overtures, &c., are regularly practised, and occasionally performed with credit. When this condition of things musical is contrasted with the school life of fifty years ago, when "not a sound was heard, not a funeral note," it is gratifying to count the progress that has been made.

In letters addressed to *The Times* and the April number of the *Journal of Education*, Mrs. Inman, an enthusiastic musical amateur resident at Bath, has been expressing some interesting views on the subject of teaching singing to young children. As Mrs. Inman writes not only with great earnestness, but with considerable knowledge, her views deserve attention. Her letter to *The Times* gives a rather depressing account of the condition of music in day schools and in training colleges, and she asks where is the necessary teaching power to come from that is to teach singing properly in the 14,000 departments in which last year singing was taught by ear. She suggests that throughout the country musical amateurs should get hold of the *pupil* teachers (who, of course, are the budding training college students and the potential school teachers) in the evening and impart to them the culture they lack so sorely. In thus fixing upon the pupil teachers as the key of the position, Mrs. Inman has shown that she very well knows the weakest point in the elementary school education of the country. But is not Mrs. Inman aware that year by year there is a steady improvement in the musical ability of the pupil teachers who seek admission to the colleges? We may say this not to discourage such laudable voluntary effort as Mrs. Inman begs for, but to point out that in the long run the improvement hoped for will be gained by the force that led 7,541 more departments and over a million more children to take to note singing in 1889 than in 1883. The schools and training colleges are gradually but surely acting upon one another. Mrs. Inman's letter to the *Journal of Education* dwells on the importance of teaching notation and singing to the very young, and more especially of the early training of the ear. The juvenile classes of a Parisian lady are mentioned in order to prove that little children of eight years of age can be taught to read at sight and tell by ear. But why need we go to Paris when these results are the everyday experience of teachers all over this country? Some of Mrs. Inman's references to counterpoint are vague. We can hardly believe that she would have this subject taught to little children under eight years of age.

THE Annual Returns of the Examinations of the English and Scotch Education Departments have just been issued.