

Feb 2, 1951

# NOTE WORTHY

by John P. Rhodes



## Gurre-Lieder: Performance Never To Be Forgotten.

THERE ARE MOMENTS in music and theater which, because of their strong appeal to the emotions, one cannot forget in a lifetime. Such an experience was afforded those yesterday afternoon who heard the Cincinnati performance of Arnold Schonberg's dramatic "Gurre-Lieder," a musical tragedy of love and death, performed by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, with chorus and six soloists, in Music Hall.

The audience which heard the "Gurre-Lieder" filled but half the auditorium; but those whose sensibilities it touched, rose at the conclusion to recall the soloists several times, to applaud the augmented orchestra of 160 players and chorus of 350, and to oblige the conductor, Thor Johnson, to take a solo bow for the excellence of his interpretation.

Loud cheers greeted the conductor, as he acknowledged the audience's insistent applause. It was the first time during the four seasons he has been with the orchestra, that he could be forced to accept personal praise for his conductorial efforts.

THE "Gurre-Lieder" had been chosen to represent Austria, in the conductor's current effort to present important highlights in music of the years between 1900 and 1925. It was an ambitious undertaking, when any one of a half-dozen other works of Schonberg might have been chosen and produced with less effort. Choral rehearsals, alone, have been going on for at least three months, and a dozen sessions were undertaken with the orchestra in Music Hall.

The cold weather influenced the restricted attendance, but those who braved the traffic discovered Music Hall comfortably warmer than most private homes in the wintry snow. Backstage after the event, symphony-goers found themselves caught in an inextricable mass of singers, instrumentalists and well-wisher, all of whom wanted to express their excitement to each other and to the conductor.

The "Gurre-Lieder" will be repeated tonight at 8:30 and, weather notwithstanding, many who heard it yesterday will hear it again, the writer included.

TO SAY that Schonberg's great cantata compares with the most effective music dramas of Wagner, the most compelling works of Strauss, Bruckner and Mahler, amounts to a half-truth. It gains its ends through similarly large masses of sound and it reaches similar heights of emotion. Many of the thematic ideas and their treatment bear a direct relationship to the two Richards, to Mahler and Bruckner. There are even reminiscences of Saint-Saens' "Delilah," when Valdemar, the hero, recalls the voice of his dead Tova, and of the "Dies Irae" when the lovers realize that their day is done.

But pointing out these resemblances, as well as others to "Tristan," "Tannhauser" and the "Meistersinger," is to confuse the question. What is most important, is the manner in which Schonberg assembled his inspirations, to achieve his own particular brand of drama, imprinted with the stamp of his own individuality. That Schonberg has since wandered into less romantic and less appealing forms of music, can be a matter of regret to many listeners, who have no love for his later cacophonous forms.

Musical historians will have a difficult time judging the true importance of the "Gurre-Lieder" from the simple reason of its rare performance. The cost of producing it will stand in the way of those, who cannot learn its beauties from merely reading the score. And one cannot be certain that mere perusal of the score can reveal its real effectiveness. In any event, the appeal of the black and white notes can be limited to only a few.

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## RADCLIFFE'S Ratings ON MOVIES

The following ratings were given to new feature-length motion pictures now showing in Cincinnati's downtown theaters:

Title.	Theater.	Rtg.
"Born Yesterday"†..	Albee	A
"Mudlark" .....	Guild	A
"Kim"*	Grand	A
"Halls of Montezuma"	Capitol	B+
"Operation Pacific" ..	Lyric	B+
"At War Army" .....	Keith's	B+
"Steel Helmet" ....	Palace	B+

\*Color. †Adult.

a shade warmer in his appeal than his sweetheart. Their voices rang sympathetically with the smallest murmur of the violins, then rousing, through massed waves of instrumental sound. Their assignments were demanding, but they met their every exigency.

Nell Tangeman, as the Wood-Dove, sang her story with utmost realism, shading with different feeling each succeeding statement: "Far I flew, far I sought, and Grief I found." Her singing was most sympathetic, mirroring the desperation of Tova's plight and the inexorable march of fate.

THEN CAME the choral sections, the wild chase—music so difficult that the singers' scores from a former performance are scribbled with pictures drawn by former singers—daggers and pistols held at caricatured heads, oaths and exclamation points. Followed the song of a peasant, the impelling bass voice of Oscar Natzka, picturing a scene of rattling coffins and graveyards—truly the voice and dignity of a Viking, with ample sustained strength and vigor. Then came the recital of Klaus, a fool at Valdemar's court, poking sarcasm at his King. Harold Haugh sang much of the recitative in a ringing tenor voice, then caricatured it to become by turns bitter and sarcastic.

Ultimately—giving the effect of relief as the drunkard knocking at the gates in "Macbeth"—comes the "Sprecker," the speaker, singing of Mother Goose and Sir Ganderfoot. Like Edgar, the fool in "Lear," the speaker wanders in symbolism between wildness and truths, and Mme. Erika Wagner-Stiedry caught all the subtlety yesterday of truth and symbolism alike—a magnificent actress with a fine sense of Schonberg's meaning.

One cannot speak strongly enough of the chorus' important and difficult role. We recall the chorus of Valdemar's retainers, "Now Chanticleer hath raised his voice," a section equaling the best moments in the Requiems of Brahms and Berlioz—especially the strength of the bass passages. There were affecting fugal passages and great crescendos which sent gooseflesh chilling down the spine—and the final Straussian chorus, a sort of transfiguration of great power and impact.

The students from the Cincinnati schools taking part in the "Gurre-Lieder," vocally and instrumentally, as well as many others involved in the production, are named in the program. Every man and woman listed deserves a hearty and sincere vote of gratitude.

## Horse Sense Answer

1. Food.
2. Radish.
3. P Meeting.
4. Cobble.
5. Wabash

event, the appeal of the black and white notes can be limited to only a few.

SCHONBERG chose a king, an empire-builder as his subject, Valdemar IV of Denmark, who succeeded not only in uniting his own scattered Danish provinces in the 14 century, but in establishing the power of Scandinavia in medieval politics. He found the romance of Valdemar and the beautiful Tove Lille, ready made in a ballad of 19 stanzas by Jens Peter Jacobsen, conveniently translated into German for him by Robert Franz Arnold, a literary historian of the University of Vienna.

What must have inspired Schonberg, was the similarity of Tova's death to Isolde's and the passionate frustration of Valdemar, after his jealous Queen Helvig had done the girl to death. One of the most beautiful passages in the "Gurre-Lieder," as likewise in "Tristan," is the delirious anticipation of waiting (or as the Germans would have it, the "Erwartung") which forms such an important section of the first part of Schonberg's drama. The love music is built less on the fulfillment, than the passion of anticipation, and one may remember that Schonberg wrote a monodrama called "Erwartung."

The great difference between Wagner's opera and Schonberg's cantata, lies in the originality of the second half—a dramatic section in which the King, maddened by the loss of Tova, questions his Maker and engages on a mad and ghostly night-ride with his court retainers, until his time and his grief is assuaged and peace can reign once more in Denmark. It is in the second half that occurs some of Schonberg's most original scoring, particularly for the chorus and for a "Sprecher," who speaks, rather than sings, on the notes the composer has written. This was an entirely new device in the early years of the 20th century.

THE FIRST SECTION of the "Gurre-Lieder" consists of a sustained and passionate duet between Valdemar and Tove, ending with the recital of Tova's death by a Wood-Dove, who witnessed it from the skies over Gurre Castle. There is a sort of "Waldweben" introduction of masterfully handled forest murmurs, birch leaves and bird notes fluttering through the woodwinds, finally an affecting passage for the strings.

The love duet begins quietly, but rises later to an onrush of emotional excitement. Valdemar's impatient horseback ride to Gurre foreshadows the later ghostly night-ride. Mario Berini and Polyna Stoska, given the roles of Valdemar and Tova, settled themselves yesterday into the mood of the orchestra and sang with moving power. Perhaps the King was

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