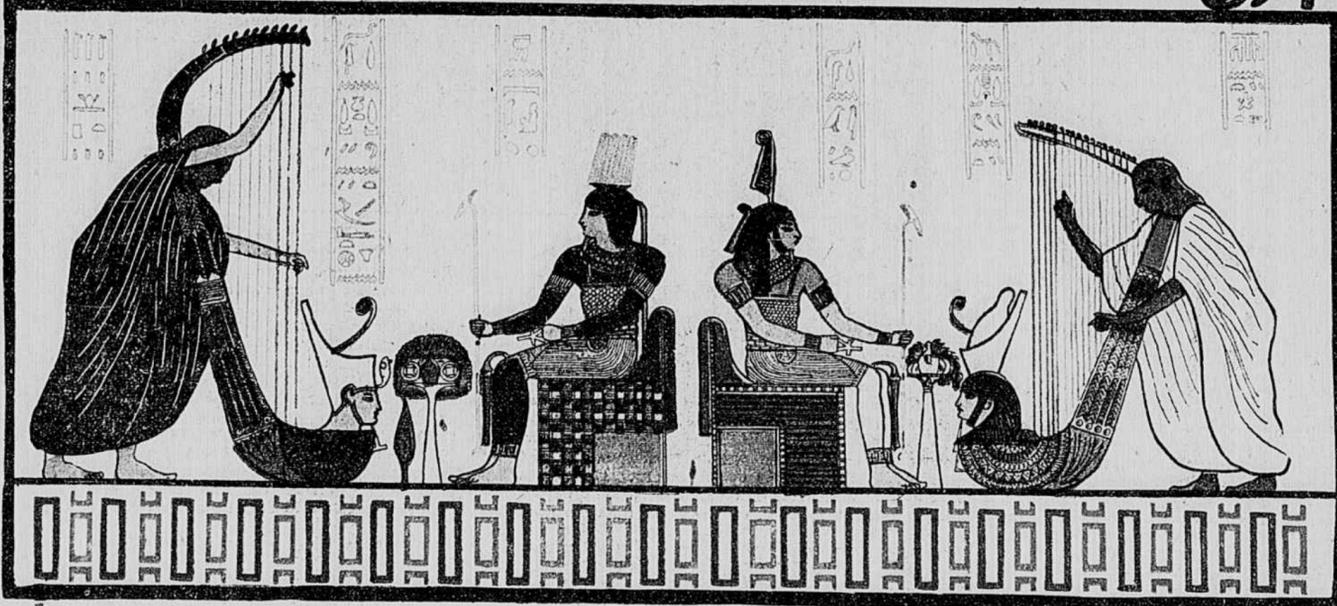


Astonishing Discoveries in Ancient Egypt.



Musical Instruments and Orchestration More Remarkable Than Anything We Now Have, and the Unwritten Law That Prima Donnas Must Commit Suicide at the Moment of Their Greatest Fame.

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WE have been excavating the ruins of the ancient Temple of Sais in Egypt for five months. Among many other interesting archeologic discoveries we have found a burial chamber of the musical celebrities of that era. It is located in the southwest corner of the imposing structure, which surpasses in its grandeur and architectonic skill the greatest cathedrals of to-day. Here, in one of the catacombs, supposed to be from the time of the Third Dynasty, we found a huge casket of stone, and within it a collection of the most unusual musical instruments. It contained also a papyrus that has not been deciphered yet, but I am of the opinion that this is a peculiar kind of Egyptian musical writing unknown to us. The hieroglyphic inscription on the sarcophagus says that the musical instruments belonged to the orchestra of the Temple of Sais, and were used for the crowning celebration of Pharaoh Amenemhat I.

A very strange custom prevailed in Egypt that every prima donna and ballerina was obliged to die at the moment of her greatest inspiration, unless she resigned as an artist and took another vocation. It therefore usually happened that great singers, dancers and musicians dropped dead while they received the greatest cheers and ovations from the audience. I shall return to this matter further on in this article and narrate a very interesting discovery we made.

The variety of discovered instruments of the old Egyptians proves that they had an orchestra of far larger scope than we do at present. We found not less than sixteen various instruments, some of which resemble our harps, violins, flutes and trumpets. But there are others which remain a mystery to the musicians of this age.

Among the instruments that we discovered there were some which produced such sounds as, for instance, the roar of the wind, the waves, the song of certain birds and various mysterious voices of nature. Our music at least has not reached as yet that degree of development. It is only the celebrated Finn, Jean Sibelius, who has made slight attempts at making his latest compositions imitate the voices of nature. But for the Egyptian composers that was a vital issue of their works. There is a huge wood trumpet among the discovered instruments of Sais which produces the weird sounds of an angry roaring lion. On the other hand, their flute has produced the sweetest tones that I have ever listened to. It has an enchanting timbre, and thrills a listener with magic rapture, even if one plays a single tone on it. I can imagine how that instrument could really make an audience wild with enthusiasm if it was played by a virtuoso.

Most of the instruments of an old Egyptian orchestra were of wood and porcelain. There is

only one horn of brass-like metal. The strings of their harps prove to be made of a fibre absolutely unknown to-day. It is exceedingly thin and strong, and has almost the appearance of a silver wire. But then, again, there are strings which our chemical expert has declared to have been spun from human hair. Thus the strings of the highest notes of an Egyptian violin are made of exceedingly long hair taken from some beauty of that age. An orchestra of sixty-five instruments and a chorus of eighty singers were required to perform the majestic anthem of the Sun.

Music by old Egyptians was closely connected with dancing performances. They even danced their hymns and oratorios—and dancing had to be studied carefully for years with music. All the ballet dancers were women. If a man was required to figure in a ballet a woman had to disguise herself for that. Women were also the harp players and singers, but other instruments were played exclusively by men. But no married woman was permitted to be a dancer or harpist unless she was divorced and had given a vow never to marry again.

The music of the ancient Egyptians was closely related to the compositions of Bach and Beethoven as far as the style was concerned, but in construction it resembled closely the modern compositions of Jean Sibelius and Reinhold Gliere. It was to some extent a phonetic story of nature, with fascinating solo parts for various instruments here and there. It contained a strong fairy-song character, and for that reason many of their great cantatas are dedicated to the spirits of various stars. The cantata Sirius was performed on a peculiarly moving stage, which rose and lowered with the orchestra and singers, producing the most powerful effects upon the listeners, as one of the ancient musical hieroglyphic records reads.

The instrument that seems to figure as the most important piece of the orchestra produces a hollow, monotonous tone of haunting effect. This instrument is made out of a bleached human skull, the cavity of which has been made like an artificial throat of some supernatural monster. It is evident that this instrument produced a register of innumerable sounds. But it required a musician who knew the secret of his instrument, and it played, therefore, a unique role in the orchestra. An inscription on the skull horn says that it contained not only the sounds of all the other instruments, but also that of a human voice. It was called the dead throat.

Another Egyptian peculiarity unknown to our modern music is the use of an animal chorus and animal solos in a symphony concert. But this was highly developed by the Egyptians. The hieroglyph found in the sarcophagus with the instruments sets forth that there were certain cantatas and ballet scores in which trained elephants, nightingales, dogs, roosters, owls and singing ibises were used.

This was proven by the fact that mummies of

those animals were found buried together with their great musicians. There is no doubt that some of those animal virtuosos must have had great technic and skill in using their voices, as one of the daughters of Pharaoh Rameses V., had presented her golden wedding chain to one of those animal musicians—a dog. The chain was found around its neck.

I have referred to the unwritten law of ancient Egypt, which demanded that prima donnas should end their lives at the period of their greatest triumphs. A papyrus found in the adjoining chamber of the one in which the instruments were found describes how a wonderful dancer, Amuremu, who could soar gracefully in the air like a butterfly had confessed to the priest that she was determined to dance the love song of the sylphides and then die. As the priest had never heard of a love song of the sylphides, he requested her to perform it for him, so that he could write a music according to her theme. The priest, being an accomplished musician on the instrument of the human skull, began to play what he imagined a suitable theme for an orchestra. Amuremu listened solemnly to the music and started in slow movements, which grew faster and faster. Finally she had danced off all her garments and stood like a statue before the priest. Next day the priest and the prima ballerina were found dead. This tragedy became one of the greatest themes in Egyptian temple ballets and musical performances.

Thus my discovery is the first in archeologic records that gives such striking information of music of the most remote periods. It will throw a new light on the ancient art and serve as the most powerful impetus to all composers, musicians and singers of this age by suggesting a new style and form of musical expression. I had a serious talk on this subject with Puccini and Strauss. They both were perfectly startled at the revelation of this discovery, and asked me how I could explain the fact that the ancient Egyptians were more advanced in their musical development four thousand years ago than we are to-day. This I explained to them is due to the fact that the Egyptians got their civilization from Atlantis, the vanished continent. There was never a time when Egypt was savage; simply because it was colonized by the inhabitants of Atlantis, who were highly cultured already ten thousand years ago. But then the Atlantians vanished with their culture, and the only trace they left are the archeologic records that can be found in the temple ruins of the Egyptians. The Egyptians carried the culture of Atlantis to their colony on the shores of the Nile. I have found in my varied excavations that the older Egypt was, the more it was cultured. The nation simply degenerated after Atlantis vanished, and Greece as well as China were the only countries which continued the work of evolution where the Egyptians had stopped.

