

NEW AMSTERDAM OPENED

A Gorgeous Theatre and a Dazzling Shakespearean Production.

Mr. N. C. Goodwin in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" — Mendelssohn's Music with Additions.

At the opening of the New Amsterdam Theatre last evening a vision of gorgeousness was disclosed to New York theatre-goers, inured to sights of that description, that may well have caused the most experienced of them to wonder and admire. The playhouse itself, one of the most elaborate in design and one of the most thoroughgoing and consistent in its embodiment of the "New Art," through the labors of architects, sculptors, decorative painters, and designers, came first in its insistent appeal to the eye with all that plastic art, sinuous line, and the blended harmonies of form and color could jointly accomplish.

The setting was no more elaborate than the dramatic show that was exhibited upon the stage. It was "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in which the scene painter, costumer, electric engineer, and mechanic of stage effects had done all in their power to realize the possibilities that the fairy comedy of Shakespeare offers ingenious handicraftsmen, who worked with all that skill and all that profusion of resource and money could give them. There was, furthermore, Mendelssohn's music composed for the drama, with many additional pieces arranged and fitted to the performance with great skill and taste by Mr. Victor Herbert. The chief actor was Mr. N. C. Goodwin, who took the part of Bottom, and there was a company of considerable merit.

The stage was thronged with fairies beautiful in face and figure, beautiful in the richness and daintiness of their costumes; with diminutive sprites and elves of all sorts. Fairies soared through the air. Puck made a most brilliant entrance from the upper regions with precision and grace. Electric bulbs twinkled in endless profusion among the flowers, and the woodland glade and Titania's bower were symphonies of soft light and subdued color. The ass's head became Bottom as though he had been born with it, and was full of all asinine graces and expressiveness as to eyes, ears, and mouth. There was, in fact, an unceasing showing of the things that mechanical skill could accomplish.

The result was a representation that in many ways charmed and delighted the senses of the listeners; though it sometimes seemed almost as if it overburdened and wearied them. Nothing was left undone, nothing was omitted that could be exhibited to the eye; the ear was continually delighted with the witchery of Mendelssohn's fairy music. Yet it seemed as if the imagination were not always touched in the highest sense by this lavish and opulent display, and that Shakespeare's own poetry and exuberant fancy were somehow buried beneath it. The audience was very large, and gave frequent manifestations of pleasure and amusement, more frequent ones, perhaps, of its amazement.

The music is one of the most delightful features of the performance. Mendelssohn, as musical amateurs know, wrote the overture to the play when he was a boy of eighteen, an astonishing tour de force that he never surpassed. Seventeen years later he composed twelve pieces of entr'acte and incidental music for the stage representation of the play at the desire of the King of Prussia, using certain of the motives of the overture, which were of a sort singularly adapted to illustrate and heighten the poetic significance of the dramatic situations. He did not exhaust all the possibilities that the play afforded for such treatment, however, and when the present performance was projected Mr. Herbert found many places where music could be further employed. He has filled these places entirely in the spirit of Mendelssohn by arrangements of his music admirably chosen for the purpose in view.

All the original "Midsummer Night's Dream" music is retained, and all the additional numbers are of Mendelssohn's composition, with the single exception of the music to Puck's song, that is of old English origin, and traditionally ascribed to Shakespeare's time. Mr. Herbert has shown great ingenuity in his choice, resorting to the "Songs Without Words" for five or six of his selections; out of the so-called "Spinning Song," for instance, he has made a very characteristic concerted piece for solo voices and the chorus of fairies. The "Spring Song" has furnished another, several times recurring. He has taken a motive from one of the string quartets, and other material he has derived from the composer's songs and duets.

The music is very capably performed. Kathryn Hutchinson as Titania sings with a charming voice and intelligent style, and Margaret Crawford, who also has much to sing in the part of Oberon, has a powerful contralto voice, though it is not utilized to the best advantage. The chorus of fairies is large and uncommonly well trained, and sings with a fine quality of sound. The orchestra is efficient, and under the skillful direction of Mr. de Novellis acquits itself of a difficult task as well as could be expected. And, remarkable to relate, the music was listened to as something important of itself, and even the entr'actes claimed a share of the audience's attention.

Mr. Goodwin at the close of the third act came before the curtain and made a brief speech, in which he said that he thought the occasion warranted his violating the principle he held that an actor ought not to come before his audience during a performance in propria persona. He thanked his audience warmly for the interest they had shown in the performance. People had been saying that there was need of a typically American theatre in New York; he thought they had it in the New Amsterdam. The proprietors of that theatre had been spoken of as speculators; but, he said, all honor to them if such a theatre as that was the result of their speculation. To which the audience assented with a polite tribute of applause.

The New Amsterdam Theatre is presented as being the first complete carrying out of the idea of the "Art Nouveau" throughout a whole building. The aim has been in the interior to produce a "pastel effect," in which vines and flowers are the chief motives. Each of the boxes, for instance, with its draperies, represents a flower—a heliotrope, a buttercup, &c., and the same idea is carried out on the curtain. The color scheme is of green, relieved by mother of pearl and mauve.

The decorations include a large composition over the proscenium arch by the late Robert Blum and A. B. Wenzell, typifying the drama. There has been a lavish use of sculptured decoration in the lobby, friezes on the two side walls representing respectively scenes from Shakespeare's plays and from Wagner's "Nibelung" dramas. On the ends are panels typifying Greek drama and "Faust." The foyer contains bas-reliefs on the side walls representing the old and new cities of New Amsterdam with vivid realism; also a panel depicting "Progress."

In the promenade foyer masses of vines and flowers, with animals, are modeled into the balustrades, and here, too, is another panel, and sylvan subject. The general reception room shows a rich green effect, with two large decorative lunettes, "Inspiration" and "Creation," and an uncommonly elaborate fireplace of Caen stone and Irish marble. Smoking and retiring rooms are ample in size, and show the same consistency in carrying out the scheme of decoration.