

There Was Plenty of Music Abroad During the War; Concerts and Recitals; Soldiers Wanted Other Kind

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Probably every musician who succeeded in entertaining our soldiers overseas discovered new viewpoints regarding music and its effects upon men. I do not know what proportion women assume in the average audience assembled to listen to music here at home. Perhaps the audiences at concerts and recitals somewhat resemble our church congregations where women predominate. The soldier gatherings to which we played overseas were not like musical soirees or religious meetings. Certainly it was a new experience to most musicians to step out in front of two hundred to three thousand men without a woman in sight. Tremendously reactive to certain moods induced by music, these audiences were keen at sizing up the people who appeared before them. Certain types did not get along very well and this was true of the speakers as well as of the musicians. One patronizing person got up and said, "Boys, do you know who I am? You don't know who I am! I speak to great audiences in so and so and am well known in such and such great cities." This unfortunate speaker did not get much farther for every soldier in the hut arose and left the room. The soldiers were not much interested in who a man was or what he had done. It was rather, "What can you do right now that will interest me and what kind of a man are you?" This made the musical performer play things which the men liked and automatically shut out certain personalities.

Cannot Make Generalizations

But it would be dangerous to make generalizations as to the musical tastes of American men based on the reactions of these soldier audiences. The conditions were extraordinary and in no degree normal. The men were in no mood, as a rule, to pay attention to serious music, yet "Dixie" and "Turkey in the Straw" would start a near riot. It was the writer's experience that after the soldiers had shouted their heads off, raised the roof, hammered, pounded and stamped besides singing with alarming energy the popular jazz stuff of the day, they would listen in absolute silence to Schumann's "Traumerei" and other respectable musical selections if they were not too long or too involved. It should be remembered that these men came from all parts of the states. Men from the big cities rarely predominated. To country men from the south and west tunes which the writer had supposed were out of date for at least thirty years proved to be the best known, in fact almost the only familiar music. How long is it since the oldest symphony concert subscriber had heard "Snow Mountain." "Two Old Indians and One Old Squaw a Settlin' on the Bank of the Arkansas," "Lady McCloud's Reel" or any of the old "Essences and Walk Arounds" which used to be and still are danced and played in the south and west? The first notes of any of these old favorites would bring shouts of approval and hilarious calling out of the dance figures for which these tunes are used. After playing to thousands of men from every state in the Union I believe that the two best known and most loved tunes of our country are "Old Zip Coon" and "Dixie". Popular as is much of the rag and jazz music of the day, it has not yet displaced in favor any of the old time dance music familiar to the fathers and grandfathers of these boys.

Value of Franc

Apròpos of many things both in general and particular the French franc was worth about fourteen cents and the German mark seven. I specify in this absurd manner because in Luxembourg the franc and mark—both coins were current as well as the language which denominate them—seemed to have a different value. I could never discover just what this was. The shop keepers would volubly explain in three languages that one had to live in Luxembourg a long time to become familiar with the exchange. Translated into English it seemed to mean that you got cheated every time you made a purchase. While playing for the S. O. S. in France our hotel bills were pretty expensive even with the franc at fourteen cents. When we were with the combat division either in France or Germany we had no lodging expenses. The army billeting officer would assign us billets, we would move in and that was all there was to it. These were sometimes in hotels, sometimes in private houses. In the devastated area in France they were not inviting for the towns were so shot up that it was hard to find a covered house to live in. Where the troops had taken over German army barracks the accommodations were best. The bad weather and if possible worse billets, kept about fifty per cent of the entertainers on the

sick list all the time. No fires, continued cold and wet weather and sanitary conditions which smelled to heaven made it hard for the singers and speakers particularly. Throat trouble and bronchitis were ever present. How the women stood it at all is a wonder. In Germany the conditions were just the opposite. Billets were uniformly good; a little shy on bathing facilities perhaps, for such luxuries had been grabbed off by the army officers to whom, of course, they belonged by right, but in contrast to our experience in France it was unalloyed comfort. Part of this was due to the weather which is so wonderful in spring and summer along the valleys of the Rhine and Moselle rivers.

Opera in Germany

With the mark at seven cents German opera was on the bargain counter and our soldiers took advantage of it in Coblenz. The bills at Wiesbaden and Cologne were more interesting but I could not get a pass outside of the third army zone. The ladies, bless their hearts, could always get passes and almost anything else from the army so they went to Cologne and Wiesbaden on Sunday nights when we did not have to work. If they forgot to get passes they went A. W. O. L. Do you think that any self-respecting M. P. would molest them? Not a chance! All the ladies had to do was to shed about them the benign light of their beneficent presence and they got anything they desired. I observed that they were careful not to hide any of that light; on the contrary they worked it overtime. For instance, a line a block long at the commissary's had no terrors for them. Right up to the head they would step and everybody gave way, and they would interview billeting, entertainment and other officers when favors would ameliorate discomforts. No American soldier but was blinded by the lustrous effulgence of that wonderful light, to his credit be it said.

Music in London

In London, where I landed in September, 1918, Sir Henry Wood's orchestra was giving promenade concerts in Queen's hall in Regent street just off from Oxford circus. In this hall the balconies only are seated, the floor being used for standing room, where smoking is permitted. I heard a Wagner program after nearly being run over getting there in the darkened streets. The orchestra included thirteen firsts, eight of whom were women; twelve seconds, seven were women; eight violas, three women; and eight cellos of which only one was a woman. I saw no women among the six contra basses. These ladies seemed to play with greater verve and freedom than the men. I thought they were better instrumentalists. Maybe I, too, was blinded by that magic light. The strings seemed good to me. The woodwind and brass were quite inferior to that in our best orchestras. Bad, even atrocious, intonation, poor balance and worse tone marred things. Some of the ineffectiveness was due to the fact that the orchestrations were not amended in the skillful manner which helps to make them sound so well to us here in Orchestra hall. The orchestra played about like the one Mr. Damrosch used to get together for Ravinia Park some years ago. It was not so good as the Minneapolis organization and with the Boston and Chicago orchestras there is no comparison.

Played Wagner Selections

The numbers were most enthusiastically received by the large audience, which prompted me to question a young British medical officer who stood beside me. About this time we were not playing very much Wagner in the States. I found out that there had been some discussion about it in London but the people very sensibly decided that it was foolish to seem patriotic by refusing to listen to perfectly good German music which they really enjoyed. I noticed, however, that the "Prize Song," and the "Swan Song" given with the assistance of Mr. Vladimir Rosing, were both sung in French. To change the key for a brief episode, will some one who knows about Queen's hall concerts kindly explain why so many young women come into the promenade, where there are no seats, coolly sit down on the floor near the back wall so they may lean against something, stretch their long legs out comfortably in front of them to the annoyance of the promenaders and calmly smoke cigarets? It seemed to be quite the thing for no one took any notice of them excepting a few astonished Americans. There were, getting back to the original key, several interesting Russian numbers on the programs for the week besides some good soloists. Miss Irene Sharrer was to do the Tchaikowski B minor, Mr. Claud Biggs the Fourth Beethoven concerto, York Bowen had something on by Saint-Saens called "Africa" for piano and orchestra and Miss Margaret Fairless was down for the Brahms violin con-

certo. Considerable music was being given in London regardless of the terrible fighting so near at hand.

Musicians Mostly Old Men

London did not have anything on Paris when it came to that. It seems that even a world war will not stop symphony concerts. In the Salle Gaveau the Colonne-Lamoreaux concerts were given every Sunday afternoon in the fall and winter of 1918. Most of the members of the orchestra appeared to be elderly men and as in the Queen's hall orchestra an occasional uniform was to be seen. In the Paris orchestra there were five ladies; two among the first violin, one 'cellist and two harpists. Pierne was advertised to conduct a Debussy program at the first concert but because of illness Chevillard took his place. The concert commenced at 3 and lasted until 5 o'clock without intermission. The woodwinds are wonderful. I think their excellence would be the first thing to strike the attention of almost any stranger, but the strings are equally fine. They have a wonderful group of first violins. The principals of all the instruments seemed to me remarkable with the

exception of the first horn and first trombone. The horns and trombones do not sound at all as they do in our

best orchestras. I missed something rich and sonorous to which we are
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