A CENTURY OF GRAND OPERA IN PHILADELPHIA.


BY JOHN CURTIS.

Music is as old as the world itself; the Drama dates from before the Christian era. Combined in the form of Grand Opera as we know it today they delighted the Florentines in the sixteenth century, when Peri gave "Dafne" to the world, although the ancient Greeks listened to great choruses as incidents of their comedies and tragedies. Started by Peri, opera gradually found its way to France, Germany, and through Europe. It was the last form of entertainment to cross the Atlantic to the new world, and while some works of the great old-time composers were heard in New York, Charleston and New Orleans in the eighteenth century, Philadelphia did not experience the pleasure until 1818 was drawing to a close, and so this city rounded out its first century of Grand Opera a little more than a year ago.

But it was a century full of interest and incident. In those hundred years Philadelphia heard 276 different Grand Operas. Thirty of these were first heard in America on a Philadelphia stage, and fourteen had their first presentation on any stage in this city. There were times when half a dozen travelling companies bid for our patronage each season; now we have one. One year Mr. Hinrichs gave us seven solid months of opera, with seven performances weekly; now we are permitted to attend sixteen performances a year, unless some wandering organization cares to take a chance with us. We have seen Charlotte Cushman, one of the world's
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greatest tragic actresses pirouetting about as the bright star of Auber's "The Dumb Girl of Portici," Mrs. John Drew singing in the chorus of "Norma," and Stuart Robson, whose name has always been linked with comedy, made almost his first stage venture in this city as Hortensius in "The Daughter of the Regiment." We have heard opera in English, French, Italian, German, Polish, and I believe, in Yiddish. The first American Grand Opera was written and composed by Philadelphians and first produced in Philadelphia. To merely read a list of the famous singers who have entertained us would take an hour's time. And we have listened to opera in twenty-seven enclosed and three open-air theatres in the century that has so recently closed. There were five thousand, eight hundred performances of opera in Philadelphia during that period.

The History of Grand Opera in Philadelphia might justly be divided into three epochs, those of the Chestnut Street Theatre, the Academy of Music and the Metropolitan Opera House, for while opera was sung in many other houses, it centered in these. The first performance on December 26, 1818 lacked only two weeks of seventy years after the first theatrical performance in this city, by the Murray and Keen Company in Plumstead's warehouse, Water Street above Pine. The warehouse was a barn-like structure back of William Plumstead's store. Murray and Keen had erected a stage at one end, installed seats and strung a curtain, probably lighting this pioneer of local theatres with candles. There was no way of heating the building, hence patrons were permitted to carry their stoves and fuel with them. You who sat in luxurious comfort in the great Metropolitan Opera House last Tuesday night and watched the magnificent pageantry of "La Juive" may note the contrast between 1749 and 1920.

But primitive as it was, it was in this theatre that
Philadelphia heard its first musical play, if one may so generally designate all forms of opera. It was not Grand Opera, however, but very crudely performed ballad or comic opera. The most pretentious work in Murray and Keen's repertoire was "The Beggar's Opera," which it may have sung here. The presumption is that it did, as this is one of several operas of that calibre that the company sang in New York after an indignant populace had chased it away from Philadelphia.

Our forefathers of the eighteenth century looked askance upon stage folk and stage entertainment; the theatre was regarded as the earthly habitat of Satan himself, and its advent in Philadelphia was not to be countenanced by the staid Quakers who did not believe the theatre to be a part of Penn's plan. The "contamination" was avoided after Murray and Keen had been hustled forth until the Hallams came in 1754 to re-open the Plumstead place and later to build the first two theatres in this city. Murray and Keen's company was composed of vagabonds, among whom were a few who had had actual stage experience in England. But Hallam's people were trained and experienced players. Hallam made extensive alterations in the warehouse, making it more nearly resemble a theatre, and opened his season on April 23, 1754, with "The Fair Penitent," a tragedy, and "Miss in her Teens" as the inevitable farce with which no early theatrical evening was complete. We may really regard the Murray and Keen effort as a "flash in the pan," as it was Hallam who established the drama here, although for a time later it was suspended. Most of the old-time plays began with a prologue and ended with an epilogue pertaining to the play. But on this occasion they were introductory of the drama in a theatrically virgin community. The prologue, spoken before the curtain, as Tonio now does it in magnificent song was:
Too oft, we own, the stage with dangerous art,
In wanton scenes has played a Syren's part;
Yet if the Muse, unfaithful to her trust,
Has sometimes strayed from what is pure and just,
Has she not oft, with awful virtue's rage
Struck home at vice, and nobly trod the stage?
Then as you'd treat a favorite Fair's mistake,
Pray spare her foibles for her virtue's sake;
And whilst her chastest scenes are made appear,
(For none but such will be admitted here),
The Muse's friends, we hope, will join the cause,
And crown our best endeavors with applause.

At the conclusion of the evening's entertainment Mrs. Lewis Hallam stepped forward and pronounced this epilogue:

Much has been said in this redeeming age,
To damn in gross, the business of the stage.
Some, for this end, in terms not quite so civil
Have given both plays and players to the devil.
With red hot zeal in dreadful pomp they come,
And bring their flaming tenets warm from Rome;
Fathers and Councils, Hermits from the cell
Are brought to prove this is the road to Hell;
To me, who am, I own, a weak woman,
This way of reformation seems uncommon.
If these authorities are good, we hope
To gain a full indulgence from the Pope.
We, too, will fly to Holy Mother Church
And leave these sage reformers in the lurch.

But to be serious;—now let's try the cause
By Truth and Reason's most impartial laws.
The play just finished, prejudice apart,
Let honest nature speak—how feels the heart?
Did it not throb? Then tell it to our foes,
To mourn the Parent, Friend and Husband's woes,
Whilst at the cause of all a noble indignation rose.
If, then, the soul in virtue's cause we move,
Why should the friends of virtue disapprove?
We trust they do not by this splendid sight
Of dazzling eyes that grace our scenes tonight;
Then smile, ye fair, propitious to our cause,
And every honest heart will beat applause.

While performances of opera by Murray and Keen
can only be surmised, the actual record of the first
operatic performance in Philadelphia is that of a comic work entitled "Flora, or Hob in the Well," by the Hallam Company on May 7, 1754, in the Plumstead warehouse. The company, during its various visits presented other musical works as well, but none worthy of particular note. The Revolution not only ended theatrical activities for the time, but Congress passed a law abolishing the theatre altogether. For a long time after the war was over plays and operas were given under thinly disguised titles and many amusing subterfuges were resorted to to present them in defiance of law. Efforts to have the law repealed were fought vigorously by the religious element. They won a temporary victory by quoting songs from two operas and demanded of Congress and the Assembly if such drivel should be authorized by law. One of these quotations, from an un-named work was:

Ditherum, doodle, aggety;
Nagity, Nigity num.
Goosterum, foodle nigidity,
Nigity, Nagity, Num.

and the other from the "Castle of Andalusia;"

A Master I have and I am his man,
Galloping dreary dun.
And he will get married as fast as he can,
With my haily, gaily, gamboraily
Giggling, nigging, galloping galloway,
Draggletail, dreary dun.

But the Act was eventually repealed, and since then Philadelphia has never been without its theatres.

The erection of the First Chestnut Street Theatre by Wignell and Reinagle, just west of Sixth Street, on the north side, gave a home to Philadelphia's first grand opera. The theatre was opened February 17, 1794, this event having been postponed ten months because of the epidemic of yellow fever which swept the city. This theatre was an exact duplicate of the Royal Theatre of
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Bath, England, which was considered the finest theatre in the world. The new Chestnut was the most pretentious ever erected up to that time on this side of the Atlantic, and its construction added to the fame and standing of the city, then the Nation’s Capital, and home of Washington, who was a frequent visitor. Wignell had engaged a splendid company for it in England, with Mrs. Oldmixon as leading lady and prima donna. This gifted woman, because of her standing in the very forefront of her profession, was paid a much higher salary than any of the others, her stipend being the munificent sum of $37 a week. As Miss George, leading woman of the Royal Theatre of Bath, she had been the toast of the young bloods of Bath and London. Among her admirers was the gayest of the gay, genial, lovable, reckless Sir John Oldmixon, called the “beau of Bath,” who carried off the prize even though he had scattered his patrimony to the four winds. He came here with his wife, bought a farm in Germantown, and settled down to the life of a farmer, driving into the city several times each week to market his cabbages. It was one case where the marriage of an actress and a sporty baronet turned out well, and the pair are said to have lived in happiness and content.

Mrs. Oldmixon and some other members of the company had been engaged with a special view to exploiting opera as well as the drama, but for some years Wignell and Reinagle hesitated to go beyond the comic and ballad line. In the meantime came Lailson and his French company from Charleston. A fine theatre had been erected for them at Fifth and Locust Streets, or Prune Street as it was then called. The feature of this house was a magnificent dome which towered ninety feet above the street level. This company was versatility personified, for it included in its repertoire opera, drama, farce, vaudeville and circus feats. The operas offered, while more pretentious than those Philadelphia
had ever heard before, were of the better grade of comic works by such composers as Paisiello, Gretry and others. Sonneck in his "Early Opera in America" says that the company produced Gretry's one Grand Opera, "Richard, the Lion Hearted;" but a search of records of that time shows that it did not. At the Chestnut, however, a play of that title was given as part of a triple bill, which accounts for the error. Lailson had given Grand Opera in Charleston, and no doubt would have done so here, but before reaching that point, on Sunday, July 8, 1798, the dome that had been his pride collapsed, wrecking the building, and bringing the career of the company in Philadelphia to a disastrous end.

But in the evolution of the stage we were steadily approaching Grand Opera. Late in 1817 Charles Benjamin Incledon, a famous tenor, sang at the Chestnut in several comic operas. He was the best tenor that Philadelphia had ever heard, and had a Grand Operatic repertoire. He was soon followed by another distinguished tenor, Henry Phillips, who was the first singer here to use the so-called Italian method. The appeal of such voices led to a demand that real Grand Opera be produced, and the management sought a vehicle. News of the success with which Sir Henry Rowley Bishop's English adaptation of Mozart's "Don Giovanni" had met in London in 1816 had reached them, and they determined to make their venture with this work. Great preparations were made. Among extra artists engaged were Mr. and Mrs. LaFolle, the latter as one of the prima donnas, the former as conductor. Mrs. LaFolle before her marriage was a Miss Placide, member of a family of players who were prominent on the Philadelphia stage for several generations. Choristers were engaged, and according to prevailing custom, those of the company who were not assigned to parts also sang in the chorus. The orchestra was augmented
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by the best ‘‘professors of Music’’ in the city, and the management ‘‘went the limit’’ in scenic investiture, costumes and properties. It was pronounced the most gorgeous theatrical entertainment that Philadelphia had ever witnessed. The performance was given on the evening of December 26, 1818, and this marks the beginning of the history of Grand Opera in Philadelphia. It was sung four times successively, and the cast was:

Don Pedro ......................... Mr. Hughes
Don Juan ............................. Henry Wallack
Don Octavio ........................ Mr. Abercrombie
Leporello ............................ Joseph Jefferson
Masetto .............................. John Darley
Lopez ................................. Mr. Hathwell
Donna Elvira ........................ Mrs. LaFolle
Donna Leonora ........................ Mrs. Henry Wallack
Zerlina ............................... Mrs. Thomas Burke
Maria ................................. Elizabeth Jefferson
Conductor ......................... Mr. LaFolle

This was the only production of opera in the first Chestnut Street Theatre. It is worthy of note that on that occasion the house was lighted by gas, the management having installed a private gas plant therein two years before. The structure was burned to the ground March 27, 1820, with the loss of all its equipment and its extremely valuable and in many cases irreplacable musical and dramatic library. But arrangements were immediately made to rebuild, and in the meantime the company was established at the Walnut Street Theatre, even then a long-established play-house, and still functioning as such more than a century later. There ‘‘The Libertine’’ was given several times, and there on February 25, 1822, Philadelphia heard its second Grand Opera, ‘‘The Barber of Seville,’’ by the same company.

The Second Chestnut Street Theatre, handsomer than its predecessor, but inheriting its title of affection, ‘‘Old Drury,’’ was opened December 2, 1822, and on January 1, 1823 the company made its third venture in Grand Opera, presenting Bishop’s ‘‘The Law of
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Java," the book of which was supplied by George Colman, the Younger. One more performance of it was given five nights later, and the opera was then shelved forever. The music was pronounced excellent, but the public would have none of it. Bishop not only adapted numerous foreign operas to the English stage, but was a prolific composer of original works as well. It was in one of these, "Clari, the Maid of Milan," book by John Howard Payne, that was first sung that song which will never die, "Home, Sweet Home." Payne, while United States Consul at Tunis, had been impressed with an old Sicilian air, which he tried to remember while collaborating with Bishop on this opera. He whistled it as he remembered it; Bishop caught the idea, and upon this base built the fine old melody to Payne's poem. The composer married his most promising pupil, who was many years his junior, and who soon afterward, before she was twenty years old, eloped with Robert Charles Nicholas Bochsa, a distinguished harpist and conductor, and general all-round forger and crook. Anna Bishop appeared often years later in Philadelphia at the head of her own opera company, with Bochsa conducting.

On March 18, 1825, the Chestnut Street Stock Company made its next venture in Grand Opera, presenting Weber's "Der Freischuetz," although it is doubtful if the amiable composer would have recognized his own child. Durang says that the vocal numbers and orchestral accompaniment were "arranged" by H. W. Darley, who also appeared in the cast as "Wilhelm," probably re-named for Max or Caspar. Adapters of operas in those days not only took extensive liberties with the score, but did not hesitate to change names and even introduce new characters. Moreover it must not be inferred that all who appeared sang. Some members of the casts in these stock company productions, while excellent actors, could no more sing than they could
fly, and it was customary for them to speak their lines either with or without orchestral accompaniment.

But while with the exception of "The Law of Java" all previous efforts in the way of Grand Opera had been reasonably profitable, "Der Freischuetz" was not. Four performances were given, the receipts of which were respectively $464, $216, $290 and $205, while the cost, exclusive of the investment, was $400 a night. What a contrast with the times in which we are living, when receipts of from $10,000 to $12,000 are not unusual, and even these large figures on certain occasions have been exceeded. The Company's experience with "Der Freischuetz" led it to confine its attention to the drama for a long time afterward. Of these operatic efforts William B. Wood wrote:

"It frequently happened that the pieces were not suited to the ability of the singers, and it became necessary to omit much of the composer's music, substituting such popular and approved airs as were certain of obtaining applause. Each artist insisted on his share of this privilege until the merciless introduction of songs, encored by admirers of the several singers, protracted the entertainment to so late an hour as to leave the contending singers to a show of empty benches."

It must be remembered also that the opera was only part of the entertainment, each work sharing honors with a comedy, tragedy or farce. Performances began at six o'clock and lasted until midnight. There were no reserved seats, and those who had them, used to send their servants to get in the line early and hold places for them.

This production of "Der Freischuetz" brought forth the first operatic criticism in a Philadelphia newspaper. The dramatic critic of the United States Gazette, after a flattering notice of "Pizarro," winds up with—

"It remains for our city to aid in checking the growing vitiation of taste and prevent such pieces from sink-
ing under any such productions as "Der Freischuetz" and "Don Giovanni." An enlightened public owes it as a duty, and each individual should feel called upon, to support fine sentiment and acting, in opposition to fairy tales and monsters of superstition."

This editorial wallop following the sad inspection of box office receipts fully convinced the management of "Old Drury" that Grand Opera did not belong in their repertoire.

It is puzzling to know why the public did not cordially respond. Possibly the theatre-going public even at that time believed in the doctrine expounded about sixty years later by the late William S. Stokley, that rum and music would not mix. For in those days there were places called bars at which certain beverages were dispensed which tradition says—caused intoxication, and one of these bars was on each floor of the theatres. One could therefore become comfortably drunk and disorderly without leaving the building, and many of them did. Indeed, this pleasant habit, which frequently led to actual rioting, was so ingrained in numerous patrons of the theatre that a strong force of police was always scattered through the house. Bars were not abolished by legislative act from the theatres until 1882.

1825, while not much of an operatic year in Philadelphia, was very important one in New York, for it witnessed the advent of the first Italian opera company in this country, that of Manual Garcia. Garcia's greatest attraction was his youthful and lovely daughter Maria, who although only in the period of charming young girlhood had already made a name for herself in London. She was soon to be acclaimed one of the rarely great singers of the world under her married name of Madame Malibran. The tale of her New York triumphs reached Philadelphia, and serious music lovers here were eager to hear her. The suggestion that arrangements be made to bring the Garcia com-
pany to the Chestnut Street Theatre was extensively discussed in conversation and in the public prints. The newspapers blew hot and blew cold. The Editor of the Gazette changed his opinions almost from day to day. Once he said that he could see no reason why the Garcias should come here as "our theatre is doing very well as it is." He confessed, however, that he was "not musical himself." Again he printed a long and dignified editorial in praise of the project, and soon afterward, on January 30, 1826, somersaulted again and said:

"As might have been expected, the New York people begin to be weary of the eternal sing song of opera; less than 250 persons occupied the boxes, it is said, on Tuesday night. We now hear something said of the want of music in Signor Garcia's voice; and the Garcia herself will ere long, we imagine, have her own delightful tones reverberating from the sounding board of empty boxes. The fact is that excepting as a matter of curiosity, a nine-days wonder, an opera company cannot be supported in America."

But the debate over "The Signorina," as Maria Garcia was generally referred to, continued. She was eventually persuaded to come here and give two concerts. One of these, on June 16, 1826, was in Musical Fund Hall, and realized $2000. The critics lost themselves in a search for adjectives with which to do justice to her God-given voice. On June 23 she gave her second concert in the Chestnut Street Theatre, and her audience filled every available spot in the house. But Philadelphia never heard this wonderful singer in opera. Virtually sold to a bankrupt and heartless French merchant of New York, Malibran, she supported him for a time by singing in the Bowery Theatre and Grace Church choir, and then in disgust, left him, went to Europe and was the idol of the opera going public until her death at the early age of twenty-eight years.
It remained for a regularly organized opera company to give Philadelphia its next taste of Grand Opera. New Orleans had long boasted such an organization, and this French company, after much thought, decided to invade the north. It was a serious undertaking, and meant a long voyage by sea in a sailing vessel; nevertheless the singers decided to risk it, and opened the first of several annual seasons here on September 28, 1827 in a comic opera, Boieldieu’s “Little Red Riding Hood.” The company was classed as third rate, and not only sang opera, but gave vaudeville, farce and drama, all in French. The operatic works presented were of the better class of comic operas by such composers as Boieldieu, Auber, Gretry and Nicolo, and during this first visit it presented for the first time in America, Caraffa’s “La Solitaire.” Nicolo’s “Cendrillon,” sung on the closing night of the season, was the first of several operatic versions of the famous old fairy tale of Cinderella to be heard here, the last of which, Massenet’s, featured Mary Garden as the Prince a few years ago.

The evident success of the French Company inspired Francis C. Wemyss, manager of the Chestnut, to take another flyer in opera. Charles E. Horn, a tenor of high standing and considerable experience in Grand Opera abroad, was approached with a proposition. Horn was to organize an opera company and give a season at the Chestnut on a “fifty-fifty” basis. Several performances were given, but the public was apathetic, and both lost money. This unfortunate outcome resulted in a marked chilliness arising between the manager and the impresario and singer, and Horn’s “grouch,” grew in proportion as the attendance shriveled. He was overheard to make remarks to the effect that there was something rotten in the box-office Denmark, which remark was promptly repeated to Wemyss, who already peeved because of his losses,
tartly replied, without qualifying or tempering phrase, that Horn was a liar, adding certain picturesque and profane embellishments which added materially to the punch. The two came face to face on the stage during a rehearsal, which was immediately suspended while the principals in the affair unburdened themselves. From words they proceeded to action. Mr. Lopez, the prompter, occupied an unfortunate position in No Man’s Land between the combatants. Over went the prompt table, while his books and papers went flying in all directions, and his glasses popped from his nose. He tried to act as peacemaker, but a missile hurled by one of the principals with very bad aim caught Lopez behind the ear, toppling him over backward into the orchestra pit, where he landed with a crash and the sound of snapping strings on the bass violin. Upon this the player thereof cursed him roundly and smote him sorely. This was accepted as the signal for battle, and the orchestra players dropped their instruments and with the singers took sides. The battle waged furiously, and no participant enjoyed it more than did Henry Walton, the leading baritone, who in his time had been a professional pugilist, and thus found an opportunity to display his especial talents. Hostilities did not cease until Horn, badly battered, admitted his defeat. He promptly swore out a warrant for Wemyss’s arrest and the manager was haled before His Honor, the Mayor, and held in $1000 bail to keep the peace. Thus ended one season of Grand Opera.

Peace came later, however, and Horn and Wemyss patched up their differences. In May, 1829, Horn essayed a brief season of opera in Italian, and it was then that Philadelphia had its first experience with opera in that language, the work being a comic opera, “Trionfa della Musica.” Associated with Horn in this venture were Rosich and Angrisani and Madames Bricha and Feron. But the season failed. In fact,
even the drama was in such a bad state that season that nearly every manager went bankrupt. Wemyss attributed this distressing condition to the "star" system, and asserted his belief that a good ensemble was far better than one great player and a mediocre support. In this I fully agree with him.

On May 18, 1830, the stock company of the Walnut Street Theatre presented for the first time on any stage a comic opera entitled "Justina," written by the musical director of the theatre, John Clements. The performance was conducted by Benjamin C. Cross, one of the city's foremost conductors and musicians, and father of that other eminent conductor Michael Cross, who is no doubt remembered by some who are here tonight. "Justina" was not a success, and was soon shelved forever.

It was not until January 1833 that Philadelphia had its first opportunity to hear opera properly sung by artists who confined their attention exclusively to Grand Opera. This company was the Montresor troupe, which opened January 23d at the Chestnut in Mercadante's "Eliza e Claudio." In the company were such artists as Henrietta Salvioni, Adelaide Pedrotti, Lorenza Marozzi, Teresa Verducci, Giuseppe Corsetti, Giovanni Montresor, Luciano Fornasari and Francesco Sapignoli. The conductor was Antonio Bagioli. The operas sung were, in addition to the one named, Bellini's "The Pirates," Rossini's "Italians in Algiers," just revived this season by the Metropolitan Opera Company, and the same composer's "Cenerentola," "Otello" and "Moses in Egypt." The latter was given in oratorio form in Musical Fund Hall.

In the companies presenting opera in English at this period the leading singers were John Sinclair, a tenor formerly of Covent Garden, for whom Rossini wrote the part of Idreno in "Semiramide," Mr. and Mrs. Henry H. Rowbotham, Miss Hughes and G. Westervelt
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Walstein. Sinclair's daughter became the wife of Edwin Forrest, whose unfortunate experience with the lady led him to divorce her. This company was well supported in productions of “Fra Diavolo,” “Der Freischuetz,” “Masaniello,” and a version of Cinderella which held popular favor for more than thirty years. It was an English version by Rophino and DeLacy, and all the music was Rossini's, being taken from his “Armida,” “Marmetto,” “Secondo,” “Cenerentola” and “William Tell.”

The fall of 1833 was marked by the advent of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Wood. Both had been members of the Covent Garden forces in London, and had won wide fame. Mrs. Wood had been a Miss Paton, and her musical accomplishments attracted the attention of the Duke of Cumberland, son of George III and brother of the Prince Regent, later George IV, while she was still a child. Under his patronage she pursued her musical career and after her debut in opera she became the bride of Lord Lennox and was accepted in London's most exclusive social circles. As Lady Lennox she continued to sing, and all was serene until the handsome tenor, Wood, joined the company. The frequent sight of their stage love making so aroused his Lordship's ire that he became gloomy, then abusive, and at last sought satisfaction by knocking his wife down with a savage blow in the face with his fist. Naturally they immediately separated and a divorce followed, after which she became the wife of Wood.

In marked contrast with the aristocratic career of his wife, Wood, who was the son of a cattle dealer in a small town, went to London and sought a means of livelihood. He was an athlete and trained boxer, and for a time made a few pounds by appearing in the ring. But his companions in this questionable business were distasteful to him, and as a last resort he became a cab driver, adding to his income by singing in Lon-
don’s “Free and Easies.” Some actors hearing him sing brought him to the attention of one of London’s best teachers, and under his instruction Wood soon blossomed forth as an opera singer.

For several years the Woods were strong drawing cards in opera here, and during their numerous visits introduced several operas new to this city, among them “La Sonnambula,” one of the most successful operas ever heard here. It was first sung by the Woods February 11, 1836, and created such a furore that it ran nightly until the 26th, and was frequently sung thereafter. The success of Mrs. Wood as Amina was so pronounced that Thomas Sully was engaged to paint a portrait of her in the rôle. For this he received $660. Some time later Mrs. Wood attached it for salary due her, and eventually it came into the possession of the Musical Fund Society, which still has it. The eventual retirement of the Woods from the Philadelphia stage was made under a cloud, although the resentment of the public did not extend to Mrs. Wood.

The Montresor Troupe had been wrecked in New York, and it was succeeded by the Rivafiroli Troupe, which paid us a visit in April, 1834. This company had acquired some members of Montresor’s, and in addition brought Raviglia, DeRosa, Orlandini and Luigia Bordogni, Rosa and Clementina Fanti and Madame Schneider-Marancelli. The company after an engagement at the Chestnut, moved to the Walnut and continued its season. It followed in Montresor’s footsteps and went to disaster in New York.

On January 28, 1836, the Woods produced for the first time in Philadelphia John Barnett’s “The Mountain Sylph,” which has the distinction of having been the first English opera written in the Italian style, with recitativo taking the place of the spoken dialogue. This opera was performed five times here before its final local retirement.
We have noted the introduction of gas in the Chestnut Street Theatre in 1816. When the new theatre was built in 1822 on the site of its fire ruins, a new gas plant was not installed, the house reverting back to the oil lamps of former days. The public had occasionally complained of them, particularly when Garcia sang there in 1826, at which time there was an emphatic demand for the restoration of gas. This was not accomplished, however, until the fall of 1837, when Wemyss, who had recovered the lesseeship of the House during the summer, again lighted it with gas. He was also the lessee of the Walnut at that time, and desired to make the same improvement there, which privilege was granted him by the stockholders only after he had consented to an increase of $1000 in his annual rent. Incidentally, it may be said that Wemyss paid $9000 a year for the Chestnut, then the most fashionable theatre in the city, and the principal home of Grand Opera.

In 1839 came the Seguins, Edward and Anne, who for years dominated the operatic stage. With them the first season was Jane Shireff and Alexander Wilson. Miss Shireff was an exceptionally beautiful young woman and an admirable artist, and Wilson, one of the best tenors heard here up to that time. He looked upon Miss Shireff as his ward, and was so devoted to her interests that thanks to his kindly advice she was able to return to England with a small fortune. There she married and retired. The Seguins, after years of success fell upon evil days and did not die in affluence. The name faded from programs for a few seasons, then appeared again, but the new Edward Seguin was their son, and while popular, was never the artist his father was. Soon after he began his career he married a charming young contralto named Zelda Harrison, and as Zelda Seguin she won wide fame and kept the name before the public until the early eighties.

The east half of the site of the Continental Hotel was
formerly occupied by Cooke’s Circus, which gave way to the National Theatre in 1840. William E. Burton was the first lessee and he engaged a very powerful stock company with which to compete with his rivals. It was there that Charlotte Cushman appeared as Fenella. There also Henrietta Sontag, one of the world’s truly great singers, gave a season of opera only a little while before her tragic death in Mexico.

Burton was an old crab. He hated to have anyone get ahead of him in any production, and on several occasions had frantically thrown together an opera or a play which he boldly offered in rivalry to the real thing elsewhere. He was doing very well at the National, and eventually offered a dazzling spectacle entitled the “Naiad Queen,” in which Miss Cushman led the Amazon march. The piece was immensely successful and bid fair to break all local records for the length of its run. All was going smoothly when Burton heard that the Woods, at the Chestnut, planned to produce “Norma,” an English version having been prepared for them by Joseph Fry, who had already translated Donizetti’s “Anna Bolena” for the local stage. The Woods had the complete score and orchestration, correct scene and costume designs and the official prompt book. Burton had nothing. But he managed to acquire a few of the published numbers of the opera, hurried his company into rehearsing a “Norma” which he speedily invented, and casting aside the money-making “Naiad Queen” in the full flood of its popularity, opened with his imitation “Norma” the same night the genuine opera was presented at the Chestnut. The result of the rivalry, says Durang, “was the most profound failure in the annals of opera,” and both Burton at the National and Robert C. Maywood at the Chestnut, went bankrupt.

Wood demanded his money from Maywood, and as that unfortunate gentleman was unable to hand it over,
withdrew, with his wife, and declined to sing again, thus breaking up the company and depriving Maywood of an opportunity to recover at least some of his losses. They quit the night before Mrs. Bailey's benefit. Mrs. Wood, however, feeling that she owed the usual courtesy to a sister artist, offered her services for a concert for the benefit of Mrs. Bailey; but Wood's arbitrary action in leaving the Chestnut in the lurch had caused so much popular antagonism that the concert was not given, and the Woods left not only the city, but the country, forever. Wemyss says that Wood left numerous unpaid notes behind him, which further aroused public ire against him. But he also says that the singer lost most of his savings, which were invested in United States Bank stock, when that institution failed, hence it was fifty-fifty.

It was Burton who, in this first company at the National Theatre, introduced to Philadelphia a man who quickly established himself in popular favor, and who held it for many years, Peter Richings. It was Peter to whom Maywood flashed the S. O. S. after the failure of "Norma," and who, quickly responding, assumed charge of the Chestnut and brought back some measure of prosperity. He had so much faith in "Norma" that he revived it with the Seguins June 7, 1841, and eight performances of the opera were given to crowded houses before the close of the season.

In the fall of 1844 Burton made a fresh start as the manager of the Arch Street Theatre, but while he changed his house he could not change his nature. The Seguins, during the summer, while in England, had obtained the rights to Balfe's opera, "The Bohemian Girl," and arranged for an elaborate production at the Chestnut. At once Burton planned to forestall his rivals. He did not have the score, nor could he obtain it; but he bought such of the vocal numbers as were on sale, attended a performance in New York during which
he made copious notes, and with these, wrote a "Bo-hemian Girl" of his own, which by dint of tremendous exertion he produced December 16, 1844. It ran all the week, at the end of which, on Saturday evening, December 21st, the genuine opera was produced at the Chestnut in splendid style and put an immediate end to Burton's effort. "The Bohemian Girl" scored heavily, and indeed, today holds the Philadelphia record for popularity, no fewer than 376 performances of it having been given before our first operatic century closed.

But before this season closed America entered the world's musical history with its first Grand Opera, "Leonora." This work, written by Joseph Fry, translator of "Anna Bolena" and "Norma," and composed by his brother William, was sung by the Seguins Company at the Chestnut Street Theatre June 4, 1845, and nightly until June 17. The cast who appeared in this first American Grand Opera was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Performer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leonora</td>
<td>Anne Seguin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariana</td>
<td>Emma Ince</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montalvo</td>
<td>Edward Seguin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julio</td>
<td>John J. Frazer</td>
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<tr>
<td>VaJdor</td>
<td>Peter Richings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alferez</td>
<td>Mr. Brunton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>A. Schmidt</td>
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"Leonora" was based on "The Lady of Lyons," and was received with favor by critics generally. While very far from perfect there is some excellent musical material in the score, and Mr. Fry supplied a very conventional plot.

Wemyss says in his "Recollections:" "Had Mr. Fry selected New York instead of Philadelphia for the first field of his operations, the whole United States would have teemed with praises—praises long and loud would have greeted the eye of the composer from all quarters. The sin he committed was daring to present the first lyrical drama ever composed in America to the citizens of Philadelphia before the New Yorkers had an oppor-
tunity of passing on its merits. Should it be played in Europe, how altered will be public opinion in its favor here. Mr. Fry may plume upon it as a work of art, to be proudly cherished. Of Mrs. Seguin’s performance of Leonora, I can only say that it was the most perfect thing I have ever seen.”

And it may be said that Philadelphia has not changed in this respect in seventy-five years. It is still customary to look coldly upon local effort, and to accept nothing until other countries or other cities have given it the stamp of approval.

The reckless guessing by Philadelphia’s critics last Wednesday as to the chronology of Halevy’s “La Juive” makes it worth while to note actual dates here. This opera was first performed in Philadelphia at the Chestnut Street Theatre on October 9, 1845, by the French Company from New Orleans, with Mme. Calve as “Rachel,” Arnaud as “Eleazar,” Mme. Cassini as the Princess and Douvry as the Cardinal. It was conducted by Eugene Prosper Prevost. The last performance of the opera here prior to last Tuesday night was by the Hinrichs Company in the Academy of Music, January 26, 1896, with Mme. Selma Koert-Kronold as “Rachel,” Amelia Loventz as “Eudoxia,” Henri Prevost as “Eleazar,” Brizio Piroia as “Leopold,” and Marius Malzac as the Cardinal, with Hinrichs conducting.

Another distinguished Italian company paid us a visit in the midsummer of 1847. This was the Havana Opera Company, of which the proprietor was Don Francisco Marty y Torrens. This gentleman is said to have been the father of profiteers. He is said to have owned the fish monopoly of Cuba, and exacted tribute from every partaker of this sea food. It is whispered that he was also interested in the slave trade, and had numerous other enterprises, all of which were extremely profitable. As wealth piled up he was stung
by the impressarial bee, and proceeded to organize a company to sing Grand Opera. At once there was a popular outcry in Havana. It was looked upon almost as sacrilege for this sordid money-grubber to carry his activities into the world of art. The attitude of the public so peeved the amiable Marty that he announced his intention of giving opera for his own exclusive entertainment; that they could all go to Mozambique or elsewhere, as no tickets would be sold. This attitude resulted in such a demand at the box office that his Grand Opera venture proved as profitable as his others.

One or two things made this company's appearance notable. First, it introduced to us that famous conductor, Luigi Arditi, who half a century later was still conducting for our pleasure. And during this engagement, July 14, 1847, the company gave the American premiere of Verdi's "Ernani," which was also the first time that Philadelphia had heard a work by this composer. The prima donna of the company was Fortunata Tedesco, and other prominent artists with it were Teresa Ranieri, Theodorinda Gerli, Juan B. Severi, Luis Bataglina, Natale Perelli, Pietro Novelli, Carantine de Vita and Luigi Perozzi. Novelli, a very fine basso, took a keen interest in the city's affairs. At that time there was much discussion of the project of the Society of the Cincinnati to erect a monument or statue to George Washington. The statue, as you know, was eventually erected many years later at the Green Street entrance to Fairmount Park. But in 1847 the form the memorial should take as well as the location, were subjects of general discussion. Novelli gave the subject much serious thought, and at length evolved an idea which he lost no time in making public. He suggested a marble statue of the Father of his Country, with Diogenes opposite, holding a lantern so that its rays would fall upon the statue and form the words, "Behold, I have found an Honest Man."
Perelli, a fine tenor, was induced by Pierce Butler to remain and make Philadelphia his home. He opened a studio and according to Armstrong, "did more to improve the taste and extend the knowledge of vocal music than all the teachers who preceded him."

The local advent of the famous Patti family occurred in 1848 when, on February 19th the Sanquerico and Patti Company opened for a season at the Chestnut Street Theatre. In this company were Salvatore Patti, tenor, his wife, Caterina Barili Patti, soprano, and Amalia Patti, their daughter, who later become the wife of Maurice Strakosch. Madame Patti, by her first husband had two sons, Nicolo and Ettore, both of whom were successful in opera, and Ettore eventually made Philadelphia his home, teaching singing here until his death. By her second marriage she had three daughters. The other two were Carlotta, whose lameness, it is said, was all that prevented her from becoming the greatest opera singer of her time, and Adelina, who was to become the most famous of them all, and who so recently passed away.

The Sanquerico and Patti Company gave four performances of Donizetti's "Gemma di Vergy" and then failed. It was announced that the house would be closed "for purposes of rehearsal," and that the Signora Biscaccianti had been specially engaged. She was a Boston girl, a superb artist, but so frail appearing, according to chroniclers of the time, that the audience was always apprehensive of a collapse during the performance. When the company resumed March 1st, Sanquerico and Patti had disappeared, and Sesto Benedetti appeared as leading tenor, Teresa Truffi as co-prima donna, Lietti Rossi, contralto, Avignone as principal baritone and others. The reorganized company kept up a losing struggle until March 24th when after a performance of Mercadante's "Il Guaramento," it went to pieces again. But with a pluck that commands
admiration the company was again reorganized and on June 4th made its third bid for support, with "la Sonnambula." The third crash came June 13th. But these valiant souls refused to accept defeat. For the fourth time it marshalled its forces, with more changes, and engaged Arditi as conductor, and his inseparable "pal," Giovanni Bottesini, acclaimed the world's greatest contra-bass player. To propitiate the jinx the company moved from the Chestnut to the Walnut Street Theatre, and tempted fate again on August 14th. Between acts there were duets by Bottesini and Arditi, the latter playing the violin, and opera nights were interspersed with concerts. But when after its performance of "The Barber of Seville" on August 26th there still remained an absence of metallic jingle in the money bags, the company collapsed for the fourth time and abandoned further effort.

But we were not to be without Italian opera. There was a third brother in the Fry family, Edward. Edward was devoted to commercial pursuits, but he had a profound belief that brother William was the greatest composer, and brother Joseph the greatest librettist in the world, and that only the prejudice of managers kept them in the background. So he determined to organize the best opera company in America, with the ultimate object of specializing on his brothers' operas. We have to thank Edward for Max Maretzek, who was a central figure in our operatic world for forty years. Edward lived in New York, and from the time the Herald adversely criticised "Leonora," had no use whatever for that newspaper. Hence, when he was ready with his company he announced that no tickets would be given to it. This so aroused the indignation of the elder James Gordon Bennett that he set out to get Edward's scalp. In this he eventually obtained assistance from members of Fry's company.

Fry had engaged Mme. Truffi and Benedetti, the
lady's principal adorer and later her husband, the Pattis, Sanquerico, buffo basso, Valtelina, and other artists of the highest standard. But when he learned that Sanquerico and Patti and their associates had refused to sing "Leonora," he was going to fire them forthwith, but was deterred by Maretzek. Suspicious of Truffi, however, he also engaged Rosine Laborde, the Belgian prima donna, much to the fair Teresa's disgust. In fact, Madame Truffi was so upset by it that when she appeared as "Norma" upon the opening of the season on October 5, 1848, at the Chestnut she broke down after singing "Casta Diva," and the performance was brought to a sudden end. Her breakdown was variously explained, but the consensus of opinion was that it was an aggravated case of artistic temperament. The fact that Madame Laborde proved to be an infinitely greater singer did not tend to soothe her, and in her pettish actions she was encouraged by Benedetti, in whose eyes his Queen could do no wrong. Nor was this feeling softened by the fact that when on December 12th her rival sang "Norma," in which she had made such a failure, the Belgian created a furore and inspired one critic to write:

"All the music of the part was given without mutilation or alteration save to add some cadenzas which but served to enrich it. Her Casta Diva was given with the most perfect effect; in grace, passion and expression we have never heard it surpassed."

Fry gave us two months of splendid opera, during which period he made no attempt to offer any of his brother's compositions; but in spite of their merit, Fry lost money steadily. Upon the conclusion of his Philadelphia season he took the company to the Astor Place Opera House, New York. There the Herald had better opportunities of getting at him, and unleashed its batteries on poor Fry with telling effect. Benedetti took occasion to insult Madame Laborde in full view of the
A Century of Grand Opera in Philadelphia.

audience during a performance of "Ernani." This interrupted the performance, and all adjourned to the Green Room to thresh the matter out. At last the fiery tenor whipped out his sword and threatened to bore Fry full of holes with it, whereupon the company immediately ended its career, and with it the impressarial experience of Edward P. Fry.

Peter Richings was a bachelor. Among his friends were Mr. and Mrs. Reynoldson, the former a newspaper man and adapter of plays. They died, leaving a baby daughter, Caroline, who had so entwined herself around his bachelor heart that Peter adopted her, and as Caroline Richings she was destined to win high place on the operatic stage. She made her debut in Philadelphia as Marie in "The Daughter of the Regiment" February 9, 1852, and this ever remained her favorite part. For some years her operatic appearances were with the Walnut Street Theatre stock company, with which she also appeared in dramatic performances. In November, 1867, she became the wife of Pierre Bernard, an operatic tenor. This gifted singer died of small-pox in Richmond, Virginia, in 1882, and the Richmond correspondent of a Philadelphia newspaper, in his report of her funeral said that a mocking bird that had escaped from its cage in a distant part of the city, perched on the limb of a tree above her grave and kept up a constant song during the service. Then it flew back to its cage. A very pretty yarn, but I am inclined to think the reporter who wrote it was blessed with a very vivid and poetic imagination.

About this time opera enthusiasts began to discuss the advisability of erecting a new and adequate home for opera. The old Chestnut was on the wane, and the National and other theatres were inadequate for the lavishness in opera that the public was beginning to demand. As early as 1851 a meeting had been held to discuss the project, and this meeting was followed by
others and the plans began to take definite shape. At last a committee was formed to obtain subscriptions for the building, which was to be called the American Academy of Music. This committee was made up of men whose names have been closely identified with much that is best in the city's history. They were Joseph R. Ingersoll, George M. Dallas, John M. Scott, Henry D. Gilpin, Charles Henry Fisher, Joseph Swift, Robert Morris, John Rea Barton, J. Price Wetherill, George Cadwalader, Edward S. Buckley, J. V. S. De Haviland, Charles Harlan, Charles Wells, Hartman Kuhn, Jr., Aubrey H. Smith, Charles E. Smith, George McHenry, George H. Boker, Emlen Physick, William Parker Foulke, James C. Fisher, James McMurtrie, Frederick Lennig, Gideon C. Westcott, John Kearsley Mitchell, John B. Myers, J. Pemberton Hutchinson, John H. Hugenell and John Siter. John B. Budd was president of the Board of Directors.

Ground was broken June 18, 1855, and July 26th of the same year the corner stone was laid with imposing ceremonies, a feature of which was an address by the scholarly Mayor Robert T. Conrad. The Academy of Music was opened with a series of promenade concerts beginning January 26, 1857. On February 24th the Maennerchor Musical Society gave a fancy dress ball in it, and the building was formally opened and dedicated the following night, February 25, 1857, with a performance of "Trovatore," in which Marietta Gazzaniga sang "Leonora," Zoe Aldoni, "Azucena," Pasquale Brignoli "Manrico," Alessandro Amodio the Count and Domenico Coletti, "Ferrando," with Max Maretzek in the conductor's chair. A poem, written expressly for the occasion by Mayor Conrad, was read from the stage by Caroline Richings. It is interesting to note that the scale of prices ranged from 25 cents to $1.50, with, however, an additional charge for what was called a "secured" seat.
The history of the Academy of Music would fill a book in itself. Its advent marked a new era in opera here. The days of stock companies were numbered, and opera was becoming more and more a specialized institution. For half a century and a little more this House was to hold undisputed sway as the Home of Opera, even though many performances were given elsewhere.

Adelina Patti's first appearance here in opera was in the Academy December 8, 1859, when although not yet seventeen years old she sang brilliantly the rôle of "Lucia." This wonderful little lady in her long career sang before many kings and queens and princes and dukes, but it is rather curious to recall that her first appearance before royalty was in this democratic city of Philadelphia, birthplace of our great Republic, the city in which it was first proclaimed to the world that all men were free and equal, and that kings were only common clay. This important event in Patti's life, and which was also an important incident in the history of opera in Philadelphia, occurred on October 10, 1860, in the Academy, when Royalty was personified by Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII of England. That night, at the Prince's request, "Martha," his favorite opera, was sung, with the youthful Adelina as "Lady Harriet," Fanny Heron Natali as "Nancy," Pasquale Brignoli, a tenor who sang for us for thirty years, as "Lionel" and Carl Formes, for whom the part was written, as "Plunkett." In addition to "Martha," the company also offered the first act of "La Traviata," with Pauline Colson as Violetta and Errani as Alfred.

The visit of Carl Anschutz's German company in the fall of 1863 was noteworthy in many ways, but chiefly because on November 18th the company gave the first performance in America of Gounod's "Faust." The part of Marguerite was sung by Marie Friederici;
Faust by Franz Himmer; Mephistopheles by Anton Graff; Valentine by Heinrich Steinecke and Siebel by John Farley, a young Philadelphia tenor. Ever since this and the performance a few nights later this part has been sung by a woman. In private life Madame Friederici was Mrs. Himmer. Her husband was not only a distinguished tenor, but he was also an eminent scientist and Doctor of Medicine, carrying honorary degrees from several universities. They were the parents of Hans Himmer, whom many of you will remember as one of the 'cellists of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Poor Hans! He went to Germany to visit his mother in the summer of 1914. There he was caught in the maelstrom of war. As a German subject he was seized, draped in a green-gray uniform, loaded with some seventy pounds of murderous equipment and sent to the trenches. In 1915 he was severely wounded by a shell, and sent home. His devoted mother nursed him long and carefully, and at last brought him back to some degree of health. This much news of him filtered through the rim of bayonets, and then our own entrance into the war brought oblivion of all things German.

"Faust" seems to really belong to Philadelphia, for it was here that the opera was first sung in its entirety on this side of the Atlantic, and here was first sung in America "Dio Possente" and Siebel's second aria. "Dio Possente" was written after the first London production, for Charles Santley, the great English baritone, and it was he who, as a member of the Parepa Rosa Company, first sang it for us. It is pleasant to know that this fine artist now, at the age of eighty-six years, is still living and in excellent health.

In the fall of 1876 the Strakosch Company gave one of its regular seasons here. The conductor was the late Siegfried Behrens. One of the operas announced was "Semiramide," which was scheduled for the evening of December 19th. The day before the conductor
was horrified to find, on looking over his music, that the band parts were missing, and he was in dire distress. He imparted his woes to his friend, Mark Hassler, conductor of the new Chestnut Street Theatre Orchestra. Hassler told him to cheer up. "I have a bright young violinist in my orchestra," he said, "who is excellent at arranging music. Let him take your conductor's score and write out the band parts from that."

"But," protested Behrens, "I have a rehearsal of the opera at 10 o'clock, and must have them then."

"You'll get them," assured Hassler, and Behrens took a chance.

At 4 o'clock the next morning while the genial musical director was slumbering peacefully in his home, 715 Locust Street, he was aroused by a ringing of the door bell and banging on the door. Poking his head out the window, his teeth chattering in the cold September night air, he saw a young man on the step.

"What do you want?" He demanded.

"I have your band parts here, Mr. Behrens," replied the youth.

"All right, good night," snapped the conductor, and slamming the window shut he sought warmth in his bed again. The young musician walked sadly away as it dawned on him how foolish he had been to awaken a harassed conductor at 4 o'clock to tell him something that could just as well wait until 10. The chief interest in this little anecdote lies in the fact that the inconsiderate youth was John Philip Sousa.

Mapleson began his famous opera seasons in America in 1879, and brought with him from season to season some of the greatest singers in the world, among whom those who shone with exceptional brilliance were Adelina Patti, Etelka Gerster, Christine Nilsson, Marie Marimon, Emma Fursch-Madi, Louise Dotti, Lillian Nordica, Sofia Scalchi, Annie Louise Cary, Ravelli, Giannini, Foli, Galassi, Italo Companini, Giuseppe Del
Puente and many others. Del Puente eventually settled in Philadelphia, and was a resident until his death.

While many foreign companies had visited Philadelphia, most of our opera had been sung in English, but English singing companies were gradually being crowded out. Americans were given few chances, and even when they did reach the operatic stage it was only by way of Europe, and they were compelled to sing in foreign tongues. But in 1886 there was a valiant effort made to establish opera in English by a first-class company, in the establishment of the American, sometimes called the National Opera Company. Charles E. Locke was Manager, Theodore Thomas General Musical Director, and his associate conductor was Gustav Hinrichs, to whom we were to owe so much in the years to come. But owing, it it said, to bad business methods, this company, after a brief but stormy career collapsed. Mr. Hinrichs reorganized it as his own, and with it opened the Grand Opera House on April 9, 1888, with "Tannhaeuser." As the building was constructed and owned by a brewer, this selection seems rather appropriate. That night the building was not finished, and Alfred Hoegerle, now so well known to us as the manager of the Metropolitan Opera House, who presided in the box office, had only a rough table upon which his tickets were spread, and was forced to sell them by candle light. This performance began a series of summer seasons of opera in the Grand Opera House which continued until 1896, and during this period Philadelphians had the opportunity of obtaining an operatic education never offered them before or since. Yet it was wholly a labor of love, for only one of all these seasons showed a small balance on the right side of the ledger.

But Mr. Hinrichs achieved much. Under his energetic direction Philadelphia witnessed the first
American performances of "Cavalleria Rusticana," "L'Amico Fritz," "Sigurd," "The Pearl Fishers," "Hansel and Gretel" and Puccini's "Manon Lescaut." And in the production of the last named work Philadelphians were honored by being the first in the United States to hear an opera by this composer.

Following the spring season of 1895 the late Mrs. Charles S. Whelen started a movement to establish opera at the Academy as a permanent institution. She wrote five hundred letters to as many persons soliciting their subscriptions, and thus obtained a guarantee fund of $50,000. Among her first subscribers was Mr. E. T. Stotesbury, who was years later to become the leading factor in keeping and sustaining opera here, and whose public spirit has been shown in his investment of several hundred thousand dollars in the enterprise with no possibility of financial return. Mrs. Whelen induced the directors of the Academy to instal the double horseshoe of boxes, the only ones prior to that time being the proscenium. Mr. Hinrichs was engaged as director and organized a new company, which sang the following season. Then came Walter Damrosch. Miss Elise Willing Balch, who had taken an active part with Mrs. Whelen, became a leader in the enterprise, and with her in pushing plans for future seasons was Miss Edith L. Hutchinson, now Mrs. Edward W. Burt. These two devoted women, by untiring effort, established the succeeding seasons for several years. Damrosch directed the season of 1896–7, but gave such a preponderance of German opera that there was energetic protest, and Charles A. Ellis became associated with him for the season of 1897–98. Still there was too much German opera, and Ellis alone assumed control for 1898–99. The performance of "Carmen," February 11, 1899, which ended his local direction of opera, was marked with a series of accidents almost without parallel.

It was an afternoon performance. The weather was
extremely cold, and in a biting wind the people who had
gone to the Academy to witness it stood outside and
shivered until five minutes after the time for the cur-
tain to rise, marveling at the delay, and expressing
themselves in various ways. Once in the building they
learned that the train which brought the company from
New York was three hours late. When it at last ar-
ri
erred it was discovered that the car containing the
costumes and orchestra parts had by some oversight,
been left behind. In response to a telegram to New
York the music was shipped on a later train. Arrange-
ments were made with a Philadelphia costumer to out-
fit the company, and William, Parry the stage manager,
went before the curtain and begged the indulgence of
the audience in his characteristic and engaging way.

Assistant Manager Heck of the company, hired a
wagon and met the train at West Philadelphia. With
his precious bundle of music safely in the wagon, he
ordered the driver to smash all speed laws in getting
to the Academy. The driver tried so faithfully to obey
that he broke the wagon instead, the vehicle collapsing
before it had gotten far on its journey. Mr. Heck,
using language suitable to the occasion, obtained
another wagon and completed his journey without fur-
ther mishap. But it was not until quarter past four
o’clock that Mr. Seppilli, the conductor, raised his baton
to start the overture.

Then came the Metropolitan Opera Company, with
whom the opera guarantors arranged to succeed these
local enterprises, and organized opera was made a per-
manent institution.

In 1903 Patti made her disastrous Farewell tour, in
concert. She sang in the Academy November 9, 1893.
Old timers went to hear again the singer they had wor-
shipped in their younger days, and young folk went to
listen to a woman whose fame had long been dinned
into their ears by their elders. But the marvelous voice
was gone. Some of the tones were apparently unmarred by age, but at times the woman of 1903 shrieked where the diva of twenty years before had poured forth golden melody. She was announced for another concert February 24, 1904, but her tour had been disastrous, and when she reached Philadelphia a suit for salary by her 'cellist brought it to an end. The concert was cancelled, and Patti never sang again on this side of the Atlantic.

The next important event in local operatic annals was the entrance of Oscar Hammerstein in his daring warfare against the long-established and solidly entrenched Metropolitan Opera House. He dared many things. He dared to cross the Market Street Rubicon and establish his new House and company at Broad and Poplar Streets, more than a mile north of the recognized center of operatic activity. He opened his house, which was to wrest supremacy away from the Academy on November 17, 1908, with "Carmen." The career of this House, and the two tempestuous seasons of the redoubtable Oscar are too recent to review here, as they are well known to all Philadelphians. Since 1914 the Metropolitan Opera Company has held undisputed sway.

In the course of these hundred years the style of operatic composition has changed. New instruments have been introduced and new orchestral effects invented. Only a few weeks ago a typewriter was used in the orchestra in a London production. Modern composers have gotten further and further away from the set aria, and spoken dialogue was long ago cast into the discard. Probably the most drastic departure from operatic form is that of Rimsky-Korsakov in his bizarre ballet-pantomime-opera, "Le Coq d'Or."

And yet some of these fine old operas still defy time and the attacks of modernists. "Don Giovanni," our first opera, was heard here as recently as February 21, 1914; our second opera, "The Barber of Seville" is in
the current repertoire, and our third, "Der Freischuetz," was sung here May 9, 1913, and its shelving after that was due to war and the temporary eclipse of German opera. Probably seventy per cent. of the operas that have been sung here, however, will never be heard again.

The time was when several first class companies contended for patronage from season to season, and prospered. True, their productions were not as lavish as those we witness today at the Metropolitan Opera House, but they satisfied, and Grand Opera had a strong and growing clientele. But they gave opera in English and could be understood. With the passing of time opera in English has undergone a process of strangulation and instead of its elevating influence being felt by the great public, thanks to the domination of foreign directors, the American people are being brought up on the drivel of so-called "follies" and dramatic art is dying in the grasp of moving pictures. And the art of Song itself is in peril through the modern habit of composers of Grand Opera in telling their stories in orchestration, with the voice as a secondary consideration.

I close my paper with a plea for opera in English, for the American singer and the American teacher; and for a patriotism on the part of the American people which will be shown not only in their willingness to go forth to battle for the old Flag, but in their exploitation and encouragement of their own artists. Will not Philadelphia point the way?