

Coming of Thomas Orchestra Puts Omaha on Musical Map



Thomas J. Kelley
Director Mendelssohn Choir



Mendelssohn Choir



Frederick Stock
Director Theodore Thomas Orchestra



Mayor C.M. Lord
President



A.A. Wedemeyer
Secretary



Perceval Allen
Soprano



Janet Spencer
Contralto



Bruno Steindel
Cellist



Hans Letz
Violinist



Theodore Thomas Orchestra



Mrs. Myra Learoad
Vice-President



Frank D. Burchmore
Treasurer



Clarence Whitehill—Baritone



Reed Miller
Tenor



Miss Louise McPherson
Vice-President

OMAHA will be put back upon the map among the western cities imbued with the proper musical spirit by the coming of the Thomas orchestra, May 15 and 16. The music lovers of the city are in a receptive and most kindly mood, and anticipation for this great treat—two evening concerts and one afternoon performance—is at high pitch.

This will be the first time in eight years that the Thomas orchestra has been killed for Omaha; and to the Mendelssohn choir, with Thomas J. Kelly at the head, the large end of the credit is due for bringing about this notable event. The last time the greatest symphony organization in the country appeared before an Omaha audience only a part of the company came. This time it will be here in full strength, to assist the Mendelssohn choir in three concerts. Frederick Stock, conductor of the Thomas orchestra, has under his baton a really magnificent ensemble of musicians; and besides there will be a quartet of vocalists of the very highest excellence, with three fine instrumentalists, headed by Max Landow, the Omaha pianist.

When the Mendelssohn choir determined to make the effort to secure the Thomas orchestra, it was not without a full understanding of the difficulties to be met and overcome. The expense to be faced was no light consideration, exceeding \$5,000, and Mr. Kelly and his choir had to give very serious thought to the matter of ways and means. Beginning last fall, subscriptions were sought from those who delight in real music, and at this time over 1,500 subscribers are behind the enterprise at \$3 each. In the first week of the campaign the hopes and confidence of the promoters were justified, the number of subscribers reaching the 1,000 mark within that time. The other 500 necessary to assure success did not come so easy, but the canvass was pushed without flagging and the public-spirited people engaged on the work finally had the satisfaction of being able to accept the terms of the Thomas orchestra for a visit this month.

Concerts for All the People.
Money is not the absolute consideration that entered into the preliminary negotiations, since Conductor Stock had to be given assurance of popular support and appreciation as fully as Manager Wessels had to be convinced of the financial safety of the venture. Artists such as have been gathered in the Thomas orchestra take an intense pride in their work, and it is no idle feeling with them that they shall have appreciative listeners as well as a congenial atmosphere all around. With the large expense involved, one concert would not suffice, and when a city is willing to subscribe for three, then it is getting up in the front row. That the success of this portentous venture is now assured signifies more than the mere fact that Omaha is willing to pay its money for the best. It was the suggestion of the management of the Chicago organization that a popular price be made for the concerts, and so it comes about that the price of \$3 was made for the trio of performances. This modest price will enable all who care for the best in music to enjoy the desire of their souls, and the response has been quite gratifying to Mr. Kelly and his backers and co-workers.

Mendelssohn Choir is Fine Organization.
Aside from the presence of the famous Chicago organization, a great deal might be said of the prospect of hearing the Mendelssohn choir in such a happy conjunction. In the choir at this time are more than 160 of the best singers in Omaha, highly trained and competent, ready and enthusiastic. They have labored so hard and earnestly to bring to fruition the wish of their hearts that a spirit has been aroused which should and will reflect its warmth and vim in the performances to be given at the Auditorium.
It must be kept in mind by those planning to hear

these concerts, who have not yet secured their tickets, that none will be on sale at the box office. Tickets must be secured from members of the Mendelssohn choir or duly authorized canvassers for the guarantee fund. In this connection a word of praise should be put in for the Omaha Society of Fine Arts, the Tuesday Morning Musical club and the Omaha Woman's club, whose members joined with right good will in the effort to make the guarantee safe.

When the preliminary canvass for subscriptions was finished, just before Christmas, the representative of the Chicago organization said he had never seen such evidence of keen musical spirit wrought into actual results in so short a time. That this was no idle compliment is proved by the fact that he at once contracted for the appearance in Omaha of the orchestra for five successive years. In this one piece of work for the esthetic side of life the Mendelssohn choir has amply justified its existence and proved its capacity to achieve big results when the spirit moves.

Thomas Orchestra Has Long Record.
Theodore Thomas formed his organization in 1864, beginning a series of concerts in New York. Touring outside the metropolis was not begun until five years later, when its fame was so solidly established that people traveled hundreds of miles to the cities where it was advertised to appear, to enjoy its productions. Success, in the financial sense, did not always attend these tours, but so indomitable was the courage of its distinguished leader and so solid his belief in the future of music in America that reverses served but as a spur to renewed and greater efforts.

In 1891 the orchestra was brought to Chicago by a number of public spirited Chicagoans (who banded themselves together as the Orchestral association) and established under the name of the Chicago orchestra—a name which was adopted at the suggestion of Mr. Thomas himself. Concerts have been given weekly in that city during the musical season for the last twenty years, the season now consisting of twenty-eight weeks, fifty-six concerts, and from eight to twelve weeks annually are devoted to spreading the cause of good music in other cities through concerts and festival tours. In 1902 a public subscription was started for the collection of funds



Max Landow—Pianist

with which to erect a music hall in Chicago as an endowment and permanent home for the orchestra. There were some 8,500 subscribers to this fund, the subscriptions ranging in amounts from 10 cents to \$25,000, and in December, 1904, the building known as Orchestra hall was opened to the public, since which time the concerts of the orchestra have been given there. A few weeks later the death of Mr. Thomas on January 4, 1905, came as a shock to musical people the world over.

As a tribute to the memory of Mr. Thomas and a means of perpetuating the name of the pioneer of orchestral music in this country, the Orchestral asso-

ciation, shortly after his death, dropped the name Chicago orchestra and re-adopted the title by which it was so well known before its advent to Chicago—the Theodore Thomas orchestra.

Conductor Stock a Master of His Craft.
There was much conjecture after the death of Mr. Thomas as to who should succeed to the conductorship, and all of the great conductors of the world were suggested at one time or another. In the meantime the concerts were going on without any break under the leadership of Frederick Stock, who had been assistant to Mr. Thomas for five years before his death. Only a few, who were in a position to know, realized that this brilliant young musician was already a great conductor and capable of carrying on the work. The audiences, musicians and musical critics, however, were not long in discovering this for themselves, with the result that Mr. Stock was the unanimous choice of the trustees of the Orchestral association and was formally elected to the conductorship—an action which met with the hearty approval of the orchestra's large following in its home city.

Mr. Stock was born in Julich, Germany, on November 11, 1873, the son of a bandmaster in the German army. Under his father he began his musical studies, entered the Cologne conservatory at 14 years of age, was graduated as a violinist, and then took up seriously the study of theory and composition. In 1895 he came to America to become a member of the Chicago orchestra. Mr. Stock has written a considerable number of works in the larger forms—overtures, symphonic poems, a set of symphonic variations which have been repeatedly played in Chicago, and were brought forward by Franz Kniesel at the festival of 1906 in Worcester. In harmonization and orchestration Mr. Stock belongs to the latter-day German school of vivid colorists. Mr. Stock's latest compositions are a symphony in C minor (first played in Chicago December 31, 1909, and January 1, 1910, and at the Cincinnati May Festival in 1910) and a festival march, written in commemoration of the opening of the twentieth season of the Theodore Thomas orchestra, and dedicated to the officers and members of the Orchestral association.

Clarence E. Whitehill is the baritone with the

organization. When Mr. Whitehill received the endorsement of Frau Cosima Wagner for the excellence of his performances in the "Nibelungen Ring" at Bayreuth, he attained a distinction that has come to few American singers. Richard Wagner's widow is critically precise and demands the utmost from those selected to carry the burdens of the leading roles in the great music dramas. The musical foresight of this remarkable woman was absolutely endorsed when the German people corroborated her judgment with their own. Since then, opera goes of the representative American cities have heaped added praise to that bestowed upon Mr. Whitehill by musicians on the other side.

Last year Mr. Whitehill sang first baritone parts with the Metropolitan Opera company in New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, St. Louis, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Toledo, Louisville, Indianapolis and Atlanta. He was frequently called upon to sing additional performances at short notice and, under such very trying circumstances, invariably surpassed every demand made upon him. As the Metropolitan's season advanced his artistic stature increased and at the close this sterling baritone had won the public of every city in which he sang and gained the endorsement of the corps of musical critics.

Vocally, Mr. Whitehill has been liberally endowed. The voice is big, vibrant and mellow in tone from bottom to top, and is so easily controlled that there is always imparted to the listener a feeling of perfect confidence that whatever is being done will be absolutely satisfactory. He sings equally well high baritone and basso-cantante roles. Musicianship, rare intelligence and a dramatic instinct, developed properly under the guidance of such masters as Giraudet, are other qualities forming a part of an equipment that is further heightened by a commanding physique and a personality particularly engaging.

Reed Miller a Great Tenor.
Reed Miller, the tenor, has gained wide recognition during the last season as an oratorio and concert artist of high order, in fact one of the best singers America has produced. The successes in connection with Mr. Miller's numerous and important appearances in New York with Walter Damrosch and his New York Symphony orchestra, the Apollo club in Chicago, the Philharmonic club of Minneapolis, the Schubert club of St. Paul and in most of the leading festivals when on a festival tour of six weeks in the spring of 1909 with the New York Symphony orchestra, substantiate the fact that he is destined to become one of the leading concert and oratorio tenors of this country.

Gifted with a rare, sympathetic voice, which he uses with exceptional skill, Mr. Miller's concert work, and particularly his oratorio work, is characterized by individuality, musical intelligence and fine diction. His repertoire includes all the standard and modern oratorios, a fine list of arias suitable for orchestral concerts and choice recital programs.

A Great American Contralto.
The contralto of the organization is Janet Spencer, who stands pre-eminent among present-day contraltos that have attained international distinction. Until the spring of 1909 Miss Spencer's career had been confined to her native country, the United States, where, for several years, she heaped success upon success, appearing in song recital, concert and oratorio—in the last instance with the foremost societies known. So exceptional was Miss Spencer's artistic growth that when European managers besieged her with offers to visit England she was compelled to acquiesce, and there the corps of music critics and the public hailed her as an artist qualified to rank with the best contraltos that had visited them during the last decade.

It is no slight task to win the distinguished position in American and English musical circles that has

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