

Julia Claussen Finds New Spirit in Post-War Music

Even Scandinavian Phlegmatism Has Been Melted by World Events, Declares Mezzo-Soprano, Pointing to the Musical Awakening of Her Own Sweden

JULIA CLAUSSEN, the Swedish prima donna mezzo-soprano, is quite "different." That is to say, she looks very little like the approved idea of a Swede, and acts not at all like one's preconceived notion of a prima donna. She is very dark for one thing; for another she is simple in dress, manner and speech. Furthermore, in our hour's talk, she forgot completely to tell the writer how she had received a decoration from the King of Sweden on her last, just-completed, trip to Europe. In fact, if it hadn't been for Blanche Freedman, most enterprising of publicity "men," that bit of information would have been completely lost to a waiting world. Neither would anybody know a thing about the other medal Mme. Claussen was given by the Swedish government to commemorate her beautiful singing. . . . "And what earthly use are medals, if nobody knows about them? Now, I ask you?" inquires the astute Miss Freedman.

But Mme. Claussen was thinking, during our talk, of other things than medals; for example, the state of her native land; the price of things therein; the condition of matters musical; why an artist should have temperament; why no great compositions resulted from the war; how nice American men are to American women; what kind of girls she wants her daughters to be; why she likes opera even better than concert; Swedish operas, and how she feels about flowers.

Things Are Awry in Europe

She has only a limited command of English, but she does well with what is at her disposal. As thus:

"In Sweden I find the price of everything six times bigger as before it was," she observed, apropos of the depreciation of currency everywhere, and a thrill of sympathy ran through the audience. "You get easier the money here, but it is not worth so much, as it is with us. And when I first reached my country it was very hard to get some kinds of food." Denmark, it seems, was the best off, Norway the worst, in these respects, and Sweden came in between. But worse than the lack of butter was the lack of cheerfulness. The whole spirit of things seemed awry somehow.

"It is the people who have the money that are so different now," Mme. Claussen said. "You used to see one kind of people in the cafés, the hotels, the theaters; now you see another." There are very many Russians, it would seem; they swarmed into Sweden when the revolution broke out, and a great number of them sold their jewels in order to buy food with the proceeds. "And now one sees these jewels placed on some funny kinds of people," says Mme. Claussen, sadly. The food profiteers, it would appear, are living a high life. "We would not think now to drink champagne," she says, but that is not because of prohibition; Sweden is still comfortably wet. "But these stout ladies with jewels to the fingers, they can drink it; and the money does not seem to belong with them."

"Poor Sweden!" said Mme. Claussen. "Poor every country! One would not think Sweden would be so sad; you know they used to call Stockholm 'Little Paris,' its culture was so French, and they were, in their fashion, gay like the French. But now they are not; not that they have reason, like the French. But there seems to be something everywhere that keeps the nations from being happy. My friends were all there, but not the same. And you are not the same here; America is different; I noticed it at once when I came back. Even here, where the people are most lovable, happiest people in the world, people are not happy as they were, before the war."

Great Interest in Music

What did rejoice the soul of the singer was that, everywhere throughout Scandinavia, she found the greatest interest in music. It was so also in Finland; she was told it was so in Russia, where she was asked to go, and wished to, but was advised against going on account of the high prices, and internal conditions in general.

In Sweden the public in general are highly educated in music and are also somewhat phlegmatic in type, as she explained. In consequence they are unused

to responding with great enthusiasm to all the music offered them, but this time they were, she declared, "just so full of enthusiasm like Italians." Mme. Claussen likes the Italian temperament, by the way, and indeed looks much more like one, or like a Spaniard, than like a Swede. "I am real Swede," she states, "but I like the Latin temperament; I

never failed has no depth; and a person who has not suffered is not yet an artist. Too much suffering, on the other hand, is not well; it kills one's spirit; but what might be called a reasonable amount uplifts."

How we came to discuss the American man, apropos of suffering, is difficult to recall; perhaps it was because we were



Julia Claussen, the Swedish Mezzo-Soprano, With Her Two Young Daughters

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believe in temperament. You get something out of people who have it; artists without it are dead, no matter what they can do."

But, to return to her own people. She thinks the new and entirely enthusiastic attitude they have taken toward music (an attitude, indeed, reported by every artist that has visited Europe) is referable in their case to their having been shaken out of the national phlegm by the tremendous influx into the neutral countries of foreign musicians of all sorts. Also that their views musically are much broadened since the European musicians that formerly found Sweden "much too far north" have decided of late that it was well worth their while to visit the Scandinavian peninsula.

Why No Great Compositions

But with all this change, this broadening and deepening, this discontent with conditions, this profound sadness, there has been no great composition resulting from the war. Mme. Claussen thinks that such creation would be as impossible, and will be for a while, as it would be for one to sit by a dying child and compose music. After, long after the child has passed away, if, perhaps, one's nature had been greatedened by the experience, then one might compose music. Europe has literally been sitting by a deathbed, and one accompanied at that by horror. Of such conditions great music cannot come all at once. Sorrow, she believes in, for the artist, and even some failures. "I don't believe in only success," she thinks. "A person who has

discussing the happy condition of the American woman, of whom Mme. Claussen remarks that "she doesn't know how good she has it." Just then in came the older of her two pretty daughters, a slim, tall, young flower of a girl, who, like her younger sister, has "ideas all American," according to her mother. "I don't blame them," she added. "It is the country for the ladies." Her daughters have been educated here for the last seven years, and have become so Americanized that they spoke Swedish with great difficulty when they first went back.

"Never mind if they are pretty," she said in answer to a comment. "They're nice clean-cut, simple girls without any fuss, and I am very glad." But that she and they idolize one another, she did not need to say. One needed only to see her expression—and theirs—and feel the atmosphere that came in with the girl's entrance.

Church Singer at Nine

Mme. Claussen has been singing all her life, she says. She began as a church singer in Sweden when she was only nine or ten years old, and only undertook serious study when she was nineteen, making her debut in her own country in 1904. America learned to know her in all the great contralto rôles with the Chicago-Philadelphia Company under Dippel's management; this year she is engaged by the Metropolitan and will sing *Amneris* in the spring.

Opera she really prefers to concert, in spite of realizing the superiority of the latter form of singing from the artistic

point of view. The emotional and dramatic side of opera greatly appeal to her and she is never so happy as when singing her favorite rôle—which is the one she is singing at the time. "I breathe for the first time, somehow, when I get on the stage," she observes.

The Scandinavian group of songs that she is incorporating in her forthcoming program of March 18, naturally possess great interest for her, and she thinks will be found admirable by the public. Mme. Claussen is enthusiastic over the Swedish choral singing and more so over Swedish operas, which are many and beautiful. Yet she questions whether they will bear transplanting, for so much of the atmosphere of Sweden is woven into them that they may not interest outside of their own country. One of them,

by the composer Stenhammar, "The Feast of Solhag," she finds especially beautiful, and hopes may be heard over here.

The great bush of flowering azaleas in the center of the room bore testimony to her love of flowers; she petted it, almost, as she talked in farewell; and it seemed to me, as I went away, to be like this singer, somehow—warm and softly colored, and made equally to give out joy in a home, or gain wonder and admiration from those who passed by, gazing. CLARE PEELER.

Nudity in New Opera Shocks Paris

[From a Universal Service Dispatch to the New York American]

PARIS, Feb. 28.—The biggest theatrical sensation in years was sprung at the premiere of Henri Cain's new opera, "Quo Vadis," at the Champs Elysees Theater when Miss d'Herlyns emerged from a huge oyster shell and proceeded to divest herself of every bit of habiliment. The audience was utterly amazed, and cries of "Censor! Censor!" were heard from many parts of the house.

Daughter of Late Gustav Kobbe Marries

Mrs. Hildegard Kobbe Stevenson, daughter of Gustav Kobbe, the New York music and art critic who died two years ago, was married at her mother's Garden City home on March 11 to Francis B. Thorne of New York.