

From the *Belfast News-Letter*, Tuesday 13 May 1862

## CONCERT OF THE CLASSICAL HARMONISTS' SOCIETY.

Last night, the Hall was opened with a grand concert given by the Classical Harmonists', and which may be pronounced the largest, best-managed, and most effective that has ever been given by any of our local musical societies. The inadequacy of the Victoria Hall to accommodate all who were anxious to attend the concerts of this flourishing society may be said to have formed one of the principal inducements to the erection of a hall commensurate with the growing importance of the town, and the musical tastes of its population.

It was, therefore, to be expected that the members should strain every effort to make the opening concert worthy of their own well-established reputation, and of the spacious and costly edifice in which it was given. To say that they succeeded expresses only a part of the truth, for their success was the most decisive they have ever achieved. They have inaugurated a new era in the history of popular concerts in Belfast. In future we shall have combined the highest musical talent with prices which must bring the treat within the reach of many who were not hitherto able to participate in it, while the crowding and overheating which detracted so much from the enjoyment of a concert in the smaller halls, but which public requirements to some extent forced upon the managers, are most effectually guarded against.

It was surprising to find the arrangements last night for a monster concert, so complete and, on the whole, so satisfactory. In some not very important matters fault might have been found; but, when it is remembered that this was the first concert at which 1,800 of an audience were brought together under a single roof, in addition to an orchestra and chorus of about 200, and that this was done with little confusion, it must be admitted that the stewards deserve the best thanks of the public for their zeal and assiduity.

The doors were thrown open shortly after seven o'clock. A very large number of shilling ticket-holders had long previously assembled around the entrance from Franklin Street, whence admission was had to the body of the hall, and as soon as the barriers were removed there was an immediate rush for the front seats. This was the only place at which there was any crowding. The holders of tickets for the gallery (dress circle) and the reserved seats on the ground floor, were admitted by the main entrance in Bedford Street, and the carriages, in compliance with the excellent police regulations made for the occasion, proceeded in a long line to set down their occupants from a quarter-past seven till eight o'clock.

There was comparatively little difficulty or delay in conducting the parties to their appointed seats, and when the hour fixed for the commencement of the concert arrived, the whole audience were in their places. The appearance presented by the interior of the Hall was such as those who witnessed it will not readily forget. It was altogether unprecedented in Belfast, and forcibly reminded us of scenes which may be witnessed in the metropolis, but seldom in the provinces.

The hall itself was seen to the greatest advantage. The beautifully stuccoed roof, the spacious and handsome gallery, with its ornamental ballustrade, and its graceful supporting metal pillars, and, at the further end, the orchestra and the organ, combined in the general effect, and when to these were added the rich attire of the ladies, and the darker colours of the gentlemen's evening costume, and, in the body of the hall, the thousand well-dressed auditors all looking towards the orchestra, gaily

adorned in front with evergreen plants, and on which was arranged a body of about two hundred vocalists and instrumentalists, the *coup d'oeil* was most effective.

In another most important point – the essential one in a concert hall – the building has fully justified the hopes of the architect and the directors – its acoustic properties are admirable. It is easily filled by a note, which, even to those close to the platform, is not disagreeably loud; and there is not the faintest shadow of that spectre which is supposed to haunt the architects of concert halls – the Echo.

The only drawback last night was the organ. The Classical Harmonists removed their organ thither from the Victoria Hall, but it looked rather small, and, though under the skilful touch of Mr. Edeson, it discoursed sweet music, there can be little doubt that, when the grand organ, which the munificence of an unknown friend has placed at the service of the directors, has been put up, the concerts that are given in the hall will be made much more effective.

At a quarter past eight o'clock precisely, Mr. Geo. B. Allen, Mus. Bac. Oxon., assumed the conductor's baton. The performance commenced with the National Anthem, during the singing of which the whole audience stood. The solo parts were taken by the vocalists especially engaged for the occasion. The chorus was most impressive. The oratorio selected was Handel's great masterpiece, "The Messiah," which was produced under the auspices of the Classical Harmonists, in the Victoria Hall, some time ago. The chorus, which, as we have said, was very large, was selected with the greatest care, and was thoroughly efficient; and the orchestra, lead by Mr. H. Loveday, and containing several performers of some celebrity, proved all that could be desired.

The list of soloists engaged by the society proved how great was its desire to produce the oratorio in a manner that would do no discredit to themselves or the North of Ireland. There were Madame Lemmens-Sherrington (soprano), Miss Whitham (soprano), Miss Moseley (contralto), Mr. Perron (tenor), and Mr. Thomas (bass).

To those who know anything of the world of music and of the bright particular stars that shine in its firmament, it is unnecessary to say anything of Madame Lemmens-Sherrington's great talents as a vocalist. We believe that this is the first occasion on which she has come to Belfast, and from the unbounded admiration which her brilliant vocalisation excited, we are sure the public would regret that this visit should be the last. She sang the recitative "There were shepherds," with consummate ability, and the difficult, but most beautiful air, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," was a perfect triumph of talent and skill. Her enunciation is most distinct, and her voice of great compass and flexibility.

Miss Whitham, upon whom fell the greater number of the soprano recitatives and airs, is not unknown in Belfast. She has appeared on former occasions at concerts of the Classical Harmonists' Society. She possesses a strong and remarkably clear voice, and takes the highest notes without apparently the slightest difficulty. The recitative, "He was cut off," and the airs, "But thou didst not leave," and "How beautiful are the feet," were sung by her in a style which deserves the utmost praise. The audience were so carried away by their enthusiasm at this as well as at other parts of the oratorio as to set at defiance the rule which prohibits applause on such occasions.

Miss Moseley, like Madame Lemmens-Sherrington, made her first appearance in Belfast last night, and produced a most favourable impression. Her voice is good, and admirably trained, and her rendering of the airs, "O Thou that Tellest," "He shall Feed His Flock," and "He was Despised," was almost faultless.

Mr. Perron and Mr. Thomas are too well known here to need any lengthened notice. Mr. Perren is a tenor of far more than average ability, and Mr. Thomas is, perhaps, the best bass singer of which

England can boast. They were both in excellent voice. The quartets in which they took part towards the close of the oratorio were given most satisfactorily. We have not space to do more than state that the chorus exhibited close and diligent training, and that the two great pieces, the “Hallelujah” and “Amen,” showed much steadiness and power. The orchestral accompaniments throughout were well managed, and reflected great credit upon Mr. Henry Loveday, the leader. The best proof of how thoroughly the audience enjoyed the concert is found in the circumstance that, though it was not over till an advanced hour – for it was produced in a complete form – there appeared to be no signs of weariness in any part of the hall.

The ladies and gentlemen who came into town from the country districts for the purpose of attending the concert returned home by special trains, which had been provided for them by the railway directors.

It will be remembered that another concert will be given in the Ulster Hall this evening.