

PREPARING FOR NEW OPERAS AT RAVINIA

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been carefully preserved in the operatic version of it.

"La Rondine" takes a special place in the literature of opera in view of the fact that it is the last complete work to come from the pen of that prolific modern composer, the late Giacomo Puccini: Its production in America and in some of the European opera houses was greatly delayed owing to the war, as the score was the property of a Viennese publishing house which was unable to send copies of it to several countries where performing rights had been sold. But now, with the war and all its unpleasantness ten-years behind us, "La Rondine" comes to Ravinia as a genuine novelty but with an enviable reputation made for itself and for Lucrezia Bori, its prima donna, in New York.

Replete in Color

Its story is replete in color, in romance, and in that tragedy which in music drama makes for what is known as "bigness of moment" and gives full opportunity for emotional expression. Its scene is Paris and its time the picturesque days of the Second Empire when France enjoyed a brilliant if short-lived period of luxurious renaissance. It is in the midst of this luxury that we meet Magda, a demi-mondaine who is the favorite of a rich banker. But Magda wants more than luxury, for within her breast there beats the heart of a true woman and she has the longing for real affection as her mind constantly reverts to the memory of her first love, a poor young student.

When this longing is at its highest, Magda forms the acquaintance of Ruggero, who, like her lover of old, is both poor and a student. The attraction between Ruggero and Magda is mutual, and at a brilliant ball, which is the mise-en-scene of the first act of this work and which pulsates with life and color, Ruggero declares his love and Magda decides to leave with him for Nice, where they hope to live in perfect happiness. Ruggero, a dutiful son, writes his parents to ask their consent to his marriage, and their reply is that if Magda is virtuous and honorable, they will be happy to receive her as their daughter. But Magda's sense of honor is too strong for her to practice deception. Fearing to bring dishonor upon the man she loves, she makes up her mind that it is best for her to make the supreme sacrifice and so for his own good, she parts with him in sorrow.

Is Not Heavy

Despite the tragic note which is sounded in it, Puccini has not permitted "La Rondine" to become heavy, but has adhered closely to the style of opera comique which lays special emphasis upon its romance. The music is always in keeping with its spirit and in the second act there is a perfect quartet which is said to rival that at the end of the third act of "La Boheme." Puccini was particularly fond of this piece of music and concerning it he once said that he had simply let his pen run. "No other method," he said, "suffices to obtain good results, in my opinion. No matter what marvellous technical

effects may be worked up by lengthy meditation, I believe in heart in preference to head."

In preparing for the presentation of "La Rondine" during the coming summer, Mr. Eckstein has laid special stress upon the casting of the work. As is already well known, Mme. Bori is to be heard as Magda, a part in which she has already scored tremendous success and which she finds entirely suited to her style. Two tenors, Edward Johnson and Mario Chamlee, are to alternate in the part of Ruggero, thus giving this work two different interpretations so far as its principal tenor role is concerned. A second charming soprano role, that of Lizette, and which is characterized as a soubrette part, is to be sung by Miss Florence Macbeth, while Armand Tokatyan will be heard in an important part which adds a second tenor to the cast.

"The Sunken Bell"

There is no modern opera more in the public eye at present which has aroused more curiosity than "The Sunken Bell" which was given its world premiere in New York last November and which, by the special request of Premier Mussolini, now forms an important part of the repertoire for the spring opera season at Rome. And what is of still greater interest to patrons of Ravinia, is the fact that Mme. Elisabeth Rethberg and Giovanni Martinelli, who created the roles of Rautendelein and Heinrich in this opera by Ottorini Respighi, are appearing in these parts in Rome. It is well known that Premier Mussolini is bent upon emphasizing the artistic genius of the Italian people, just as he is in stressing the commercial possibilities of the country over which he rules as dictator. Mr. Martinelli is one of the outstanding examples of what Italian singers mean in the world of opera, but it has been some years since he last sang in the capital of his own country. Benito Mussolini concluded that it was high time this great tenor was coming home for a time at least, and so made the special request that Respighi's new opera "La Campana Sommersa" be included in the Roman repertoire and that Martinelli appear as Heinrich. This was indeed an exhibition of good taste on the part of Il Duce. But the Italian Premier showed equally good taste when he insisted that Mme. Rethberg, who is not an Italian, but a German, be engaged for the part of Rautendelein in this same work. Premier Mussolini had evidently not forgotten other triumphs scored by Mme. Rethberg in the opera houses of Italy. He learned also of the manner in which she carried all before her when she first sang this role in New York. He was desirous that when "La Campana Sommersa" was produced on the stage of the Roman Opera House, it should have the same casting advantages it had enjoyed on the occasion of its American premiere, hence both Mr. Martinelli and Mme. Rethberg were invited to take part in it. However, both artists are now looking forward to their Ravinia season and by the time the call for rehearsals is posted, they will be on hand and ready for the various tasks that will be assigned them.

Based on Folklore

Hauptman, in writing the dramatic poem which forms the basis of "The Sunken Bell" has not gone back into that wealth of Teutonic saga and leg-

end of which Wagner made such effective use, but he has drawn upon the old folks beliefs with the result that "The Sunken Bell" is peopled not only by humans, but likewise by elves and gnomes and fauns who are able to weave supernatural spells and to exert uncanny influence upon the creatures of earth. Rautendelein, who may be called the heroine of this work is partly of earth and partly of elfland. Her grandmother is a witch and hence Rautendelein is gifted with supernatural powers while at the same time she is capable of human emotions.

Heinrich the bell caster has become the victim of the gnomes and has seen his masterpiece, the bell whose silver notes were to resound from the spire of the church on the hillsides, sunk beneath the waters of the lake. Rautendelein knows this is the work of the Faun, and as she loves Heinrich she is overcome with a longing for the land of men. Heinrich, distracted at his ill-fortune, is carried to his home and Rautendelein resolves to save him, acting against the wishes of her grandmother. She feigns dumbness and is introduced into Heinrich's home under the pretext of helping his wife. Heinrich bemoans the loss of his masterpiece and declares that he can never create another unless he is able to draw new life from a wondrous and mythical blossom.

Rautendelein exerts her wiles in an effort to give Heinrich the inspiration he needs and she succeeds in her task. Heinrich becomes infatuated with the elf-girl, abandons his family and goes to live with her in the mountains. Through her power he makes Nickelman and the Faun his slaves and becomes imbued with the desire to erect a Temple dedicated to a new and heretical cult of his own making. "If I depart from this purpose," he declares, "may the sunken bell toll again." But the false hap-

piness of Heinrich and Rautendelein is not to last. Heinrich's old neighbors hear of his ungodly plan, storm his mountain and attempt to destroy him. However, Heinrich, with the aid of magic, overcomes them and returns to Rautendelein. Then there arise the wraiths of his children who bear an urn filled with the tears their mother shed before she cast herself into the mountain lake. And then, from the depths of the lake there comes the tolling of the sunken bell. This awakens Heinrich to his senses. In anger he abjures his love for Rautendelein and flees into the night. Rautendelein, in despair, descends into the water and weds Nickelman. But Heinrich cannot live without her and begins a search which is all in vain. He is granted just one favor by the witch and this is to see Rautendelein just once before he dies. She appears to him worn and sorrowful, and reproaches him for having driven her into the lake. However, as Heinrich died she kisses him tenderly and forgives him.

Large Cast

"The Sunken Bell" requires a large cast of principals and likewise gives opportunity for fine choral display. There is a chorus of elves, another of children and in addition to these ensembles there are dancing elves, spirits, dwarfs and villagers. With such abundant material to go on, with a score like that which Respighi has provided and with the fanciful tale of Gerhart Hauptman to command interest, it is small wonder that this opera has within the space of a few months attracted the attention of the entire world of opera. It is a matter of congratulation that Ravinia patrons are to hear it this summer and that in addition to Mme. Rethberg and Mr. Martinelli the cast will contain several more Ravinia artists who were members of the cast when the work was given its initial showing in New York.



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