

The Prose of Music.

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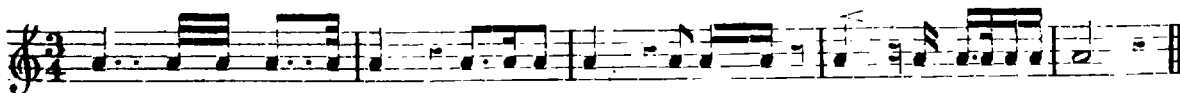


It is on record that a celebrated Italian musician once heard a criminal undergoing a severe castigation in the market-place at the hands of the executioner. The culprit, who was being beaten with what answers in Italy to our cat-o-nine-tails, uttered such terrible shrieks and cries that the people who were standing round, filled with commiseration, were about to attempt a rescue. The great composer, however, who had been listening intently, put a stop to their intended good offices by remarking to the bystanders that all the criminal's cries were delivered by his *head* voice, not his *chest*; and therefore were artificial. "The man," said the great composer, "is undoubtedly shamming." So, indeed, it actually proved to be, for on examination there was discovered a thick buff jerkin between the man's coat and his back, which had effectually warded off all blows that had been aimed at him. So important is it to cultivate the habit of minute observation, and such an aid did music in this instance prove to the detection of a criminal.

But there are a thousand such things around us in life, most interesting to observe, and most easy to notice, if the attention is once called to them. Not only does music monopolize the field of art and song, but, if we only consider the case, it extends its domain into every spoken and uttered sound. Its realm is commensurate with everything that affects the ear, although directly we leave the sphere of rhythm and melody we undoubtedly arrive at "The Prose of Music," and leave the poetry far behind.

Many words in language are undoubtedly coined in order to express a musical reproduction of the act they signify. Thus: "splash," "scrape," "crack," "crush" — what could be more graphic than these four words, what device could better express the action of splashing and cracking?

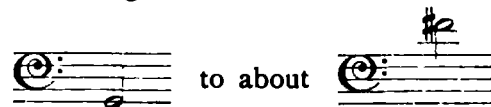
But all language, especially blank verse, can have its utterance recorded in musical notes. To take a line from Milton:—



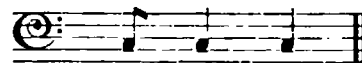
These are Thy glorious works, parent of good, Al-mighty! Thine this universal frame.

The whole of language, prose and poetry, can be musically expressed on such an analogy; but while the majority of such language proves comparatively uninteresting, the tones of a great actor or the inflections of an eloquent orator offer a theme of fruitful study.

The speaking voice of Mr. Irving will be found to range from



He speaks on each and all the tones between these extremes, sometimes adhering to one note, as, for instance, the parting injunction in "Charles I." :—



Re - mem - ber.

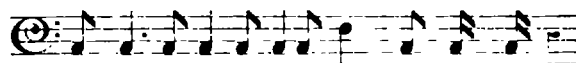
At other times running the whole gamut of the chromatic intervals in one ejaculation, as :—



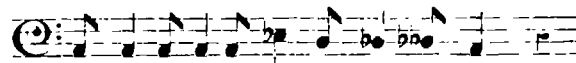
Oh

No.

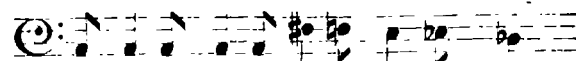
Mr. Irving's style of utterance is, however, inclined to the monotone rather than to the chromatic; we have heard him say several lines, often, as under :—



Tis not alone my in-ky cloak, good mother,



nor cus-to-ma-ry suits of sol-emn black,



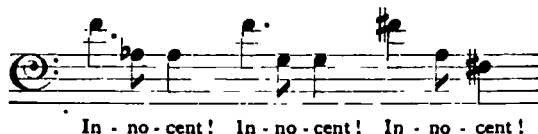
nor win-dy sus-pi-ra-tion of forced breath.

By contrast with this grave style of utter-

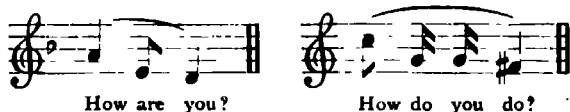
ance Mr. Wilson Barrett's is exceedingly light and buoyant, travels through a greater range of notes, and makes more use of the high and melodious tones of the voice. A forcible illustration of this is his remarkable exclamation in "The Silver King" on the word "innocent." Mr. Irving would most probably have spoken this:—



Mr. Wilson Barrett ejaculates:—



We make use of the language of celebrated actors for our illustrations, because their words and utterances are familiar to thousands; but students of oratory may form precisely the same observations by listening to their favourite speaker. All language, no matter of what kind, has its music. In ordinary conversation, when we greet a friend, we unconsciously utter the musical phrase:—

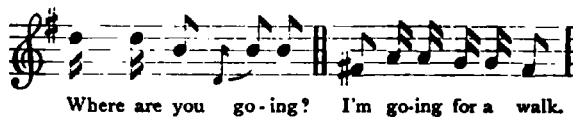


The variations of this ordinary salutation are as numerous as the moods of feeling in which it is uttered. We are aware what a stiff turn can be given to these common words by the spirit in which we say them, so numerous are the musical inflections of the voice. And the following may be added to the above as instancing some of the commonest methods of uttering the familiar address:—

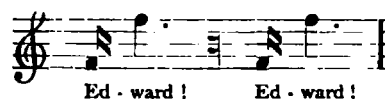


At one time we lift our voice upwards when we address our friends. At another time we let it sink downwards. What is the cause of this difference? Which is the blither

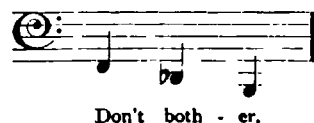
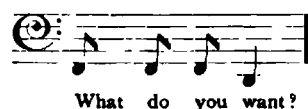
and more joyous exclamation of the two? At any rate, both are used, and readers may test the cause of the variation themselves.



Occasionally one may overhear a wife calling to her husband:—

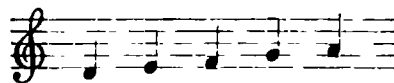


And the reply comes:—



Let us hope that such an answer is not always the final one in a matrimonial conversation; but at any rate, when it is, it is always intoned so.

The tones of ordinary conversation, when the voice is not uplifted in any eagerness or emotion, seldom range beyond—



for women, and the bass equivalent notes for men. Small talk, which does not invite any enthusiasm, any feeling, or any excitement, can be always very completely ejaculated by the repetition of these five tones, and the intervening semi-tones and demi-tones. For the peculiarity of spoken language is that it makes great use of the little fraction of intervals which play but a small part in music proper—that is, at least, in the music of European nations. The musical systems of some Orientals are in this respect much closer to speech than ours is.

But suppose we pass from the domain of small talk and chatter, and give vent to any emotional utterance. At once the tones are so decided, and so much alike in every one of us, that it becomes easy to chronicle them and to express them on the staff.

When we sigh, we say :—



When we complain, we ejaculate :—



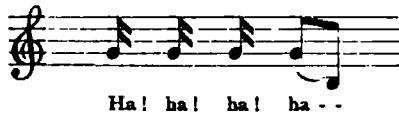
Hurt us, and we all cry :—



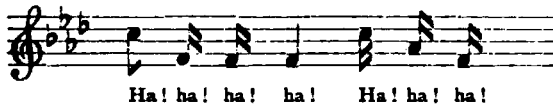
In different keys, perhaps, according to our sex and the pitch of our voices, but in pretty much the same notes, every one of us.

Laughter may be expressed very clearly in music; and it has been artistically expressed many times. Perhaps the best utterance ever given to it is by Handel in "L'Allegro," where the words "Laughter holding both his sides" almost make the notes, despite themselves, burst into a roar of merriment. *Mephistopheles'* laugh in "Faust" on the G in alto will be familiar to opera-goers. Also "laughing" songs and "laughing" choruses many.

The ordinary laugh of everyday life may be here expressed :—



or in the shorter and snappier style :—



If laughter is so decided in its rhythm and clear in its intonation, crying is decidedly the reverse. It is very hard to register crying in musical notes. The voice slips about at a great rate, and rests such a short while on any given tone, that the finest ear must confess itself baffled in the attempt to record the plaintive utterance of the heart till long practice and many failures have at last rendered the attempt possible. A young lady giving vent to a tempest of sobs, while in the first place she disfigures her counten-

ance, in the second place ought to be warned that she utters the following intolerable musical sentence :—



Vary it as she likes, the variations are yet more intolerable :—



and—



While if at the end of her outburst she falls into a fit of sobbing, the following ugly noise is the result :—



Not to the exclamations of human beings alone does the prose of music extend, but to those of the lower animals likewise.

This is how a cow lows :—



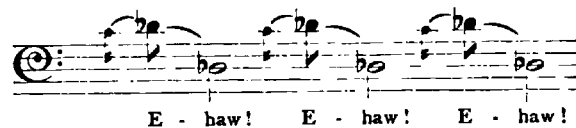
A horse neighs :—



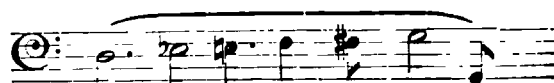
A lamb bleats :—



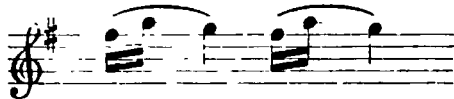
A donkey brays :—



A calf bleats :—



A dog yelps:—



A hen cackles:—

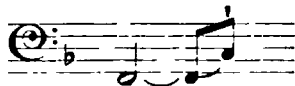


A cat mews:—



Mi - aw Mi - aw.

A pig grunts:—



Some of these sounds might be expressed on a more elaborate scale, for these creatures, like ourselves, do not confine themselves to the very simplest utterance of their emotions at all times. And to take the cry of the horse alone, we may offer the three following additional expressions of it:—

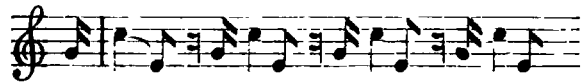


Not only animate beings, but inanimate objects come within the scope of the "Prose of Music."

Who would not recognise the following as "a creaking wheelbarrow":—



This as "a pair of bellows" blowing:—



and the following, in the same way, as the ring of a counterfeit shilling:—



while the blacksmith on his anvil, so often imitated in songs, is, when reduced to its simplest form:—



The range of the "Prose of Music" is practically commensurate with creation itself, and the Greek philosopher who said there was music in everything was not far from the truth, though we question if he ever thought of including the homely

things which we have incorporated in our article.

But enough has been said to show what an interesting field the whole subject opens up, and what untold enjoyment may be had by the amateur investigator if he exercises himself in transferring to musical notes the commonest impressions of his ear.