

THE Musical Times ESTABLISHED IN 1844

Mr. Stanford's "Savonarola"

Author(s): J. A. Fuller-Maitland

Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 25, No. 495 (May 1, 1884), pp. 270-272

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3356439>

Accessed: 09/01/2015 12:33

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Musical Times Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

favourite artists to take their farewell for the season. Haydn's Quartet in G (Op. 17, No. 5) opened the proceedings, after which Miss Zimmermann and Signor Piatti played Rubinstein's three pieces for pianoforte and violoncello (Op. 11). Madame Schumann had a greeting more demonstrative than ever, and the audience tried hard to obtain more from her than the three numbers of Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Worte" set down in the programme, though happily in vain. Bach's Concerto in D minor, for two violins, as played by Madame Néruda and Herr Joachim, afforded an opportunity for contrasting the styles of the two great violinists. After Mr. Santley had sung "The Erl-King" and Gounod's "Ho messo nuove corde," the Concert was brought to a worthy termination by an exceptionally fine rendering of Schumann's Quintet in E flat (Op. 44), in which Madame Schumann sustained the pianoforte part. It only remains to be mentioned that the twenty-seventh season will commence on October 27 next, and to congratulate the management and the public alike on the remarkable vitality exhibited in an enterprise conducted on the purest art principles.

RICHTER CONCERTS.

THE scheme of these Concerts for the present season is, as our readers well know, of a more eclectic character than usual, embracing many masters and many varied works. Opinions differ about the policy thus exemplified. Some hold that the Richter Concerts, like their Conductor, are chiefly associated with Wagner and Beethoven, and should devote themselves to making the works of those masters understood with, perhaps, an occasional excursion towards Liszt. Others contend that as the works of Wagner which are possible in a Concert-room can be counted on ten fingers, and as Beethoven belongs to classic art, the special field of labour is not large enough for the avoidance of monotony. With this we are disposed to agree, the more readily because we cannot approve of an avowed propaganda in favour of a particular school, tending, as it does, to perpetuate strife and discord where there should be peace and harmony. The programme of the opening Concert, given in St. James's Hall, on the 21st ult., was, apart from the inevitable Beethoven Symphony, a sop thrown to "advanced" taste, the only composers represented being Wagner and Liszt. Yet even this did not draw a full house, though perhaps the empty places were due more to a high tariff than indifference about the fare provided. The orchestra was much as usual and again "led" by Herr Schiever, while of Herr Richter it suffices to say that he appeared to be himself in the completest sense. On coming forward to conduct as usual, without book, he was loudly cheered from all parts of the Hall. The Concert opened with Wagner's "Huldigungs-Marsch," dedicated to the King of Bavaria, a work often played before under Richter's direction, and therefore not calling for special observation now. About its merits as a piece of orchestration no dispute can arise. It scales the heights and sounds the depths of instrumental capacity. Regarded in any other light it at once excites controversy, over the provocation to which we had better pass in order to praise an extremely judicious and well-balanced performance—as complete an exposition of the given work as critical taste could desire. Wagner's "Faust" overture followed and pleased all parties, the orthodox by its classic form and, to some extent, classic treatment, the "advanced" by its distinctively Wagnerian expression. Next came the Prelude to "Parsifal," with which the selections from Wagner fitly ended. This once more took the audience into debatable ground, but none could have refused acknowledgment of the interest which the work commanded, of the consummate skill displayed by the composer in dealing with his plan, or of the beauty that made some passages shine in an almost unearthly light. Classicists may fight Wagner on the ground of principle, and we decline to say that they are not often right, but all must bow before the evidence of his genius, while, perhaps, regretting its application. Liszt's first Hungarian Rhapsody came after the "Parsifal" music with a thorough shock of change, but its wild rhythms and impetuous flow delighted the audience, who were clearly disposed to hear it again. Then followed Beethoven's

"Eroica," to lift men's minds into a higher sphere and show what music is in its purest and most exalted manifestation. The performance of all the foregoing works left little to desire, and opened the Richter season in splendid fashion.

ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL.

THAT there would be no falling off this year in the interest which attaches to the special service held in St. Paul's Cathedral on the Tuesday in Holy Week, at which Bach's St. Matthew Passion forms so important a feature, was clearly evidenced fully two hours before the time fixed for the commencement of the service. And it speaks well for the oft-abused taste of the British public that hundreds upon hundreds should be content to go year by year and wait patiently, and, in the great majority of cases, wait devoutly too, for the reward, at length, of music diametrically opposed in style to what is usually held to be "popular," lofty and sublime alike in conception and execution, and pre-eminently religious and sacred.

Of the actual performance of the music on the present occasion we have little to say, from the critic's point of view, beyond recording the fact that the high standard of past years was fully maintained, if not surpassed. The innovation, started some two or three years since in consideration of the size of the building, of assigning some of the treble solos to all the trebles of the cathedral choir, seems to be gaining favour with the authorities, as this year only one solo—the recitative "Thou blessed Saviour, Thou"—was actually sung by one voice (the solo "Have mercy upon me, O Lord" was sung by two boys, but this eyes alone would have been able to discover) and with this exception the soprano solos were taken by the whole of the cathedral boys. Whatever objection may be felt against such a proceeding from the Purist point of view, we are bound to say that the result, in the present case, was an example of *ensemble* singing rarely to be enjoyed.

As in past years the tenor and bass parts were sung by Mr. Kenningham and Mr. Winn. Dr. G. C. Martin presided at the organ, and Dr. Stainer conducted.

EARLY CLOSING ASSOCIATION.

THIS at first sight appears a singular heading for a notice of a musical performance; but without being unduly sanguine, we may attach considerable significance to a movement which produces such an initial result as that witnessed in St. James's Hall on Friday, the 18th ult. The Early Closing Association, being desirous of affording public testimony to the beneficial use made of the leisure hours secured to shop employés by its efforts, organised a "grand musical demonstration," consisting of vocal and instrumental pieces, given under the direction of Mr. Joseph Barnby. The Society may be congratulated on having obtained the services of so excellent a musician as Conductor. In a purely artistic sense the greatest merit was exhibited by the Choir, the performances of various part-songs being really very creditable. If the members remain together and rehearse with regularity, the body may eventually take an honourable position among metropolitan choral societies. The instrumental part of the programme consisted of selections performed by the wind bands, organised by the employés of Messrs. Marshall & Snelgrove and Messrs. Shoolbred & Co. Criticism of the various solo efforts, vocal and instrumental, would be out of place, and it will be sufficient to say that several of the performers fully earned the applause they received. This undertaking deserves encouragement, and its progress will be watched with interest.

MR. STANFORD'S "SAVONAROLA."

THE question of how best to turn history to account on the operatic stage is one that has vexed the souls of many a librettist and composer before now, and it does not seem probable that any ultimate solution will easily be arrived at. If on the one hand, historical accuracy be strictly adhered to, and nothing allowed into the text but what is established by the most unimpeachable documentary evidence, the result is apt to be terribly dull and

ineffective, for the lives even of the greatest men do not obligingly arrange themselves into a convenient number of acts for stage purposes. On the other hand, if the facts of history be modified to suit the exigencies of the drama, the public and the critics will often complain that their firmest historical convictions have been grossly outraged, and will therefore have nothing to say to the production. Some composers, as for instance Wagner in "Rienzi," and Berlioz in "Benvenuto Cellini," have eluded the difficulty by screening themselves behind an historical novel, in which the modifications necessary for effect have been already successfully made.

In Mr. Stanford's new opera the librettist, Mr. Gilbert-à-Beckett, has had recourse to no such subterfuge as this, but has faced the difficulty for himself, and solved it in the best possible way, by surrounding the central figure with characters of his own invention, one of which at least is developed from a hint in Villari's life of the great Dominican.

Clarice, the daughter of a rich merchant of Ferrara, is beloved by *Savonarola*, a young student; she has been betrothed, against her will, to a Florentine nobleman named *Rucello*. She has appointed a last meeting with her lover on the evening of her betrothal, and at the opening of the Prologue he waits outside the gate of her house. He knows that his love is returned, but not that *Clarice* has been affianced to another. She comes, but only to bid him farewell. They are interrupted by *Rucello*, who taunts *Savonarola* with his lowly origin, and roughly orders *Clarice* to return to the house. *Savonarola* denounces him, and they are about to fight when a company of Dominican monks cross the stage singing as they go. The combatants put up their swords, and after the procession has passed, *Clarice* is drawn within the gates, but not before she has sworn to *Savonarola* that she will never marry *Rucello*. The student, left alone outside the gates, struggles once more against his fate, and tries to force an entrance, but as he does so the distant chant of the Dominicans breaks upon his ear, and he determines to join them and embrace a religious life.

So far the Prologue, after which twenty-three years are supposed to elapse. In the meantime, *Clarice* has been married to a certain *Strozzi*, and has died leaving a daughter, closely resembling herself, named *Francesca*. Of this daughter *Rucello* has obtained the guardianship, for *Strozzi* is also dead. She has been brought up in Florence, learning from her guardian to hate the very name of *Savonarola*, who by this time has, by his unbounded influence and strength of character, risen to a position of supremacy in the city. *Rucello* is at the head of a set of partisans of the Medici, who desire to overthrow the power of the priest and to bring in their own princes as rulers.

At the beginning of Act I. they meet opposite *Rucello's* house in the Piazza della Signoria, he having promised to produce an emissary who shall be instrumental in delivering up Florence to the Medici. This messenger is *Francesca*, who now enters and declares her hatred of *Savonarola*, and her longing to see Florence delivered from his sway. While waiting for her message, she is met by *Sebastiano*, a member of the secular order of the Piagnoni, founded by *Savonarola*; he loves her, but in vain, for her heart is given to the cause wherein lies, as she has been taught, the only hope for Florence. He tries to dissuade her from her error, and to show her the treachery which it involves; but she is not to be turned from her purpose. When she is gone, the ceremony of the "Burning of Vanities," so graphically described in "Romola," takes place, the Piagnoni boys collecting from the rich Florentines jewels and other spoils "for the holy fire." The partisans of the Medici deride the donors, and a tumult arises, which is immediately quelled at the appearance of *Savonarola*, the people falling at his feet as he advances, clad in the white robe and black hood of the order, and bearing in his hand a skull. Peace is restored, but is soon broken again by the discovery of *Francesca's* treachery. She is brought in, and confesses with pride that she is of the Medicean faction. *Savonarola* orders her to prison, but *Rucello* steps in and tells him whose daughter she is, showing him a miniature of *Clarice*. *Savonarola* wavers, and orders her to be freed.

Upon this *Rucello* reviles him to the crowd, calling him

One who sells
The honour of the state to feed and fan
The puling passion of a love-sick boy.

Savonarola regains his self-possession, and gives *Rucello* the lie, by confirming his first order of condemnation, and as *Francesca* is led off, the curtain falls.

Act II. passes in the monastery of San Marco. The Medicean faction has gained strength, and is endangering the ecclesiastical power in the city. The monks are praying to their founder, St. Dominic, for aid. *Sebastiano* and the chiefs of the Piagnoni come to defend the convent, and all go into the chapel, except *Sebastiano*, who stands as sentinel outside. To his surprise, *Francesca* demands admission. She has been set free by *Rucello*, and in her imprisonment her feelings towards *Savonarola* have completely changed, and she is now come to warn him and his monks of the approach of the Medici. Shortly afterwards they come and sack the convent, defeating its defenders and killing *Sebastiano*. *Savonarola* is imprisoned.

The third act is occupied with the final scenes of his life. In the prison *Francesca* comes to crave his forgiveness. He blesses her, and as he does so the memory of years gone by returns, and in *Clarice's* child his old sorrow is expiated. The guards enter to take him to execution, and curtains close in the scene while a funeral march is played. The second scene is in the Piazza, where *Rucello* is exulting in the accomplishment of his revenge. As *Savonarola* comes, followed by the crowd who kneel for his blessing, *Rucello* confronts him in triumph, and scoffs at him. He remains perfectly calm, but *Francesca* and the crowd pour curses upon *Rucello's* head. The procession moves on, leaving *Francesca* alone on the stage, watching the preparations for the execution. As the ruddy glow of the distant fire lights up the stage, she utters strains of rapturous exaltation as though seeing an angelic vision, and at last sinks lifeless to the ground.

The music inspired by this fine libretto is in all respects worthy of it. It is throughout lofty in emotion, conceived on the highest lines, intellectually as well as musically, and admirably sustained in every portion. It is not too much to say that in breadth of conception and richness of imagination, as well as in intrinsic musical beauty, it far excels all Mr. Stanford's former works. His method of operatic treatment is as original as the music itself. He uses "leading motives" freely, but by no means too lavishly. Some of the recurring phrases savour rather of musical allusion than of the "Leitmotiv" proper. Thus the orchestral opening of the Prologue is used again almost note for note to introduce Acts II. and III., which treat, like the Prologue, of *Savonarola's* sufferings. A phrase of great breadth and beauty which first occurs in G major as an accompaniment to the expression of the young student's hopes of victory in love, is used again in a slightly modified form where supremacy of his influence is to be expressed, and again when he is taken prisoner, exulting in view of the martyr's triumphant death. The other musical motives may be left to explain themselves. The use of the Dominican Chant, the melody of which is taken from a collection of church music dating from about 1300, is very fine indeed, representing as it does the religious element in the drama. Of set pieces there are few or none in the opera, but nothing is farther from the composer's style than the "endless recitative" affected by some young musicians in fancied imitation of Wagner. Though there are no separable numbers, unless we count the prayer of the Dominicans and the funeral march as such, yet the music is divided into movements which are scarcely less clear in form than those of a sonata.

Among the most beautiful and striking portions of the score we may mention the duet and final tenor solo in the Prologue, *Francesca's* song and the scene of the Burning of Vanities in Act I., the Dominican Hymn and the duet between *Francesca* and *Sebastiano* in Act II., and in Act III. the duet in the prison, the funeral march and final soprano solo, in which the music first heard at the close of the Prologue recurs with the best possible effect, and by which the whole work is brought to a solemn and most affecting conclusion.

The performance at the Stadt Theater, Hamburg, on the 18th ult., when the work was produced for the first

time, was on the whole exceedingly good, and bore traces of the most careful study in all parts. The *title-rôle* was undertaken by Herr Ernst, a young tenor whose admirable acting made up for what his voice yet lacks in sustaining power. Frau Rosa Sucher, in the parts of *Clarice* and *Francesca*, was extremely fine, as will easily be imagined by those who saw her wonderful impersonations in the last season of German opera in London in 1882. Dr. Kraus sang and acted the part of *Rucello* with great vigour and artistic intelligence, and Herr Landau was the *Sebastiano*. The choruses were fairly well sung, but the acting of the singers was not all that could be wished. The orchestra was weak in the string parts, but was otherwise good. Herr Sucher conducted with the greatest care and skill, and the mounting of the work left nothing to be desired. The reception of the opera was most enthusiastic, the composer being called before the curtain many times at the conclusion of each act. "Savonarola" is to be produced in London during the approaching season of German performances at Covent Garden, under Herr Richter's direction.

J. A. FULLER-MAITLAND.

MUSIC IN BIRMINGHAM.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

SPECIAL interest attached to the fourth and last Concert of the Festival Choral Society on March 27, because it was the occasion of introducing to the Birmingham public the sacred masterpiece of a foreign composer of note, who is probably destined to play an important part in the musical history of the town. Anton Dvorák, whose "Stabat Mater" furnished the principal item of the Concert, was entrusted some time ago with a commission for the Birmingham Festival of 1885, and he has now intimated to the committee that he has found a congenial subject in the life of the reformer, John Huss. But little of his music had been heard in Birmingham prior to the performance of his "Stabat Mater," which came, therefore, almost as a revelation upon the musical public of the Midland metropolis, and though the mournful character of the theme, and the somewhat severe spirit in which the composer has addressed himself to its exposition, render it improbable that the work will ever command the suffrages of the million, there was no mistaking the deep impression its noble strains produced upon the many earnest and educated music lovers present on this occasion. It was remarked that the themes employed in his "Stabat" are few and simple, but expressive, with little or none of the changeful flow of luscious, cloying melody which we get in Rossini's setting of the hymn, but more reserve and severity, if not more purity of style, than in the work of the Italian composer. The performance, though by no means an ideal one was, considering the difficulty of the music, a very creditable effort, more especially on the part of the chorus and band. A good deal of the solo music, however, severely taxed the resources of the principal artists, Miss Anna Williams, Madame Mudie Bolingbroke, Mr. Redfern Hollins, and Signor Foli. Schubert's "Song of Miriam," which was also performed here for the first time on this occasion, scarcely fulfilled the expectations of the many Schubert lovers present, who comforted themselves, however, with the reflection that if the composer himself had written the orchestral parts, which were supplied by Lachner, the result might, perhaps, have been different. The performance of the work by Miss Anna Williams and the chorus was, under every aspect, very satisfactory. An excellent rendering of Mendelssohn's setting of the Forty-second Psalm, "As the hart pants," concluded the Concert.

At the second Concert of the Amateur Harmonic Association, on the 2nd ult., the principal item was Schubert's tuneful First Mass in F, which exhibited the choir in a very favourable light where their efforts were not obscured by the loudness of the band. With the exception of an occasional want of balance between the vocal and instrumental sections, and a tendency to drag the time in places, the performance left little to be desired. In Beethoven's Choral Fantasia Miss Agnes Miller was the pianist, and acquitted herself in this and in a series of four harpsichord studies by Scarlatti with her accustomed skill and judgment. A couple of part-songs, including Beethoven's

"Calm sea and prosperous voyage," Handel's Fourth Organ Concerto, capitolly played by Mr. Stimpson, and songs by Rossi, Braga, Sullivan, and Ambrose Thomas, made up the programme.

Schumann's "Paradise and the Peri," first produced before a Birmingham audience by the local Philharmonic Union, in September, 1878, was repeated by the same Society on the 3rd ult., when the important part of the *Peri* devolved on Miss Anna Williams. The work possesses a special interest for Birmingham, owing to the many points of contrast and analogy it presents with Mr. Barnett's setting of the same poem, produced at the Birmingham Musical Festival of 1870—more than a quarter of a century after that of Schumann. Of the sterling qualities of the latter work it would now be superfluous to speak, and its performance on this occasion does not call for much comment. The choir, though somewhat weak in the tenor section, had evidently rehearsed the work carefully, and notwithstanding that the band was not large enough to fulfil all the requirements of the score, it was of excellent quality. Miss Williams was in fine voice, for which the music of the *Peri* afforded large and effective scope, and her efforts were well seconded by those of Miss Johnson, Miss Yates, Mr. Abercrombie, Mr. Alexander Smith, and Mr. D. Harrison. Of the choruses, the more delicate ones fared best, the brief Angels' chorus and the chorus of Houris being exquisitely sung. For some of the other choral numbers more weight and volume of tone and occasionally more fire were wanting. In Hiller's Pianoforte Concerto in F sharp minor, Mr. G. J. Halford displayed a neat articulate touch combined with good phrasing and power. The "banquet scene," from Max Bruch's "Odysseus," a clever but somewhat heavy work, first heard in Birmingham in May of last year, was the next item of this interesting Concert, which terminated with a spirited performance of Gounod's "Mireille" Overture. Dr. Swinerton Heap conducted throughout with his accustomed judgment.

On Good Friday the Philharmonic Union gave its usual performance of "The Messiah" in the Town Hall, with organ accompaniment only, under the direction of Dr. Heap. The choral singing generally was satisfactory, and Mr. Stimpson's playing left nothing to be desired, though the instrument was somewhat out of condition. At Aston Lower Grounds, on the same day, there was a crowded hall to hear a performance of "Elijah," under the direction of Mr. C. J. Stevens. There was a full band and chorus of 400 voices, with Miss Anna Williams, Miss Emilie Lloyd, Mr. Vernon Rigby, and Mr. Bridson, among the vocal principals. Miss Williams was in excellent voice, and impressed the audience more particularly by her singing of "Hear, ye Israel." Miss Emilie Lloyd was effective in the dramatic scene between *Jezabel* and the *Prophet*. Mr. Vernon Rigby won great applause by his singing of "If with all your hearts," and Mr. Bridson, in the music of "Elijah," sang with judgment and skill. The choruses generally were well rendered, and the playing of the instrumental accompaniments left little to be desired.

At Mr. Stockley's fourth and last Orchestral Concert, on the 24th ult., the principal features were Gade's Fourth Symphony—which had to be substituted at short notice for Dr. Villiers Stanford's Serenade, owing to the difficulty of procuring copies—Sullivan's "In Memoriam" Overture, two of Dvorák's Slav dances, Schubert's "Rosamunde" ballet music in G, Weber's Overture to "Der Freischütz," and Handel's Fourth Organ Concerto, to which Mr. Stimpson, who played the organ part, contributed some additional band parts, calculated to meet the requirements of the modern orchestra. The playing of these various pieces showed that the band, which numbers 80 performers, is steadily gaining in strength, unity, and precision, and that it is in a fair way to occupy the same relative position in Birmingham as that filled so creditably by Mr. Hallé's orchestra in Manchester. Madame Patey sang Gounod's "Golden thread" and Haydn's "Spirit song" in her most effective manner. Mr. Maas excited great enthusiasm by his singing of Handel's "Sound an alarm," which had to be repeated, Meyerbeer's "Disperso il crin," from "L'Etoile du Nord," and Wagner's "Prize song." Miss Nannie Reynolds favourably impressed the audience by her playing of Chopin's Andante Spianato and Polonaise