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MARITANA COMES TO LIFE AGAIN

An Old Favorite Just as Glamorous

By ALEX. BURNARD

The birth of the work of "Maritana" must have been quite painless. We cannot conceive of its having cost its composer, Vincent Wallace, a single pang. "Born 1845, and still going," might be said of it; and one or two might be disposed to add "strong." One may as well honestly appraise it, at the outset, as a typical production of its time: Easy-going, sentimental, highly venerated. But these attributes have a strong attraction still.

The actual performance at the Theatre Royal on Saturday night was, all in all, very creditable, speaking volumes for the painstaking detail expended on the Elder Conservatorium opera class rehearsals by the opera director, Mr. Winsloe Hall, and the producer, Mr. Harold Denton. This production was the first of six, and two entirely different casts have been trained.

Maritana Herself

The principal character, Maritana, the gipsy girl, was very well sustained, histrionically and vocally, by Alison Lane. Although she seemed a trifle nervous in her first song (and a first appearance, perched precariously on a small table, would excuse any amount of nervousness), she quickly captured all the poise and charm requisite to her interesting part. Some of her best work was in "The Harp in the Air" and in the whole of the third act, from the consistently fine efforts of which we select her duet with Lazarillo for special praise. Both girls attained a truly lovely pianissimo. Miss Lane, in her duet with Don Jose about the "Fairy Wand" displayed great vocal agility, all her floriture being refreshingly clean.

As Lazarillo, Decima Harvey made a distinct hit. Her voice is slight but very pure, and so successful was she in "Alas, Those Chimes," that, despite its mawkish tune, we were quite glad to hear part of it sung again. If she have a fault, it is the over-frequency of an upward portamento. This was never once offensive, however.

John G. Jonas, as Don Caesar, was quite effective, more especially in his acting and dialogue. He raised many a laugh over that Damocles' sword of his—his creditors—and his bearing and gestures were always to the manner born. His singing, though, was rather unequal. Lower and middle notes were well produced, but his more lofty ones seemed rather forced. Another fault was his occasional lapse from true pitch. This was painfully noticeable in "Flower That Bloometh." Apart from these matters, "Let Me Like a Soldier Fall" was well done, and he was at his best in the duet with Don Jose at the end of Act two.

Jack Prider's Part.

Jack Prider's Don Jose was very good in spots. He has a good, resonant baritone—lacking perhaps in the finer niceties of color—which was well suited to his part. His presence of mind was admirable in the ballade, "In Happy Moments." Having inadvertently kicked a chair over with a clatter—at which several of the audience very inconsiderately tittered—he sang if anything better than ever. In both this song and "This Heart by Woe O'ertaken," he was quite good.

He was not always to be relied on to remember his dialogue, but his acting was good throughout; as was that of the king, personated by Victor Innes-Morcom. The latter's voice still retains its tendency to throatiness and over-vibrato; but he made an effective monarch, despite the librettist's having provided him with some stilted dialogue. The minor characters were only moderately convincing.

The chorus was always efficient, and showed a marked improvement on last year's essays, in point of attack and in following the beat. Their singing of "The Angelus," in a kneeling posture, was very effective.

The orchestra, under Mr. Winsloe Hall, maintained a high standard throughout, the work of the solo violin, 'cello, and harp being particularly satisfying. The volume of the whole band was a thought too strong in the first act, but this was rectified thereafter. The horns, unfortunately, were a fraction off pitch.

Phyllis Leitch, as ballet mistress, showed the excellent work that had been devoted to this section, which appeared in three charming ensembles, with Miss Leitch herself as accomplished soloist. Costumes and scenery were delightful.

"MARITANA" REVIVED

Conservatorium Opera Class

"Maritana" is a sweet piece of music-making—oversweet, perhaps, for the modern palate that likes its fare flavored with cayenne. But there is undeniable appeal in the melody, rhythm, and gracious movement of the show staged by Elder Conservatorium Opera Class in Theatre Royal on Saturday night.

"Maritana" has all the delightful naivette of the days before "Alexander's Ragtime Band" shattered the musical heavens, and a plot housed in castles in Spain.

First notes of the overture under the baton of Mr. H. Winsloe Hall set heads wagging and feet tapping—after 20 years.

Which is more than can or will be said for the melodies of our moderns.

The plot is largely a peg on which to hang the melodies that poured from Vincent Wallace's prolific brain. It has everything but the long-lost son in it, and a cast in which even the comedian is a count.

Vocally the piece was a marked success. There were some admirable voices in the cast. With Mr. Hall as director and Mr. Harold S. Denton as producer,

every drop of Wallace's sweetness was carefully distilled—perhaps a trifle too carefully, for the production as a whole lacked a certain brio.

Histrionically, the cast did remarkably well, considering that whereas most of them had studied singing for years, they had been acting only for weeks. Here again spontaneity will undoubtedly be gained as the season progresses.

Excellent Choral Work

Best actor of all was John G. Jonas, who made a truly professional Don Caesar, the rollicking knightly scapegrace of the piece. The score once or twice made too great demands on his voice. Close behind him was the sparkling character sketch of Dr. Welsh as Marquis de Montefiori. Jack Prider made a sonorous Don Jose, but he leaned too heavily on the prompter.

Alison Lane made a singularly tuneful Maritana, and her pure soprano soared delightfully in "Tis the Harp in the Air" to a sympathetic harp accompaniment by Clarice Gmeiner. The Lazarillo of Decima Harvey nearly ran away with feminine honors. Her sustained notes brought rounds of applause in that ever-green "Alas Those Chimes," said to have been inspired by the bells of St. Mary's Cathedral, in Sydney.

The choral work was, as was expected, excellent. Too seldom were its full resources called upon, and when they were, as in the finales, the result was memorable. The chorus was well trained and well frocked, and under the supervision of Madame Deimar Hall.

Outstanding musical moments were the hushed beauty of "The Angelus" chorus, the quartet "Health to the Lady," "What Mystery," and "Turn On, Old Time."

Phyllis Leitch led the dancers with concentrated verve. A new cast will be seen on Wednesday.



Mr. H. S. Denton