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The LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

May - June 1967



CATLIN HOUSE
Home of the Historical Society
232 Monroe Ave., Scranton, Pa.

LET THERE BE MUSIC

In 1893 a young man joined the staff of the Scranton Tribune as music critic, and occupied that post until his death in January, 1948, at the age of 80. During that long period there was no musical event that took place in the Scranton area that escaped his notice. If he didn't attend the event personally in his capacity as music critic, he made certain that he clipped the items publicizing the event out of the newspapers. These items, along with his reviews and special columns, were methodically pasted in chronological order in bound volumes.

The music critic was the late Dr. David E. Jones. Born in Wales on November 25, 1867, he came to America at the age of 19. His doctorate in music was earned at the University of Toronto, Canada. From 1912 until 1941, he served as supervisor of music in the Taylor Borough public schools. After his death his entire collection of musicana was donated to the Lackawanna Historical Society by his daughter, Mrs. Rhea Parry, now also deceased.

The collection includes news clippings of musical events from 1885 until January 13, 1948, books and encyclopedias, letters, programs, and related papers. For anyone engaged in musical research, the Jones Collection is a gold mine of information. A meticulous compiler, Dr. Jones maintained a voluminous card file with alphabetical listings of subjects, events, and individuals.

In addition to his erudition in the field of music, Dr. Jones also possessed a keen sense of humor. For many years the Armory on Adams Avenue doubled as a concert hall. Because of its cavernous size, it was not an ideal place for a concert. It also had two other disadvantages: trolley cars ran in front of the building, and nearby was the passenger station of the Erie Railroad. Here is an excerpt from Dr. Jones' review of the recital by the eminent violin virtuoso, Fritz Kreisler, on January 6, 1922:

Just as he was well launched on the first movement of Mendelssohn's "E Minor Concerto," an Erie train came crashing and puffing along headed for the station, just a few blocks away. The violinist finished the concerto and was obliging with an encore when the Erie also obliged with an encore.

Mr. Kreisler was playing the soft strains of Bach's "Adagio and Fugue," for violin alone, when the strident blasts of a breaker whistle announced to the world that it had become 9 o'clock in Dunmore.

If only sound travelled within the building as distinctly and as well as it penetrates the walls, Scranton would have America's best concert hall. When, by grace of the Erie Railroad Company, the Scranton Railway Company, and the borough of Dunmore, Mr. Kreisler could be heard, his work was such that it added weight to a name already more than great.

When the world-renowned pianist, Ignace Paderewski, played at the Armory on April 16, 1923, Dr. Jones again lamented the lack of an adequate concert hall:

...the Erie trains with whistles and bells took all the delight out of a Beethoven sonata, and those who knew Paderewski best were a little surprised that he did not stop playing. But he continued, although those seated near him noticed a blinking of the eyes and a tightening of the muscles of his mouth.

Paderewski was sixty-five years old at the time of this Scranton concert. During World War I, he had served as president of his native country, Poland. The concert was sponsored by the Keystone Concert Course, managed by Mr. Chauncey Hand of the Griffith Piano Company. Paderewski arrived in Scranton in his private railroad car, "Ideal," via the Delaware and Hudson Railroad. Dr. Jones went down to the railroad yard hoping to interview the musical giant, but was blocked from entering the car by Paderewski's valet. Finally, Paderewski came to the door, looked out, and said, "It's a nice day. Good-bye." Whereupon he shut the door and the interview was terminated.

The famous Russian pianist and composer, Sergei Rachmaninoff, gave a concert at Central High School on November 13, 1923. Dr. Jones commented on the quiet melancholy and sombre dignity of Rachmaninoff's demeanor, and attributed it to the disorders and oppressions of the pianist's native land.

There is no question but that he is a pianist of the first magnitude; he possesses what advanced pianists call "the grand sweep," which means that his virtuosity and his powers of interpretation and imagination are consummate.

When the Italian tenor, Beniamano Gigli, sang at Central High School on March 12, 1925, he received such a warm reception that he said to the audience at the end of the concert, "O, mio Scranton, I will come to you again if you let me."

Dr. Jones could be kind and humorous; he could also be caustic. In the early thirties Rudy Vallee was famous for a brand of singing known as "crooning." Dr. Jones left no doubts about his opinion of this style of singing in a column which appeared on September 11, 1935:

Most musicians dislike crooning. It is not a legitimate form of singing, and there is a wide difference between crooning and a smooth, even legato pianissimo as a basic form of tone. The latter is not only beautiful but can be developed. Crooning cannot. It is a devitalized tone and detrimental to the highest form of normal voice processes. It robs the human voice of its ability to express the higher emotions and deprives it of its inherent devotional quality. It limits the development of the vocal mechanism and corrupts the minds of the younger generation.

One can well imagine how upset Dr. Jones would be if he were around today to hear the ear-shattering amplifications of the rock and roll "singers."

Dr. Jones' last critique was of a recital by the Metropolitan Opera baritone, Robert Merrill, at the Masonic Temple Auditorium, on January 13, 1948. A few days later he departed to review a series of concerts by the Celestial Choir.

.....ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Institute of Pennsylvania Life and Culture will be held on June 20-23 at the Pennsylvania Farm Museum, Landis Valley, Lancaster. It will feature seminars on Pennsylvania and American antiques, trolley cars, crime and punishment in early Pennsylvania, natural history of the state, and archeology of the American Indians. If you would like additional information on the Institute, telephone Miss Dorothea Mattes at

the Historical Society.

The Historical Society has purchased an opaque projector, a machine which projects onto a screen magnifications of photographs, maps, charts, newspapers, letters, etc. We are certain that future lecturers will welcome this extremely useful visual aid.

.....THE SEARCHERS

It is hoped that in a few years the area bordering Roaring Brook from Harrison Avenue to Cedar Avenue will be cleared of debris and beautified. Among the projects scheduled for this area is one designed to preserve the site of the blast furnaces of the Lackawanna Iron and Steel Company. During the past few weeks, Mr. Robert Mattes, curator of the Historical Society, and Mr. Horace Franco, Jr., of the architectural firm of Valverde and Franco, have been pouring over old documents, drawings, and photographs to determine just how the furnaces looked when they were in operation many years ago. Historical research has a lot in common with detective work. Like the detective, the researcher must follow clues, weigh and examine evidence, and finally arrive at a conclusion that he hopes is accurate. Anyone who has had an opportunity to observe the painstaking efforts of Messrs. Mattes and Franco will agree that the restoration plans could not have been entrusted to two more capable gentlemen.

.....HELP !!!

This is the final Bulletin of the current season; the next issue will be for September-October. All material has been written by the editor, thus far, and he would like to make it known here and now that he would welcome articles and items written by members of the Society. He will not guarantee that he will publish everything submitted, but he would like to fulfill what he expected would be his primary task: editing copy, rather than writing it. So if you would like to see your words in print, here is your opportunity.

.....HAVE A NICE SUMMER !

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