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MAUD POWELL CHAMPIONS THE WEST'S TASTE FOR MUSIC

Eminent American Violinist Declares That Programs of the Highest Standard Are Invariably Demanded and Appreciated.

Three or four years ago, when Maud Powell, as soloist of a New York Philharmonic Orchestra concert conducted by Henry Wood, played the thirty-fifth of old Fiorillo's famous etudes as an encore, a New York reviewer quaintly remarked, "And then she came out and played a duet with herself," adding "and it made Henry Wood stand up and take notice."

Three or four weeks ago when, away across the continent, down in Southern California, in the picturesque city that someone has christened "Port Orient," this little classic gem was again transfigured under her bow, a Lomaland writer said:

"Maud Powell played it—and how we sat and listened! And back of the smile upon her lips, as she looked up at the boxes at the close, was a merry smile in the eye which said plainly, "Sh-h! This is our secret!"

No one who has come under the sway of the temperamental vitality and magnetism of this eminent American artist can believe her capable of anything but the most ardent and at the same time wholesome enthusiasm for whatever appeals to her as worth championing. Consequently, when, after playing in practically all other parts of the world she is brought face to face for the first time with the possibilities of the musical development of the great West and the opportunities it offers for pioneer work, it is not surprising that the fire of optimistic patriotism is stimulated in her to an extent that is bound to make itself felt. And she was radiating with inspiring enthusiasm when on her return to New York the other day from her long tour, she told me of many of her happiest experiences. All sorts of interesting incidents marked the tour, which opened in Helena, Mont., and proceeded to Seattle and Portland, down the Pacific Coast to San Diego, and took a long railway jump of four nights and three days from there to Denver.

"I have come back a better American than I was before," began Miss Powell, who seemed to have brought with her the breeziness of the West. "In the first place, the pioneer instinct in me is very strong, as my father was a pioneer in educational work, and my grandfather conspicuous in the opening up of the West. Then the spontaneous enthusiasm of the people out there is delightful. They absolutely refuse to accept Eastern verdicts without testing them for themselves. In their attitude towards music, as in everything else, they have the courage to be themselves. They are fresh, wholesome, receptive, responsive; they insist upon thinking independently at all

costs, and they want only the best. Unfortunately they have been deceived a good deal by managers who have taken out artists of the second and third rank — or perhaps a little *passé* — and advertised them as stars of the first magnitude, charging high fees for them. And these people arrange their programs on the theory that they must cater to a taste that is not capable of appreciating what the Easterners demand. It is a great mistake, and the Westerners have been disappointed so often in the extravagant claims made by managers that they are now strictly on their guard when new attractions are announced.

“Here is an indication of their progressiveness musically. In Colorado Springs, which is not a very large place, they have a very energetic Women’s Musical Club, and when I was there I visited the ex-president. She casually mentioned that she was studying some of Vincent d’Indy’s songs, and when the present president called I found she was working up songs by Debussy and Réger for one of their meetings.

“Throughout my trip I played the same programs I do in the East. For instance, I would open with Grieg’s Sonata in G major, op. 13, for violin and piano, follow it with Vieuxtemps’s Concerto, op. 31, and later play a group of smaller numbers; or beginning with the Schütt Suite, I would play the Arensky Concerto, and so on. The only numbers I had that could be considered as in any way of a ‘popular’ nature were three arrangements of *St. Patrick’s Day*, *The Arkansas Traveler* and *Dixie*, which I used as encores. But they are such excellent arrangements — the *Dixie* being quite worthy of Paganini — that I should not hesitate to play them anywhere. But I must say the regular program numbers were just as keenly appreciated as they were. One number I invariably had to repeat was Schumann’s *Traumerei*.

“That reminds me of a pretty incident in Seattle. There being no large concert hall there, our concert was given in the Dreamland Rink — a huge place — and it was packed [1,700 people]. Mattresses were placed against the windows to keep out the noise of the trolleys, and the evening was one of the most successful of the whole tour. The people seemed to be so absorbed in the music it was inspiring to play for them. When I played the *Traumerei* with muted strings there was not a sound in the place except the ticking of the clock, and the manager climbed up on a chair and stopped it. Wasn’t it thoughtful? After the concert, by the way, they went to work there and organized a symphony orchestra to have for the succeeding concerts in the same course — Paderewski, Gadski, Kubelik and Witherspoon are some of the artists engaged. So if I gave them the impetus to form an orchestra, that was a little bit of pioneer work, wasn’t it?

“Another point that interested me mightily was Ogden, Utah. It is quite a large city and though they have had lecture courses, I was the first musical attraction they had ever had. The concert was held in the Weber Stake Academy, which had no piano. They didn’t realize till the last minute that I would need one, and after skirmishing around the town they found there was not a grand in the place. However, they succeeded in borrowing an upright. Then when I explained I would require a music stand, too, they bought one, and after the concert, which was a fine success, they came to me and said, ‘Miss Powell, we now have a music stand to begin with, and when you come again we will have a grand piano for you.’

“One thing that was particularly pleasing was the appreciative attitude of the managers and committees. When they took pains to thank me personally for the pleasure they had derived from my concert, it added a friendly touch even to financial relations. One of the most graceful compliments that I received was a remark the managers in one of the larger towns made — ‘Miss Powell, this is not the best concert we have ever had; it is the first.’

“In Salt Lake City, by the way, we attended the funeral service of a Mormon bishop. The music was simple but beautiful.”

Miss Powell has brought back many pictures of memory – of the flowers and the baskets of fruit that were presented to her across the footlights, of a banquet given in her honor in Los Angeles by the Celtic Club, where she made her speech through the medium of her violin, and of the cordial responsiveness of her audiences everywhere– and they will not soon fade.

J. L. H.

From the Archive of The Maud Powell Society for Music and Education