

opera with jazz themes employed as leit-motifs to unify the whole work.

There are two conditions which account for the lack of progress in developing this form of music. The first is the obvious one—the scarcity of films which, like *Caligari*, have been molded in their setting, atmosphere and plot by modernistic tendencies. The source of inspiration is not plentiful. Preparation of scores for the average film has developed certain easy methods, which are however, amenable to a great improvement. The music ordinarily composed for the movies is of a petty descriptive quality, employing leit-motifs in an exceedingly primitive and mechanical way. In character it achieves only the effect of re-echoing Wagner's themes and descriptions. When the material of the film itself is improved, and it acquires an aesthetic and dramatic unity, the inadequacy of the present type of score becomes obvious, and the need for better music is then clearly felt.

The second retarding condition is one which, though of a mechanical nature, is still extremely important. Films are produced with incredible abundance and rapidity. The speed of production necessitates the creation of stores of film leit-motifs and bits of musical description which shall be suitable to all the stock dramatic incidents and atmospheres with which we are familiar. These musical fragments must be of a kind that can be quickly amalgamated, so that a score may be concocted *ad hoc*.

Moreover each film has a very short lease of life, and this fact, together with the mechanical conditions which are imposed on the musicians have alienated the interest of the better composers and leaders of the contemporary movement. And until the film itself, its nature, atmosphere, time for production and of duration, is submitted to a basic change, the music written for the movies will not achieve a higher level.

By Hugo Riesenfeld

FOR A NEW REPERTOIRE AT THE OPERA HOUSE

IF one's life is spent amid the symphonic pleasures and cinema palaces of New York, I doubt very much if one ever realizes in dragging himself to this oversupply of things musical and un-

musical that, despite everything the standard orchestral organizations, the guilds and leagues do for music, so that New York hears many a new musical work before other centers do, there is a very decided apathy among those who supply the city with operatic fare to produce new and significant works. Certain it is that when I lived in New York this exceedingly important want was not as obvious to me as it is now. For after living away from my own country for a couple of years, which time was spent principally in Italy, an entirely new perspective has been gained on the situation that exists, and which all who love the art of music better than they do popular operatic voices hope will not always exist.

In a nutshell it is simply this: that the Metropolitan Opera Company displays little or no interest in the new works for the lyric stage which the best composers of our day are producing. Whereas there appear even on the programs of the symphonic orchestras works which bear the legend "first time" and indicate more or less that their conductors are willing to advance a novelty now and then between the one thousand eight hundred and seventy-sixth performance of the *Fifth Symphony* and the two thousand three hundred and ninetieth performance of the *Pathétique*, operatic novelties in recent years at the Metropolitan have comprised revivals of such thrilling antiques as *Don Carlos*, *La Forza del Destino*, *William Tell* and I do not know what during the current season, plus such twaddle as Weiss' *The Polish Jew* a few years ago, Janáček's *Jenufa* and things of like kidney. In the spring of 1923 the Scala produced Pizzetti's *Debora*, a work of undoubted importance, a work of a composer whose name means a lot to music-lovers throughout the world. Of course *Debora* is no *Butterfly* and there is no Toscanini to conduct it at the Metropolitan. Alfano's *Sakuntala*, whatever its defects, is a work that calls for production in America, and even Respighi's *Belfagor*, unoperatic as it may be, deserves a hearing from one of the first opera-houses in the world.

This is 1926. Before I went abroad, which was in 1922, the *Sette Canzoni* of G. Francesco Malipiero had been produced at the Opera in Paris, that old reactionary theatre having for a moment thrown itself out of its course of *Faust* and *Mignon* and

decided to present something in the way of a serious novelty. I am happy that the League of Composers interested itself last season in producing this important work of one of the truly significant composers of our time, and I only regret that it has not been possible to give it a stage performance. There have recently been issued *Three Goldoni Comedies* by the same composer, three short works calculated to make up an evening in the theatre. They are typical of their composer and for all who know Venice and its overpowering charm—Malipiero being a Venetian was just the man to write these works—they will have a special message. I have not yet seen any announcement made that America is to hear them either this or next season, and I should not be surprised if it were many years until the Metropolitan would come to “discover” them, as it has now “discovered” *Pelléas*, years after *Pelléas* has any message for mankind except one of calm retrospective admiration for the musician who did this kind of thing superlatively well without realizing how boring a whole opera of it could be.



No city in the world hears so many new works by important and unimportant European composers as does New York. Only the other day I was reading an article by a prominent Berlin music critic who wrote with all seriousness that the music of Ravel was still regarded in the German capital as new and modern. Ravel is a classic, of course, and New York has long ago recognized that fact. He is almost “old hat” compared with the Kreneks, Hindemiths and Hábas of atonal, polytonal and quartertonal fame! But in spite of New York hearing through the activity of its leagues and guilds so much of the new music, it hears only new symphonic, chamber and vocal music. It seems imperative that these leagues now devote some of their energy to convincing the men who choose the new works for our opera-houses that the new music must be heard there, too. Think of an opera-house that has not yet produced a Schreker opera. New York in 1926 has not yet heard *Der Schatzgräber*, *Die Gezeichneten*, or the new *Irrelohe!!!* Yet this opera-house which does not produce Schreker

gives its time to such padded things as Herr Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt*. I hold no special brief for Schreker and his works, though there is not one of them in which he has not written some magnificent and powerful music, perhaps a bit brutal, but hardly to be reckoned so by an opera-house that indulges in such trash as *Zaza* of Leoncavallo, *Adriana* of Cilea and that kind of thing. It is simply that the tendency to investigate new fields, to explore new regions, to cultivate lyric art that is progressive instead of operatic music that is effective, does not exist in America's most important operatic theatre. There is no desire at the Metropolitan to do the big, vital operatic works that composers in various lands have written in recent years and are writing now. Perhaps a change of heart and mind may come. Who knows? The Staatsoper in Berlin, formerly as deadly in its reactionary policy as our own opera-house, has this season opened its doors to Krenek's *Zwingburg*, a work of ultra-progressive character. One hears that the reason for this interest in the new music is to be traced to the conductor, Herr Kleiber. Probably that is what we need then at the Metropolitan. For I should be the last to blame Signor Gatticasazza for the conventional repertoire of his theatre, when every intelligent opera impresario (and he is one of the most intelligent) relies to a great degree upon his conductors for his choice of new works to be produced. A new conductor of progressive tendencies, one who believes in the future of the art of music and does not satisfy himself with preparing Meyerbeer revivals, could change the whole status of things operatic in New York in a single season. He might lose his job doing so, to be sure; but would it not be well worth while to have a musician come to us, and go from us, so that the hopeless condition now obtaining in our principal opera house might be altered, and the future of the opera in New York be brought nearer to salvation?

Out of this change so much good could come—but it is unlikely that the change will be made. Therefore, let me suggest the following: let all the leagues and guilds who agree that there has been too much attention paid in the Metropolitan Opera House to Puccini, Leoncavallo, Mascagni, Massenet, Leroux, et al., unite in an effort to place before the directors of that institution a resumé of the important operatic works that have appeared in the prin-

cipal countries of Europe these last five years. Let them explain that there has been a public interested in the compositions of these men written for chamber music combinations, for the voice, etc. and that this public will form a nucleus on which to build for the presentation of the new music for the lyric stage. I have no way of knowing what measure of success such efforts could meet with, but I feel certain that if they were repeated annually New York might hear the stage works of Malipiero and Pizzetti before 1935. And that would be worth working for. It would be something of which every guild and every league in New York might well be proud.

By A. Walter Kramer

