Trapp Singers Recall Music’s Informal Youth

BY A. R. T. E R T  G O L D B E R G.

A musical event wholly out of the beaten path of such observances was the concert given by the Trapp Family Singers at a full house at Orchestra hall yesterday afternoon. Present were Baroness Maria von Trapp and her daughter, Anele, Johanna, Eleonore, Maria, Rosemary, Hedwig, and Martina, who divide themselves into four sopranos and three contraltos, sometimes joined by the pleasant baritone of their conductor and family priest, Dr. Franz Wimmer. Introduced, but silent, was the Baron von Trapp, the chaperon and father of this lively aggregation, and attending were Johannes, who tends the family farm in Vermont, and three other sons who are with the ski troops of the United States army.

The first and decidedly the more interesting half of their program reverted to the days when music making was an informal business in which any one who was any one socially took an active and expert part. The atmosphere was more that of the Elizabethan landed gentry than of the modern Tyro, in whose native dirndls the daughters were dressed. But musically, which is what matters most, the style was flawless, the voices fresh and true, and for an enchanted hour one lived in the remote and delicious age of music’s innocence.

There was a 16th century Easter motet, sung with simple and shining faith; a beautiful “Vere Languores” by Antonio Lotti of a century later; a remarkably apt canon on the words “Ave Maria” that revealed an unfamiliar aspect of Mozart’s genius, and a Solitude setting of the 23rd Psalm that was of classic simplicity. Purcell’s “In These Delightful, Pleasant Groves” sung to the accompaniment of the unliking virginal, carried its own truthful adjectives, and “The Cuckoo,” a charming conceit by the 17th century Johann Stéfani, called on the tenor recorder for an ingenious touch of realism.

The recorder family—forescursors of the modern flute—came in for particular attention with melodies by Byrd and Handel for tenor recorder and virginal, Couperin’s “The Nightingale,” and two compositions by Falter and Reicher, “A Little Terzetto” and an arrangement of an Austrian lansnderl for the full battery of recorders. This last number produced a genuinely well that unfortunately shattered the spell of fragil charm which had been evolved with the instruments remained within their proper frame.

An intermission and a general change of costume brought the Trapps to the yodels of their native mountains and to some folk song arrangements, pleasant enough and popular with their audience, but which left one auditor wistfully wishing for more of the things they do uniquely well.

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