

LONDON MUSIC

BY BERNARD SHAW

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Included herein is a collection of commentary by George Bernard Shaw about William Gilbert, Arthur Sullivan, Richard D'Oyly Carte and the Savoy Theatre. The articles or portions thereof are culled from *THE STAR* of London from May 14, 1888 through May 16, 1890 and from *THE WORLD* of London from May 28, 1890 through August 8, 1894. During this period Shaw wrote as a critic of the musical presentations on the London stage including — but not limited to — conductors, composers, performers, lyricists and librettists.

The editor of *THE STAR* wrote on Shaw's departure:

"We are losing, we are sorry to say, Corno di Bassetto. [Nom de plume used by Shaw when he wrote for *THE STAR*.] The larger salary of a weekly organ of the classes has proved too much for the virtue even of a Fabian, and he has abandoned us. We wish him well, and twice even the big salary that is coming to him from the bloated coffers of the organ of the aristocracy. Let us give his adieu to *THE STAR* readers, with whom he has been on terms of such pleasant intercourse, in his own words."

And an excerpt from Corno di Bassetto's rather long and meandering remarks:

"After the malediction [curse], the valediction [farewell]. I have now to make a ruinous, a desolating, an incredible announcement. This is the last column from the hand of Corno di Bassetto which will appear in *THE STAR*. Friday will no longer be looked forward to in a hundred thousand households as the day of the Feast of Light....

"A daily paper requires, in the season at least, a daily and not a weekly chronicle and criticism of musical events. Such a chronicle I am unable to undertake. A man who, like myself, has to rise regularly at eleven o'clock every morning cannot sit up night after night writing opera notices piping hot from the performance. My habits, my health, and my other activities forbid it. Therefore I felt that my wisest course would be to transfer myself to a weekly paper, which I have accordingly done. I ask some indulgence for my successor, handicapped as he will be for a time by the inevitable comparison with one whom he can hardly hope to equal, much less to surpass. I say this on my own responsibility, as he has not invited me to make any such appeal on his behalf, perhaps because it is not yet settled who he is to be. Whoever he is, I hope he will never suffer the musical department of *THE STAR* to lose that pre-eminence which has distinguished it throughout the administration of 'Corno di Bassetto.'"

After Shaw's tenure on *THE WORLD*, he never again undertook regular duties as a critic of music. Also included are an article from *THE ANGLO-SAXON REVIEW* dated March 1901 and an article from *THE NATION* dated July 7, 1917.

* * * * * indicates sections from Shaw's commentary not included because they wander far afield from the main subject of this collection.

December 12 1888

One of the painful features of oratorio performances in this country is the indifference of most English singers to the artistic treatment of their own language. Hardly any of them show the results of such training as that by which Italian singers used to be kept at *do, re, mi, fa* until they acquired a certain virtuosity in the sounding of the vowel and the articulation of the consonant. On Saturday afternoon it was not pleasant to hear Mr Barton McGuckin singing line after line as if he were vocalizing for the sake of practice on the very disagreeable vowel “*aw*.” By a singer who knows this department of his business, such a word, for example, as “command” is a prized opportunity. Mr Barton McGuckin pronounced it “co-monnd” and spoiled it. It is somewhat unlucky that artists who are aware of the full importance of pronunciation, and whose cultivated sense of hearing keeps them acutely conscious of distinctions to which the ordinary singer seems deaf, are also for the most part persons with a strong mannerism, which makes it unsafe to recommend them as models for imitation. Advise a student to pronounce as Mr Irving does, as Mr Sims Reeves does, as Mrs Weldon does, or as Madame Antoinette Sterling does, and the chances are that that student will simply graft on to his own cockney diphthongs and muddled consonants, an absurd burlesque of Mr Irving’s resonant nose, of Mr Sims Reeves’ lackadaisical way of letting the unaccented syllables die away, of Mrs Weldon’s inflexible delivery and shut teeth, or of Madame Sterling’s peculiar cadence and Scottish-American accent.

The importance of this question of English as she is sung is emphasized just now by the advertisement which announces Mr Leslie’s very laudable and far-sighted plan of making the new Lyric Theatre an English opera house. English opera suggests at once the Carl Rosa style of entertainment. Now, with all due honor to Mr Carl Rosa’s enterprise and perseverance, the performances of his company have never, even at their best, achieved a satisfactory degree of distinction and refinement. But what is peculiar to its representation is the slovenliness in uttering the national language. In an institution which ought to be a school of pure English this is disgraceful, the more so as the defect is, of course, not really the result of social and educational disadvantages, but only of indifference caused by colloquial habit, and by want of artistic sensibility and vigilance.

The **Gilbert-Sullivan** form of opera caused a remarkable improvement in this respect by making the success of the whole enterprise depend on the pointed and intelligible delivery of the words. It is an encouraging sign, too, that in the success of Dorothy a very important share has been borne by Mr Hayden Coffin, an American, who is a much more accomplished master of his language than many older and more famous baritones of English birth. If Mr Leslie is well advised he will test the artists whom he engages for his new theatre no less carefully as speakers than as singers.

April 1 1889

If criticism is to have any effect on concerts, it must clearly be published before they come off. On this principle it behooves me at once to say a word about the Richter Concerts, which will take place every Monday, except Whit Monday, from 6 May to 8 July inclusive. First, then, I want to know whether the orchestra is going to be any better than it was last year. Because last year, as Dr Hans Richter knows quite as well as I do, it was not up to the mark. I remember one scramble through the *Walkürenritt* which would have disgraced a second-rate military band; and the general want of refinement in detail, especially in the wind, was apparent in nearly all the Beethoven symphony performances. Nobody was more delighted than Bassetto [Shaw] by the breadth and force which Richter taught our orchestras after a period of stagnation that cannot be recalled without a shiver. Nobody thrilled with more savage and vengeful glee when the old, heartless, brainless, purposeless, vapid, conceited, jack-in-office, kid-glove, St James's-street, finicking Philharmonic fastidiousness was blown into space by him. But, contemptible and inadequate as this genteel fastidiousness was in the mass, it had its good points in detail; and [conductor] **Sir Arthur Sullivan's** delicate taste, individuality, and abhorrence of exaggeration and slovenliness raised it to a point at which, if it still did nothing, it at least did it with exquisite refinement.

April 27 1889

BRINIO is a grand opera in four acts by S. van Milligen. The book is by Flower of the Snow, a memorable name. The characters include William Tell and Ophelia in the relation of brother and sister, our old friend Oroveso the Druid from *Norma*, Pollio from the same opera, and an unpopular Roman governor, who is addressed throughout by the Ethiopian title of Massa, and who may possibly have been suggested by Pontius Pilate. The action takes place in Batavia during the ascendancy of the Romans. Brinio (W. Tell) is a patriotic Batavian with two sisters, one of whom is mad and the other sane, although I am bound to add that there is but little to choose between them except that Rheime overdoes the make-up of her eyes and plays hysterically with straws and poppies. Ada, the uncertified one, is beloved by Aquilius, a Roman officer, and by Massa, both of whom, accordingly, cultivate Brinio's acquaintance. Massa, however, is out of the question, for he not only drinks — he emptied a large goblet seven times in the course of one act without turning a hair — but he seems to have had something to do with Rheime's mental affliction. Consequently Brinio invites Aquilius to dinner, and shuts the door in Massa's face.

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The third act takes place at night, in the depths of a primeval forest. Ada and Rheime happen to be strolling there in their ordinary indoor costume. Rheime sings to a tambourine accompaniment, which indicates that she is distraught. Ada sings then without the tambourine; and finally the two repeat their parts simultaneously in a manner much affected by **Sir Arthur Sullivan** in his operas. Massa then enters, unobserved, with two villains in cloaks, to whom he laboriously points out Ada — mind! *Ada*, not Rheime, because the villains of course subsequently get hold of the wrong woman.

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On the whole, though BRINIO is not without the sort of plausibility that has secured for *Lucifer* a troublesome and expensive hearing in London, there is no reason why it too should be brought across the North Sea. But the example of the manager who produced it might be imitated by our impresarios. Mr Goring Thomas can do Heer van Milligen's work, and do it far better. So can Mr Villiers Stanford, who is sprightly enough when he is not gratifying his fancy for the pedantries of sonata form. Why Mr Augustus Harris does not get a grand opera out of **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, who is never dull, is one of the unaccountable things in modern management. Perhaps Mr Harris does not understand that he is expected to produce new work. If so, he is mistaken. Far too many nights last season were wasted in rattling the drying bones of *Un Ballo* and *Il Trovatore*; whilst works like Goetz's *Taming of the Shrew* and Wagner's *Die Walküre*, both of them beautiful and popular works, were left on the shelf. If that happens again, the readers of *The Star* shall learn my opinion of such senseless proceedings. [Sullivan's opera *IVANHOE* was announced in June 1890 and opened in January 1891.]

September 20 1889

Since Monday, when I saw Offenbach's BRIGANDS at the Avenue Theatre [with translated libretto by Gilbert], I have been trying to make up my mind whether I run any serious risk of being damned for preferring the profligacy of Offenbach [composer of Brigands], Meilhac and Halévy [French librettists of Brigands] to the decorum of Cellier [composer] and the dullness of Stephenson [librettist]. Perhaps an item more or less in the account can make no very great difference to me personally, but I warn others solemnly that Offenbach's music is wicked. It is abandoned stuff: every accent in it is a snap of the fingers in the face of moral responsibility: every ripple and sparkle on its surface twits me for my teetotalism, and mocks at the early rising of which I fully intend to make a habit some day.

In Mr Cellier's scores, music is still the chastest of the Muses. In Offenbach's — she is what shall I say? — I am ashamed of her. I no longer wonder that the Germans came to Paris and suppressed her with fire and thunder. Here in England how respectful she is! Virtuous and rustically innocent her 6-8 measures are, even when Dorothy sings "Come, fill up your glass to the brim!" She learnt her morals from Handel, her ladylike manners from Mendelssohn, her sentiment from the Bailiff's Daughter of Islington. But listen to her in Paris, with Offenbach. Talk of 6-8 time: why, she stumbles at the second quaver, only to race off again in a wild Bacchanalian, Saturnalian, petticoat spurning, irreclaimable, shocking cancan. Nothing but the wit of a Frenchman shining through the chinks in the materialism of English comic opera artists, could make such music endurable and presentable at the same time.

When **Mr Gilbert** translated LES BRIGANDS for Messrs Boosey, years ago, he must have said to himself: "This Meilhac-Halévy stuff is very funny, but I could do it just as well in English; and so I would too, if only I could find an English Offenbach." In due time he did find his Offenbach in **Sir Arthur Sullivan**. Accordingly, when Falsacappa the brigand chief exclaims: "Marry my daughter to an honest man! Never!" we are not surprised to recognize in him a missing link in the ancestry of the Pirate King of **Penzance**. The relationship of the carbineers to the policemen is too obvious to be worth dwelling on; but there are other ties between the two phases of musical farce. The extremely funny song in the second act, *Nous avons, ce matin, tous deux*, is closely allied to When I First put this Uniform on in **Patience**; and the opening chorus *Deux par deux ou bien par trois* is first cousin to Carefully on Tiptoe Stealing in **H.M.S. Pinafore**.
[Continued]

September 20 1889 [Continued]

I cannot, however, suppose that **Mr Gilbert's** objection to the use of his libretto [at the Avenue Theatre, but it was used anyway after Gilbert failed in his effort] was founded on an idiotic desire to appear "original." The people who regard the function of a writer as "creative" must surely be the most illiterate of dupes. The province of the fictionist is a common which no man has a right to enclose. I cultivate that common myself; and when someone claims to have grown a new plant there, different from all the rest, I smile sardonically, knowing that the selfsame plant grows in all our plots, and grew there before he was born. And when he discovers in my plot a plant which he has raised in his own or seen in his neighbor's, and thereupon cries out "Stop thief! Stop plagiarist! Stop picker of other men's brains!" I only smile the widelier. What are brains for, if not to be picked by me and the rest of the world? In my business I know *me* and *te*, but not *meum* and *tuum*.

Mr Gilbert's book as played at the Avenue is much nearer in spirit to the [French] original than Henry Leigh's. [Leigh had produced a translation which had been performed in 1871.] Leigh's lyrics sometimes flowed more smoothly than **Mr Gilbert's**; but his libretti were silly and raffish: the fun too often degenerated into tedious tomfoolery: his feeble and fleshy whimsicalities are inferior in grit and sparkle to even the most perfunctory paradoxes of **Mr Gilbert**. His [Leigh's] Royal Horse Marines, commanded by Marshal Murphi, and his brigands Jacksheppardo, Dickturpino, and Clauduvallo, only show how French wit of no very high order can yet be degraded by translation into English fun. The horse-collar bar-loafing buffoonery is not in the least like the genuine Meilhac and Halévy *opera bouffe*, in which the characters, primarily persons of engaging culture, reasonableness, amiability, and address, are made irresistibly ridiculous by an exquisite folly, an impossible frivolity of motive, which exhibit them as at once miracles of wit and sensibility and monsters of moral obtuseness.

Mr Gilbert has given us the English equivalent of this in his own operas; and a curiously brutalized, embittered, stolidified, middle-classical mechanical equivalent it is; but the essential wit and incongruity are preserved. In translating *LES BRIGANDS*, he naturally did not miss these qualities; though, oddly enough, his version makes hardly anything of a couple of points which might have been expected to appeal specially to him: to wit, the family sentiment of Falsacappa, and the conscientious scruples of Fiorella on the subject of robbing handsome young men (just as the **Pirates of Penzance** drew the line at orphans).

[Continued]

September 20 1889 [Continued]

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The third act depends altogether on Antonio, the ancient treasurer of the Duke of Mantua, who has squandered the contents of the treasury on his love-affairs. His song His song, *O mes amours, O mes maîtresses!* with its refrain ending in falsetto on high D, is the most important number in the act. At the Avenue it is omitted, the part being taken by a gentleman who presumably cannot sing, and who seems to have derived his ideas of character acting from the antics of Lurcher in Dorothy. Undaunted by **Mr Gilbert**, he “gagged” the line about the sundries in his accounts, and gagged it so senselessly that **Mr Gilbert** would only have pitied him and passed on. Under these circumstances the act was even less worth waiting for than the third act of a farcical performance usually is. Years ago, somewhere or other, I saw Mr Edward Royce, of Gaiety fame, double a brigand’s part with that of Antonio very cleverly indeed. I wish he had been at the Avenue on Monday.

December 2 1889

Last week, when my colleagues were filling in their stereotyped “magnificent rendering of the Seventh Symphony by Mr Manns’s famous orchestra,” I was sorrowfully recording my opinion that the famous ones did not on that occasion play worth a cent. On Saturday they had evidently, to a man, made up their minds to let me know whether they could play or not. This is interesting, by the bye, as proving that Mr J. A. Smith, the eminent drum player (I would give anything to play the drum), is not the only orchestral artist who studies the press (he, I may remark, does so with such diligence that when I compose a symphony for the Palace, or for Herr Richter, I shall not write in the old style, “the drums count” but simply “Mr Smith reads the paper”). He does not mean to annoy me, I am sure; but if he only knew how desperately I long for something to read myself during a tedious movement, he would rightly ascribe my feelings to mere envy.

However, whether it was the sharp, crisp weather, or my disparagement of the previous concert, certain it is that the band was on the alert, strings keen and impetuous, wood wind and horns full of soft color, brass noble and splendid. The Euryanthe overture had “a magnificent rendering,” if you like; and Brahms’ symphony in D delighted me, though I try to turn up my nose at Brahms. Individual, or rather dual, virtuosity was represented by Mr and Mrs Henschel, who, after making a genuinely valuable contribution to the concert by their Euryanthe selections, in every bar of which Wagner casts his shadow before, unexpectedly relapsed into a feeble drawing-room duet entertainment, in which Mrs Henschel sang in tune, and thereby took the part of the pianoforte against her own husband, which was hardly acting up to her vows. I wonder whether Mr Henschel is conscious of his trick of forcing the intonation just the fiftieth part of a comma to the bad. Let him beware: such habits grow; and there is the spoiling of a good singer in him.

As to **Sir Arthur Sullivan’s** Macbeth music, I am eagerly in favor of such performances at standard orchestral concerts, as the anticipation of them causes composers to take their theatrical commissions for incidental music in a much more earnest and lofty spirit, with a view to their subsequent enlargement to the full scale of grand orchestra. By making such events customary, we should at least get a good overture occasionally. This music of **Sir Arthur’s**, clever, skillful, brilliantly scored, catchingly runs the round of the most paying modulations; and there are some ha’porths of true Celtic melody and feeling to boot. Mr Hamish MacCunn’s Ship o’ the Fiend, which, as it happened, I had never heard before, did not supplant Lord Ullin’s Daughter in my affections. The ship is certainly a river steamer in a desperate hurry. I have listened to the sea in all weathers for months together; and whenever I heard four in a bar going, that was a steamer, reader, usually a screw-steamer. Neither oar, wave, nor sailing ship ever made that dread Harwich-Rotterdam-Dover-Calais rum-tum accompaniment to the only wishes for death that are really sincere. The big drum is fine; but methinks I have heard the effect before — in Les Francs Juges, was it not? Not, of course, that it is any the worse for that.

December 13 1889

The past week has, I believe, been a busy one for the musical critics. It has certainly been a busy one for me, but not musically: I have not even been to the Savoy opera. The first night I have to spare, I shall — but stop! I have not seen *The Dead Heart* yet, nor *La Tosca*, nor *A Man's Shadow*. So let us fix the fourth night I have to spare for **The Gondoliers**. It will probably come about Easter, or if not then, towards the end of August.

Do not be disappointed at this, eager reader. A new Savoy opera is an event of no greater artistic significance than — to take the most flattering comparison — a new oratorio by Gounod. We know the exact limits of **Mr Gilbert's** and **Sir Arthur Sullivan's** talents by this time, as well as we know the width of the Thames at Waterloo Bridge; and I am just as likely to find Somerset House under water next Easter or autumn, as to find **The Gondoliers** one hair's-breadth better than **The Mikado**, or Gounod's promised *Mass* a step in advance of *Mors et Vita*. The Savoy has a certain artistic position, like the German Reed entertainment; but it is not a movable position. The *Red Hussar* might have been a new departure at the Lyric; *Gretna Green* might have been anything; but I am already as absolutely certain of what **The Gondoliers** is as I shall be when I have witnessed the performance.

One result of this is that I have no real curiosity on the subject. Indeed, I may as well confess that I have no real conviction that I shall ever fulfill my promise to go. Would you be surprised to learn that I have never seen **The Sorcerer**, **Iolanthe**, **Princess Ida**, and **Ruddigore** at all, nor even **Patience**, except from behind the scenes at an amateur performance. I have a sorrowfully minute acquaintance with the music of them all; but it has been imposed upon me by circumstances over which I have no control. And as I have seen **Trial by Jury** only as an afterpiece by a provincial company when it first appeared ever so many years ago; as I saw **The Pirates** at the Opera Comique, and **H.M.S. Pinafore** by the secessionists at the Imperial, I begin to realize the fact that I have been only once inside the Savoy Theatre. On that occasion I was haled thither forcibly by a friend who had a spare stall for a **Mikado** matinee. The conclusion is irresistible that the attraction of **Gilbert-Sullivan** opera is not sufficient to overcome my inertia. The reason is not far to seek. **Mr Gilbert's** paradoxical wit, astonishing to the ordinary Englishman, is nothing to me. Nature has cursed me with a facility for the same trick; and I could paradox **Mr Gilbert's** head off were I not convinced that such trifling is morally unjustifiable.

[Continued]

December 13 1889 [Continued]

As to **Sir Arthur's** scores, they form an easy introduction to dramatic music and picturesque or topical orchestration for perfect novices; but as I had learned it all from Meyerbeer (not to profane the great name of Mozart in such a connection), and was pretty well tired of Offenbach before **Trial by Jury** was born, there was no musical novelty in the affair for me. Besides, **Sir Arthur's** school is an exploded one. Neatly and cleverly as he exploits it, he cannot get a progression or a melody out of it that is not the worse for wear. It smells mustily of Dr Day and his sham science of harmony, beloved of the Royal Academy of Music. Give me unaffected melodies consisting chiefly of augmented intervals, a natural harmony progressing by consecutive fifths and sevenths, plenty of healthy unprepared tonic discords and major ninths, elevenths, and thirteenth, without any pedantic dread of "false relations"; and then I will listen with some interest. But no more of Dr Day for me.

By the way, the question of learning harmony reminds me that I never finished the reply I began some weeks ago to the gentleman who asked my advice as to how he should proceed in the matter of taking singing lessons. But I do not know that I have anything to add, except that if he succeeds in finding in one and the same person a master able to teach him to produce his voice and pronounce well, besides helping him with really valuable artistic advice and criticism, I shall be glad to learn that gifted one's address.

February 21 1890

I see that somebody in the Pall Mall Gazette wants to have Mr August Manns knighted. The suggestion will be taken up by the comic journals for the sake of saying that “a Manns a man for a’ that.” As for me, who am no punster, I ask why Mr Manns should be bothered about it. He knows how we manage these things here. We keep a couple of musical knights (in addition to clerical organist chivalry) in order to make knighthood a little respectable, just as we keep a couple of mounted sentries at Whitehall so as to give the War Office a military air.

There is no question of selecting the man who has done most for music: Costa, who had no respect for the past, no help for the present, and no aspiration towards the future — who was equally ready to murder anything old with “additional accompaniments” and cuts, or to strangle anything new by refusing to have anything to do with it — who allowed the opera to die in his grasp whilst it was renewing its youth and strength all over Germany: Costa was made Sir Michael.

The gentleman selected by **Mr W. S. Gilbert** to set his burlesques of grand opera to music is **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, though music in England would not be one inch further behind-hand than she is if he had never existed.

Charles Hallé, who endowed England with a second orchestra (Rule, Britannia!), and who is therefore the only man whose services are for a moment comparable to those of Mr Manns, was given a knighthood when he was seventy. No doubt Mr Manns’s position is such that he can, if he chooses, confer (at sixty-five) on a worthless order an honor that it cannot confer on him. But if he receives any such offer, I hope he will politely pass it over to Mr Barnby or Mr Cusins, and go on quietly with his work. I respect him so much that I am always half ashamed to call him Mister. If he became Sir August I should blush every time I penned that cherished distinction of successful brewers and oratorio mongers.

April 5 1890

The Philharmonic Society is, I fear, hardly to be held responsible for its actions. It is very old; and it never even in its best days had much sense. Some years ago it brought itself to the verge of extinction by its conservatism. Since then it has been desperately spurring to get abreast of the times — trying new composers, new conductors, new virtuosos, new everything. Now if the Philharmonic had any musical intelligence it would stick to its old line by bringing forward only what is new in that line. It should concern itself mainly with abstract music and the very highest class of dramatic music: that class of dramatic music which may be called secularly religious music. But whatever else it may see fit to do — and Providence only knows what it will be up to next — it had better avoid such senseless vagaries as its last effort at a concert program.

First, by way of showing that it has learnt nothing and forgotten nothing, it put down the *Naïades* overture, a genteel musical mongrel which would be a musical description of the Rhine if it were not meant to be a formal concert overture, and which would be a formal concert overture if it were not meant to be a musical description of the Rhine, the net result being, of course, that it is neither the one nor the other. At this time of day, wasting the Philharmonic orchestral forces on it is about as sensible as engaging Rubinstein to play pieces by Stephen Heller would be.

Mr Joseph Bennett helps out the society by bravely eulogizing the work in his analytical program as “enjoying universal recognition as among the most beautiful of its kind” (observe that the mischief is just that it is of no kind at all), and by peppering in such adjectives as “divine” and the like; but who is taken in thereby? We all know that Mr Bennett loves Mendelssohn with a love that overflows upon Mendelssohn’s most slavish imitator; and how firmly persuaded he is that Wagner wrote music only to revenge himself by its ugliness on the Parisians for not producing *Rienzi* at the Grand Opera in 1840; but the value of these opinions is a purely historical one, like that of the fossils in the Jermyn Street museum. When I want to impress a young man with the vastness of my musical experience, I hand him the criticisms of Mr Bennett on Wagner and Mendelssohn, and say “Young man: I can remember the days when everybody talked like that.” To which the neophyte always reverently responds, “Indeed, sir?” meaning “Poor old buffer!”

Therefore I would counsel the Philharmonic to drop Sterndale Bennett [composer unrelated to critic Joseph Bennett. He is considered the most distinguished English composer of the Romantic school.] until they begin to find their audiences falling off for lack of his attraction, when they can easily recover the lost ground by devoting an entire concert to his works, with a few antiques by Smart or Bishop, a novelty by **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, and a song from Costa’s *Eli*, thrown in for the sake of variety. Such a concert would be crowded with old associations; but otherwise there would be plenty of room at it.

May 2 1890

I have to apologize to Mr Harold and Miss Ethel Bauer for missing their concert on Monday. I allowed myself to be seduced by the management of the Prince of Wales's Theatre into attending the 100th night of *Marjorie*, intending to leave after an act or two and go on to the concert. But my Herculean frame suddenly yielded to the strain which the present stress of pictures, politics, and music put on a critic who is engaged in all three departments simultaneously. I settled down lazily in my stall and never budged until the curtain fell. Not that the performance, though it amused me, can be said to have enthralled me. I can tell you very little about it — not even how often Mr Coffin kissed Miss Broughton. He seemed to me to be kissing everybody with a reckless disregard of propriety. I must say that Mr Coffin, being a handsome young man, and considerably under-parted to boot, had an easy time of it. Had he been trying his prentice hand at *Iago* or *Don Juan* I should have set my brains seriously to the task of criticism; but *Marjorie* is child's play for him. As a singer he has been better, and he will some day again be better, than he is today. He insists too much on the manly roughness of his voice, and is, it seems to me, actually impatient of the delicate color and the rich, light, smooth tone with which he started, and which was the cause of his success; for anybody can produce the rough, loud article if he sets himself at it. Mr Coffin has only to cast back after his old charm to get two stops to his organ. Then skill and taste in their employment, with the dramatic intelligence of which, even in this *Marjorie* nonsense, he shows plenty, will keep him in the front rank when he becomes a middle-aged operatic villain, and takes to serious business.

Mr Slaughter has not allowed the better to become the enemy of the good in composing *Marjorie*. The score is sufficient for its purpose; but I think he really might have devised some worthier climax for Mr Coffin's song in the third act than a hackneyed waltz refrain. *Marjorie* compares favorably with *Dorothy* as to the book: unfavorably as to the music. The book of *Dorothy* was not only silly, but stupid. The book of *Marjorie* is also silly, but it is amusing. On the other hand, the music of *Dorothy* was pretty, and had a certain elegance and technical finish which belonged to the Mendelssohn-Sterndale Bennett traditions in which Mr Cellier, like **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, was trained. Mr Slaughter has been less fastidious; and his share in the success of *Marjorie* is proportionately less than that of Mr Cellier in the success of *Dorothy*, which, by the way, is still ravaging the provinces.

December 17 1890

One cannot but admire Mr Richard Temple's independence and enterprise in trying back to Gounod and Molière as a relief to Cellier and Stephenson. His Mock Doctor company, however, shows how superficial are the accomplishments of the artists (save the mark!) who run about the country in light-opera companies. To perform all the latest works in their line no very great technical skill is needed: good looks, a certain felicity of address, and sufficient natural aptitude for music qualify any young person to play principal parts. At the **Savoy** we are highly amused by what we indulgently call the acting; but we have only to pronounce the magic word Molière, and think of the Théâtre Français, to recognize at once that this "acting" is nothing but pure tomfoolery — "jack-acting," the Irish call it — wittily turned into a stage entertainment by **Mr Gilbert**.

I was at the gala performance of **The Gondoliers** the other night, and noticed two things: first, that the music was much more familiar to the band than to the composer, who conducted on that occasion; and second, that the representation did not involve a single stroke of skilled stage-playing. Mr Frank Wyatt's success as the Duke of Plaza Toro does not afford the faintest presumption that he could manage three minutes of Sganarelle: Mr Courtice Pounds and Mr Wallace Brownlow might win unbounded applause as Marco and Luiz a thousand times without knowing enough to enable them to walk half across the stage and make a bow in the character of Leandre. I do not say this as an advocate of the French system: I have always maintained that the English actor who grows his own technique is much to be preferred to the drilled French actor with his borrowed regulation equipment. But if the finished English actor's original art is better than the French actor's conventional art, the Frenchman has still the advantage of the Englishman who has "gone on the stage" without any conception of art at all — who has not only an untrained body and a slovenly tongue, but who, having walked and talked all his life without thinking about it, has no idea that action and speech are subjects for artistic culture. Such innocents, though they do not find engagements at the Garrick or the Haymarket, unfortunately get before the public in light opera very easily, if only they can achieve anything that will pass for singing. Indeed, I need not confine the statement to light opera.

The vulgarities and ineptitudes of Carl Rosaism pass unrebuked at Drury Lane, although, if the culprits were only actors, Mr Harris would scornfully recommend them not to venture north of the Surrey or west of the Pavilion until they had made themselves commonly presentable. Light opera gets the best of it; for all the pleasantest, funniest, and most gifted novices get snapped up by the **Savoy**, the Gaiety, the Prince of Wales', and the Lyric, leaving the second-rate aspirants to the provinces for rough wear in grand opera (in English) or lighter work on tour with comic operas, according to their robustness and capacity. Under these circumstances I do not blame Mr Temple for failing to find a company capable of handling The Mock Doctor with the requisite skill and delicacy.

February 4 1891

On second thoughts I have resolved to suppress my notice of **Ivanhoe**. [Grand opera by Sir Arthur Sullivan and Julian Sturgis opened January 31, 1891.] I was upon my high horse last week when I wrote it; and when I went on Saturday, and saw how pleasantly everything went off, and how the place was full of lovely and distinguished persons, and how everybody applauded like mad at the end, and, above all, how here at last was an English opera-house superbly equipped for its purpose, I felt what a brute I had been to grumble — and that, too, after having been indulged with peeps at the proofs of the score, admission to rehearsals, and every courtesy that could pass betwixt myself and the management, without loss of dignity on either side. Just as a sort of penance, and to show what I am capable of, I give a couple of paragraphs from the discarded notice. Here they are:

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“Proceeding then at once to the faults of **Ivanhoe**, I maintain that it is disqualified as a serious dramatic work by the composer’s failure to reproduce in music the vivid characterization of [Sir Walter] Scott, which alone classes the novel among the masterpieces of fiction. It would hardly be reasonable to demand that **Sir Arthur** should have intensified the work of Scott as Mozart intensified that of Beaumarchais and even of Molière; but he might at least have done as much for him as he has done for **Mr Gilbert** in **Patience** and its forerunners: that is, before the **Savoy** operas became machine-made like **The Gondoliers**. Take for example Scott’s Bois Guilbert, the fierce Templar, the original ‘bold, bad man’ tanned nearly black, disfigured with sword-cuts, strong, ambitious, going on for fifty, a subject for Verdi or Velasquez. Is it possible to sit patiently and hear the music of the drawing room, sensuous and passionate without virility or intelligence, put into the mouth of such a figure? Not with all the brass and drum sauce in the world. Then there is that gallant scamp De Bracy, for whom we all have a sneaking fondness because he broke down ignominiously when Rowena began to cry, and then went out and stood up like a man to King Richard’s terrific horseplay. Did he deserve nothing better than to be treated as a mere fop out of **Princess Ida**? And Richard himself, whose occasional attempts to behave like a king were so like Mr Pickwick’s famous attempt to sneer: surely, though it is quite conceivable that he should be singing the same sentimental ballad whenever he is neither drinking nor killing anybody, yet the ballad should not be a mere paraphrase of the Wandering Minstrel song in **The Mikado**, as if Coeur de Lion had picked up that subtle strain by ear, and not picked it up quite accurately. As to Cedric singing the most arrant modern tum-tum in honor of the Crusaders — no, **Sir Arthur**: it may be very pretty and very popular; but it is not **Ivanhoe**.”

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February 4 1891 [Continued]

"I have here condemned the composer, and not the book-maker, because, with Scott's novel to work upon, it was clearly the composer's business to dramatize it musically himself, resorting to a librettist's aid only for the filling in of the lyrics, and of such speeches as could not be taken verbatim from Scott. The task would not, I grant, have been an easy one; for though the material of the story is dramatic enough, yet, being a story, it is told with a disregard of stage conditions which no playwright's ingenuity could entirely overcome. It is true that the resources of music-drama surpass those of narrative in some respects: the castle of Torquilstone might have been exhibited in three compartments, with the scene between Rowena and De Bracy in one, that between Bois Guilbert and Rebecca in another, and Front de Boeuf and the Jew in the cellar, all three couples proceeding simultaneously to the point at which they are interrupted by the horn of the besiegers. Some polyphonic skill would have been required in the composition of the music; and only a comprehensive *coup d'oeil* and *coup d'oreille* could have taken it all in; but then **Sir Arthur** is an accomplished contrapuntist, and the London public has had some training at Barnum's in the practice of watching several shows at the same time. Yet this disposes of but one difficulty. The tournament — and what would **Ivanhoe** be lacking the tournament? — is obviously impracticable without adjourning to the Agricultural Hall. Still, though the jousting must perforce be done by description, it is hard to have to exchange the inimitable commentary of Isaac of York — 'Father Abraham! how fiercely that Gentile rides!' etc. — for alternate characterless fragments of recitative from Locksley and Friar Tuck, officiating as a pair of bawling showmen. This, however, is but a trivial sample of the way in which the story has been gutted of every poetic and humorous speech it contains. Here is a piece of Scott's dialogue in the scene in the lists in Templestowe, with Mr Sturgis's 'restorations' (in the architectural sense) of the same:

REBECCA. Say to the Grand Master that I maintain my innocence, and do not yield me as justly condemned, lest I become guilty of mine own blood. Say to him that I challenge such delay as his forms will permit, to see if God, whose opportunity is in man's extremity, will raise me up a deliverer; and when such uttermost space is passed, may His holy will be done!

GRAND MASTER. God forbid that Jew or Pagan should impeach us of injustice! Until the shadows be cast from the west to the eastward will we wait to see if a champion shall appear for this unfortunate woman.

BOIS GUILBERT. Rebecca, dost thou hear me?

REBECCA. I have no portion in thee, cruel, hard-hearted man.

BOIS GUILBERT. Ay, but dost thou understand my words? for the sound of my voice is frightful in mine own ears. I scarce know on what ground we stand, or for what purpose they have brought us hither ... But hear me, Rebecca: a better chance hast thou for life and liberty than yonder knaves and dotard dream of. Mount thee behind me on my steed — on Zamor, etc., etc."

[Continued]

February 4 1891 [Continued]

“Mr Sturgis ‘adapts’ the above to the stage as follows:

REBECCA. I am innocent. Now, if God will, even in this last dark hour He will appoint a champion. But if no champion come, I bow before His holy will and am content to die.

GRAND MASTER. Sound trumpets! ... Now, since no champion makes answer here, draw near and bind the maiden to the stake, for surely she shall die.

BOIS GUILBERT. It shall not be! Fools, dotards, will ye slay the innocent? Butchers and burners, she is mine, I say! I say she shall not burn! Back, as you hope to live! Swear to be mine, and I will save thee now. My horse is nigh at hand, etc., etc.

If the noble dialogue of Scott is not more suitable for English music than the fustian of Mr Sturgis, then so much the worse for English music. Purcell would have found it so. I protest, in the name of my own art of letters, against a Royal English Opera which begins by handing over a literary masterpiece for wanton debasement at the hands of a journeyman hired for the job.”

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 Now all this was evidently mere temper. Poor Mr Sturgis, I suppose, knew no better: he unquestionably meant to improve on the book; and if, when he came forward hand in hand with the composer amid thunders of applause on Saturday night, nobody had a brickbat to break on him for love of Scott, why should I spoil the harmony of the occasion by striving to belittle him? But the fact is, I must have been possessed by a demon when I wrote that notice, for I find lower down in it that even the building did not please me. I wrote:

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 “The scene-painters have alone dreamt of going to Scott for inspiration; and they stand forth as gods in consequence; though even to them I will say that if Mr Ryan will go round to the front, and look at that pointed doorway under the Norman arch in the scene where Rebecca describes the siege from the window, he will agree with me that it was not a happy thought. Otherwise, the Torquilstone architecture contrasts most favorably with the curious absence of any architectural idea in the auditorium. The view of the stage from all parts of the house, as far as I was able to test it, is capital; and the acoustical conditions are of the happiest. Also the upholstery and materials are luxurious and costly to excess; but as to any beauty of form or individuality of design, I have been in hydraulic lifts of much higher excellence in these respects. Even the exterior has been disfigured by a glass and iron rain-shelter, which I can hardly believe to be the work of human hands, so utterly destitute is it of any trace of the artist’s sense. But people who are not particular about these matters will find every comfort and convenience that money can buy; and the majority, I fear, will find that a sufficient recommendation. Indeed, I should not go out of the way to complain myself if it were not for the ostentation of artistic effort everywhere, challenging me at all points to give my opinion — as a musical critic — whether the building is not really handsome.”

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February 4 1891 [Continued]

But enough of this unsociable document. The truth is that the theatre is very pretty; and so is the opera. I do not say that the ceiling is equal to that of Henry VII's chapel in Westminster, or that the score is in any essential point an advance upon that of Macfarren's Robin Hood, which had a long run at Her Majesty's thirty years ago; but who ever said they were? My business is to praise them for what they are, not to disparage them for what they are not. **Ivanhoe**, then, has plenty of charming songs in it; and the crash-bang and the top notes in the exciting situations are as stirring as heart could wish. The score is as neat as a new pin. The instrumentation, from the big drum upwards, is effective, practiced, and stylish, with all the fullness given by the latest improvements; the tone-colors, though rich, are eminently gentlemanly; there is no Bohemian effervescence, no puerile attempts at brilliancy or grandiosity; all is smooth, orderly, and within the bounds of good breeding. There are several interesting examples of that coincidence of inspiration which is so common in music. For instance, the third act of **Ivanhoe** begins like Berlioz' Faust, with a scene before sunrise for the tenor. And the musical expression found by both composers is practically identical. Again, when Rebecca presently comes in, and sings Ah! would that thou and I might lead our sheep! we hear through the music a delightful echo of that other pastorale in the first act of Orphée aux Enfers. Then the hag Ulrica no sooner begins her invocation of Zernebock than we recognize her as first cousin to Ulrica in Un Ballo, with her Re dell' abisso affrettati. The rousing prelude to the Friar's drinking song might be a variation on Vivat Bacchus from Mozart's Seraglio. The chief stroke of humor in the opera is the patriotic chorus in the tournament scene, to which, with a sly reference to Mr Macdermott, **Sir Arthur** has imparted an unmistakable music-hall swing, which must have sorely tempted the gallery to join in.

As there is a double cast, I must be careful not to fall into such an error of taste as to draw comparisons; for, after all, a critic is expected to be a gentleman. Therefore I shall keep to myself my opinion that Miss Macintyre is a stronger and more intelligent Rebecca than Miss Thudichum, who is, on the other hand, more sympathetic and yields more readily to musical inspiration than Miss Macintyre, besides having the more suitable voice in point of tone-color.

Nor must I hint that Miss Lucile Hill, if her performance was looked forward to with less curiosity than that of Miss Palliser, is a much more credibly Saxon Rowena, in voice as well as in appearance, interesting as Miss Palliser is in her own way. And if I permit myself to remark that Mr Norman Salmond is a more congenial Richard than his gloomy and remorseful rival, it is not that I wish for a moment to contrast the two to the disadvantage of either.

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February 4 1891 [Continued]

As to Mr Ben Davies, the robust and eupeptic Ivanhoe, who sets to with the mailed Bois Guilbert at Templestowe in a comfortable immensikoff of the period, and gets beaten because he is obviously some three stone over his proper fighting weight, his obstreperous self-satisfaction put everybody into good humor. But unless he tones himself down a little at future performances, Mr O'Mara, from the artistic point of view, will leave him nowhere. I do not care how good a voice a man has: I object to his rushing out of the stage-picture and bawling at me — not to mention that it sets everybody else bawling too. The Templar of Mr Sturgis' version is a pirate king sort of personage, of whom nothing sensible can be made. Mr Noije did not dress at the rehearsal at which I saw him play; and as Mr Oudin was in full war-paint both at rehearsal and of course at the first performance, it is not surprising that I have a penny plain impression of Mr Noije, and a twopence colored one of Mr Oudin. But I applaud them both for their struggles with the worst and most difficult part in the opera. Further comment I must defer until I have seen a public performance by the second cast. I may, however, confirm the good reports of the chorus and the orchestra, especially the orchestra.

Several other performers and composers — Albeniz, Henschel, Mozart, Wagner, etc. — may be safely postponed to next week, their lasting qualities being better ascertained than those of **Ivanhoe**.

February 11 1891

I ventured on a couple of acts of **Ivanhoe** again last week; and I must say I saw no sign of the falling-off in public interest which was said to have been apparent on the second night. The house seemed to me as good a one as any manager could reasonably expect or desire. The only reaction that has really occurred is a reaction in feeling after the extravagant hopes raised by the puffery with which the Royal English Opera was inaugurated. A comparison of the newspapers of 1876 with those of 1891 would lead anybody who knew no better to conclude that the opening of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus with The Niblung's Ring was an insignificant event in comparison with the opening of the Shaftesbury Avenuehaus with **Ivanhoe**. The innocent people who believe whatever they see in print — and among these are still a considerable section of the playgoing public — are convinced that something magnificent and momentous beyond all parallel in the annals of music has just happened. And no wonder! Editors have given their space, critics their superlatives, with reckless profusion, apparently for the sake of **Mr Carte's** *beaux yeux*. Dissentients have been intimidated by the unanimity of the cheering; and the fuglemen [leaders] have been shameless in their disposition to make themselves agreeable. There has never been anything like it since first the press began to notice music.

And now to improve the occasion. First, I would ask **Mr Carte** whether all those silly columns which soddened the Monday papers have convinced anybody that **Ivanhoe** is a greater work than Don Juan, than Les Huguenots, than Der Freischütz, than Faust, than Die Meistersinger — and I contemptuously submit that if they do not mean this they mean nothing. Well, the adept, who knows that on these terms they must mean nothing, is justly incensed at being trifled with on so gigantic a scale; whilst the novice, who swallows the stuff and rushes to the theatre, comes away deeply disappointed, whereas if he went with any sort of reasonable expectation he would find a good deal to please him. The truth is, **Mr Carte** is not a master of the art of advertisement. With all his experience he has fallen into the beginner's error of thinking that praise cannot be overdone, and that nothing else is of any use.

Now it is quite true that over-puffery is impossible; but over-praise is not puffery at all, because it neither interests people nor convinces them. I yield to no man in the ingenuity and persistence with which I seize every opportunity of puffing myself and my affairs; but I never nauseate the public by getting myself praised. My favorite plan is to select some gentleman who has a weakness for writing to the papers, and who writes rather well when his blood is up. Him I provoke, by standing on his tenderest corn, to write to the papers saying that I have no sense of humor, of morals, of decency, of art, of manners, or what not.

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February 11 1891 [Continued]

This creates an impression that the national feeling on these points runs so strongly the other way as to require urgent correction; and straightway many people who never heard of me in their lives become ashamed of their ignorance. Then all the enemies of my assailant constitute themselves my partisans; and so I become famous to a degree that goads those who see through the whole puff to write fresh letters and paragraphs denying that I am famous at all, thereby making me more famous, or infamous, or what you will; for any sort of notoriety will serve my turn equally. All this would be the easiest thing in the world did not so much depend on the adroitness and opportuneness of the original provocation; and here, no doubt, my well-known critical insight, developed by profound economic, historic, artistic, and social studies, gives me an advantage. But if **Mr Carte** will study my method, he will, I think, profit by seeing how the damaging recoil after the **IVANHOE** boom might have been avoided, and much ineffective fulsomeness converted into invaluable stimulant, if only an element of attack and controversy had been provided.

There is another point in the recoil which specially concerns **Sir Arthur Sullivan**. The score of **Ivanhoe** is far superior to the libretto; and if it be true, as I affirm, and as even the most abandoned of the laudatory critics hint between the lines, that nearly half the second and third acts — that is, the last two scenes of all, and the second scene of the second act — would be better out than in, the fault is entirely Mr Sturgis's (although I still think it serves **Sir Arthur** right for not having constructed his own libretto).

But, according to the press, Mr Sturgis has risen to the full height of the occasion, and has given the composer the utmost opportunity of exercising his powers. Consequently **Sir Arthur** has not only been baulked in his artistic effort by the weakness of the libretto, but he has to bear the blame of the shortcoming himself in order that nothing may be said against his colleague.

It really does not do to spread butter on both sides of the bread. However, the balance of dramatic criticism will soon be redressed. Next Monday week there will be performed, for the first time in England, Rosmersholm, one of the masterpieces of Henrik Ibsen. We shall see how the papers which have just proclaimed Mr Sturgis a great dramatic poet will take it out of Ibsen. The dramatic critics sometimes jibe at us, their musical brethren, because we came so frightfully to grief over Wagner. I should not be surprised if we found a *tu quoque* presently to console ourselves with.

March 11 1891

This is an old story; but it remains true to the present hour that whenever anything is well rehearsed for a Philharmonic concert, nothing else thereat is rehearsed at all. For the last season or two we have seen certain composers — Grieg, Moszkowski, Benoit, etc. — all engaged to conduct their own compositions. At the rehearsals, they were of course accorded the first turn; and they naturally kept the band at their works until they had got the effects they wanted. Then there was the concerto player to be attended to: he or she, an artist of European reputation, was not going to be kept waiting for anybody. By the time composer and virtuoso were half satisfied, the men were hungry, impatient, due at other engagements: in short, the rehearsal was virtually over.

Mr Mackenzie or Mr Cowen [official conductors] could at most approach the Society's illustrious guests with a polite request for just five minutes at the end to run through Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, or any other trifle that might have been announced. The effect of this was of course to make the unfortunate official conductor, in contrast with the composer who had appropriated all his opportunities of rehearsing, seem only half as competent and conscientious as he really was. But this was no ground for relieving him of the full blame. It was his business to insist on adequate artistic conditions, or, failing them, to resign. Besides, there was no alternative: it was useless to pitch into the Philharmonic directors, who pride themselves on keeping the outside public in its place, and not pampering it with concessions to clamor.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that **Sir Arthur Sullivan** did not find it worth his while to retain the baton, and that Mr Mackenzie soon followed his example. Then came Mr Cowen, under whom matters came to such a point that Mr Edward Carpenter, having innocently paid hard cash to hear the Ninth Symphony done by the famous Philharmonic band, wrote to the papers indignantly describing the sort of value he had received.

June 24 1891

Brahms seems to have been impressed by the fact that Beethoven produced remarkable effects by persisting with his pedal points long after Mozart would have resolved them, and to have convinced himself by an obvious logical process that it must be possible to produce still more remarkable results by outdoing Beethoven in persistency. And so indeed it is, as Bach proved before Mozart was born. Only somehow it has not come off in Brahms' hands, though he has prolonged and persisted to the verge of human endurance. Yet, as I say, the academic gentlemen like it, and seem pleased even by those endless repetitions, which are only the "rosalias" of the old Italian masses in a heavy and pretentious disguise. I can only say, with due respect, that I disagree with the academic gentlemen.

The fact is, there is nothing a genuine musician regards with more jealousy than an attempt to pass off the forms of music for music itself, especially those forms which have received a sort of consecration from their use by great composers in the past. Unfortunately, such impostures are sure of support from the sort of people — pretty numerous in this country as far as art is concerned — who think that it is the cowl that makes the monk. Any conspiracy between a musician and a literary man to set Wardour Street Jacobean English to Wardour Street Handelian counterpoint will find ready victims in this class, which may be seen at any festival impartially applauding the music of Handel and the profane interpolations of any opera singer who has learned by experience how to turn its ignorant hero-worship to account.

Sometimes, of course, we have, for the sake of some respected professor, to put up with performances of honest pieces of pedantry like the oratorios of Kiel of Berlin, or Macfarren, not to mention names of the living. But I altogether demur to making concessions of this kind to Brahms. It will only end in his doing it again; for his extraordinary mechanical power of turning out the most ponderous description of music positively by tons, and the stupendous seriousness with which he takes this gift, are unrestrained by any consciousness on his part of the commonplaceness of his ideas, which makes his tone poetry all but worthless, or of the lack of constructive capacity which makes his "absolute music" incoherent. He is quite capable of writing half a dozen more Requiems, all as insufferable as this one, if we hail him as "the most prominent living representative of the classical school," as some enthusiastic simpleton did the other day on the strength of a couple of motets which were inferior in every essential characteristic of the classical school to the best bits of part-writing in **Sir Arthur Sullivan's** comic operas.

These are not gracious things to say of a composer who has written so many really pretty trifles; but self-defense is the first law of Nature; and though I am at this moment lying broiling on the sands at Broadstairs, at peace with all mankind, and indulgently disposed even towards Brahms, I can say no less when I think of that dreary Requiem, and of the imminent danger of its being repeated next season.

July 8 1891

[When Gilbert and Sullivan separated after producing *THE GONDOLIERS* in 1889, Richard D'Oyly Carte looked for new works to present at his Savoy Theatre. *THE NAUTCH GIRL* was the first non-Gilbert and Sullivan "Savoy Opera," but it was designed to resemble Gilbert and Sullivan, in particular *THE MIKADO*, with its exotic oriental setting. Nautch is a style of dancing from India.]

On thinking it over I am inclined to conclude that **Mr D'Oyly Carte** did not quite accurately measure the vacancy made at the **Savoy** by the withdrawal of his dramatic poet [Gilbert] and his tone poet [Sullivan]. His wish to continue on the old lines as closely as possible is obvious; but instead of trying to find another **Gilbert** and another **Sullivan**, he has tried to find another **Mikado**, which, I admit, is exactly what nobody wanted, one **Mikado** being enough for any reasonable generation. Perhaps **Mr Carte** may have found that another **Gilbert** does not exist. That may very well be the case; for **Mr Gilbert**, at his best, was a much cleverer man than most of the playwrights of his day: he could always see beneath the surface of things; and if he could only have seen through them, he might have made his mark as a serious dramatist instead of having, as a satirist, to depend for the piquancy of his ridicule on the general assumption of the validity of the very things he ridiculed. The theme of **The Pirates of Penzance** is essentially the same as that of Ibsen's *Wild Duck*; but we all understood that the joke of the pirate being "the slave of duty" lay in the utter absurdity and topsyturviness of such a proposition, whereas when we read *The Wild Duck* we see that the exhibition of the same sort of slave there as a mischievous fool is no joke at all, but a grimly serious attack on our notion that we need stick at nothing in the cause of duty.

Nevertheless, there was a substratum of earnest in **Mr Gilbert's** joking which showed that he was not exactly the sort of writer whom **Mr Carte** could have replaced by merely going into the Strand in the usual managerial way and hailing the first librettist he met there. Now, in the case of the musician, matters were on a very different footing. Sir **Arthur Sullivan** made his reputation as a composer of comic operas by a consummate savoir faire which was partly, no doubt, a personal and social talent, but which had been cultivated musically by a thorough technical training in the elegant and fastidious school of Mendelssohn, and by twenty years' work in composing for the drawing room, the church, the festival, and the concert room. In 1875, when he composed *TRIAL BY JURY*, no manager would have dreamt of approaching him with a commission for an Offenbachian opera: he was pre-eminently a sentimental and ecclesiastical composer, whose name suggested *Guinevere* and *Thou'rt passing hence*, *Nearer my God to Thee*, and *Onward Christian soldiers*, *In Memoriam*, and the additional accompaniments to Handel's *Jephtha*. When he plunged into the banalities and trivialities of **Savoy** opera he carried his old training with him. He taught the public to understand orchestral fun; but his instrumental jokes, which he never carried too far, were always in good taste; and his workmanship was unfailingly skillful and refined, even when the material was of the cheapest.

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July 8 1891 [Continued]

Why, under these circumstances, **Mr Carte** should have looked to Mr [Edward] Solomon to replace **Sir Arthur** is a problem which reason cannot solve. The right man, [composer] Mr Villiers Stanford, was ready to his hand — for I presume that the composer of the Irish symphony would not disdain to follow in the footsteps of Mozart any more than **Sir Arthur** did [compose operettas]. He [Stanford] has the technical training and the culture which stood **Sullivan** in such good stead; and there must be still alive in him something of the young Irishman of genius who wrote those spirited Cavalier tunes, not to mention some numbers from *The Veiled Prophet*, before he was forced back into the dismal routine of manufacturing impossible trash like *The Revenge* for provincial festival purposes, and into conducting, which is so little his affair that when I lately described his Bach choir work in my unliterary way from the point of view of a person whose business it is to use his ears, the only champion who ventured to say a word in his defense did not dare to sign it. But I do not want to force Mr Stanford on **Mr Carte**. I might have cited Mr Cowen with equal point. He, also, is no more fitted to be a conductor than the majority of brilliant and popular writers are to be editors. My interest in getting both gentlemen back to their proper work, which I take to be intelligent and vivacious dramatic composition, is that it would then become a pleasure to criticize them, instead of, as it generally is at present, a disagreeable duty.

All this may seem rather hard on poor Mr Solomon, the composer upon whom **Mr Carte's** choice has actually fallen. But then Mr Solomon has been very hard on me. He has given me the worst headache I ever had in a theatre by an instrumental score which is more wearisome than the conversation of an inveterate punster, and more noisy than the *melodrame* which accompanies the knockabout business in a music-hall. **Mr Carte** had better remove the bassoon, the piccolo, the cymbals, the triangle, and the drums, both *timpani* and *tamburo*, from the theatre; for Mr Solomon is clearly not to be trusted with them. If **Sir Arthur Sullivan** used these instruments in an artistically comic way once in a thousand bars or so, is that any reason why Mr Solomon should use them in an inartistically comic way nine hundred and ninety-nine times in the same period? Besides, **Sir Arthur** only did it to point an allusion. Mr Solomon does it, allusion or no allusion, out of a mere schoolboyish itching to lark with the instruments. When he has an allusion to excuse him, he does not make it with anything like the neatness which he showed once or twice in his *Penelope*. Sometimes he simply stops the opera whilst the band play a fragment from some familiar work, and then calmly resumes. This is how he manages the phrase from the Hallelujah Chorus which follows the reference to the Salvation Army, a jape which is open to the double objection that the warriors of the Salvation Army never sing the Hallelujah Chorus, and that Mr Solomon ought to have more regard for his own music than to remind people of Handel's whilst it is proceeding. In the end this topical sort of orchestration becomes distracting, worrying, even exasperating.

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July 8 1891 [Continued]

I do not insist on this to disparage Mr Solomon's incessant inventive activity, or to drive him back into routine instrumentation. But I certainly do wish to recall him to the necessity of exercising that activity under strictly artistic conditions, the first of these being that the score shall be at least agreeable to the ear, if it is too much to ask that it shall be beautiful.

Nothing in *THE NAUTCH GIRL* sustains the orchestral traditions of comic opera — the delicacy and humor of Auber, the inimitable effervescence of Offenbach, or the musicianly smoothness and charm of **Sullivan** and Cellier, all of whom felt that the function of the orchestra was primarily to make music, and only secondarily to make fun. If Mr Solomon ever had that feeling, he has allowed it to become blunted; and for want of its guidance he has now landed himself in mere horse-play, and brought the artistic standard at our leading comic opera house down with a run. The remedy for him is by no means to acquire the polite but unprogressive technique of our Mendelssohn scholars, which, though it would carry him a safe distance, would then stop him dead, but simply to cultivate the sense of beauty in music until it becomes an infallible monitor as to the point at which those twitches on the piccolo, and grunts on the bassoon, and slams on the drum cease to amuse, and become offensive disfigurements of the tone-fabric instead of eccentric ornaments upon it.

Of the opera as an artistic whole I cannot very well speak, because it hardly is an artistic whole. The book was evidently selected for the sake of its resemblance to **The Mikado**, of which it might almost be called a paraphrase if it were not that the secession of Mr Grossmith and his replacement by Mr Wyatt has necessitated the substitution of a second edition of the *DUKE OF PLAZA TORO* for the *LORD HIGH EXECUTIONER*. The managerial argument evidently was that since **The Mikado** had been so unlike externally to any previous **Savoy** opera, the way to secure a repetition of its success was to produce the most slavish possible imitation of the best known previous **Savoy** opera. Managers always reason in this way. The result on the first night was that when the rather characterless equivalents of **The Mikado** opening chorus, and of *A WANDERING MINSTREL*, and of the three girls' trio had been sung, there were signs of the settling down of an ominous dullness, which was only dispelled by the appearance of Mr Rutland Barrington, who changed the fortunes of the evening, and, in fact, saved the opera.
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July 8 1891 [Continued]

At this point, too, the dialogue brightened a good deal; and thenceforth, though there was a plentiful lack of freshness, there was liveliness enough and to spare. Miss Snyders, the only member of the cast whose accomplishments are not too well known to need description, owed her success chiefly to a truly Circassian beauty; for, though she has sufficient taste and address to do her business very presentably, she is not as yet specially interesting as a singer or actress. As usual at the **Savoy**, the piece has been well rehearsed; the *mise-en-scene* is of exceptional excellence; and Mr Charles Harris, the stage-manager, was received with a cordiality which, I hope, convinced him that he has lost nothing by getting rid of the ballets of infants and the interminable processions in which he formerly delighted. As to the music, it is, to say the least, not distinguished; but it is obvious, lively, and easily caught up by the amateur strummer. Those who rejoiced in An everyday young man will be enchanted with Vive la liberté; and if here and there a number is a little too stale and vulgar for even such words as It was all my eye, on the other hand the mosquito song, and one or two others in the same vein, are by no means graceless.

It will not escape observation that the utmost that can be said for THE NAUTCH GIRL amounts to no more than can be said for any piece at the Lyric or the Prince of Wales's. In other words, the **Savoy** has lost its speciality. This, I think, is a misfortune; and if **Mr Carte** wishes to remedy it, and cannot discover two new geniuses, he had better make up his mind at once to give a commission to Mr Grundy for his next libretto, and to Mr Stanford or Mr Cowen for his next score.

November 11 1891

THE BASOCHE [Parisian guild of law clerks that was abolished with the French Revolution] is so good an opera of its kind that I am quite at a loss to explain how if it succeeded in getting itself trusted to the mercy of London. The plan of the work is almost perfect: the dainty combination of farce and fairy tale in an historical framework could hardly be more happily hit off. The farce is void of all vulgarity; the fairy tale proceeds by natural magic alone, giving us its Cinderellas and its princesses without any nursery miracles; and the pie-crust of history is as digestible as if it had been rolled by the great Dumas himself. Add to this that the music has a charming liveliness, and that whilst Messenger, the composer, has avoided the more hackneyed and obvious turns of the modern operatic stock-in-trade in a fresh, clever, cultivated, and ingenious way, yet he does not presume upon his ability.

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Now that **Mr D'Oyly Carte** has at last given us the right sort of theatre for musical comedy [Royal English Opera House], it is too late for Auber: we have had enough of the serenade in *Fra Diavolo* and the Crown Diamonds galop, and can no longer stand the Scribe libretto which sufficed to keep our fathers from grumbling. We want contemporary work of the Auber class. The difficulty, so far, has been to find a contemporary Auber. The **Gilbertian** opera did not exactly fill the vacancy: it was an altogether peculiar product, extravagant and sometimes vulgar, as in the case of the inevitable old woman brought on to be jeered at simply because she was old, but still with an intellectual foundation — with a certain criticism of life in it. When the **Gilbert-Sullivan** series came to an end, the attempt to keep up the school at second-hand produced the old vulgarity and extravagance without the higher element; and **Savoy** opera instantly slipped down towards the lower level. **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, meanwhile, made a spring at the higher one by trying his hand on **Ivanhoe**, which is a good novel turned into the very silliest sort of sham “grand opera.” I hardly believed that the cumulative prestige of Sir Walter Scott, **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, **Mr D'Oyly Carte** with his new English Opera House, and the very strong company engaged, not to mention log-rolling [promoting] on an unprecedented scale, could make *Ivanhoe* pay a reasonable return on the enormous expenditure it cost. Yet it turns out that I either overrated the public or underrated the opera. I fancy I overrated the public.

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November 11 1891 [Continued]

Now LA BASOCHE is exactly what IVANHOE ought to have been. Though it is a comic opera, it can be relished without several years' previous initiation as a bar loafer. The usual assumption that the comic-opera audience is necessarily a parcel of futile blackguards, destitute not only of art and scholarship, but of the commonest human interests and sympathies, is not countenanced for a moment during the performance. The opposite, and if possible more offensive and ridiculous, assumption that it consists of undesirably naïve schoolgirls is put equally out of the question: you can take your daughter to see it without either wishing that you had left her at home or being bored to death. You attain, in short, to that happy region which lies between the pity and terror of tragic opera and the licentious stupidity and insincerity of *opera-bouffe*.

Now comes the question, What is going to happen to THE BASOCHE? The opera-goers who support the long runs upon which **Mr Carte** depends for the recoupment of his princely expenditure, must be largely taken from the social strata upheaved by popular education within the last twenty years. These novices have only just learned, partly from glimpses of Wagner, but mostly from the **Savoy** operas, that music can be dramatic in itself, and that an opera does not mean merely the insertion of songs like When Other Lips into plays otherwise too bad to be tolerated. Only the other day they were encoring The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra la, I forget how many times every evening, with a childish delight in frank tomfoolery and tum-tum which a digger or backwoodsman might have shared with them. In IVANHOE they found plenty of the old rum-tum, with sentimentality substituted for the tomfoolery, and a huge stage glitter; and it is these, and not the elegance of the musical workmanship or the memories of Scott's story, which have kept the work on the stage so long for it is still flourishing: it was revived last Friday, with Mr Barton McGuckin in the title-part.

I begin to think that Mr Sturgis was right in concluding that the first thing to do with Scott, in order to adapt him to the Cambridge Circus audience, was to remove his brains. Now, on the plane of THE BASOCHE there is neither tomfoolery nor sentimentality: the atmosphere is that of high comedy, of the very lightest kind, it is true, but still much cooler, wittier, finer, more intelligent than that of either IVANHOE or THE NAUTCH GIRL. It remains to be seen whether the admirers of these works will respond to the new appeal. If they do not — if **Mr D'Oyly Carte** is forced back on the normal assumption that the respectable opera-goer must be catered for as at best a good-humored, soft-hearted, slow-witted blockhead, void of all intellectual or artistic cultivation, then the critics may as well abandon English opera to its fate for another generation or so. There is no use in our making ourselves disagreeable to the managers by clamoring for higher art, if the managers can simply retort by showing us rows of empty benches as the result of complying with our demands. Deep as is the affection in which I am held by most of our London impresarios, they can hardly be expected to ruin themselves solely to carry out my ideas.

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November 11 1891 [Continued]

Mr Carte, in mounting the piece, seems to have had no misgiving about its running powers. He has not only spent a huge sum of money on it, but he has apparently got value for every penny of his outlay. This sort of economy is so rare among managers — for instance, Mr Irving, in a Shakespearean revival, generally contrives to spoil a scene or two; whilst Sir Augustus Harris will occasionally slaughter a whole opera, like poor Orfeo, by dint of misdirected expenditure — I say it is so rare, that I strongly suspect that **Mrs Carte** comes to the rescue at the ROYAL ENGLISH OPERA just at the point where the other managers break down. However that may be, the only disparaging criticism I have to offer on the staging of THE BASOCHE is, that the dance at the beginning of the third act is a pointless, poorly invented affair, and that the scene, considering that the audience consent to wait half an hour to allow time for its setting, ought to be a wonder of French Gothic, best of the best, which can hardly be said for it at present, handsome as it is.

However, the fact that things have progressed far enough to set me complaining that the scene-painters have not saturated the stage with the architectural beauty of the Middle Ages, proves the attainment of something like perfection from the ordinary standpoint. Bianchini's dresses are admirable; and the movements of the crowds engaged in the action are free alike from the silly stage-drill of *opera-bouffe* and the hopeless idiocy and instinctive ugliness of our Italian choristers. As the work has been thoroughly rehearsed, and the band is up to the best English standard of delicacy and steadiness, I think it must be admitted that, incredible as it may sound, we have at last got an opera-house where musical words are treated as seriously and handsomely as dramatic works are at the Lyceum. **Mr Carte** has really put London, as far as his department of art is concerned, in a leading position for us; and the acknowledgment of that service can hardly be too cordial.

The “dram of eale” in the matter is, that THE BASOCHE is the work of a French author and a French composer. Such drawbacks, however, cannot be helped as long as we abandon high musical comedy to the French, and persist in setting men who are not dramatists to compile nonsensical plays of the obsolete Miller and his Men type, in order that popular musicians, of proved incapacity for tragedy, may pepper them with sentimental ballads, and make royalties out of them when paragraphists have puffed them as pages of grand opera.

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November 11 1891 [Continued]

For the principal performers in THE BASOCHE I have nothing but praise, as they are all quite equal to the occasion, and do no less than their best. A prodigious improvement in the diction and stage manners of the company has taken place since the opening of the theatre. Even Mr Ben Davies conquers, not without evidences of an occasional internal struggle, his propensity to bounce out of the stage picture and deliver his high notes over the footlights in the attitude of irrepressible appeal first discovered by the inventor of Jack-in-the-box. Being still sufficiently hearty, good-humored, and well-filled to totally dispel all the mists of imagination which arise from his medieval surroundings, he is emphatically himself, and not Clement Marot; but except in so far as his opportunities are spoiled in the concerted music by the fact that his part is a baritone part, and not a tenor one, he sings satisfactorily, and succeeds in persuading the audience that the Basoche king very likely was much the same pleasant sort of fellow as Ben Davies.

Miss Palliser is to be congratulated on having a light, florid vocal part instead of a broad, heavy one, in which she would probably knock her voice to pieces through her hard way of using it; but the inevitable association of the light music with comedy is less fortunate for her, as her dramatic capacity evidently lies rather in the expression of strong feeling.

On the other hand, Miss Lucile Hill, who was thrown away as Rowena, has in Colette a part which exactly suits her genuine humor, her quiet cleverness, and her well, whatever is the feminine of bonhomie. And then she affords one the relief of hearing a singer whose method of producing her voice is not also a method of finally destroying it. Nine times out of ten, when a prima donna thinks I am being thrilled through and through by her vibrant tones, I am simply wrestling with an impulse to spring on the stage and say, "My dear young lady, pray *don't*. Your voice is not a nail, to be driven into my head: I did not come here to play Sisera to your Jael. Pray unstring yourself, subdue your ebullient self-assertiveness, loosen your chin and tongue, round the back of your throat, and try to realize that the back of the pit is not a thousand yards beyond ordinary earshot." Miss Hill, far too sensible to need such exhortation, gets her encores as triumphantly as if she shortened her natural term as a singer by two years every time she sang a song in public. And her acting, for the purpose of this particular part, could hardly be bettered.

Mr Burgon, Mr Bispham, and the rest, down to the players of the smallest parts, make the most of their tolerably easy work. Altogether, if we do not take kindly to THE BASOCHE, we may make up our minds to ninety-nine chances in the hundred of having to fall back on something worse in its place.

December 16 1891

Thirty-three years that have elapsed since [Peter] Cornelius composed his **BARBER OF BAGDAD**, which the Royal College students introduced to England last Wednesday at the **Savoy** Theatre....Its late arrival here is due, not to any peculiarity in the work itself, but to the poverty of our operatic resources, which has limited us for so many years to grand opera on the one hand, and opera bouffe on the other, with no intermediate theatre for the higher artistic forms of light and comic opera. I need not now repeat all that I had to say on this point when **LA BASOCHE** was produced. Suffice it that **THE BARBER OF BAGDAD** — very different from our threadbare old acquaintance, once so prosperous, the Barber of Seville — is an excellent specimen of comic opera taken seriously in an artistic sense. The concerted music is remarkably good, especially a quintet, Oh? Mustapha! in the second act, which is, besides, highly comic. The weakest parts are the patter solos of the barber, which are too ponderous in their movement and heavy in their style for any country on earth except Germany. Such doggerel as Lore academical, physical, chemical; Learning grammatical; Facts mathematical; Rules arithmetical, trigonometrical, etc., etc., etc., if they must be set to music for the hundredth time, had better still be set in the time-honored lilt which **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, following the example of Mozart and Rossini, chose for the lists of accomplishments of the Major-General in **The Pirates** or the Colonel in **Patience**.

The performance at the **Savoy** was of the usual Royal College sort, carefully prepared as a task by the principals, and enjoyed as a rare bit of fun by the chorus and band, but uninspired and amateurish. The tenor, Mr William Green, had to struggle not only against the irrational but uncontrollable nervousness of a novice, but against the rational nervousness caused by his having neither been taught how to produce his voice nor succeeded in finding out a safe method for himself. He was anything but happy during the first act, singing mostly flat; but in the second, when the worst was over and he was beginning to feel more at ease, he rallied, and came off with glory. I still hold to my opinion that in none of these large music-teaching institutions is there, as yet, any instruction to be had in the physical act of singing. When I see a set of pupils among whom there is a certain clearly evident agreement as to aiming at certain graces and avoiding certain blemishes of style, I conclude that they have had some common teaching on these points.

But when I find, at the same time, that one of them will produce his voice as if he were trying to crack a walnut between his vocal chords, whilst his neighbor depends on spasms of the diaphragm for vocal execution, and yet another regards the judicious use of the nose as the true secret of tone-coloring, then I naturally conclude that the motto of the professorial staff is, "Make yourself a singer as best you can; and we will then give you excellent precepts as to what a singer should and should not do." Fortunately, most of the cast of **THE BARBER OF BAGDAD** were clever enough to have come to no serious harm under this system. Mr Sandbrook and Mr Magrath are comparatively oldhands: the first much improved, the second not so much so. Mr Magrath has the misfortune to be an Irishman, with all that musical facility and native genius which have prevented so many of his countrymen from going on to acquire a seriously cultivated artistic sensibility.

January 6 1892

Need I say anything more in justification of **The Mountebanks** [Pretenders], a **Gilbert** opera with Cellier as composer vice **Sullivan**, retired, than that it made me laugh heartily several times. The brigands whose motto is “Heroism without Risk”; the alchemist who pays his bills with halfpence, accompanied by a written undertaking to transmute them into gold as soon as he discovers the philosopher’s stone; the girl who thinks herself plain and her lover handsome but has to confess to him that she finds herself in a hopeless minority on both subjects; the unsuccessful Hamlet who so dreads to be ever again laughed at by the public that he has turned clown; the mountebank who, pretending that he has swallowed poison and is in the agonies of stomach-ache, is forced to swallow an elixir which has the magic property of turning all pretenses into realities; the transformation by this same elixir of the brigands into monks, the clown and columbine into automatic clockwork figures, the village belle into an old hag, the heroine into a lunatic, and the rustic hero into a duke: if all these went for no more than one laugh apiece, the opera would come out ahead of many of its rivals in point of fun. With them, however, the merit of the piece stops: every line that goes a step further is a line to the bad.

Mr Gilbert has gone wrong in his old way: he has mixed his *genres*. In this Shakespeare-ridden land one cannot be a stickler for the unities of time and place; but I defy any dramatist to set the fantastic and the conventional, the philosophic and the sentimental, jostling one another for stage-room without spoiling his play. Now **The Mountebanks** begins in an outrageous Sicily, where the stage-struck people want to play Shakespeare, and where impossible brigands, prosecuting farcical vendettas, agree to hold a revel for twenty-four days on wine ordered from the chemist’s, and not to cheer during all that time above a whisper, because of a bedridden alchemist upstairs, shattered by the repeated explosions which have attended his researches into the transmutation of metals. As aforesaid, brigands, mountebanks, and everyone else become enchanted by drinking a magic potion, and are restored to their natural, or rather normal, condition by the burning of the label of the bottle which contains the philtre.

Clearly there is no room here for the realism of Ibsen or the idealism of Drury Lane. That a man so clever as **Mr Gilbert** could have supposed that the atmosphere of such a Sicily could be breathed by a figure from the conventional drama is a startling example of the illusions of authorship. He undoubtedly did suppose it, however; for one of the characters, a girl who loves the hero and is cordially detested by him, might have been turned out by Tom Taylor himself. When Alfredo impersonates the duke, and is caught in that assumption by the action of the elixir, she impersonates the duchess and shares his fate, thereby becoming his adored wife.

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January 6 1892 [Continued]

Incidentally she delays the action, bores the audience, and, being quite unfancifully conceived, repeatedly knocks the piece off its proper plane. In the second act, she goes to the incredible length of a sentimental *dénouement*. She “relents” at the entreaty of the heroine, not in the fashion of the **Pirate of Penzance** on learning that his prisoner is an orphan — the only variety of ruth [pity] conceivable in **Gilbertland** — but actually in the orthodox manner of Hubert in King John.

I am afraid that Miss Lucille Saunders will think me grossly inconsiderate when I say, as I must, that if her part were completely cut out, the opera would be vastly improved; but that is certainly my opinion. Alfredo could quite **Gilbertianly** be represented as devoted to an absent duchess whom he had never seen; and the incident of Pietro losing the charm might easily be managed otherwise, if not wholly omitted. Under these circumstances it is little to be thankful for that Ultrice, though she is ugly, is at least not old. The old woman of the play is happily not a new LADY JANE or KATISHA, but a young maiden who takes the elixir when simulating octogenarianism, and pays the penalty like the rest.

Another weakness in the scheme is that there is no dramatic action in the second act nothing but a simple exhibition of the characters in the plight to which the elixir reduced them at the end of the first. They walk on in twos; sing comic duets recounting the anomalies of their condition in **Gilbertian** verse; and go off again, all except the incorrigibly malapropos Ultrice, who sings a tragic scena which nobody wants to hear. And nothing else happens except an incident planned in the first act and deprived of its *raison d'être* by the charm, and the sentimental *dénouement*, which is dragged in by the ears (if I may so mix my metaphors) when the fun begins to wear out. The result is that the opera is virtually over ten minutes before the curtain falls; and this means that the curtain falls rather flatly, especially as the composer signally failed to come to the rescue at this particular point.

Cellier's strength never lay in the working up of finales; but this one flickers and goes out so suddenly that one can almost hear ghostly muffled drums in the orchestra. The rest of the score is what might have been expected from the composer — that is, better than the occasion required it to be; and in this very superfluity of musical conscience one recognizes his want of the tact which has saved **Sir Arthur Sullivan** from ever wasting musical sentiment on **Mr Gilbert**. Musicians will not think the worse of Cellier for this. There are many points, such as the graceful formalism of the little overture, with its orthodox “working out,” and the many tender elaborations in the accompaniments, all done from sheer love of music, which will shield Cellier more effectually than his new dignity of *de mortuis* from that reproach of musical unscrupulousness which qualifies every musician's appreciation of the **Sullivan-esque** savoir-faire.

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But from the more comprehensive standpoint which is necessary in judging an opera, it must be confessed that, since **Sullivan** is spontaneously vivacious where Cellier was only energetic and that, too, with an effort which, though successful, was obvious and since **Sullivan** is out of all comparison more various in his moods, besides being a better song-writer, **Mr Gilbert** cannot, on the whole, be said to have changed for the better when he left the **Savoy** for the Lyric. Only, Cellier's master, Sterndale Bennett, would not have thought the worse of him on that account; nor do I set it down here as any disparagement to him.

In speaking of Cellier as generally less vivacious than **Sullivan**, I do not of course imply that he is behindhand in those musical facetiousnesses which tickled the public so hugely at the **Savoy**. The duet for the automata with the quaint squeaking accompaniment, the clockwork music, and the showman's song with big drum obbligato by Mr Monkhouse, are quite up to the **Savoy** standard if, indeed, that does not prove too modest an appreciation of the popularity of Put a penny in the slot. The old and easy expedient of making the men sing a solemn chorus and the women a merry one successively (or vice versa, as in **Patience**), and then repeat them simultaneously, is achieved in the second act to the entire satisfaction of those who regard it as one of the miracles of counterpoint.

One of the operatic jokes is the best in the whole **Gilbertian** series. The monkized brigands receive the Duke with a mock ecclesiastical chorus on the syllable La. He expresses his acknowledgments by an elaborate recitative in the same eloquent terms, and, having to finish on the dominant, and finding himself at a loss to hit that note, explains that he is "in want of a word," whereupon they offer him La on the tonic. He shakes his head, and a monk gives him La on the dominant, which he immediately accepts with an air of relief, and so finishes triumphantly. Not to damp my readers too much, I may add that anybody with an ear can appreciate the joke when they hear it without in the least knowing what "the dominant" means.

Mr Gilbert has not much to complain of in the way his work is given to the public. Miss Aida Jenoure makes a hit as the dancing girl who becomes an automaton. She is clever, funny, pretty, a sufficient singer and dancer, with the only woman's part in the opera worth having. Poor Miss Lucille Saunders does her work earnestly, in spite of the fact that the better she does it the more heartily the audience (through no fault of her own) wish her at the Adelphi. Miss Geraldine Ulmar can do little except clothe herself in the dignity of leading lady, and get through her part as prettily as possible. She rather declines to be mad in the second act, mistrusting, as I surmise, the effect of vociferous lunacy on the voice.

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January 6 1892 [Continued]

Miss Eva Moore, as one of a subsidiary pair of lovers, brings in a second tenor, Mr Cecil Burt, who, though condemned to impersonate a particularly fatuous brigand, and to answer to the name of Risotto all of which he does without apparent reluctance looks like an early portrait of Daniel O'Connell by Sir Thomas Lawrence. Mr Robertson, the leading tenor, retains all his freshness, even to the extent of an occasional rawness of voice which suggests that it has not yet attained full maturity, and an air of unfamiliarity with the stage which often clings for long to men who are not mummers by natural temperament. The comedians are as funny as could be desired. Mr Monkhouse's Bartolo is a genuine creation: he shows a thoroughly artistic perception of the fact that as the pseudo-Ibsenite clown with drum and pipes he has to make his part funny, whereas in the automaton scenes his part makes him funny, and he has only to be careful not to spoil it by trying to help it too much. Mr Brough gets everything that is to be got out of the business of the chief mountebank; and Mr Wyatt is in the highest spirits, dancing less than usual, but executing every step with all his old air of receiving the most exquisite anguish from the exercise. Furneaux Cook, as the innkeeper, describes the alchemist with an unembarrassed conviction which sends the fun well across the footlights. And the band, under Mr Caryll, is excellent. I am bound to mention, though, that I am writing all this before the first public performance, on the strength of a dress rehearsal. But I do not think I shall have occasion to change any of my judgments, however the cat may jump.

The death of Cellier has diverted public attention from that of Weist Hill, who was chiefly remarkable, as far as my knowledge of him went, for what he did as a conductor. The set of concerts he conducted for Madame Viard Louis, when orchestral music in London was at its lowest ebb, can hardly yet be forgotten by the survivors of that famine. Had he been lucky enough to find a capitalist of sufficient staying powers, he would undoubtedly have anticipated Mr Henschel's London Symphony enterprise. He knew that the London orchestral forces of his day were capable of extraordinary feats of combined speed and precision; and he saw, what everybody has since learned from Richter, the need for enlarging the orchestra and insisting on the importance of broad handling and sustained tone. It is not altogether to the credit of English musical enterprise that it should have been possible for him to give such signal proofs of capacity as he did with Madame Viard Louis without succeeding in finding another backer when that lady's resources were exhausted.

February 3 1892

The London Symphony Concert on the 26th was none the worse for its postponement as far as the band was concerned, though it unluckily found Mrs Henschel [soprano] on the sick-list. The Lohengrin prelude and Schubert's unfinished symphony in H moll were played *con amore*, and went splendidly, in spite of a rough detail or two. Mr Gorski gave a respectable performance of Max Bruch's first violin concerto.

The Hamlet music, eked out a little by some illogical repeats, was naturally much more effective in its stormier phrases than it is when played at the Haymarket by a band of forty thrust under the stage. In dramatic force and consistency it is undoubtedly better than anything which our great theatrical revivals have yet produced. The impetuous interlude, in which occur the remarkably graphic passages for the piccolo which laugh away the Ophelia motive, is, on the whole, the best number. The pastorale, the march, and the dirge would probably have been better done by **Sir Arthur Sullivan** or any of our "absolute musicians."

February 10 1892

[The Royal English Opera House of Richard D'Oyly Carte was the home of Sullivan's *IVANHOE* which had its initial run from January 31, 1891 to July 1891 — when the opera house closed for the summer. After the summer came *THE BASOCHE* which played there from November 3, 1891 to January 16, 1892.]

The closing of the ROYAL ENGLISH OPERA HOUSE has elicited a chorus of indignant despair from us all as to the possibility of doing anything for a public which will not support *THE BASOCHE*. It does not appear to be certain that *THE BASOCHE* is stark dead — I see it stated that it is only speechless for the moment; but, assuming that it has had its utmost run, let me point out that it is not true that it has received no support. There are many degrees of failure. If I compose an opera, and get **Mr Carte** to produce it at his theatre, with the result that not a single person is found willing to pay to hear it, that will undoubtedly be a failure.

Suppose, however, that **Mr Carte**, bent on surpassing all previous examples of managerial enterprise and munificence, spends £1,000,000 sterling in mounting my opera, and that it is played for a thousand nights to a thousand people every night with the free list entirely suspended, that will be a failure too. Failure means simply failure to replace the capital expended with a fair profit to boot in a single run; and this may be brought about by the manager spending more than the first run is worth, as well as by the public paying less. The fact is, there is no grand opera in the world which will run long enough in one capital to pay for a complete and splendid *mise-en-scène*. On the other hand, such a *mise-en-scène* will last for years as part of the stock of the house.

What **Mr Carte** wants is a repertory, and a position in the social economy of London like that occupied in Germany by such opera-houses as those of Frankfort or Munich, where works like *The Trumpeter of Sakkingen* or *The Barber of Bagdad* may have a prodigious vogue without the manager dreaming for a moment of running them exclusively and leaving the town for months bereft of all opportunity of hearing *Der Freischütz*, or *Fidelio*, or *Die Walküre*, or *Le Nozze di Figaro*. And here **Mr Carte** will recoil, and ask me whether I seriously propose that he should attempt to recover his outlay on *IVANHOE* and *THE BASOCHE* by mounting half-a-dozen grand operas to sandwich them. Certainly not, if the mounting is to be as sumptuous as that of these two operas. But why should it be? Of course, it is impossible to insult gentlemen like *Messager* and **Sir Arthur Sullivan** with less than the best of everything; but there is no need to be particular with Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, and Wagner. They are all dead; and when they were alive they had to put up with what they could get.

[Continued]

February 10 1892 [Continued]

Signor Lago has shown that the way to make money out of the classic masterpieces of lyric drama is to practice the severest asceticism, not to say downright mortification, in respect of scenery, dresses, and everything in which **Mr Carte** is habitually extravagant. Not that I would have **Mr Carte** too slavishly copy Signor Lago, who, perhaps, overdoes his Lenten severities a trifle; but there is no avoiding the conclusion that if the expensive ventures of the ROYAL ENGLISH OPERA are to be spread over the full period needed to produce a reasonable return on them, their runs must be broken by performances of attractive operas mounted neatly but not gaudily, and perhaps performed on “popular nights” with lower prices than when the stage is *en grande tenue* for IVANHOE, etc. I see nothing else for it, unless **Mr Carte** by chance discovers some individual performer whose magnetism may do for THE BASOCHE what Mr Irving’s does for the Lyceum plays. The smallness of the cultivated section of our population is the disabling factor in all these costly schemes for performing musical works of the best class. London, artistically speaking, is still a mere village.

March 23 1892

A modern disciple of Schubert — or at least a walker in his ways — is Mr Algernon Ashton, who gave a concert of his own music at Prince's Hall last Wednesday. Mr Algernon Ashton goes in for the delight of creation, stopping short at the point where the intellectual grapple turns that delight into the grim effort which makes the greater sort of creators rather glad when it is over. He is at no loss for pretty themes — who is, nowadays? — and he dandles them in his arms, in at one key and out at another, in a very tender, playful, and fatherly way. This is engaging, and even interesting, for a limited period — usually something short of four movements; but it is not quite the same thing as composing quintets in the sense established by the practice of the greatest masters. It may be that I was lazy and discursive, and did not concentrate my attention with sufficient intensity on Mr Ashton's ideas.

Anyhow, I thought the quintet purposeless and extemporaneous, fluent without being coherent, carefully finished in detail without being elegant or striking on the whole, and generally tending to recall that terrible couplet of **Mr Gilbert's** which so often runs through my head at concerts:

Though I'm anything but clever,
I could talk like that for ever.
[Captain Corcoran in H.M.S. Pinafore]

At the same time, I do not wish it to be inferred that such quintets should not be composed. They give a great deal of pleasure in musical circles where Spohr and Hummel are venerated, and Schubert's violin sonatas not despised. They help to educate the members of such circles in the latest harmonic developments, and to accustom them not to make wry faces in good company when they hear a dominant eleventh in some other form than the venerable four-to-three of the schools. But my business is to declare concerning chamber music offered at Prince's Hall whether it is of the stuff from which Monday Popular programs are made. All I can say is, that Mr Ashton is far from having touched even the Schumann level, without bringing into question the summit marked by Mozart's G minor quintet. He is far more successful in his songs and fantasias, which are pretty, and not lacking in appropriate feeling.

July 13 1892

I have just received the most amusingly frank book I have read for a long time — just the thing for any old musical hand who would like to be led back, without too much detail, over the last thirty years. It is the HISTORY OF THE LEEDS MUSICAL FESTIVAL by Joseph Bennett and Alderman Frederick' Spark. Which of the twain handled the scissors and which the paste is not stated on the title-page; but I think I may venture to guess that Mr Bennett selected the press notices quoted, and supplied most of the pen-and-ink setting for the mosaic of programs, facsimiles, advertisements, letters, balance-sheets, and miscellaneous excerpts of which the volume is composed.

Pray do not suppose that I mention the scissors and paste as a reproach to the authors. On the contrary, they have made the book exactly as it ought to be made. Instead of an essay on the festivals, which would be insufferable, we get all the documents needed to give concert-goers the required information in the form to which they are most accustomed — that of the program and prospectus, which is also the most compact for reference. The statistical particulars are thus packed into a book of 400 pages, which you read easily in two hours, picking out what you are curious about in the programs; skipping the dry records of hours, days, and names of nobodies; abstracting the letters at a glance; and taking the anecdotes and significant bits of narrative at your ease.

Imagine a parcel of Yorkshire manufacturers, trained to go through the world on the understanding that every man with wares to sell is to get as much for them as he can; every man with money to buy to give as little as possible for what wares he wants; and nobody without wares to sell or money to buy with to be considered at all. Conceive these plain dealers suddenly set to bargain with great singers, the highest souled and most sensitive artists of their time, creatures to be approached like princes and princesses, too delicate to name a price, and too proud to endure a bid lower than what they privately think themselves well worth!

Naturally, there was a pretty confusion until Yorkshire discovered that the pursuit of manufacturing profits might pass for disinterested benevolence in comparison with artistic rapacity; that manufacturing competition looked like pure altruism beside musical jealousy; and that manufacturing domineering and push had not a chance against the absolutism of the foreign favorites of the musical public. Prima donna number one coolly demanding (and getting), in addition to her salary, the handsome sum she was to subscribe with queenly charity to the Leeds hospitals; prima donna number two inserting a clause in her agreement that no artist engaged should be paid more than herself; Costa ordering the committee not to write letters but to send an ambassador to see him, as if Leeds lay within ten minutes' walk of London, and browbeating them out of every proposal to get a little ahead of Rossini; impresarios planting unspeakable miscellaneous concerts of operatic bits and scraps on them as choice expositions of the highest glories of musical art: these and cognate matters are recorded with all possible openness in Messrs Bennett and Spark's volume.

[Continued]

July 13 1892 [Continued]

The Leeds committee-men do not always cut a very dignified figure in its pages. When Charles Hallé treated them politely, reasonably, and unassumingly, in a thoroughly artistic spirit, they immediately proceeded to insult him, and let him know that his Manchester orchestra was not good enough for Leeds — that they were accustomed to a first-rate article from London, conducted by the great Costa. When Costa treated them with contempt, sneered at their ignorance, personally insulted those who dared to argue with him, publicly brought their Yorkshire novelty (Smart's *Bride of Dunkerron*) to grief in order, I presume, to have an excuse for refusing to have anything to do with novelties in future, and demanded a hundred guineas more for his services than Hallé, they groveled before him, and only fell back on **Sir Arthur Sullivan** when their Neapolitan tyrant finally refused to have anything further to do with them. And yet, while Costa was treating them in this way, they had the assurance to write to Liszt asking him whether he would not like to "submit" a work of his for performance at the Festival (of 1877); which of course elicited a snub from him.

Down to 1877 the majority of the committee never got beyond the primitive notion that a great musical event was one at which Tietjens sang and Costa conducted. I should myself have been educated in that superstition if it had been possible to educate me at all, which it most fortunately was not. Poor Tietjens herself, I imagine, believed in it devoutly; and so did Costa: it was not until she died and he repudiated the committee that Leeds at last found out that familiarity with *The Messiah*, *Elijah*, and the overture to *William Tell*, was not the climax of nineteenth-century musical culture. Since then, thanks to the tact of **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, the Leeds Festival has become a really important musical event. The forthcoming performances in October will be welcomed by all except those who incautiously attended the benumbing fourth day of the 1889 Festival, on which occasion the whole West Riding [part of Yorkshire] was plunged into listless gloom by an unprovoked performance of Brahms' *Requiem*.

On one point this book, which may be obtained at Novello's for the considerable sum of twenty-five shillings, has made me somewhat remorseful. A friend of mine asked me the other evening: whether the Opera, at which I am so constantly grumbling, is not far better than it used to be under the regime that collapsed so soon after Costa vanished. And I replied, in the words of Matthew Bagnet, "Yes; but I never own to it. Discipline must be maintained." The memories awakened by the programs in the *HISTORY OF THE LEEDS MUSICAL FESTIVAL* bring home to me how great the advance has been, and nerves me to clamor implacably for further progress.

September 28 1892

To a superficial person it may seem that my objection to a mixture of *genres* in opera has been most signally exploded by the huge success of **Haddon Hall** at the **Savoy** last Saturday. I do not admit this for a moment. I contend that **Savoy** opera is a *genre* in itself; and that **Haddon Hall** is the highest and most consistent expression it has yet attained. This result is due to the critical insight of Mr Grundy. He is evidently a frequenter of Covent Garden; for he has discovered that what Italian opera desperately lacks is the classic element of comic relief. He has sat out the last acts of Lucia, and has felt, as I so often have myself, that what was wanted there was a comic Highlander with a fling, and a burlesque chorus to enliven the precepts of Raimondo.

He has then gone to the **Savoy**, and has seen that there, too, relief was wanted — sentimental relief generally, but anyhow relief from **Mr Gilbert**, whose great fault was that he began and ended with himself, and gave no really congenial opportunities to the management and the composer. He exploited their unrivalled *savoir faire* to his head's content; but he starved their genius, possibly because he did not give them credit for possessing any.

Now **THE BASOCHE** and **Haddon Hall** prove that **Mr and Mrs D'Oyly Carte** have unmistakable genius for management: their stage pictures are as recognizable by the style alone as a picture by Watteau or Monticelli. You do not catch them spending ten guineas on two-penn'orth of show: they are at once munificent and economical, getting their full pound of beauty out of every yard of costly stuff on the stage. As to **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, he is certainly not a dramatic composer; but he has over and over again proved that in the sort of descriptive ballad which touches on the dramatic his gift is as genuine as that of Schubert or Loewe. In this province he excites a feeling which is as different as possible from the cynical admiration of his adroitness, his tact, his wit, and his professional dexterity, which is all that could ever be evoked by his settings of **Mr Gilbert's** aridly fanciful lyrics, whether for the stage or the drawing room.

All these observations have evidently been made by Mr Grundy, who has accordingly devised a unique entertainment, consisting of a series of charming stage-pictures which at once put you in the mood to listen to episode after episode of descriptive ballad music, full of unforced feeling, and tenderly handled down to the minutest detail of their skillful and finished workmanship. After each of these episodes you are let down into indulgent boredom during a brief would-be dramatic number, in which the principals are consciously ridiculous, and the music suggestive of nothing but a storm in a tin pot. And then, just as you are beginning to feel dull and apprehensive of failure, comes the comic relief — the unspeakably outrageous but unspeakably welcome comic relief.

[Continued]

September 28 1892 [Continued]

The patter song which Mr Kenningham [as Oswald] suddenly fired into the house from a masked battery in the form of a futile “dramatic” trio in the first act, produced, by its mere unexpectedness and contrast, an effect beyond the reach of Mr Grossmith.

- [DOROTHY. Oh, tell me, what is a maid to say,
 What is a maid to do,
 When heart says “Go,” and duty “Stay,”
 And she’d to both be true?
 Oh, tell me, what is a maid to say?
 Shall it be rice or rue?
 When heart says “Yea,” and duty “Nay,”
 What is a maid to do?
- THE THREE. Yea or nay? Go or stay?
 To which be false, to which be true?
 When a maiden wavers ’twixt yea and nay —
 Shall it be rice or rue?
- OSWALD. Thou askest what is a maid to say,
 What is a maid to do?
 I answer, if her heart say yea,
 Her duty says so too.
- DORCAS. I can but tell thee what I should say,
 Tell thee what I should do;
 I’d go in showers of rice away,
 And leave behind the rue.
- THE THREE. Yea or nay? Go or stay?
 To which be false, to which be true?
 When a maiden wavers ’twixt yea and nay—
 Shall it be rice or rue?]

Later on, the business of Mr Rutland Barrington and the comic Puritans, who are addicted to Stage Socialism (a very fearful variety), created, uproarious merriment; and if Mr Rutland Barrington’s elaborate japes on the land question fell somewhat flat, it was probably not so much because the joke was at the expense of the audience as because everybody had got accustomed during the late general election to hear better and fresher fun made out of the subject at every political meeting throughout the country. In the second act the comic business was less happy. The act began with it; so that it did not take the form of “relief”; and the hopes raised by the entrance of Mr Denny in a kilt, playing the bagpipes, were speedily dashed by the discovery that his Scotch dialect was spurious, and that Mr Grundy’s treatment of the tempting theme of Social Puritanism was cheap and witless, the duet, *If We But Had Our Way*, being the least successful comic number in the opera.

[Continued]

September 28 1892 [Continued]

It is always a mistake to undervalue our friend the enemy; and Mr Grundy had better recognize that unless his social satires are at least as smart as Mr Hugh Price Hughes's sermons, Mr Hughes will get the better of him. The real relief in this act occurs when **Sir Arthur Sullivan** takes up the running with his romantic setting of the dependent scene as a quartet, or rather as a descriptive ballad for four voices. (By the way, in the previous comic trio Hoity Toity, the composer has reproduced the exact movement of *For A British Tar Is A Soaring Soul* from **Pinafore**, the notes alone being altered.) The following few minutes, during which the stage remains a black void, with hammer-and-tongs storm music and patent lightning flashes recurring with unerring precision in the same four spots, is merely an effective dodge to intensify the brilliancy of the ensuing ballroom scene, which is a Cartesian triumph.

It was the last act, however, which swept away all doubts as to the popular success of the opera. First, a sentimental duet for Mr Green [as Sir George Vernon] and Miss Brandram [as Lady Vernon] brought down the house [see below]; and then the comic business became irresistible. A song for Mr Rutland Barrington [as Rupert Vernon], with a general dance in which he joins after a painful struggle with his conscience, was none the less triply encored because much the same thing had been seen in the *VICAR OF BRAY*.

[SIR GEORGE. Bride of my youth, wife of my age,
 Who, hand in hand and page by page,
 Hast read life's book with me,
 Upon whose knee our son hath slept,
 Together we have smiled and wept
 Over his grave — the sea.
 Until we quit life's chequered scene,
 Love, let us keep our friendship green;
 Friends we have always, always been,
 Friends let us always be.

LADY VERNON. Our years are spent, our heads are grey,
 And slowly ebbs the tide away
 That bears us out to sea.

SIR GEORGE. I print a kiss upon thy brow;
 We are too old to quarrel now;
 What have I left but thee?

BOTH. Until we quit life's chequered scene,
 Love, let us keep our friendship green;
 Friends we have always, always been,
 Friends let us always be!]

September 28 1892 [Continued]

Yet it was no sooner over than it was eclipsed by the entry of Mr Denny [as The McCrankie], in breeches, to sing an absurdly funny musical burlesque of Auld Lang Syne, and to dance again, and yet again — the encores seemed endless — a Highland fling, in which he was seconded with remarkable grace and *élan* by Miss Nita Cole [as Nance].

[Hech, mon! hech, mon! it gars me greet
 Tae see thy capers mony,
 When nature made the earth sae sweet,
 An' life micht be sae bonny.
 Why nae accept what fortune sen's
 An' learn that earth an' heaven are frien's?
 Eneugh o' hanky-panky —
 Gie ower thy freaks
 An' don the breeks,
 An' be a mon, McCrankie!
 I've got 'em on, McCrankie!
 At first I thocht the sudden swap
 Was jist a wee bit risky;
 But noo they're fastened o' the tap
 I feel quite young an' frisky.
 To show ye jist the sort o' thing,
 I'm gaun tae dance a Heeland fling,
 An' if ye'll help, I'll thank'ee.
 A wee bit skirl —
 A wee bit whirl —
 A fling wi' auld McCrankie!]

All the critics in the house exclaimed as one man that if something of this sort could be done at Covent Garden with the last act of *La Favorita*, *Il Travatore*, etc., etc. their lives would be indefinitely prolonged — which, by the bye, is an argument against the innovation.

Of the cast of established favorites I need say little more than that they fully sustained their reputation. Miss Lucille Hill's part [Dorothy Vernon] is more difficult and less effective than that which she had in *THE BASOCHE*, but her ability is no less conspicuous. Mr. Courtice Pounds [John Manners], costumed as a harmony in strawberries-and-cream, was nervously screwed up to the tenseness of a compressed spiral spring, in which condition he declared [to Dorothy], with convulsive elocution, that Too-Wen'ty [twenty] cousins should not interrupt his love-making. [Let twenty cousins come, I fear them not! Thy word is pledged.] He also took his high notes flat; expressed his emotions facially in a manner extremely disconcerting so the spectators; and generally did himself injustice. These, however, were clearly mere first-night aberrations, the effect of an unblunted artistic sensitiveness; and he is no doubt by this time as good a John Manners as could be desired. [Continued]

September 28 1892 [Continued]

Mr Rutland Barrington [Rupert Vernon] was capital, though his compulsory lapses into melodrama tried the gravity of the audience as severely as they tried his own. If at such moments he were allowed to sing in Italian, the effect would be far finer. It only remains to warn the matter-of-fact theatre-goer that from the hour when, at the beginning of the piece, Sir George Vernon points to the sixteenth-century façade of Haddon Hall, and remarks that it “smiled before the Conquest,” to the final happy moment when Charles I, having beheaded Cromwell in 1680, or thereabout, restores the property to the evicted parent [Sir George Vernon] of the heroine [Dorothy Vernon], **Haddon Hall**, in history, costume, logic, and everything else of the kind, is perfectly impossible.

May 17 1893

I have never heard an orchestra more completely thrown away than the one conducted by **Sir Arthur Sullivan** at the opening of the Imperial Institute. When I was outside, making my way to the hall, I heard it pretty well: when I got inside I heard it only now and then. In the march from *Le Propète*, played as the Court withdrew, not a note of the section where the theme is taken up by the trumpet and bass clarinet reached me at the dais end of the hall. The overture to *Euryanthe* was fitfully audible, the pianissimo for muted strings coming off rather better than the more powerful passages. Under these circumstances, the effect produced by the conductor's new IMPERIAL MARCH was very like a stage wait in the proceedings. I reserve my opinion until I get an opportunity of really hearing it, only certifying for the present that it contains a long flowing theme which shows off the strings very cleverly.

May 24 1893

The new **Savoy** opera would not occupy me very long here if the comic-opera stage were in a reasonably presentable condition. If I ask Messrs Barrie and Conan Doyle whether I am to regard their reputations as founded on JANE ANNIE, or JANE ANNIE on their reputations, I have no doubt they will hastily declare for the second alternative. [Music is by Ernest Ford.] And, indeed, it would ill become me, as a brother of the literary craft, to pretend to congratulate them seriously upon the most unblushing outburst of tomfoolery that two responsible citizens could conceivably indulge in publicly. Still less can I, as a musical critic, encourage them in their want of respect for opera as an artistic entertainment. I do not mean that a comic-opera writer would be tolerable if he bore himself reverently; but there is a conscientious irreverence which aims at comic perfection, and a reckless irreverence which ridicules its own work and throws away the efforts of the composer and the artists; and I must say that there is a good deal of this sort of irreverence in JANE ANNIE.

After all, nothing requires so much gravity as joking; and when the authors of JANE ANNIE begin by admitting that they are not in earnest, they literally give the show away. They no doubt secure from the public a certain indulgence by openly confessing that their work will not bear being taken soberly; but this confession is a throwing up of the sponge: after it, it is idle to talk of success. A retreat may be executed with great tact and humor, but cannot thereby be turned into a victory. The question then arises, Is victory possible on purely humorous lines? Well, who is the great fountain-head of the modern humorous school, from Artemus Ward down to Messrs Barrie and Doyle themselves?

Clearly Dickens, who has saturated the whole English-speaking world with his humor. We have whole squadrons of humorous writers who, if they had never read him, would have produced nothing but sectarian tracts, or, worse still, magazine articles. His ascendancy is greater now than ever, because, like Beethoven, he had “a third manner,” in which he produced works which influenced his contemporaries as little as the Ninth Symphony influenced Spohr or Weber, but which are influencing the present generation of writers as much as the Ninth Symphony influenced Schumann and Wagner. When I first read *Great Expectations*, I was not much older than Pip was when the convict turned him upside down in the churchyard: in fact, I was so young that I was astonished beyond measure when it came out that the convict was the author of Pip’s mysterious fortune, although Dickens took care to make that fact obvious all along to every reader of adult capacity.

[Continued]

May 24 1893 [Continued]

My first acquaintance with the French Revolution was acquired at the same age, from *A Tale of Two Cities*; and I also struggled with *Little Dorrit* at this time. I say struggled; for the books oppressed my imagination most fearfully, so real were they to me. It was not until I became a cynical *blasé* person of twelve or thirteen that I read *Pickwick*, *Bleak House*, and the intervening works. Now it is pretty clear that Dickens, having caught me young when he was working with his deepest intensity of conviction, must have left his mark on me far more deeply than on his own contemporaries, who read *Pickwick* when they were twenty, and *Our Mutual Friend* when they were fifty, if indeed they kept up with him at all. Every successive generation of his readers had a greater advantage. The generation twenty years younger than his was the first that knew his value; and it is probable that the generation which will be born as the copyrights of his latest works expire, and leave the market open to sixpenny editions of them, will be the most extensively Dickensized of any.

Now I do not see why the disciples should not be expected to keep up to the master's standard of hard work, as far as that can be done by elbow grease, which is a more important factor in good art work than lazy artists like to admit. The fun of Dickens without his knowledge and capacity for taking pains can only end in what I have called JANE ANNIE mere tomfoolery. The pains without the humor, or, indeed, any other artistic quality, as we get it occasionally from an industrious "naturalist" when he is not also an artist, is far more respectable. There are a fair number of humorists who can throw off conceits as laughable as Mr Silas Wegg's comments on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, or his version of Oh, weep for the hour! But Wegg himself is not to be had so cheaply: all the "photographic realism" in the world is distanced by the power and labor which gave us this study of a rascal, so complete inside and out, body and soul, that the most fantastic playing with it cannot destroy the illusion it creates.

You have only to compare Dickens's pictures of people as they really are with the best contemporary pictures of people as they imagine each other to be (Trollope's, for instance) to understand how Dickens, taking life with intense interest, and observing, analyzing, remembering with amazing scientific power, got more hard work crammed into a thumbnail sketch than ordinary men do into colossal statues. The high privilege of joking in public should never be granted except to people who know thoroughly what they are joking about — that is, to exceptionally serious and laborious people. Now, in JANE ANNIE the authors do not impress me as having taken their work seriously or labored honestly over it. I make no allowances for their performances in ordinary fiction: anybody can write a novel. A play — especially a music-play — is a different matter — different, too, in the sense of being weightier, not lighter.

[Continued]

May 24 1893 [Continued]

Messrs Doyle and Barrie have not thought so: they have, with a Philistinism as to music of which only literary men are capable, regarded their commission as an opportunity for a lark, and nothing more. Fortunately, they have larked better than they knew. Flimsy as their work is compared to the fiction of the founder of their school, they have made something like a revolution in comic opera by bringing that school on to the comic-opera stage. For years past managers have allowed themselves to be persuaded that in comic-opera books they must choose between **Mr Gilbert's** librettos and a style of writing which would have disgraced the Cities of the Plain.

In all populous places there is a currency of slang phrases, catch words, scraps from comic songs, and petty verbal indecencies which get into circulation among bar loafers, and after being accepted by them as facetious, get a certain vogue in that fringe of the sporting and dramatic worlds which cannot be accurately described without an appearance of Puritanism which I wish to avoid. An operatic style based on this currency, and requiring for its complete enjoyment nothing else except an exhaustive knowledge of the names and prices of drinks of all kinds, and an almost inconceivable callousness to, and impatience of every other subject on the face of the earth, does not seem possible; but it certainly exists, and has, in fact, prevailed to the extent of keeping the comic-opera stage in a distinctly blackguardly condition for some time past.

Now the fun in JANE ANNIE, senseless as some of it is, is not in the least of this order. If anyone had offered at the end of the performance to introduce me to the authors, I should not have hastily declined; and this is saying a good deal. Further, the characters, always excepting the pageboy, whose point lies in his impossibility, and who is a most degenerate descendant of Bailey junior, are so sketched as to make it not only possible but necessary for the performers to act, thereby departing from the tradition of the "good acting play," the goodness of which consists in the skill with which it is constructed so as to require no acting for its successful performance.

Miss Dorothy Vane acted, and acted cleverly, as Jane Annie. I never knew before that she could act, though I had seen her in other comic operas. Mr Kenningham, whose want of skill as a comedian has not hitherto been any great disadvantage to him, was very decidedly hampered by it this time. The thinness of Miss Decima Moore's dramatic accomplishments were also more apparent than usual; and her efforts to make her part go by mere restlessness did not altogether help her out. The honors of prima donna fell virtually to Miss Rosina Brandram, who, like Mr Rutland Barrington and Messrs Gridley and Passmore, profited by the change in style.

[Continued]

May 24 1893 [Continued]

A remarkable success was scored by a surpassingly beautiful young gentleman named Scott Fishe, with plenty of musical aptitude and a penetrating but agreeable bass voice, who looked the part of the handsome Lancer to perfection, and was received with shouts of laughter and an encore on the extravagantly silly occasion of his first entry. Mr Scott Fishe must, however, excuse me if, whilst admitting that he is a pleasant and amusing person, I dare not add anything as to his general ability on the strength of his success in the character of a consummate ass.

As to the music, a few numbers, notably the prelude, which sounds suspiciously like some old attempt at a concerto utilized for the occasion, and the love duet in the first act, have the effect of patches on the score; but the rest is often as adroit, lively, and humorous as **Sir Arthur Sullivan's** work. There is one plagiarism, curious because it is obvious enough to convince everyone of its unconsciousness. It is the "I don't know why" refrain to the proctor's song, treated exactly like the "I can't think why" in the king's song in *Princess Ida*. I may add generally that the effect of *JANE ANNIE* was so novel that I have no idea whether it was a success or not; but it certainly amused me more than most comic operas do.

June 21 1893

There was a tremendous crush at the Philharmonic to hear, or possibly to see, Paderewski. Gangways were abolished and narrow benches substituted for wide ones to make the most of the available space, Paderewski took advantage of the occasion to bring forward for the second time his own CONCERTO, which is a very bad one. No doubt it was “frightfully thrilling” to Paderewski himself to fly up and down the keyboard, playing the piccolo and the cymbals and the big drum and every instrument except the pianoforte on it, and driving the band along, in spite of Dr Mackenzie, as if it were a coach-and-seventy thundering down a steep mountain road; but to me it was simply a waste of the talent I wanted to hear applied to some true masterpiece of pianoforte music.

I could see that he felt like a Titan when he was threshing out those fortissimos with the full band; but he had the advantage of me, for he could hear what he was doing, whereas he might just as well have been addressing postcards for all that reached me through the din of the orchestra. I do not want ever to hear that CONCERTO again. It is riotous, strenuous, bold, vigorous, abounding in ready-made themes and figures, scored without one touch of sympathetic feeling for any instrument — least of all for the pianoforte, pardonable on the plea of youth and stimulating willfulness in the first movement, clever and pleasing in the andante, and vulgar and cheap in the finale, which repeatedly made me rub my eyes and ask myself whether I was not really in the Empire Music Hall listening to a rattling ballet scene.

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As for the rest of the concert, it was, of course, most horribly long, a second CONCERTO (Max Bruch in G minor, conducted by the composer and played by Gorski) having been wantonly thrust into it in order that the audience might enjoy their Turkish bath as long over two hours as possible.

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The concert ended with **Sir Arthur Sullivan’s** new IMPERIAL MARCH, which will undoubtedly have a considerable vogue in the suburbs as a pianoforte duet. This finished the Philharmonic season, which has been, on the whole, one of improvement in the value and prospects of the Society. All that is wanted to accelerate the improvement is a rigid restriction of the duration of the concerts to a hundred and ten minutes at the outside, and the compulsory retirement of all directors at the age of ninety-five, into a lethal chamber if possible.

June 28 1893

Sir Arthur Sullivan's GOLDEN LEGEND was done at the Crystal Palace on Saturday afternoon on the Handel festival scale, with Albani, Miss Marian Mackenzie, Messrs Ben Davies, Henschel, and Grice. I look with indulgence on THE GOLDEN LEGEND, because I know that the composer really loves “those evening bells” and all that sincerely sentimental prettiness, with a dash of piety here and a dash of fun there (as in Lucifer's comic song with the Kneller Hall accompaniment), not to mention the liberal allowance of blissful but indeterminate meandering for mere love of musical sound.

I am not that sort of person myself; but I must not therefore churlishly withhold my blessing. The chorus was good, especially the men; but the dainty orchestration was for the most part wasted on the huge scattered band, always the weak point in these monster performances.

July 26 1893

The musical season took advantage of the nuptial festivities at Court to fall down in a swoon; and it may now, I suppose, be regarded as stone-dead. It ended piously with a cantata at the Crystal Palace, on the Handel Festival scale, at popular prices, relieved by a mild fling at the Criterion in the evening, where Mr Wyndham has revived *La Fille de Madame Angot* for the benefit of the autumnal visitor. Whether it has been a good season or not I cannot say: the usual number of assurances that it has been “the worst ever known” are to hand; but it has been quite busy enough for me, even though my labors have been lightened by the retirement of some of our *entrepreneurs* from an unequal combat with my criticism. On looking back over it I recall, with a certain hopeful satisfaction, the failure of innumerable comic operas. They were not worse than the comic operas which used to succeed — quite the contrary. On the musical side, both as to composition and execution, there has been a steady improvement. The comic-opera stage now exchanges artists with the grand-opera stage and the oratorio platform; and the orchestras, compared to their predecessors, are exquisite and imperial.

The difficulty lies on the dramatic side. I have often expressed my opinion of the average comic-opera librettist with pointed frankness; and I have not changed my mind in the least. **Mr D'Oyly Carte's** attempt to keep the **Savoy** stage up to the **Gilbertian** level by calling in Messrs Grundy, Barrie, and Conan Doyle is part of a sound policy, however this or that particular application of it may fail. But for the moment the effect on our younger comic-opera artists of having been trained so extensively at bad dramatic work is that the rank and file of them cannot act; and when good work is put into their hands, they are unable to execute it effectively. On the ordinary stage the incapacity of the actors is got over by the ingenuity of the authors, who, by adroitly contriving a constant supply of effective lines, situations, and passages of pure stage management, reduce the function of the actor to the display of fairly good stage manners; but the ordinary opera librettist has not the skill thus to substitute good parts for good acting, nor the imagination to write drama of the order which stimulates actors to genuine feats of impersonation, and eventually teaches them their business.

And so a comic opera, on its dramatic side, has come to mean mostly an inane and occasionally indecorous play, performed by self-satisfied bunglers who have all the amateur's ineptitude without his disinterestedness, one or two experienced and popular comedians being thrown in to help the rest out by such fun as they can improvise.

[Continued]

July 26 1893 [Continued]

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Now the theatre-going public may be divided roughly into three classes. First, a very small class of experts who know the exact value of the entertainment, and who do not give it a second trial if it does not please them. Second, a much larger class, which can be persuaded by puffs or by the general curiosity about a novelty which “catches on,” to accept it at twice or thrice its real value. Third, a mob of persons who, when their imaginations are excited, will accept everything at from ten times to a million times its real value, and who will, in this condition, make a hero of everybody who comes within their ken — manager, composer, author, comedian, and even critic. When a form of art, originally good enough to “catch on,” begins to go down-hill as opera bouffe did, the first class drops off at once; and the second, after some years, begins to follow suit gradually.

But the third class still worships its own illusion, and enjoys itself rather more than less as the stuff becomes more and more familiar, obvious, and vulgar; and in this folly the managers keep speculating until that generation passes away, and its idols are too degraded to attract fresh worshippers. Managers are still trying to pick profits out of the dregs of the Offenbach movement; and the question of the day for **Mr D'Oyly Carte** is, how to keep the **Gilbert-Sullivan** movement from following the Offenbach movement into the abyss.

This being the situation, up comes an interesting question. Why not go back and begin over again? Generations of play-goers are happily shorter than generations of men; for most men only begin to go to the theatre when they arrive at the stage of having a latchkey and pocket money, but no family; and they leave off when they arrive at the stage of a family and (consequently) no pocket money. As for myself, I can be proved by figures to have completely outgrown that boyish shyness which still compels me to regard myself as a young man; but I am not so very old — nothing like what you would suppose from the wisdom and serenity of my writing. Yet I have the flight of time brought home to me at every theatrical “revival” by the number of men, to all appearance my contemporaries, for whom the operas and plays and artists which seem to me those of yesterday are as Edmund Kean’s Richard [acted Shakespeare’s King Richard III ~1815], or [soprano Giuditta Negri] Pasta’s Medea [sang Mayr’s Medea ~1825].

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Somehow the Zeitgeist [spirit of the time], as it stalks along, brushes the sparkling bloom off operas just as it does off pastel drawings; and even an “opera buffa” like Mozart’s Don Juan, which turns out to be not for an age but for all time (meaning a few hundred years or so), survives as a repertory opera, to be heard once a year or so, instead of being boomed into a furious run of five hundred nights.

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July 26 1893 [Continued]

And Don Juan is a very different affair [better] from Lecocq's Madame Angot. [Composer Charles Lecocq's operetta, which in Paris in 1873 was performed for more than 400 nights consecutively.] I wish I had some music type at my disposal to show exactly what Lecocq would have made out of [Mozart's] *La ci darem la mano*. To begin with, he would have simply composed the first line and the fourth, and then repeated them without altering a note. In the sixties and seventies nobody minded this: Offenbach is full of it; and **Sir Arthur Sullivan** was not ashamed to give us a most flagrant example of it in the sailors' chorus which opens **H.M.S. Pinafore**. It not only saved the composer the trouble of composing: it was positively popular; for it made the tunes easier to learn. Besides, I need hardly say that there are all sorts of precedents, from The Vicar of Bray to the finale of Beethoven's choral symphony, to countenance it. Still, there is a difference between the repetition of a phrase which is worth repeating and one which is not; and the song in which the market-woman describes the career of Madame Angot in the first act of Lecocq's opera may be taken as a convincing sample of a series of repetitions of phrases which are not worth hearing once, much less twice. They delighted [the audience of] 1873; but I am happy to say that [at the revival of Madame Angot] on last Saturday, [the audience of] 1893 saw through their flimsiness at once, and would have damned the whole opera as *vieux jeu* if the rest of it had been no better.

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We nourish our orchestral accompaniments so much better nowadays that the score sounded a little thin; although that was partly due to the fact that Mr Wyndham, who, as frequenters of his theatre know, is not a judge of a band, has made no such orchestral provision as would be a matter of course at the Lyric or **Savoy**. Still, the band did well enough to show that we now expect more substance and color in accompaniments, and will no be put off with mere movement and froth. In other respects the opera stood the test of revival very well.

October 11 1893

Pleasant it is to see **Mr Gilbert** and **Sir Arthur Sullivan** working together again full brotherly. They should be on the best of terms; for henceforth **Sir Arthur** can always say, “Any other librettist would do just as well: look at **Haddon Hall**”; whilst **Mr Gilbert** can retort, “Any other musician would do just as well: look at **The Mountebanks**.” Thus have the years of divorce cemented the happy reunion at which we all assisted last Saturday. The twain still excite the expectations of the public as much as ever. How **Trial by Jury** and **The Sorcerer** surprised the public, and how **Pinafore**, **The Pirates**, and **Patience** kept the sensation fresh, can be guessed by the youngest man from the fact that the announcement of a new **Savoy** opera always throws the middle-aged playgoer into the attitude of expecting a surprise. As for me, I avoid this attitude, if only because it is a middle-aged one. Still, I expect a good deal that I could not have hoped for when I first made the acquaintance of comic opera.

Those who are old enough to compare the **Savoy** performances with those of the dark ages, taking into account the pictorial treatment of the fabrics and colors on the stage, the cultivation and intelligence of the choristers, the quality of the orchestra, and the degree of artistic good breeding, so to speak, expected from the principals, best know how great an advance has been made by **Mr D'Oyly Carte** in organizing and harmonizing that complex co-operation of artists of all kinds which goes to make up a satisfactory operatic performance. Long before the run of a successful **Savoy** opera is over **Sir Arthur's** melodies are dinned into our ears by every promenade band and street piano, and **Mr Gilbert's** sallies are quoted threadbare by conversationalists and journalists; but the whole work as presented to eye and ear on the **Savoy** stage remains unhackneyed.

Further, no theatre in London is more independent of those executants whose personal popularity enables them to demand ruinous salaries; and this is not the least advantageous of the differences between opera as the work of a combination of manager, poet, and musician, all three making the most of one another in their concerted striving for the common object of a completely successful representation, and opera as the result of a speculator picking up a libretto, getting somebody with a name to set it to music, ordering a few tradesmen to “mount” it, and then, with a stage manager hired here, an acting manager hired there, and a popular prima donna, comedian, and serpentine dancer stuck in at reckless salaries like almonds into an under-done dumpling, engaging some empty theatre on the chance of the affair “catching on.”

[Continued]

October 11 1893 [Continued]

If any capitalist wants to succeed with comic opera, I can assure him that he can do so with tolerable security if he only possesses the requisite managerial ability. There is no lack of artistic material for him to set to work on: London is overstocked with artistic talent ready to the hand of anyone who can recognize it and select from it. The difficulty is to find the man with this power of recognition and selection. The effect of the finer artistic temperaments and talents on the ordinary speculator is not merely nil (for in that case he might give them an engagement by accident), but antipathetic. People sometimes complain of the indifference of the public and the managers to the highest elements in fine art. There never was a greater mistake. The Philistine is not indifferent to fine art: he *hates* it.

The relevance of these observations will be apparent when I say that, though I enjoyed the score of **Utopia** more than that of any of the previous **Savoy** operas, I am quite prepared to hear that it is not as palatable to the majority of the human race — otherwise the mob — as it was to me. It is written with an artistic absorption and enjoyment of which **Sir Arthur Sullivan** always had moments, but which seem to have become constant with him only since he was knighted, though I do not suggest that the two things stand in the relation of cause and effect. The orchestral work is charmingly humorous; and as I happen to mean by this only what I say, perhaps I had better warn my readers not to infer that **Utopia** is full of buffooneries with the bassoon and piccolo, or of patter and turn-turn.

Whoever can listen to such caressing wind parts — zephyr parts, in fact — as those in the trio for the King and the two Judges in the first act, without being coaxed to feel pleased and amused, is not fit even for treasons, stratagems, and spoils; whilst anyone whose ears are capable of taking in more than one thing at a time must be tickled by the sudden busyness of the orchestra as the city man takes up the parable. I also confidently recommend those who go into solemn academic raptures over themes “in diminution” to go and hear how prettily the chorus of the Christy Minstrel song (borrowed from the plantation dance Johnnie, get a gun) is used, very much in diminution, to make an exquisite mock-banjo accompaniment. In these examples we are on the plane, not of the bones and tambourine, but of Mozart’s accompaniments to *Soave sia il vento* in *Così fan tutte* and the entry of the gardener in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Of course these things are as much thrown away on people who are not musicians as a copy of *Fliegende Blätter* on people who do not read German, whereas anyone can understand mere horseplay with the instruments.

[Continued]

October 11 1893 [Continued]

But people who are not musicians should not intrude into opera-houses: indeed, it is to me an open question whether they ought to be allowed to exist at all. As to the score generally, I have only one fault to find with **Sir Arthur's** luxurious ingenuity in finding pretty timbres of all sorts, and that is that it still leads him to abuse the human voice most unmercifully. I will say nothing about the part he has written for the unfortunate soprano, who might as well leave her lower octave at home for all the relief she gets from the use of her upper one. But take the case of Mr Scott Fishe, one of **Mr Carte's** most promising discoveries, who did so much to make the ill-fated JANE ANNIE endurable.

What made Mr Fishe's voice so welcome was that it was neither the eternal callow baritone nor the growling bass: it rang like a genuine "singing bass"; and one felt that here at last was a chance of an English dramatic *basso cantante*, able to "sing both high and low," and to contrast his high D with an equally fine one an octave below. Unfortunately, the upper fifth of Mr Fishe's voice, being flexible and of excellent quality, gives him easy command (on occasion) of high passages; and **Sir Arthur** has ruthlessly seized on this to write for him an excessively specialized baritone part, in which we get not one of those deep, ringing tones which relieved the JANE ANNIE music so attractively. I have in my time heard so many singers reduced by parts of this sort, in the operas of Verdi and Gounod, to a condition in which they could bawl F sharps *ad lib.* at high pressure, but could neither place a note accurately nor produce any tolerable tone from B flat downwards, that I always protest against vocal parts, no matter what voice they are written for, if they do not employ the voice all over its range, though lying mainly where the singer can sing continuously without fatigue.

A composer who uses up young voices by harping on the prettiest notes in them is an ogreish voluptuary; and if **Sir Arthur** does not wish posterity either to see the stage whitened with the bones of his victims or else to hear his music transposed wholesale, as Lassalle transposes Rigoletto, he should make up his mind whether he means to write for a tenor or a baritone, and place the part accordingly. Considering that since Santley retired from the stage and Jean de Reszke turned tenor, all the big reputations have been made by *bassi cantanti* like Edouard de Reszke and Lassalle, and that all the great Wagner parts in which reputations of the same calibre will be made for some time to come are impossible to completely specialized baritones, I venture, as a critic who greatly enjoys Mr Fishe's performance, to recommend him to ask the composer politely not to treat him worse than Mozart treated Don Giovanni, than Wagner treated Wolfram, or than **Sir Arthur** himself would treat a clarinet.

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October 11 1893 [Continued]

Miss Nancy McIntosh, who was introduced to us, it will be remembered, by Mr Henschel at the London Symphony Concerts, where she sang in a selection from *Die Meistersinger* and in the Choral Symphony, came through the trials of a most inconsiderate vocal part very cleverly, evading the worst of the strain by a treatment which, if a little flimsy, was always pretty. She spoke her part admirably, and, by dint of natural tact, managed to make a positive advantage of her stage inexperience, so that she won over the audience in no time. As to Miss Brandram, Mr Barrington (who by means of a remarkable pair of eyebrows transformed himself into a surprising compound of Mr Goschen and the late Sir William Cusins), Messrs Denny, Kenningham, Le Hay, Gridley, and the rest, everybody knows what they can do; and I need only particularize as to Miss Owen and Miss Florence Perry, who gave us some excellent pantomime in the very amusing lecture scene, contrived by **Mr Gilbert**, and set to perfection by **Sir Arthur**, in the first act.

The book has **Mr Gilbert's** lighter qualities without his faults. Its main idea, the Anglicization of Utopia by a people boundlessly credulous as to the superiority of the English race, is as certain of popularity as that reference to England by the Gravedigger in *Hamlet*, which never yet failed to make the house laugh. There is, happily, no plot; and the stage business is fresh and well invented — for instance, the lecture already alluded to, the adoration of the troopers by the female Utopians, the Cabinet Council “as held at the Court of St James's Hall,” and the quadrille, are capital strokes. As to the “Drawing Room,” with *débutantes*, cards, trains, and presentations all complete, and the little innovation of a cup of tea and a plate of cheap biscuits, I cannot vouch for its verisimilitude, as I have never, strange as it may appear, been present at a Drawing Room; but that is exactly why I enjoyed it, and why the majority of the **Savoyards** will share my appreciation of it.

December 13 1893

The chief musical event of last week was the performance of [Robert] Schumann's [opera] GENOVEVA for the first time on the English stage by the students of the Royal College of Music....GENOVEVA was an excellent selection for the College to make. Since it is commercially valueless as an opera, we should never have heard it at all if it had not been taken in hand by a purely academic institution; and yet, being by Schumann, it was certain that some interesting music lay buried in it...Schumann gives away all pretension to seriousness in his enterprise by providing as its subject a book which is nakedly silly. He may have persuaded himself that he could make his heroine do for his opera what Beethoven made Leonora do for Fidelio.

But Fidelio, though commonplace and homely, is not silly. Its few harmless stage conventions do not prevent it from being credible and human from beginning to end; whereas Genoveva, from the moment when the witch enters in the first act, degenerates into pure bosh, and remains mostly at that level to the end. The witch's music is frivolous and serio-comic, the orchestration sprouting at the top into an outrageous piccolo part which would hardly be let off with mere indulgent laughter if it came from any less well-beloved composer.

In one place, the villain being left with the heroine, who has fainted, he exclaims: "We are alone." Immediately — the witch being round the corner — the piccolo utters a prolonged and derisive squawk, as if a cockatoo were reminding him that it had its eye on him. Instrumentation, as we all know, was not Schumann's strong point; and there is plenty of his characteristic orchestral muddling in GENOVEVA; but I can remember no other instance of his scoring being foolish in its intention. The witch is perhaps not much worse in the early scenes than **Sir Arthur Sullivan's** Ulrica in IVANHOE, or in the incantation scene than Verdi's Ulrica in Un Ballo; but one has only to think of Ortrud in Lohengrin to realize the distance that separates Schumann's second-hand ideas from those of a really creative genius.

July 11 1894

[MIRETTE, composed by André Messager opened at the Savoy on July 3, 1894.]

MIRETTE was interesting enough from the critical point of view. I have made a careful analysis of it, and have formed the following opinion as to the process by which it was produced. First, it was decided, in view of the essentially English character of the **Savoy** enterprise, to engage a French librettist and a French composer. Then came the appalling difficulty that Frenchmen are often clever, and are consequently in danger of writing above the heads of the British public. Consequently Messager was selected as having learnt by the financial failure of his **BASOCHE** at the [D'oyly Carte] Royal English Opera (now a music-hall) how very stupid the English nation is. Carré [wrote libretto in French] was warned to ascertain the exact British gauge by a careful preliminary study of the works of Mr Weatherly [wrote English lyrics for Mirette], the most popular of English providers of words for music. Both composer and poet followed their instructions conscientiously and adroitly. Never has the spirit of Mr Weatherly, never has the depth of his poetic passion, the breadth of his view of life, and the peculiar amenity of his literary touch been more exactly reproduced than by Carré.

As to Messager, he has hit off **Sir Arthur Sullivan**, in **Sir Arthur's** worldliest moods, with a quite exquisite felicity. The only drawback to this double success is that the result, however curious to experts in theatrical manufacture, is not particularly delectable as an opera. In fact, if I were a private individual, and could escape from the public responsibility which forbids a critic to tell the truth, I should say flatly that Mirette goes, in pointlessness and tediousness, to the extreme limits compatible with production at the **Savoy Theatre**. I have the less hesitation in allowing the acute reader to guess this private conviction of mine since **Mr D'Oyly Carte**, apparently realizing that the opera was open to misconstruction [wrong interpretation], circulated on the first night a managerial note explaining that it was not on **Gilbert-Sullivan** lines, but was rather like *IL Barbiere*, *L'Etoile du Nord*, *Carmen*, and *BASOCHE*. Also that the book dealt with a subject which has interested the world for some thousands of years. It gave me quite an uncanny sense that the order of nature was being suspended and even reversed without a word of warning when I found the subject which had enjoyed this prolonged popularity falling perfectly flat on me. And for the life of me I could not see where the resemblance to *L'Etoile du Nord* came in.

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July 11 1894 [Continued]

Further, **Mr Carte** is anxious lest the comic man should stamp the opera as a comic opera in the English sense. “This personage,” says the managerial manifesto, “falls into a pond and gets wet (as a matter of fact he adhered closely to stage tradition by falling into a pond and not getting wet), displays cowardice, and dances: actions which may possibly be laughed at again as they have been since plays were first written. He also gives utterance to certain anachronisms.” I wonder what the anachronisms were. The gentleman sang in a duet about Noah, and gave us a song about special editions; but neither of these seemed at all out of place, perhaps because of the extreme difficulty of referring the events or personages of the opera to any conceivable period of human history. Surely the plain fact of the matter (unless I dreamt that special-edition song and other cognate features) is that an attempt was made in manufacturing MIRETTE to repeat the **Haddon Hall** experiment of combining sentimental opera in the style of Balfe with topical extravaganza in the style of **Mr Gilbert**. I can quite well understand how **Mr Carte**, when he saw the result, felt impelled to urge that the work should not be criticized from that point of view; but he can hardly suppose that it would mend matters if I were to criticize MIRETTE as an attempt at a work of the class of Carmen.

I cannot even wholly endorse his modest plea that “it is a very simple love story, not too exciting or absorbing, but which may please.” The story, briefly told, is as follows: Mirette, who is adored by Picorin, adores Gerard, who adores her, but is adored by Bianca. This is disagreeable for Picorin and Bianca, and not particularly pleasant for Gerard and Mirette, who are separated by a considerable difference in social position. Finally, Mirette very sensibly concludes that it would save no end of trouble if she were to marry Picorin and Gerard to marry Bianca. Gerard falls in with the suggestion at once; and down comes the curtain. I do not deny that this is “a very simple love story”: my only doubt is whether it is not rather too simple to give even that mild degree of pleasure which **Mr Carte** hopes for. Perhaps, in view of my scepticism and in justice to Michel Carré, I should state that the exact account of the authorship given in the program is “The book by Michel Carré; English lyrics by Fred E. Weatherly; English dialogue by Harry Greenbank.” This may mean either that Mr Greenbank has supplied dialogue to M. Carré’s scenario, or that he has translated M. Carré’s dialogue. But I am afraid it does not greatly matter.

[Continued]

July 11 1894 [Continued]

Of the music I need only say that at the very outset Messenger announced, fortissimo, that he was going to be as commonplace as he possibly could; and he kept his word in the main., though he could not help once or twice lapsing into habits of distinction and refinement formed in his own unhappy country. Miss Maud Ellicot, as a Bohemian girl who dwells in marble halls in the second act, and so does not need to dream about them, proved herself a very capable young lady, with a ready fund of dramatic feeling and musical talent, backed by a voice which, if not particularly remarkable for richness of color or purity of tone, is vigorous and serviceable, and has in the middle and lower registers a not unattractive peculiarity which answers perhaps to a touch of swarthy color in her complexion. The other parts are in the hands of old friends, none of whom have any opportunity of adding to their reputations: indeed Mr Scott Fishe has to exert all his tact to keep Prince Gerard from having an unintended success as a wild burlesque of Lucia di Lammermoor. The opera is staged with all the taste and thoroughness that distinguish the **Savoy**: nothing is missing except Mr Rutland Barrington and a good work for him to appear in.

July 11 1894

L'ATTAQUE DU MOULIN [composed by Alfred Bruneau] was well supported. Madame de Nuovina had scope for her power of acting, and had perhaps been warned to use her voice mercifully. At all events, she rent the air only once or twice, in pressing emergencies. There had been great talk of Madame Delna's Marcelline; but, frankly, it was not a bit good, Madame Delna being a lady of an essentially urbane charm, much more likely to have two daughters well married in society than two sons as rankers in the Army, and quite out of the question as nurse and housekeeper to a country miller. Her voice, a bright mezzo-soprano, is a little the worse for violent wear at the top.

Bouvet would have been very good if he had not forced his voice so furiously in the more exciting passages. It was clearly Bruneau's intention that at these points I, as audience, should be excited, and Bouvet, as actor, cool and efficient. As a matter of fact, it was the other way about. The music is like all Bruneau's music: that is, it has every sort of originality except musical originality. It is impossible not to admire the composer's freedom from technical superstitions. In his perfect readiness to play two tunes at once without exacting any harmonic coincidences or even community of key, and the almost Mozartian *sans-gêne* with which he makes the music go where he wants it, even if he has to step over all sorts of professorial fences and disregard all sorts of academic notice-boards in doing so, he shows himself not only a man of strong character, but a keen musical observer of what the ear will tolerate. He will combine a few hackneyed fanfares, or a rum-tum pedal bass with a few commonplace progressions and snatches of tunes, in such a way as to make people talk as if he had conquered a new musical domain.

But, for all that, his musical stock-in-trade is very limited, and entirely borrowed. Like [Arrigo] Boito, he is ever so much abler and more interesting than some of the poor musical bees and silkworms whose honey and silk he manufactures; but he is himself barren; he invents novel combinations, but does not discover new harmonies — can keep an opera cast singing the whole evening, but could not, for the life of him, produce one of **Sir Arthur Sullivan's** ballads — stands, as artificer compared with creative artists, in the same relation to Gounod as Boito to Verdi, or as Berlioz to the whole romantic movement in music — from Gluck to the Eroica symphony and the operas of Meyerbeer and Spontini. I am very curious to see what rank these literary exploiters of music — these Delaroches and Kaulbachs of the orchestra — will take finally in the republic of art; for I have noticed that they generally make their living as musical critics; and I am not sure that I could not compose a little in their style myself. Will any impresario with a commission to give take the hint?

MARCH 1901 — THE ANGLO-SAXON REVIEW

And here may I mildly protest that the quartet in *Rigoletto*, with its four people expressing different emotions simultaneously, was not, as the obituary notices almost all imply, an innovation of Verdi's. Such concerted pieces were *de rigueur* in Italian opera before he was born. The earliest example that holds the stage is the quartet in *Don Giovanni*, *Non ti fidar*; and between *Don Giovanni* and *Rigoletto* it would be difficult to find an Italian opera without a specimen. Several of them were quite as famous as the *Rigoletto* quartet became. They were burlesqued by **Arthur Sullivan** in ***Trial by Jury***; but Verdi never, to the end of his life, saw anything ridiculous in them; nor do I. There are some charming examples in *Un Ballo*, of which but little seems to be remembered nowadays.

JULY 7 1907 — THE NATION

IL Trovatore [The Troubadour, an opera in four acts by Giuseppe Verdi] is, in fact, unique, even among the works of its own composer and its own country. It has tragic power, poignant melancholy, impetuous vigor, and a sweet and intense pathos that never loses its dignity. It is swift in action, and perfectly homogeneous in atmosphere and feeling. It is absolutely void of intellectual interest: the appeal is to the instincts and to the senses all through. If it allowed you to think for a moment it would crumble into absurdity like the garden of *Klingsor*. The very orchestra is silenced as to every sound that has the irritant quality that awakens thought: for example, you never hear the oboe: all the scoring for the wind that is not mere noise is for the lower registers of the clarinets and flutes, and for the least reedy notes of the bassoon.

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What makes me touchy about *IL Trovatore* is that the materials for a better performance than I have ever heard were present. In the nineteenth century, Verdi, Gounod, **Arthur Sullivan**, and the rest wrote so abominably for the human voice that the tenors all had goat-bleat (and were proud of it); the baritones had a shattering vibrato, and could not, to save their lives, produce a note of any definite pitch; and the sopranos had the tone of a locomotive whistle without its steadiness: all this being the result of singing parts written for the extreme upper fifth of voices of exceptional range, because high notes are pretty. But to-day our singers, trained on Wagner, who shares with Handel the glory of being great among the greatest writers for the voice, can play with Verdi, provided they do not have to do it too often.