

NEWS OF THE THEATERS.

An Interesting Concert.

Maud Powell—"our" Maud Powell, since she is an American and her career has been made largely in this country—scored a triumph yesterday at the public rehearsal of the Thomas orchestra. She played for the first time here a composition which is one of the most difficult in all violin literature and at the same time one of the most original. And she played it superbly. There are extremely few of her brother artists who could compass its technical intricacies with such surety and seeming ease as she did, and still fewer of them who could interpret it with such masterful skill.

The composition is a concerto for violin written by the Finnish composer, Jean Sibelius. Miss Powell brought it forward less than a month ago in New York at the concerts of the Philharmonic society of that city, and the majority of the music reviewers there proceeded to pronounce the composition impossible, and, while giving the soloist credit for doing excellent work, could find scarcely a word of commendation for the concerto itself.

Rereading of the reviews strengthens the impression originally received that the critics were at a loss just what to say. Either because of the unusualness of the work itself, or possibly because of the presentation by the orchestra having been inadequate, they seemed to have failed utterly to grasp the musical content of the composition. Certainly had they heard a performance as complete in note and spirit as was the one Miss Powell and Mr. Stock and his men gave, they could not have failed to discover the striking originality and the inherent musical strength that lie in this greatest of the talented Finnish composer's creations. For the New York critics are men who know. It must have been that the performance there was inadequate as regards the orchestral part.

The Thomas orchestra patrons received the new concerto with unmistakable approval. The work itself is short, requiring less than a half hour for performance, but the listeners were held deeply interested and attentive from beginning to close, and when after hearty recalls for Miss Powell she came back, and it was seen that the last movement was to be repeated, everybody smiled with satisfaction. Many gladly would have heard the entire concerto a second time.

It is a work strikingly original—one of the most original musical messages sent into the world in recent years. It is northern in spirit, so strongly so that it seems more pronouncedly national than any other utterance that has come as yet out of either the Scandinavian or the Russian schools of music. It is heavy with the sadness and the longing that the world associates with the northern character, and it has also an abundance of that wild, mad spirit of abandon which belongs to that character and finds its expression in the music and songs to which the people dance.

Much of it is music which sounds strange to our ears, and at first seems hardly beautiful, but as it is listened to its beauty increases, it fascinates, it pleases, and it moves. It is as though a whole nation spoke—a nation which has been great, but has suffered, and still is suffering. The background is almost forbiddingly dark—the orchestra groans and growls and threatens, and then again it dashes wildly into sharp, snapping rhythms that tell of dancing and reveling. But strangely and darkly written as is this orchestral score it "sounds." It has distinct character, and many parts of it are wonderfully beautiful in coloring and tonal shading, and against this alternately somber and wild background the solo part stands out astonishingly clear and effective. For it, too, is written in similar dark, impassioned, oftentimes fierce, mood.

The first of the three movements is like an improvisation. It is built up on two clear-cut, original themes, but it moves with a freedom and a fantasy which suggest extemporizing rather than written composition. And it is all truly violinistic—intensely difficult, and yet lying well within the limits and the character of the instrument. It has the keen, poignant sadness of the north in it, and yet it is wild as the impassioned improvisation of the Hungarian gypsy.

The second movement is an Adagio of surpassing beauty and greatness—a mighty song, dark and somber, but filled with emotion that is both genuine and big. And the last movement is a brilliant rondo, built up of material clearly of folk music character and containing the same spirit as lives in their dances and songs.

It is a work of true significance—one of the most important that the season has brought to us—and the performance was truly masterly. Miss Powell is such a comfortable artist. There is nothing of pose or virtuoso affectation and airs about her. She loves the work she is doing, and her heart, soul, and mind are wholly in it. The public and the concert surroundings are forgotten, and only the task in hand claims her attention.

She showed keenest pleasure in the splendid work the orchestra did, and there was such fine sympathy between her and Mr. Stock and every one of the men in the orchestra that the performance took on the nature of a triumph for all concerned. Of her individual work no words too high in praise can be spoken. She commands a technic which places her among the foremost of the world's violinists, and yet so subservient is this technic made to musical expression and meaning that it is wholly lost sight of. She is a virtuoso in technic and ability, but an artist and unfailing musician—a great one—in spirit. It was an afternoon long to be remembered.

Mr. Stock had surrounded the Sibelius Concerto with compositions entirely of the northern school. Sinding's "Rondo Infinito" began the afternoon. The composition has no apparent connection with the Drachmann poem which bears the same title and is quoted by the composer, but aside from any "meaning" the work is of attractive brilliancy, musically strongly made, with fine melodic sweep and full rich coloring, and is a number which, given as it was yesterday, with abundant verve and firmness, should become widely popular.

Balakireff's C major Symphony followed. It has all the merits and also the shortcomings which mark the Russian works. It is built on themes that are true themes in that they are melodies rather than a few notes, and it has many moments which melodically, harmonically, and orchestrally are of wonderful beauty. It is diffuse, however, and wanders so in form that it oftentimes seems illogical and not infrequently unduly long. The first movement suffers particularly from this indefiniteness and want of compactness. The scherzo is a charming piece of writing, and the slow movement has much of beauty to lend it appeal.

The Capriccio Espagnol of Rimsky-Korsakow followed the Concerto and ended the program. It is a brilliant, captivating work and was played in exhilarating fashion by the orchestra.

The same program will be given tonight commencing at 8:15 o'clock.

Moriz Rosenthal's first piano recital here this season will take place this afternoon in Orchestra hall at 2:30 o'clock.

W. L. HUBBARD.