

From the *Belfast News-Letter*, Wednesday 14 May 1862

CLASSICAL HARMONISTS' SOCIETY.

If any faint lingering doubt remained on the mind of some solitary sceptic as to the acoustic qualities of the Ulster Hall, it must have been finally and forever dispelled by the brilliant and successful concert of last evening. Those qualities were put to a severe test on Monday evening in the music of Handel's "Messiah;" they were further tested last night in music of a totally different class; and, after an experience of most of the concert halls in England and Ireland, we have no hesitation in asserting that the Ulster stands unexcelled, and all but unrivalled, as an edifice for the production of musical works. It combines all the best qualities that are sought by architects entrusted with the construction of such buildings.

The faintest note tells in every part of the house; the softest accent is as distinct to remote as to adjacent ears; and yet, in the loudest passages of orchestra and chorus combined, there is no echo – no undue prolongation of the sound; but the phrasing is as clear as if a single voice, in a small room were reciting some familiar piece of music. As regards acoustic properties, therefore, the hall is a great and unmingled success, and the public, no less than the proprietors, may feel the utmost gratification at a result at once so pleasant and so rare.

The concert last night was one of the most charming that has ever been given in Belfast. It had the one supreme advantage over all concerts given in the older buildings – that the hall displayed, irrespective altogether of the music, a charming, and attractive sight. The soft and inexpressibly pleasing light falling upon a multitude ranged in order, and arrayed in costumes the most brilliant, and the glorious proportions of the building itself, gave an effect such as could not be secured elsewhere, whilst, without prejudice to Handel's masterpiece, the more varied programme of last night gave the concert a character which more than counterbalanced the prestige of the opening night.

The first part consisted of an opera recital, and Weber's ever-welcome *Der Freischütz* was wisely selected for the occasion. The leading parts were taken by Madame Lemmens-Sherrington, Miss Whithorn, Mr. Thomas, and Mr. Perren. Mr. Loveday led the orchestra, and Mr. G. B. Allen's baton directed the whole musical force. There was an ample and most effective orchestra, and the very difficult instrumental parts were given with rare effect.

Madame Sherrington sang her part of the opera in the most finished manner; and the two airs, "Softly Sighs" and "Though Clouds by Tempests," were perfect in expression and in all that lends them their unfading charms. In the exquisite *finale* her pure and telling voice was heard with renewed pleasure, and the scenes with Ann were sung with all that grace and finish which might be expected from an artist so rarely gifted. Miss Whitham sang remarkably well, and narrowly escaped an *encore* in the arietta, "Were a Slender Youth;" and, indeed, the same may be said of the air, "Let Not Sorrow," which she gave with piquancy, and yet without pertness.

Mr. Perren's enunciation was always perfect, though his voice did not always tell with such effectiveness as could have been desired; and in the remarkable air, "Through the Forests, Through the Meadows," he might have produced a more decided impression. At the same

time, he sang purely and well, and the acoustic properties of the hall were frequently tested during some of his weaker passages, when, though his tone was not all that could be desired, his words were heard with all that distinctness that might be expected from a speaker in a small room. Mr. Thomas sang the music of Casper's part with great spirit, and was most deservedly encored in the celebrated drinking song, "Life is Darkened o'er with Woe." We should not omit to say that the choruses were unexceptionably given, and "the Bridesmaids Chorus," one of the most tuneful bits in the opera, was rapturously encored.

In the second part, which was composed of a miscellaneous selection, the gem of the whole concert was Madame Sherrington's "Shadow Song," by Meyerbeer. It is scarcely in the power of words to describe this wonderful piece of writing. The melody is exquisite, and the florid ornamentation is so characteristic as to suggest the idea of a shadow even to those who were not acquainted with the idea of the composition. The repeated phrases are not merely in the nature of echoes – they are shadows, often faint, sometimes almost indistinct, sometimes exaggerated, but always melodious. The accomplished singer executed this most difficult and trying piece of vocalisation with an ease and skill that astonished, and a grace that captivated, the audience; and when the last note died away there was a tempest of applause amid which she re-appeared, and after a vain effort to escape, had to bow to the inevitable *encore*. She gave a theme of Mozart's, with variations, and we can only say of it that it was barely less effective than the original piece.

In the same part Miss Moseley was warmly encored in the song by Glover, "The Gipsy Girl," which she sang with great sweetness; and Mr. Thomas was also encored in a telling air by *Randegger*.

At half-past eleven, Herr Elmes began to play a violoncello solo, which was only too long, considering the hour; and Miss Whitham and Mr. Perren sang solos afterwards.

Miss Whitham and Miss Moseley also sang the "Hear me, Norma," duet; but, as it was already after midnight, there were many who were obliged to resist the temptation of listening to a charming performance.

The concert closed with the National Anthem; and we congratulate the society and all who were concerned upon its great success. It was not only successful as regards the vast number who attended, but still more as regards the character of the performance, and, above all, as proving that Belfast possesses a hall which is not surpassed by any public edifice in the United Kingdom.