

MUSIC AND PLAYS

Thibaud Thrills Toronto . Russian Symphony Still Improving . Choral Music by the Masses

Jacques Thibaud and the Russians.

IMITATION may be sincere flattery. Repetition may be a good thing. But why in the name of mummified mischief were the two chief numbers on the Russian Symphony Orchestra's programme in Massey Hall last week identical with two on a similar programme given by Damrosch season before last? The two we refer to are the Manfred Symphony of Tchaikowsky and the symphonie Espagnole of Lolo. Together these occupied about an hour and a quarter, or more than two-thirds of the programme. So far as the orchestra was concerned they were done last week by a band much inferior to the Damrosch players. In the matter of soloists there was also a difference. Which way we are not saying as yet. The Damrosch people had Mischa Elman. The Russian Symphony had Jacques Thibaud.

Of course Canada is in a state of orchestral famine just now, and a hungry tramp will gnaw a crust. Last year we had nothing in Canada but the Russians. By the time they got back this season our tongues were hanging out. When the rather loose-jointed band from New York struck up God Save the King and the Russian National Anthem about 3,000 people got a thrill. We dimly recollected that there were 1st violins to the left and that the battery was over on the north-east corner of the map. Otherwise we took it as read, shut our eyes and settled back to enjoy about 45 minutes of Manfred. Judging from the rather past-impressions of the performance of this work Tchaikowsky could have crowded all that's worth remembering of it into about 20 minutes. It contains a heap of description. From all we know of Manfred he was a stormy person. The music takes full advantage of him. About fifty per cent. more of Beethoven would have made this symphony a real work of art. It lacks content. That's a mystic sort of high-brow word, but it has the meaning. Some artists use a much less polite name of one syllable. But the Manfred is not real art. It is high-class artifice, eloquent here and there with beautiful episodes in the best of form, colourful as a pageant in sections, abounding with many suggestions of barbarism in rhythm—but for long acting passages, empty, empty. Yet it tasted so good that we all sat back and imbibed this two and a half per cent. as though it had been "jolly good ale and old." And we called it

By THE MUSIC EDITOR

"Fine! Ripping! Let's have another!"

Of the players let us admit that they were in better form than when they somewhat nervously appeared here last winter. Now and then Mr. Altschiler got some really big episodes out of them. If the woodwinds were sometimes in various pitches and the horns stuttered a bit and the violinists exhibited several distinct methods of bowing, it was not for the likes of us to be critical. No, if they had played with their toes we should have been content. It was all so new—just to hear an orchestra in a country that only supports local orchestras when we are able to import players and goes clear out of that line of goods when the embargo is on. Protection may work all right in other industries. Free trade seems to be the only system for orchestras.

The balance of their programme—all Russian—was rather more in the scope of the orchestra's palette; an Indian song of Rimsky-Korsakoff, a Scherzo of Scriabine, very sprightly and colourful, and the stirring Rachmaninoff Prelude in G Minor of pianistic memory. The last number was the Death Scene from the opera Boris Gudonoff of Moussorgsky and proved to be a splendid dramatic treatment of old Slav chants, presumably of the church Russian.

We are glad the Russian Symphony people came. Otherwise we should all have been in the soup kitchen before the end of the season. And we are conscious that at certain intervals in the programme they really rose to a fine height of dynamic expression.

As for Jacques Thibaud, he is one of the most glorified masters of tone ever heard in this country. So far as we can remember he is the only great French violinist that ever went on circuit here. It was the first appearance in his American circuit for this season, and he was naturally anxious to produce a good impression. He did. I see they are expecting him in Montreal next month. If our French-Canadian friends don't turn out to hear him en masse they will be sorry. He is a wonderful player. Thibaud is not merely a virtuoso. He is a master of tone poetry. His tone is not of the robustious bridge-cracking variety, but it surely has the silken softness of the zephyr and the

eternal sweetness of the cherubim. As a master of phraseology commend us to Thibaud. In this respect he suggests Ysaye, the great phrase-builder, though he is less intellectual, is never profound and never plays to the grandstand. In the matter of mere technique he is all he requires to be. More of it would make him less of a poetizing songster. He is an apostle of pure and perfect art, gifted with a divine clarity of utterance, a strong and resilient quality of bowing, absolute certainty of intonation, and a rigid lack of swooning airs and caprices—none of those semi-sexual confessions that so often parade as popular music on the violin. Thibaud has all the graces and suavity of the Frenchman with none of the Frenchman's mere politesse, and no tricks whatever. In his manly vigour he suggests Kreisler, though he is less virile. In his brilliancy he simulates Elman on a smaller scale. He has an almost inconceivably small tone for so great an artist. But with so small a tone did any artist in these parts ever express so much.

Music By the Masses.

WHY should the Germans produce most of the community music in the United States? is a question suggested by the New York Evening Post, whose editor reviews what is being done in that city to produce community music. He observes that for some years now there has been an effort to break away from the European national idea of music for the masses in New York, thanks to the pioneer efforts of Arthur Farwell in conjunction with the Commissioner and with Walter Damrosch, H. H. Flagler and other men. He says:

That a Community Chorus could attract to Central Park what city officials pronounce the largest crowd ever there for a single event is surprising. New York has been supposed to be too unappreciative or too self-conscious to care for choral singing. Even as our neighbourhood associations and similar bodies have cultivated various of the community activities so marked in smaller centres, music has been neglected. The beauty of the night and other favourable circumstances do not rob Conductor Barnhart and his associates of any credit for inducing 60,000 people to sing popular selections as well as to listen to a long classical programme. The feat, following the successful concerts of the Civic Orchestral Society, will awaken in some much the same hope.

The spectacle of 60,000 people in a mass singing together as a huge choral society is novel enough to make even sensational New York take notice. And it gets away from the Liederkrantz, the Maemerge-sangverein, the Maennerchor and the Liedertafel—or even the Elstedfodd of the Welsh. The Italians don't as a rule, even in New York, go in much for choral singing. But the choral society movement on a popular basis is fast getting bigger than the Carnegie Hall or Massey Hall idea of a couple of hundred people in evening dress "under the distinguished patronage of," etc. The chorus in Central Park was under the patronage of the police. Pittsburg seems to head American cities for numbers of choral societies and its other musical activities entitle it to a high place in the nationalizing of music in the United States. The writer mentions at least eight choral organizations in the City of Smoke. Minneapolis is strong on municipal music and has a first-class orchestra. Cincinnati, as every one knows, has the greatest biennial May Festival in America and a good local orchestra. And there are fifty cities in the United States where mass music has become a great popular feature. We are a long way behind this in Canada. It's a curious thing that although Canada through its Mendelssohn Choir gave the United States a stimulus in the high art of choral music, such as it never got anywhere else, our own efforts to nationalize

(Continued on page 24.)



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This is what might be called a Diminuendo. The lady with the fiddle is Mrs. Tom Thumb (that was) and Count Magri, her present husband. The music was played at their home in Middleboro, Mass., in celebration of the Countess Magri's 75th birthday. In all that time she has never grown more than three feet, three inches high.

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