

An "A.Z. Idelsohn" Evening in Johannesburg

Unique Contribution to Jewish Music

A MOST stimulating and informative evening was spent by a large gathering on Wednesday evening last at the Elgin Hotel, Johannesburg, when instructive addresses were delivered on the labours and achievements of the eminent Jewish musicologist, Professor A. Z. Idelsohn, of the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. This was held under the auspices of the "A. Z. Idelsohn" group of the Association of Jewish groups.

Mr. D. Mierowsky, who presided, spoke of Professor Idelsohn's unique contributions to Jewish culture in our generation. His researches in the vast domain of Hebrew music, both ancient and modern, must be regarded as of outstanding value. His contributions to Hebrew letters claimed for him a permanent niche in the literary temple of his people. No less than his scholarly work, Professor Idelsohn's creative labours were also to be looked upon in no mean light.

Rabbi M. C. Weiler, who was a student of Professor Idelsohn at the Hebrew Union College, paid respect to him as an outstanding personality and as a man of vast knowledge who had rendered a marvellous service to the intellectual cause of his people.

Speaking in a reminiscent mood, the speaker gave the high lights of Professor Idelsohn's extraordinary—romantic—career. Professor Idelsohn, who was born in Courland on 26 Sivan, 1882, developed a fascination for Jewish melodies at a very early age, principally through the inspiration of his father, who now resided in Johannesburg. As a youth the Professor was under the tuition of the famous Ober Kantor Edward Birnbaum of Koenigsberg. He was also educated in certain well-known German conservatoires. He first became a professional cantor in Leipzig. Some thirty years ago he came to Johannesburg, and, for a short while, he officiated at Fordsburg. However, he did not remain long in this country.

Result of South African Experiences.

It was as a result of his experiences in Fordsburg, declared the speaker, that really gave him a start in his vocation in music. While journeying to Palestine he met on board, the famous Zionist idealist and president of the Organisation after Herzl, David Wolffsohn. It may have been David Wolffsohn who must have inspired him to carry on the great work which Professor Idelsohn was later to astound the world.

Professor Idelsohn's coming to Palestine must be regarded as a most important factor in his life, for Jerusalem was then "a living museum of the Jewish past." He had spent there some sixteen years, industriously and opportunely. It was during that period of his life that he gathered more than four thousand melodies of Oriental, North African, Sephardic and Ashkenazic tunes. These have been published in some

ten volumes, issued originally in Hebrew, later to be translated into German and English. This was not the only thing he performed. During the years that have passed, Professor Idelsohn published many other volumes of original and absorbing works. His "Thesaurus," declared the speaker in conclusion, which was a vast expanse of the firmament of Jewish music, would live throughout the ages.

Distinctive Aspects of his Scholarship.

SPEAKING enthusiastically on "The Musical Research of A.Z. Idelsohn," Professor P. R. Kirby (of the Department of Music at the Witwatersrand University), called attention to the way the ends of scholarship were directed. It was not the person, said the speaker, who enriched knowledge by poring over old and forgotten dusty documentary evidence that counted so much, but it was that person who, combined with the latter quality with that of creative labours, was really considered in the estimation of the cultural world. Such a personality of the latter kind was Professor Idelsohn. Justifying his recent assertion "that there is no such thing as music; there are musics," Professor Kirby deprecated those scholars who were obsessed with so-called "highbrow" Western music.

In studying age-old Hebrew music one must have great patience as well as an ordered system of knowledge. Professor Idelsohn had those qualities in no mean fashion. Professor Idelsohn revealed the roots of the Hebrew in Gregorian music. It was well that he should honour Professor Idelsohn, whom the speaker met some five years ago, and most of whose books are to be found in the Music Department of the Witwatersrand University.

Delightful musical illustrations of several aspects of Professor Idelsohn's works were rendered by members of the Group. Among other renditions, which were much appreciated, were those of Mrs. (Dr.) Morrison, Messrs. Johnson and Soloway. They were accompanied on the piano by Mr. J. Idelsohn (brother of Professor A. Z. Idelsohn) and Miss Rotkin.

After a vote of thanks to the chief participants of the evening had been moved by Mr. Wall, the function concluded with the singing of "Hatikvah."

PARKTOWN ZIONIST YOUTH SOCIETY.

The recently formed Parktown Zionist Youth Society has decided to concentrate on cultural activities, meeting once a fortnight to study and discuss various aspects of Zionism and Judaism. So far, these meetings have been addressed by outside speakers, but later it is intended that papers should be prepared and read by members themselves.

At the first meeting, Mr. J. S. Sergay and Adv. L. Lawrence spoke on "Forerunners of Zionism." This was followed by lectures on "The Historical Basis of Zionism," by Mr. A. Abrahamson, and on the general principles of Zionism, by Mr. M. Katz.

Its next meeting will take place on Thursday, 6th June, when Adv. A. Shacksnovis will address the Society at the residence of Mrs. Grusd, 51, Rutland Road; while on Sunday, 16th June, the society will meet Northern Districts in the second round of the Oratorical contest at the residence of Mrs. M. Cohen, 4, Frere Road.

SPECIAL SHEVUOTH SERVICE.

A special service will take place tomorrow evening (the eve of the second day of Shevuoth) at the Berea Synagogue, Tudhope Avenue, when Rev. M. I. Cohen, B.A., of Bulawayo, will preach and Chief Cantor Rev. S. Steinberg, assisted by full choir, will officiate. Service will commence at 5.45 p.m.

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"DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS."

ORGANISATIONS such as the recently formed Art Theatre in Johannesburg deserve every encouragement; but why will they insist on choosing the most difficult plays to commence their existence? The Art Theatre made a mistake in presenting Eugene O'Neill's "Desire Under the Elms." The play is far too difficult for them to handle—it is difficult even for gifted actors of long experience; and probably it is not possible for young players, handicapped as they are by their own small experience of life, to give adequate expression to the emotions on which this play is based.

If one makes concessions on these grounds, then the Art Theatre acquitted itself tolerably well in the performance of this play at the Jewish Guild last week. Mr. Kurt J. Baum had to step into the chief part of Ephraim Cabot at the last moment, and at such short notice he gave a competent portrayal, though one that suffered from considerable unevenness. Pat Moloney had a difficult part in Ephraim's wife, Abbie. She was not able to handle all its subtle facets, especially in the famous parlour scene, when her emotions suffered from theatricality; otherwise she did remarkably well, though her dialect occasionally broke down. Edouard du Toit was wrongly cast in the part of Ephraim's son, Eben. He melodramatised the part, endowing it with an emotionalism it is not supposed to contain. His attitudes were rigid and overworked. The portrayal of Eben requires infinitely more subtlety.

T. W. Johnson and S. Schreiber, in the rôles of the other two sons, Simeon and Peter, gave the best performances of the evening. Each was convincing, and the part where they went off singing to set out for California was excellent. The various minor characters were fair.

One feels that a word should be said about the production, since this undoubtedly set the tone of the whole performance. It was not a sufficiently subtle and restrained production. It was too theatrically emotional—in parts it was almost hysterical. Mr. Baum, as those who have seen his previous productions will agree, is inclined to err on the side of emotionalism. I hope he will not take it amiss if one poor critic suggests that more restrained production would do much to improve his plays.

E.B.

BEREA'S JUBILEE SERVICE

A special service was held at the Berea Synagogue, Berea, on Friday evening, the 31st ult. to celebrate the Union Silver Jubilee. Chief Cantor S. Steinberg, assisted by a full choir, officiated.

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