IN RELATED KEYS

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Omaha appreciates German opera, nor does it limit its appreciation to the lighter operas. The Valkyrie found as warm a welcome as either Tannhaeuser or Lohengrin, and it was the Valkyrie that was the most prominent, It was overwhelming, so overwhelming indeed, that the critic of the World Herald forgot to criticize, and went into two columns of inarticulate ecstatic hysterics. And no wonder. It takes about twelve hours to sober up after an emotional carouse of that kind. One is brought, more or less unprepared, into sudden contact with one of the greatest of artistic creations.

This set of operas, this Cycle of the Ring of the Nibelungs, ranks with the plays of Shakespeare, the Symphonies of Beethoven. The myth it deals with is our own, the epic of the Germanic north. We have adopted Greek Gods, we teach the Greek mythology in our schools, we accept, reluctantly, the story of the slow-blooded Beowulf. But too many of us know nothing of the glorious story of the Volsungs. We know that it has something to do with the Niblungenlied. The connection, however, is very remote. That is gross and physical. The Volsunga Saga is spiritual, of the immortals, strong Scandinavian immortals, ideals of our northern race. Any one who has not studied this vigorous mythology has missed much.

It is upon this mythology that the cycle of music-drama, of which the Valkyrie is second, is founded. It is not complete in itself, it is merely one of a chain, but it is complete as a link. Like all the rest of the cycle, it is emotionally most intense. There is a constant sense of suppressed passion, of impending fate, of approaching outburst. Keats dreamt of music sighing "like a god in pain." He could have heard it in the motive of Votan's grief. Then there is the motive of the Volsung race, a strong-hearted, hopeless aspiring, met and sadly soothed by the tenderer notes of woman's comfort.

The first act is one grand climax, reaching its height when Siegmund draws the sword from the stem to the blare of the triumphant sword-motive. In the second act there is less outburst. One feels the gloomy sorrow of Votan, forced to give up his own son to death. In the last act comes the wild ride of Valkyries, and the punishment of Brunhild. Votan sadly lays her in the magic sleep; and the fire flames all around her. As the elder Edda says:

'He set round my hall toward the south-quarter
The bane of all trees burning aloft,
And ruled that he only thereover should ride
Who should bring me the gold o'er which Fafnir brooded."

It is a pity that the rest of the cycle could not be given. Perhaps, however, there will be a chance to hear them in successive years. One does not like to leave the story forever "to be continued."

Berthald distinguished himself as Siegmund, both in acting and in singing. In the "spring song' he was particularly successful. Of all love-scenes in opera, that in the Valkyrie is the most impassioned. It is love in deadly peril, the love of the children of gods, the strong-blooded first of men. It takes genius to act such a scene. And this Berthald and Fraulein Mulder have. At the end of the act the audience was wild with enthusiasm.

Popovici as Votan lacked the thunderous richness of voice that the part called for; he falls far short of Fischer. He made, however, the best of his material. As Telramund in "Lohengrin,' a part far better suited to him, he did excellently. Klafski as Brynhild was superb. She is not beautiful; she is not, like the Brynhild of the Edda, "a swan on a billow." She has the very substantial physique needed by a singer of Wagnerian opera. But her voice and her dramatic force make one forget all this. One sees only the noble-hearted Valkyrie, disobeying her father's commands for his own good, asking only, since she must become mortal, that she may be surrounded by perils that shall keep away all save the man who is worthy of her, the hero who shall ride the fire. Her voice is strong, wonderfully strong, yet sweet and so easily produced that one does not appreciate the wonder of its volume. It is a great voice, one of the few great voices of the operatic stage.

The work of the orchestra was above criticism. It was as remarkable in blending as in force. The phrases seemed to slip imperceptibly from instrument to instrument. Herr Lohse, the husband of Fra Klafski, conducted in the absence of Damrosch. Of Damrosch's absence I heard no very satisfying explanation. It was rather to be regretted that the audience, not realizing the significance of every phrase of the music, insisted on applauding at the fall of the curtain. In Italian opera this is very well. In Wagner's work, applause should have been delayed till the last note had died away. As it was, the significance of the closing measures was entirely lost.

In "Tannhaeuser," Gruening and Klafski deserve special mention. In "Lohengrin" Franlin Gadsky made an excellent Elsa, but attention centered on Alvari, His voice has lost a little, especially in the upper notes. This was shown particularly in the first act. But he improved greatly as he went on. In the chamber scene he was at his best, so too in the sad farewell to Elsa. Whatever his faults, he remains, the De Rezkes excepted, one of the greatest actor-singers on the stage. The thrilling violin tone of his voice, the delicacy of shading in every note, his dramatic power, his impetuous grace, all join to make him the ideal hero of German opera. It is sad, however, to see such a voice begin to fail. Some say its failure is the result of bad method. That may be. Whatever the cause, it is pitiable. pitiable with the great piteousness of the passing of youth.

The scenery was mediocre. This was owing, partly to the smallness of the stage, partly, I suppose, to the smallness of the cars that carried the company. It was fair so far as it went, and the music supplied the rest. No stage moonlight could be half so melting as that silver rippling of the harp when spring "laughed in the hall."

Well, it is over, and Omaha is proud, for she appreciated it, It is to be hoped that she paid for it, so that it may come again. If we cannot have opera ourselves, it is much to have it visit our neighors.

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At the Universalist church, Mr, August Hagenow played Svenson's Romanza, better on the whole, than I have heard him play it before. He seemed more in the mood. Miss Turner's solo was, also, a great improvement over her last. Her voice showed more power and more confident handling. It needs, however, still more training. There was a slight tendency to flat, which should be overcome. It is remarkable in purity and sweetness of tone. Of the numbers by the quartet, the theme and variations from Beethoven was the most substantial. Haydn's Allegro was pleasing, and the Meyerbeer Coronation march made a stirring close. The numbers from Mendelssohn were not so satisfactory. The Songs without Words seem to belong to the piano, at least to a solo instrument; they seem strange when presented in a large mass.

The audience was as large as usual. The hymns were helped considerably by Miss Turner and an unknown singer somewhere in the body of the church. If a few more could help, this part of the service would go better still. The hymns that are sung are not at all bad. They are slow, pas the Journal says, but they are rather better as music than "Rescue the Perishing" or "There is Life For a Look." All that is needed is a little effort.

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The audience of the German opera at Omaha was not surpassingly dazzling Many men wore evening dress, and the pretty costumes of many of the women brightenod the theatre. But the general effect was not of society display. One saw not brilliant dress, but earnest faces. The audience came to hear. Incidentally many of them dressed well. A large part of the audience was German. One caught from all directions, subdued ich's and ach's. Long haired musicians sat poring over their scores, greedily critical of every note, It in fact, an audiense as intelligently appreciative as one could wish. And it is to the Germans, by the way, that we owe the musical growth of this country. The Italians have been enthusiastic enough, but their ardor cannot fire us. One might as well try to kindle coal with shavings. They flare up, and go out, and we are still cold. But the glow of the German burns stronger, with intenser and more communicable heat. His nature, too, is more akin to our own. Already we begin to feel the crackle and cordial spread of the new fire.