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“VICTORIA AND MERRIE ENGLAND.”

SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN’S NEW BALLET.

By A MUSICIAN.

“Yes, the work is practically finished, and a formidable task it has been,” and with something like a sigh of relief Sir Arthur Sullivan pushes aside the heavy score which lies before him on the table of his sanctum in Victoria-street.

“I don’t think I quite realised what I was doing when I promised Mr. Alfred Moul a Jubilee ballet for the Alhambra. But it is certainly pleasant, now that the strain is ended, to look back at the past few months and feel that—well, that I have not been idle. There is almost as much work here as in two Savoy operas,” adds Sir Arthur, bestowing an affectionate pat upon the bulky pages of his latest score. “In ballet, you see, the composer has no lyrics to help him, nothing to suggest a measure or a rhythm. He must cudgel his own brains for every beat and every bar, and realise at the same time that he will have no voices to help him out. That is what I have been doing in the Riviera, and here is the result—another budget of music which, I hope, will please the ears of my good friends the public. There will be just room here for the score, when in good time it comes to take its place with the rest.” And the composer turns with paternal pride to the bookshelves where his full-scores, from “The Tempest” and “The Prodigal Son” to “Utopia” and “The Grand Duke,” stand side by side in imposing array.

“Your preparation for the Diamond Jubilee has been an elaborate one, then, Sir Arthur?”

“Yes, indeed, and there are those who would have made it a still busier time for me. Look at this ‘Jubilee Ode,’ which an amiable Baboo has sent me from India. The first two stanzas promise well:

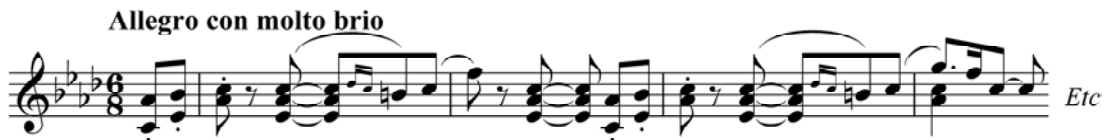
Let us sing the Diamond Jubilee
Of our great Queen-Empress Victoria,
As her Majesty has reigned truly
Over the British Empire and India,
For sixty years, a period of reign
Scarcely marked by any Monarch
In the world’s history on the main,
Although the events be many and dark!

“It appears later on, however, that the poet is a vocalist in want of an engagement; for he concludes his ode by styling himself Orpheus—

Who is very anxious to sing this song
Before the presence of the mighty Empress;
And surely to do so it is not wrong,
Let him therefore be called for by express!



Next, a dance the rhythm of which quickly catches the ear:



And then a Mazurka with a real “swing” in it:



“Here come the hobby-horses,” says Sir Arthur, after he has touched upon a *pas de deux* for Robin Hood and Maid Marian. “Clarinets and bassoons, you see!”



“And here,” adds the composer, as he strikes up a jovial tune, “is the May Pole Dance, which puts an end to the merrymaking”:



Then the music takes different shape. A storm rises in the heart of Windsor Forest, and Herne the Hunter, with his uncanny followers, comes upon the scene. When they have vanished a group of wood-nymphs dance to a swaying valse-theme:



“And now,” says the composer, “we come to the ‘Procession of the Yule Log,’ a march which, as you see, is built upon a ‘ground bass.’ Here is one of the tunes which I have fitted to this foundation”:



When Sir Arthur’s lively peasants have brought their Yule-log home they proceed to make the most of it in the fire-place of a fine old baronial hall, where Christmas is kept in the good old-fashioned way. The boar’s head and roast beef are brought in to the mingled strains of “Caput Apri Defero” and “The Roast Beef of Old England”; “The Fine Old English Gentleman” is also pressed into service; while the tenants pay homage to their lord to music peculiarly courtly in its grace:



“There is some lively dancing here,” remarks the composer, as he plays a *pas seul* allotted to a jester who has been a little too attentive to the punch bowl:



“Then we have also a game at ‘Blind Man’s Buff,’ a ‘Kissing Dance,’ and a fugue—“
 “A what?”

“Yes, a fugue, in which the dancers take to their feet, one after another, as the ‘subject’ makes its various entrances. A little daring, isn’t it? But why shouldn’t you have a minute or two of severe counterpoint in a ballet? What Mr. Ryan and Mr. Alias have done with the scene of the Queen’s Coronation and the gathering of British and Colonial troops you will see in due course. In the march-music many old friends, newly treated, will be recognized. For instance, at one point I have an English, a Scotch, and an Irish tune uniting their voices in friendly rivalry:

Flute & Piccolo
Cornet
1st Violin

Then after a brief snatch of the “Pas redoublé” to which the troops will execute their manoeuvres:

Alla vivace
p *f* Etc.

Sir Arthur concludes his exposition.

“You see,” he says, “I have tried to keep the music as English in style as possible. That has been my main object. Here and there, perhaps—“

“But what is it you are playing now, Sir Arthur?”

“Legnani’s new solo dance. I am going to score it this evening.”

“Isn’t there a little touch of Paris and Vienna there?”

“Quite right, so there is. Well, the orchestration shall be strictly English; so perhaps I shan’t be found out. Good-bye!”