

HOW FASHION INVADES THE CONCERT STAGE

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The amateur who dreams of a life of fame in music, has one of two ideas about her future work. If she has talent and personality, she fancies that her playing alone will bring the desired recognition; if artistic and fond of dress, she has visions of beautiful gowns trailing behind her on the concert platform, producing a picture of harmony and elegance. Both pictures have other sides, however. For dress plays almost as important a part in the concert as the talent itself and becomes, as the season progresses, a veritable "Old Man of the Sea." The professional woman owes it to her public to dress fashionably, for the simple gowns of former years have passed into obscurity and with the increased importance of dress in everyday life, it has spread into all professions, until the carelessly dressed woman or one whose clothes are hopelessly old fashioned has no place in the scheme of things.

The business woman receives much help from the fashion periodicals; the mother of a large family is also reached and it is possible for many persons to procure ready-made clothing, thus obviating the necessity of shopping and fitting. Valuable as these two are in the acquiring of an up-to-date wardrobe, they help the musician but little. It is absolutely essential that she have a certain style and individuality in the selection of her gowns, particularly those which must be worn before a critical audience.

Clothes are such an intricate part of one's life that they consume hours of valuable time in selection of materials and trimmings, planning suitable styles and then the long weary hours of fittings--the musician's gowns are fashioned to be comfortable as well as stylish and require ever so many additional stitches. It is absolutely imperative that there be perfect freedom of movement and that the completed gown be easy in every part.

My clothes are the despair of every tailor and dressmaker until they have mastered the intricacies of gowns for public appearances. There are several distinct peculiarities of such costumes--the violin, of course, is responsible for them all.

The long arm movement requires that the armholes be of an extra size, that there be additional length from shoulder to elbow; usually at least four inches. There must be fullness across the bust and back to permit free breathing, and at the waistline the gown must set well, yet be perfectly free so that the bow may be easily used. The vogue of the kimono sleeves, on account of their peculiar construction, made it impossible for violinists to wear them while playing.

Then too the hobble skirt could not be used to any extent because there must be liberty in the movement of all parts of the body. Short skirts never give the effect that long ones do and a graceful train adds to the beauty of a concert gown. Some people wonder at the artist's cleverness in managing the somewhat awkward length but it is the hidden weights and heavy cords that help the musician to gather up the train in so fascinating a manner.

There is no place on the stage where clothes are more on exhibition than on concert tours, for the brilliant lights bring out every line and show the defects of one's costume far plainer than the calcium and footlights of the theatre, and there is often no background or scenery of any kind, so the musician stands out alone. For this reason her dress must not be too conspicuous or it will detract from the recital, which is not a dressmaker's exhibition, but a programme of classical music and nothing she wears should be too brilliant or inharmonious with the hangings of the hall.

At times I have known artists to lose their self control over so insignificant a thing as "angel sleeves" which hung too long and interfered with their playing, and a brilliantly spangled dress has often glistened so brightly in the electric light that it has given its wearer a most unhappy evening for if dressed in bad taste the audience's sense of discomfort somehow projects itself across the footlights. Whenever I am to appear in a hall or theatre, with which I am unfamiliar my manager goes a few hours before the concert and reports to me the colors of the hangings and the general effect. If the predominant shade is red or some other brilliant hue, I select a white gown or one of a delicate tint of yellow. On the other hand, a new room with much white plaster and few decorations save palms and potted plants causes me to appear in a warm red costume or similar bright combination.

I remember visiting a city where the hall decorations were of the plainest. I had forgotten that at the former recital given there I wore a deep coral robe with rich trimmings, and chose a simple white spangled robe. There had been a glow of enthusiasm before, but on the second occasion I felt a difference in the reception and general effect and am confident that the dress was the cause.

The many details of everyday dress predominate also on concert tours. The hair must be becomingly dressed so as to give a good shape to the head. It must be comfortable and well pinned or even covered partially by an invisible net so that no strand or hair pin detaches itself. Shoes must be easy yet in the latest fashion, harmonizing with the gown and should be in perfect condition. Soiled white slippers or tawdry gilt ones are out of place. I do not imagine that any one could play in shoes with an extreme heel of the French type.

I could write a book on experiences in my career that have been connected with dress. Some are ludicrous and others almost pathetic.

My first concert dress comes under both headings. I appeared in public when only a child, and my first dresses were of the simplest sort--white frocks with sashes, blouses and skirts, and sometimes I even wore a jersey and skirt, for in the Middle West, where I lived, a decollete gown was unknown. Finally something more pretentious was required and I can still see it and experience the sensations that overwhelmed me when I wore it. I am certain that I never played worse in my life than when garbed in that wonderful "creation." There was a bright red plush skirt, quite full, over which was draped a much shirred yellow silk "drop," the collar was square, in imitation of a decollete neck and there were bits of lace in every imaginable spot. This skirt came below my knees and I wore high yellow boots and bright stockings of the same shade. It is no wonder that the problem of dress overwhelmed me even at that early date.

Several times within the last few years, I have been forced to play in my traveling dress on account of delayed baggage, but at each recital the sympathy of my audience put me at ease. An interesting point about public appearances, and one that is common to many others that I know, is that while you may often scour the city for a particular ornament or jewel as a special addition to the concert costume, it is often forgotten in the excitement of the evening! This has

often happened to me, usually after I had spent hours in securing just what I fancied was absolutely essential to make my costume look its best.

Clothes are a bother, yet a blessing and each faded gown recalls happy days and pleasant people in all parts of the world. So, after all, I do not regret the long hours spent in search of the solution of the problem of dress for the result is well worth all the time and trouble.

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