

The Cost of Choral Music

Is it the Duty of Wealthy Men to Spend or Lend Thousands on this Form of Art?

By THE MUSIC EDITOR

THE financing of choral societies, orchestras and grand opera in this country has become a fine art which has very little to do with music. It is now definitely decided that the Montreal Opera Company will not remain on the boards in the face of a heavily increased deficit this year. And the M. O. C. has always figured on a deficit, because there's no other way for a grand opera company to do. A few months ago the Toronto Symphony Orchestra asked the City Council for a \$5,000 grant. It was refused. The deficit has increased there also. A campaign of publicity must be undertaken to extend the list of guarantors who put up the money which cannot be taken from the public who attend the concerts. And this also was expected, because good symphony orchestras always operate at a loss.

Just recently the National Chorus were voted \$2,500 by the Toronto Council for part of a fund to go on a choral tour to England. Lord Strathcona cabled \$1,000. About \$10,000 was raised by subscriptions from the chorus itself. Private wealthy guarantors expected to put up the balance of \$30,000 which was the sum stipulated by Chas. A. E. Harris for the cost of the trip—based on what it cost his management to bring the Sheffield Choir to Canada. Internal reasons developed, however, to prevent the choir from making use of the subscriptions. The \$30,000 trip to England is declared off.

At the present time the conductor of the most remarkable choir in America is on his way back to Canada after a year studying musical conditions in the whole of Europe from Finland to Milan. He expects to reorganize his choir for the purpose of spending about \$25,000 a year. The Mendelssohn Choir has several thousands to its credit in the bank. It is operated as a business concern and managed effectively by one man with a very efficient committee. It has never had a deficit. Lord Strathcona, honorary patron of the Choir, once cabled a subscription supposing it would be needed; but it wasn't. Sir Edmund Walker, honorary president, expected more than once to be consulted financially. He never was. And it is the financially profitable Mendelssohn Choir with its programmes setting the art pace for all the choral bodies in America that is responsible for the tremendous competition forcing other choral societies to spend annually thousands of dollars on their programmes.

THE latest factor in the financing of choral music is the Toronto Oratorio Society, who gave two concerts last week at a cost of several thousand dollars. The net result of the concerts is that the fourteen guarantors will have to put up nearly \$4,000 net loss, of which the conductor, Dr. Edward Broome, stands to lose \$400.

Why? In the first place, to bring the New York Philharmonic Orchestra as part of a circuit cost three thousand dollars. To prepare three separate choral bodies—the Oratorio Society, the Children's Choir and the Women's Musical Club—for the programmes, meant a heavy outlay for many things, including hall-rent for rehearsals, expensive music, newspaper and other advertising, rent for the concert hall, and costly programmes, besides all the hundred and one sundry expenses that always manage to pile up. In the midst of the season the chief conductor was taken ill and ordered abroad for his health. The management asked the orchestra to cancel the contract. This was declined, on the ground that the arrangement had been made with that particular series of concerts in the circuit, and to cancel them meant the loss of three thousand dollars. And although the New York Philharmonic is backed by wealthy men and is one of the three best orchestras in America, it is expected to run itself on an economic basis.

The concerts were gone on with. Part of the original programme, the oratorio "Les Beatitudes," by Cesar Franck, with nine solo parts, had to be dropped on account of the conductor's absence. The children's rehearsals went on under the associate conductor, Mr. Knight, originally from St. John. The Women's Musical Club were engaged to sing in order to fill out part of one programme. The business men who were running the organization had not time enough to drop everything else and look after the spending of several thousand dollars in order to get it all back again. So they spent the money and went ahead anyway. The result was—two exceedingly good but rather promis-

uous concerts and a large deficit.

The first was inevitable. So was the second. With a splendid array of talent and a pair of remarkably efficient conductors; with no less than 900 people actually taking part in the programmes, the management was not able to interest the public enough to draw even decent crowds. Two abler conductors than Dr. Edward Broome and Josef Stranski have seldom appeared on any concert plat-



Dr. J. Edward Broome, Conductor of the Toronto Oratorio Society.

form in Canada. Dr. Broome is a peculiarly efficient man of many nerves, a fine dynamic conception of the conductor's role and a large experience in choral work. He is a composer of more than common reputation. He is an Englishman who spent some years in Wales and got credit for being a Welshman. At the World's Fair he had a body of men singers that took honours. In Montreal, as organist and choirmaster of the American Presbyterian Church, he lived much unto himself; and it was his recommendation by A. S. Vogt to succeed him in the choir of Jarvis St. Baptist Church that made him a citizen of Toronto, where he has been for five years or more. Last year he organized the Oratorio Society. It gave promise of being by all odds our second best choir. Oratorio in its broadest sense has never been exhausted in this country, and Dr. Broome had begun to modernize the oratorio by presenting it in a vital way with all the resources of a magnificent symphony orchestra to back it up.

HOWEVER, this season he struck a streak of bad luck, and got out of it courageously the best way he could. His doctor told him that the only way to save his life was to keep away from the excitement of the conductor's desk. But he came back from the Mediterranean and pulled his forces together. He carried out his contract to give the concerts announced—but alas! not adequately advertised. He brought Stranski and his great orchestra of 86 men; because in the face of competition from other choral societies bringing big orchestras from the United States it was necessary to spend \$3,000 on that attraction.

The programmes were reorganized with only a few weeks to get ready. It was impossible to do the biggest work advertised. The Women's Club was drafted in to help out, though it might easily have been omitted. The oratorio chorus itself appeared only on the second programme. And it was not up to the mark of last season, as might have been expected. What chorus under the circumstances could have been? It was top-heavy with women, the basses were weak, the tenors inadequate, the altos rather obscure and the sopranos brilliant. The unaccompanied works were put on in a scrambled sort of way. The "News from Whydah," a tremendously modern impressionistic piece of work based on a weird text of Masefield, was given a thoroughly dramatic rendering and showed what Dr. Broome is capable of even in an emergency with so baffling a composition. The piece by Coleridge Taylor was well done, with the dramatic force that may always be expected from Broome's baton. His own work, "Hoist the Sail," proved to be a clever bit of writing.

BUT it was, after all, the children who saved the situation. Never before has such child-singing been heard in Canada. In no city in America is there such an efficient body of children's choral talent to draw from, after years of excellent training in the schools; and Dr. Broome has a personal magnetism that is quite irresistible. The legend, "Vogelweid the Minnesinger," by Rathbone, was given twice; the second time at least fifty per cent. better than before. And it was a remarkable bit of work. Many of these children will be heard from in grown-up choral societies of the future.

The New York Philharmonic Orchestra was worth every cent of the \$3,000 it cost. Stranski, as the successor to Mahler and Safonoff, is surely one of the three finest conductors heard in Canada during the last decade. He is a Bohemian of fire, hailing from Prague, that little city of great music; a young man, but chockfull of ideas and brimming over with temperament; not over intellectual and seldom if ever subtle, but a man of rare force and authority. He scored his biggest popular success in the "Ride of the Valkyries." He did almost as well in the noisy Rienzi overture, to which he imparted more poetry than most conductors do. In many respects he may rank as a great Wagnerian. It is doubtful, however, if in the more subtle Wagnerian excerpts, as for instance the Good Friday music from Parsifal, he would be half as effective. He seems to depend a great deal upon the climax, of which he is a perfect master. The way he builds up a tonal ensemble with that back-elbow movement is quite peculiar to himself. He expects a huge service from his battery and his brass; and he gets it. He has a fine wood-wind section, 'cellos and double basses magnificent, and violins that shriek divinely on the E strings but are not always so singing clear in the middle register.

The Grieg suite for strings only was done with excellent finish. The Scherzo from the "Midsummer Night's Dream" overture was as dainty as could be. The first movement of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony was ravishingly fine; but in the second the conductor seemed to reduce the *andante con moto* to an *adagio*.

Stranski must be set down as one of the most interesting and able conductors that ever came to Canada. He has many gifts that suggest Emil Paur and Nikisch. And it was a very great oversight on the part of thousands of people that they failed to hear him.

But will the Oratorio Society disband? That is the question being considered over cold cash by the guarantors. The conductor says—Not. He believes he has a work to do and that he is able to do it. He surely is. With a good business management and no bad luck, Dr. Broome should be able to prove that he has something to do that no other man in Canada is doing. But he will need to reorganize his forces and to take a wider survey of the field; because, though the people may expect to support orchestras and opera companies at a loss to the guarantors, choral societies must be expected to pay their own way. And the blind optimism of a few often leads other people into being liable for a lot of cold, clammy debts, which are not a good thing for enthusiasm. No business was ever run by mere optimism. Neither should a choral society, or an orchestra, or a grand opera company.