

The Bath Chronicle.



ADVERTISER FOR SOMERSET, GLOUCESTER, WILTS. DORSET, DEVON, CORNWALL & SOUTH WALES.

REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION IN THE
UNITED KINGDOM.

THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 1911.

PRICE

RAFF'S "LENORE" SYMPHONY

To the Editor of the "Barn Chronicle."

Sir,—In last week's issue of the "Barn Chronicle" your musical critic, referring to the performance of the march movement from Raff's "Lenore" symphony, endeavoured to give your readers an idea of the subject of this composition. What he does say on this head seems to me to be merely an attempt to put into words a very vague impression resulting from hearing the work, whilst he leaves the reader unenlightened as to the real nature of the subject. Will you, therefore, allow me to point out that the subject of this symphony is, as a matter of fact, a very definite one: for the work is neither more nor less than a musical version or interpretation of Burger's famous ballad "Lenore."

The first movement of the symphony depicts, if not altogether happiness in love (as your critic will have it), at any rate the mixed emotions of an intense love, longing for, and almost doubting the faith of the absent lover. The poet in the opening lines of the first verse of his poem at once plainly states the situation thus:

Lenore fuhr ums Morgenrot
Empor aus schweren Traumen:
"Bist untreu, Wilhelm, oder todt?
Wie lange willst du saumen?"

He then adds by way of explaining Lenore's troubled state of mind:

Er war mit Konig Friedrich's Macht
Gezogen in die Prager Schlacht,
Und hatte nicht geschrie'n,
Ob er gesondt geliebet.

The origin of the second movement—the march theme, is evidently to be looked for in the second verse of the poem where, with a few masterly touches, the poet vividly brings before our imagination the picture of the Prussian and Austrian armies returning home on the termination of the "Seven Years" war.

Und jedes Heer, mit Sing und Sang,
Und Paukenschlag und Kling und Klang,
Geschmückt mit grunen Reisern,
Zog heim zu seinen Hausern.

There seems to me to hang about the theme employed by the composer an old-world flavour, strongly reminiscent of the eighteenth century regimental band music.

The rest of the poem finds its interpretation in the third movement. The distraught maiden, after fruitless inquiries, realises the certainty of her lover having perished in the battle of Prague. In her mad despair she throws herself to the ground, tears her hair, and smites her bosom, and impiously rails against Heaven and Providence, until at last, towards eve, she is overcome by sheer physical exhaustion.

So wutete Verzweiflung
Thr in Gehirn und Adern,
Sie fuhr mit Gottes Vorsehung
Vermessen fort zu hadern.
Zerschlug den Busen und zerrang
Die Hand, bis Sonnenuntergang,
Es auf am Himmelsbogen
Die goldenen Sterne zogen.

In the dead of night a spectral horseman—the shade of her lover—appears at her door and bids her to make haste and mount behind him, for he means to take her straight to the wedding. And now the mad career begins across fields and hedges, over hills and through forests, past towns and villages.

Und hurra, hurra, hop, hop, hop!
Ging's fort in erschreckend Galopp,
Daes Ross und Reiter schnoben,
Und Kies und Funken stoben.

At last they reach the iron gate of a cemetery, which opens to the touch of the rider's whip. And now, as the cock crows at break of day, the spark is swallowed up by the earth, and Lenore is left a lifeless body on her lover's grave.

The weird, discordant, and "creepy" passages of the third movement very aptly portray this dread nocturnal ride, whilst the purer and more brilliant harmonies at the close of the symphony fitly represent the ultimate reunion of the lovers in death.

As this symphony has been repeatedly performed at the Roman Promenade concerts, these few explaining details may perhaps prove a help to music lovers, and lead to a better understanding and a greater enjoyment of Raff's beautiful composition. The official programmes, if I remember rightly, fail to give satisfactory information on this subject.

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