

Grand Opera Season



Moving Grand Opera Is Bigger Job Than Circus

Delicacy of Equipment Causes Constant Repair—Stage Hands Often Do Forty-eight Hours Without Food—Call Circus Men Amateurs.

Presentation of grand opera from any aspect is not a child's play. Watching it from behind the scenes, one soon learns that there is a large body of specialties, never seen by the public, to whom it is the hardest kind of hard driving, incessant work. It is bad enough when a company like the Chicago Opera association is in a city for a continuous engagement. It is worse when the organization picks up and moves to another place.

Heavier Than Circus.
Ask Harry Beatty, the genial giant in charge of the stage force of the company's stage crew. He will, if he happens to have the time, tell you that moving a circus from town to town is a small thing in comparison. For years the circus train has been the world's standard, the last word in efficiency in the matter of moving.

According to Mr. Beatty, a circus is not so much. The men in charge may be estimable citizens and they probably are gifted amateurs, but they would soon learn that they were taking a postgraduate course in their own profession if they were with an opera company for a season or so.

Twenty Truckloads.
"We have one production—Aida—alone," says Mr. Beatty, "which fills three 72-foot baggage cars, the largest made, to the brim. When it goes to the theater it makes 20 automobile truckloads. Twenty up and 20 back are 40. If the performance is repeated, 80. And this is just one."

When the Chicago Opera association went from Chicago to New

York in the last week of January this year, it took with it 46 baggage cars of scenery. Four special trains moved this one item. In order to avoid all chance of delay on the road all this went ahead of the company.

Trains of Personnel.
But at 1:30 on the morning of January 25, just after the final performance of the season, three more special trains moved out of Chicago carrying nothing but people, the members of the company, principals, chorus, orchestra and stage crew. One was routed over the Michigan Central, a second over the Lake Shore and the third over the Pennsylvania.

This does not count a number of other principals, who had been leaving Chicago all through the week as soon as their last performances had been sung. During the last three days the organization's truckmen had picked up 400 personal trunks in various parts of Chicago, all belonging to members of the company, and had moved 1,200 costume trunks from the wardrobe warehouse. Incidentally the company owns four five-story warehouses, each full of scenery, costumes and properties, with a total value of something like \$1,500,000.

An Intense Organization.
It is interesting to a degree to watch the stage crew take possession of a stage in a new town preparatory to a performance. The men come on a day or so in advance of the singers and from the time they reach the stage until the curtain rings up for the performance, all is intense, organized and specialized industry. No time is wasted in looking over the equipment of the stage, for the company carries its own equipment, not only scenery, but lights and mechanical devices down to the last stage-brace.

"It did not take us long to find out," says Mr. Beatty, "that very few stages have rope enough to swing our scenes. So now we always carry our own rope, 20 coils of 1,000 feet each—nearly four miles of rope, if you prefer to put it that way."

Complete Light Equipment.
The traveling electrical equipment is as complete in all its details as that used in the Chicago auditorium. It is all of the latest and

most improved type, and includes footlights, border lights, flood lights, bunch lights, strip lights and spot lights, together with dimmers, resistance coils and switchboards. Special crates hold the incandescent lights, 2,000 60-watt lights and 100 1,000-watt lights. The old fashioned arc lamps are entirely eliminated. The ten bunch lights carry 1,000 watts, and the four spot lights 3,300 watts each.

The back drops or full-sized scene used in the Auditorium are 68 feet wide and 40 feet high. This means 2,720 square feet of painted and fireproofed surface for each. The company carries 47 such, a total of 227,840 square feet. Something over 200 set pieces of 156 square feet each add to the burden. The properties, or stage furnishings, run to such numbers that the services of 12 men are necessary to handle them.

Constant Repair Work.
Stage equipment is fragile, easily broken, soon defaced. The company is obliged to maintain a plant in Chicago in operation the year around for the repair of old and the manufacture of new material. A visitor to the various workshops will find 25 employes making costumes, five who do nothing but make armor, ten in the electrical department, a like number in the property department, 12 artists—and they are real artists—who construct and paint scenery; 25 in the carpenter department.

Merely for the setting up and performance of an opera 100 men are necessary behind the scenes, and thirty with the singers, the stage manager and his three assistants, three assistant conductors, the ballet master, the chorusmaster, the wig-maker and his four assistants, the two wardrobe women and the eight dressers. These are merely counted, a like number in the property department, the artists who appear in the focus of the lights and receive all the applause. The 100 are the stage crew, the electricians, the gripmen, the flymen, the property men and all the rest.

Often Miss Meals.
They work themselves and their associates unmercifully, for, once fallen behind, it is twice as hard to catch up. It is no unusual thing for the force to work 48 hours on end without rest or sleep, merely catching an occasional hasty bite of food as it is brought to them on the stage. Once on unloading crew in the railroad yards in Chicago did not have their clothes off for 72 hours. "But," said one of them apologetically, "it was during a big blizzard, and the storm slowed up the work a little." Sometimes they get a little "jumpy" in the nerves, but—they get the work done. That is why Harry Beatty thinks circus men are amateurs.

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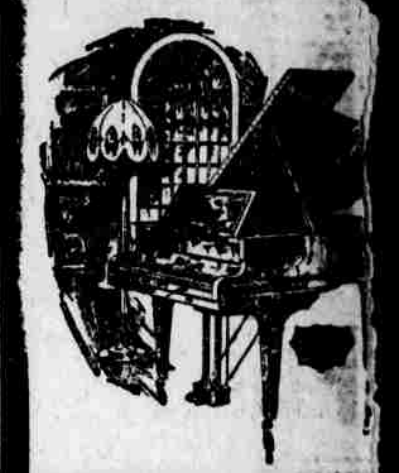
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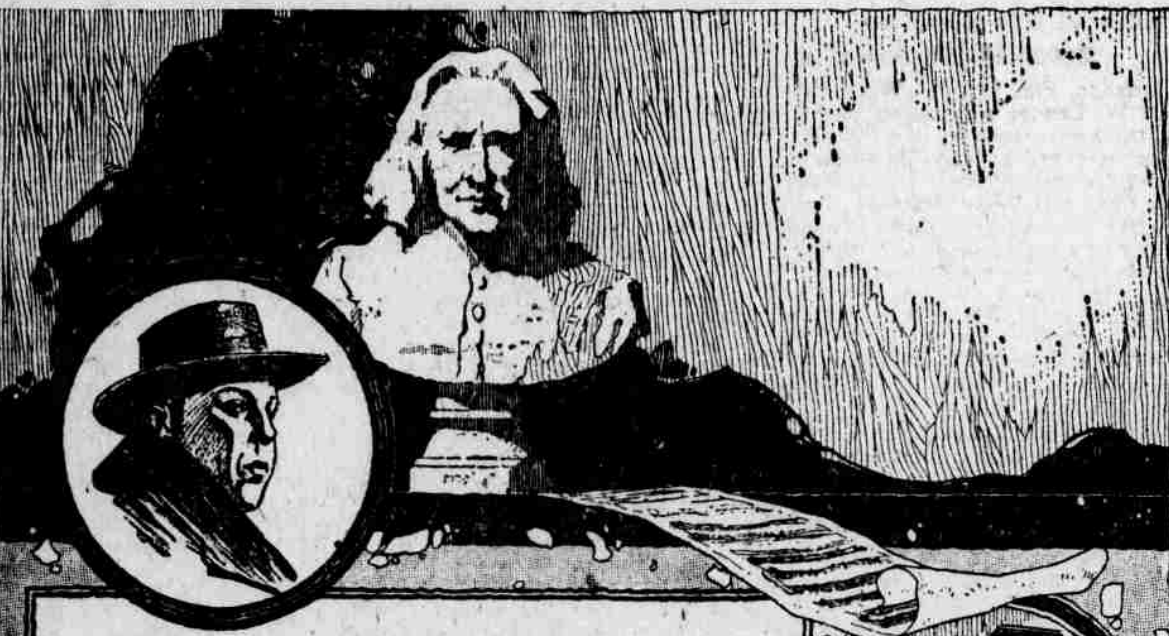
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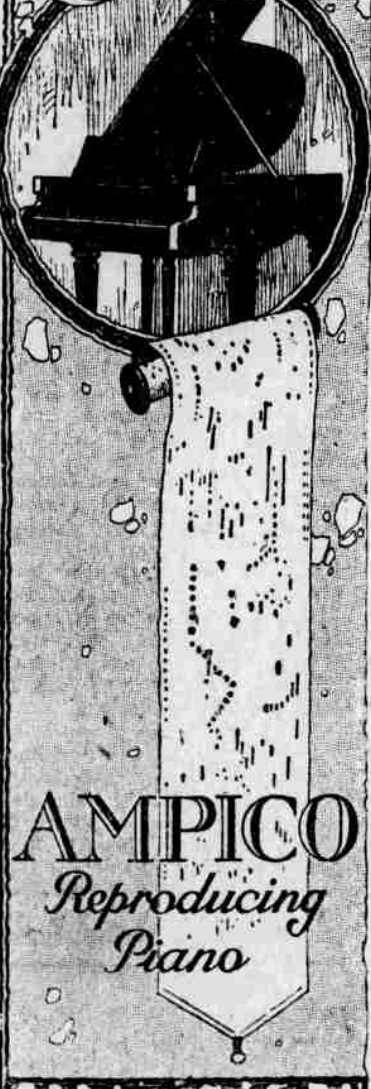
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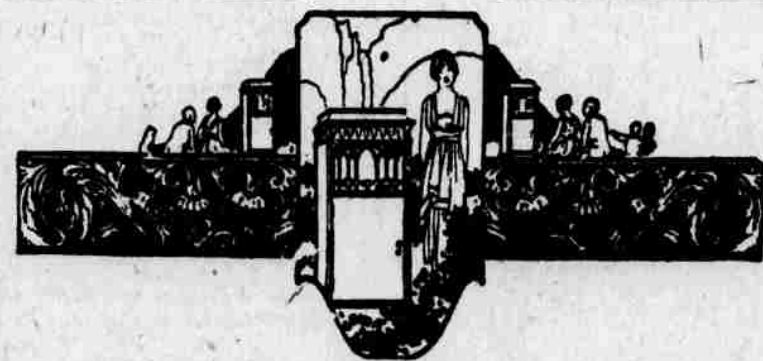
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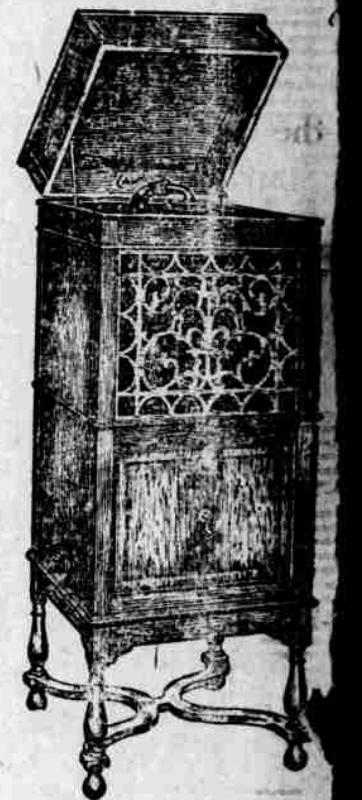
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