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THE BELFAST MUSICAL FESTIVAL

THE CONCERT

For more than an hour before the time announced for the commencement of the concert, every approach to the Ulster Hall was crowded last night with carriages and foot passengers; but the excellent arrangements which had been made prevented any inconvenience from being experienced. The interior of the Hall presented to the eye a most brilliant and effective scene. Every place was occupied, and the ladies seemed to vie with each other, not only in the amplitude of their surroundings, but in the gracefulness and richness of their attire. The line of jets that runs round the gallery was lighted. Exquisite plants from the green-house were placed wherever the foliage and flowers could best aid the general effect; and the military officers, of whom many were present, appeared in all the glory of scarlet and gold.

The orchestra was crowded by numerous vocal and instrumental performers, many of both being brought from England for the festival, and above them rose the grand and stately organ towering toward the ceiling, and attracting every eye, more by its massive character than by its architectural proportions. In the West balcony, facing the orchestra, seats were reserved for the Viceregal party, and a chair of state was placed in the centre for the Lord Lieutenant; whilst in front of the balcony, and just before his Excellency, were the Royal arms.

The Viceregal party were not altogether punctual, and for twenty minutes before their arrival the conductor stood at his post, and everyone was on the *qui vive*. At length there is an evident stir in the passages without; Dr. Chipp lifts his wand; and, whilst a sudden roll of drums announces the fact, his Excellency enters, conducted by the stewards, and accompanied by his host, Charles Lanyon, Esq., J.P.

The Lord Bishop of Derry, who is a guest at The Abbey, came with the Viceregal party to the concert, and the Mayor of Belfast was seated near his Excellency and at his right hand. Immediately after the entrance of the Viceregal party, the band and chorus gave the first verse of the National Anthem; and by a pleasing modulation the key was then changed, and the *altos* gave the second verse. The last verse was subsequently sung in full chorus in the original key.

The next part of the proceedings was the presentation of an address by the directors, represented by the following gentlemen, who approached his Excellency for the purpose:— W. T. B. Lyons, Esq., J.P., Chairman; Charles Lanyon, Esq., J.P.; Sir Edward Coey, J.P.; William Coates, Esq., D.L., J.P.; John F. Ferguson, Esq., D.L., J.P.; Jas. A. Henderson, Esq.; James McIntyre, Esq. The address was read by the Secretary of the Company, Mr. J. Dunn, jun., and was [as] follows:—

“TO HIS EXCELLENCY GEORGE WILLIAM FREDERICK EARL OF CAR LISLE,
LORD LIEUTENANT-GENERAL AND GENERAL GOVERNOR OF IRELAND.

“In bidding your Excellency welcome once more to the metropolis of Ulster, we, the Chairman and Directors of the Ulster Hall Company, desire to return you our sincere thanks for consenting to grace with your presence our inaugural proceedings.

“Your Excellency has long manifested a lively interest in the welfare and education of the masses of the people; and we therefore felt that you would view with satisfaction the erection, in this populous district, of a hall so ample in its proportions as to enable the humbler classes to enjoy many advantages which have hitherto been confined to the more opulent. Here music will have no unworthy home; and here the artisan, after the labours of the day, will have a hearty welcome.

“The noble organ which is this evening for the first time to peal forth its glorious harmonies is the gift of an honoured townsman, who, when he lived amongst us, was distinguished by his munificent contributions to every object for the amelioration of the working-classes, and who, although now residing at some little distance, has proved, by this princely present, that the interests of those classes are still as dear to him as ever. His special object in presenting the organ to this hall was, that the thousands in this town who crowd the humbler walks of life might, from time to time, be permitted to enjoy the finest music, at a cost so moderate as to be little more than nominal.

“Often and often we hope to see the vast area of this hall filled with listeners whose ears are accustomed daily to the whirr of busy wheels or the ring of the ceaseless hammer; and, when another generation has ripened into manhood, and passed from manhood into age, still the name of the princely donor will live among them – still the splendid instrument, unimpaired by time, will breathe forth its enchantments: illustrating anew the truth, that ‘life is short, but art is long.’

“We may expect that, from the first, the organ performances in the Ulster Hall will attract large audiences, and have an important educational influence; for, happily, the cloud that has closed so densely around other manufacturing districts has not fallen heavily on this. Here, too, we trust, the voice of the orator may often plead the cause of truth, and touch the best emotions of the heart; and here, when national events fill a people with grief, or stir them with a common joy, thousands may meet to express their sympathies or unite their congratulations.

“Permit us, in conclusion, to thank your Excellency once again for the favour you have conferred upon us in giving our proceedings the high sanction of your presence. We welcome you as a generous, accomplished, and discriminating patron of art; and we trust that you will see in this hall, and in the organ that is its chief and most appropriate ornament, hopeful indications that art has amongst us earnest friends and students, and no unworthy home.”

His Excellency then, in a voice remarkably clear and distinct, spoke the following reply, which was more than once applauded during its delivery:—

“Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you very sincerely for your kindly address and welcome, and the only check which I feel to be imposed upon the full expression of my gratitude is the circumstances of our being now assembled in a concert hall, where strains are about to greet

the ear with which my prosaic and unrhythmical accents would very imperfectly accord, as I am, unfortunately, not qualified to address you in song, or even in recitative.

“However, happily, the most homely terms, and the most familiar tones, will suffice to convey the satisfaction I feel at surveying the ample and noble dimensions of this new edifice, to be henceforth appropriated to the purposes of social intercourse, of blameless pleasure, of refined and elevating art; as well as to join with you in grateful recognition of that munificent liberality which has prompted your excellent fellow-citizen and neighbour to make a contribution which will impart to the musical achievements of which this room will be the theatre their crowning ornament and perfection.

“It is my earnest hope that in company and in meet accordance with those pursuits of busy industry and enterprise which have conferred so much credit and splendour on the community of Belfast, which have filled its harbour with ships, its wharves with merchandise, its streets with shops and factories, and lined the banks of the Lagan and the Lough with villas and palaces, so at the same time your Athens of the North may likewise furnish haunts for the Arts and homes for the Muses; nor can the stately space in which we are assembled suggest a more appropriate wish than that musical harmony and the other harmonies may henceforth reign without interruption in Belfast.”

Dr. Chipp, during these proceedings, had left the conductor’s rostrum, where his place was taken by Mr. Loveday; and a screen, which had before concealed the keyboard of the organ, having been removed, he took his seat at the instrument, and the performance of the Inaugural Ode commenced. The words of the ode are by the Rev. Wm. McIlwaine, and we reprint them, that the record of the proceedings may be complete:—

CHORUS

Where the limpid river gliding
Bears its tribute to the main,
Where the dews of morn abiding
Clothe with corn the smiling plain;
Upward rise adoring voices,
Praising God, all-wise, all-good,
Universal earth rejoices,
Surging sea, and waving wood.
Praise His name in sounding chorus,
Swell the organ’s tuneful voice;
Praise Him for His goodness o’er us,
For His mercies past rejoice.
Praise Him, all ye mighty nations,
From all oceans, through all lands;
Praise Him with your minds’ creations,
With the labour of your hands!

RECITATIVE

Hardy son of toil,

Sage of soaring reason,
Brothers, cease to moil,
Rest ye here a season.
High and low unite,
Hearts and voices blended,
Join our festal rite,
Feud and faction ended.
Banish care and pain,
Smooth the brow of sadness;
Raise the choral strain,
Roll the tide of gladness.

ARIA

Thus crown we him whose generous care
Is spent the sons of toil to raise,
Nor war's proud trophies may compare
With this our meed of peaceful praise.
Let distant ages learn his name
Whose wealth to bless his kind is given;
And, as we raise the loud acclaim,
Around he shed the smile of Heaven!

CHORUS

Praise the God that dwelleth
In the realms of light;
Praise His name who telleth
All the stars of night.
Roll your notes of thunder,
Cloud and storm above;
Praise the God of wonder,
Laud the God of love.
Sons of men, adore Him,
Sound His praises high;
Lowly bend before Him,
Earth, and sea, and sky!

Mr. Lyons then, having asked his Excellency's permission, introduced Mr. Barre, the architect of the building, to the Lord Lieutenant. His Excellency shook hands with Mr. Barre, and said – I have much pleasure in congratulating yon upon the success you have achieved. I had an opportunity of examining the building last night, and admire it greatly. Mr. Barre acknowledged the compliment of his Excellency, and withdrew.

The music of the ode is very gracefully written, and the choruses are especially effective. The recitative and solo were sung by Miss Palmer. Dr. Chipp's *forte* as a composer lies apparently rather in massing together a number of voices than in writing for a solo performer, for the solo was not in merit quite equal to the choruses. The whole composition was, however, masterly and original; and the organ had, and justly, a prominent part in it. That Dr. Chipp

will achieve fame as a composer is evident from his treatment of the choral portions of the ode. Loud applause greeted the composer as he descended to the conductor's desk.

The concert proper may then be said to have commenced with the performance of Beethoven's overture to *Fidelio*, a classical composition of the highest order, and which was played with a truth and accuracy that could not be surpassed. Of the subsequent overtures, that to *Zanetta*, by Auber, so light and graceful in its style, and Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra*, a happy contrast to both, we can only speak in the same terms. They were played in a manner the most masterly, and it is a rare treat to hear so effective a performance in Belfast, admirably as our local societies execute similar compositions.

After a duet by Mr. W. Cooper and Mr. L. Thomas, Madame Lemmens-Sherrington sang *The Shadow Song*, from Meyerbeer's *Dinorah*, in which she made so great a sensation at the opening of the Ulster Hall some months ago. The effects produced by her in this song were absolutely marvellous. The most florid passages were imitated in notes which scarcely touched the ear, and were yet true and distinct. No echo ever repeated sounds more accurately, and at times it seemed as if some second and distant voice must have been imitating the vocalist. Madame Sherrington subsequently gave with much expression the Irish melody *Rich and Rare*, in which she was rapturously encored.

Miss Palmer sang Meyerbeer's *Ah, mon fils* very fairly, though not with that depth of feeling which the song requires, and which it wants the dramatic power of Viardot Garcia to give. Mr. Thomas sang Mendelssohn's *I am a Roamer*, and Mr. Cooper was encored in a song by Gabriel, *The long waves come and go*. His voice has great sweetness, but comparatively little power; but the execution of the song was all that could be desired. We should not omit to mention Mr. Pratten's solo on the flute, which was very clever and telling.

We have left to the last what was after all the great feature of the concert, the organ performances by Dr. Chipp. It was in these that the audience were afforded an opportunity of judging of the power and resources of the instrument, and of the great ability of the performer, and it is not possible to overrate either.

The first of these performances was *God preserve the Emperor*, with variations by Dr. Chipp himself. The astonishing acquirements of the performer as a pedallist were in this solo exhibited to perfection. Rapid passages and intricate variations were played by the two feet, which crossed over each other, and flew from side to side and from note to note with an agility that often baffled the keenest eyes, and might have been envied by the most accomplished reel-dancer that was ever attached to a Scottish clan.

Nor were his hands idle. The grasp of the instrument, if we may so say, which Dr. Chipp took, asserted itself from the first. He could call any one of the three thousand pipes to his assistance at will, and the noble instrument, a giant amongst its brethren, was obedient to every touch of the master. From soft, and almost vocal combinations it changed, under his hand, to a wild tempest of tumultuous sounds, all answering their purpose, indeed, and all grandly characteristic; and then, again, it died away in sweet and appealing harmonies, until its closing notes were lost amid a burst of genuine applause.

The second composition was a fugue of Bach's, which was played with wonderful skill. It was evidently Dr. Chipp's purpose to give in the performance an idea of the power of the instrument, and an amazing volume of sound was poured forth as part followed part, the

trumpets and trombones telling with triumphant effect, and ever and anon giving out the leading theme above the general hurricane of harmony.

The concert closed with Handel's chorus, *Let their celestial Concerts*. The Viceregal party remained until the close. It should be mentioned that Mr. B. Hobson Carroll played most effectively the pianoforte accompaniments for the various artists.

It is to be regretted that the giver of the organ, Andrew Mulholland, Esq., D.L., J.P., Springvale, was not in person present to witness its inauguration. He is at present in England with his family, and could not at this inclement season be expected to cross the Channel. His place was, however, filled by his son, John Mulholland, Esq., J.P. Craigavad.