

John McCormack

The Famous Irish Tenor From Dublin

By THE MUSIC EDITOR

FIRST time in this country John McCormack, the renowned Irish tenor, sang first in Winnipeg and last week two nights in Toronto. No tenor ever came to this country with such a peculiar prestige. Of the six thousand people who heard him in Toronto, perhaps two thousand had already heard him on phonograph records long before he came. The phonograph did much to advertise John. One little illustration shows it. As soon as the accompanist struck up the opening chords of the encore, "I Hear You Calling Me," the audience broke into applause. They knew the song; they had heard McCormack sing it on the phonograph; and perhaps a few may have known that it was John himself who first brought out this very sentimental and popular song that every tenor tries to sing, and a great many can't. Of course John—can. Nevertheless he showed most of his worst faults right in the song which he himself popularized.

This is going the wrong way round. To appreciate an Irishman, do as the Irish do—say the pleasant thing first. John McCormack is the most remarkable ballad singer and lyric tenor that ever came to this country. He is so first—because he is an Irishman. He was born in Dublin, where he was only a poor lad who, by his singing of popular airs, won the attention of some rich people, afterwards of Harty, the famous accompanist, in London. He was sent to Italy to have the maestros work on this marvelous Irish tenor voice. He was the first British tenor that ever sang in La Scala, Milan, where only four years ago he made his debut in Lucia di Lammermoor. He has been famous most of the time since. He afterwards sang in Covent Garden. For the past two years he has been in grand opera in America—much of his time, and making \$50,000 a year from that and from his ballad concerts. He has sung all over the United States. He has made fortunes for phonograph people who produced his records. He has won his way by sheer Irish personality and lyric gifts into the popular imagination—as no tenor ever did in America, not even Caruso.

For there is a world of difference between John and other tenors. He is not a great grand opera voice like Caruso. Neither as an Irish balladist has he the historic authority of Plunket Greene. He is a good-humored "broth of an Irish boy," as good-looking as he can be, twenty-eight years old, fresh and fine and full of the temperament that produces in some people poetry and sadness and great mirth. And when he comes forward with an easy smile to the front of the stage and tilts back his head, and lets his large benevolent mouth fly open, he is as much of a native minstrel as any bird on a bough.

His singing of Irish ballads is amazingly fine. First because he is Irish; and because he has a wonderful lyric voice brimful of the most sudden and volatile emotion. He has a face as mobile as an actor's. He can pass in a second from grave to gay, from tragedy to the rollicking Irish comedy. He can talk a song to music and never fail to make it musical. He can speak his words so that everybody, even a child, can hear every syllable. And he sings mainly in English, which is one more reason why he is a popular idol.

John's singing of English words in an Irish ballad is as much in character to him as German opera is to a German tenor, and a hundred times more universally satisfying. The way he enunciates his words makes it the easiest thing in the world to listen. It is the ease and the comfort of hearing him that goes so far to make one of his concerts such a popular success. It is a fact that John McCormack can sing a programme with a minimum of musical meaning in the numbers and capture his audience with more ease than any singer that ever came to this country. He does it by all the native arts of cutting out resistance. John is irresistible. He is easily magnetic. He knows what tired people want. There may be a percentage of musicians in his audience. For them he reserves a few big things in opera while he takes his chances on keeping their

interest in his ballad work by his amazing beauty of tone and his splendid lyric qualities.

This is a great art. John came by it naturally. He has never needed to work as some tenors do. His gifts are as native as his brogue. He shows them in everything he does, ballad or opera or plain song. He can't help it. He does it all as naturally as he breathes. To him a simple Irish ballad is the tenderest thing in the world because it's the language of the nursery; and he sings on the stage as he did on the street, with the fine careless rapture of a minstrel.

And then before the woman behind you has done wiping her eyes over a sentimental song he is back with some rollicking devil-may-care thing that sets everybody laughing, when they scarcely know why. When he strikes up an old-fashioned Irish air, hear the feet softly patting on the rhythm all over the hall. A little more and he would have the top gallery whistling.

And then he is off into a burst of grand opera; into a big aria from Leoncavallo's "La Boheme." Can he do it? Will he not fall down on this heavy stuff that he had to learn in a foreign tongue down in Milan? You think so. But he doesn't. He sang the brief big thing as superbly as a master of grand opera. For McCormack in a big sentimental role in opera is as compelling as McCormack in an Irish ballad. There, so far as opera singing goes, perhaps, he stops. He would scarcely do for a big heroic role. The tenor role in "Aida" would probably tucker him out. German opera he would find impossible; would probably find some Irish way out and spoil it all.

And with all his native consummate magnificence of gifts there are times when McCormack spoils even a simple thing by over-elaboration. He did so with "I Hear You Calling." He did so with another encore when he did a trill half a page long on "Good-night." He revels in decrescendos and portamentos and "linked sweetness long drawn out." John has not cared to learn the great art of self-restraint. He is Irish. He must have his fling. Let those who like mezzo voce and all the cloying tricks that please the music hall listen. They will get all they want.

And yet McCormack is a real artist. He is so by reason of great native qualities never taught him by a tutor. He fails as a profound singer. He is superficial. He is volatile. He is gracious and kind and tender and devilish. And there he stops.

"YEOMEN OF THE GUARD."

THE week's performance of "Yeomen of the Guard" put on last week by the Canadian Academy of Music in aid of the Preventorium for Consumptive Children was by far the best amateur opera ever given in this part of Canada. There was so much near-professional work about this presentation that the company missed very little of the original Gilbert-Sullivan intention. The orchestra was particularly fine. The chorus was good—lacking only in the vocal make-up that "puts it across" on the very first night. This was overcome on following nights. Most of the solo roles were well taken.

Superiority.

WHEN a boy has thought of the dandiest plan

And is telling a grown-up, man to man,

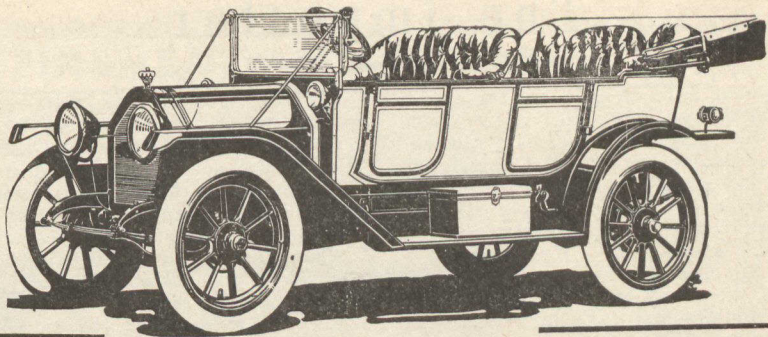
Why must the grown-up look down and say,

"My child, you'll be older some fine day?"

Very Different.—"Darling," he said, "I would do anything for you." "Would you become a member of the legislature for me?" "I mean anything honourable," he hastened to explain.—Redlands Raconteur.

"Why did she want to set her husband's will aside?"

"Merely because it was her husband's, and she had got in the habit of setting it aside."



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