

From "Sunday Times" Johannesburg Dec 11 1911

The Stage

by  
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Ofcourse, I have been to see Maud Allan.

My artistic confreres and I, our souls exalted with hope, joined the peregrinating queue that trapsed Commissioner Street towards the portals of His Majesty's Theatre which, as the lawyer says, will be hereinafter referred to as the sacred shrine.

When I say I joined the peregrinating queue, I am simply making use of my literary licence. Not to speak disrespectfully, I am obliged to chronicle with regret that, owing to the uncertainties of the Johannesburg tram system, I was some minutes late in prostrating myself before the sacred shrine.

And as this is an opportunity for getting one in for the trams, I trust the reader will pardon me if I delay coming to Maud, and devote myself to "Dobbie" instead.

I was just in time to see a tram whiz by as I hurried down the tributorial street that leads to the tram track. As I was in good time, and we are provided by the thoughtful Municipality with a ten minute service, I did not worry, but determined to indulge in a profitable introspect. This is a sort of mental book keeping in which morals and virtues take the place of pounds, shillings and pence, and in which the credit side generally shows a deficit. But, while indulging in this moral stocktaking, I still had one eye unskinned to our tram service. This one eye noticed the outward passage of half a dozen outward cars and reference to my elaborately chased gun metal watch - of Swiss manufacture - showed me I had been waiting in the gutter for five and twenty minutes. Suddenly a tram bore down on me. It was crowded to excess - so crowded, that it was in a position to ignore, not only the stopping stations, but the agonised cries of would be passengers, myself among that number.

Oh Dobbie, Dobbie!

From this it will be seen that I was somewhat late in arriving at the sacred shrine. In the hall I was astonished to see a couple of dozen people clamouring around the Commissioner and demanding entrance. That official, wearing a worried look, stood with his back to the door, much as Horatius must have stood when he held the bridge against a gentleman whose name was, I think, Lars Porsena, and who was aided and abetted by a furious army. The position was all the more irksome to my unformed friend because use had accustomed him to throw open the doors to all and sundry with something very akin to a flush of welcome.

"It's no use" he was saying to one strenuous

Scottish enquirer, and there was a catch of grief in his voice, "it's my instruction. I can't let you in."

Apparently Johannesburg is not yet keyed up to the atmosphere of the Queen's Hall. The position was also unaccountable to those who had seen Miss Allan dance at the Palace Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue in London, when they were entitled to enter or leave the auditorium exactly as they chose. But the public as a whole likes to know when it is patronizing a good thing, and these little impressivenesses are one way of intimidating the public into opinion.

There was another surprise for the Johannesburg theatre goer, and that was when he was called upon to pay sixpence for something he had been in the habit of receiving quite freely - a program. But before his disturbed equilibrium was restored he had parted with his "tizzy" and the deal was complete.

The gentlemen who waited on the threshold while Maud galumphed through Chopin's Valse in A Flat and one of his Mazurkas - orchestrated, oh! strangest of combinations! by Howard Fink, of the Palace Theatre, London, the a man who wrote that ubiquitous dollop of treacle "In the Shadows" were loud in their protests.

Ultimately we were admitted in to the "dim religious light" surrounding the sacred light, and were just in time for the "Spring Song" that irrepressible melody of Mendelssohn.

The space before the sacred shrine was packed to overflowing. Everybody who was not swaggering at a Niagara Club night was there. Ex-Mayors and distinguished members of the Consular Service; military men and financiers; well known hostesses and chaperoned charges; and many of Johannesburg's most notorious "dead heads" who - joy of joys! - were obliged to plunk down good, red gold, before they could put a nose past that inexorable commissionaire.

If for nothing else than this welcome Memesis, Maud Allan and Arthur de Jong deserve well of all those who have the welfare of the Johannesburg entertaining world at heart/. I was glad to see them spatch-cocked. May each successive tenant take example and lay the old bilin' of 'em by the heels. And now for Maud.

There is something very wood-nymph about Maud. She dances the Spring Song as if she were the habitant of some some classical grove bordering on the outskirts of ancient Athens. She romps and bounds, pulsing for the joy of life and unconscious of observation. Suddenly it seems as if the rustling leaves were brushed aside by the prying eyes of some inquisitive faun. A shade of concern drifts across the dancer's face, veiling its joyful animation just as if a vapoury cloud had drifted across the face of the sun. He pauses, listens and, reassured, once more gives herself

up to the modified abandon of the pastoral.

Beyond natural grace and a rhythmic following of the music, there is nothing about Maud Allan's art that is common with dancing as we have been taught to know it. Whether her art is greater than the art of Genee, that inspired little Dane who stands higher upon a pinnacle than most dancers and pantomimists, or of Pavlova, the great exponent of the Russian school of ballet dancing, I am not going to discuss here, nor am I going to deal with the question of whether Maud Allan's conception of the ultimate object of the dance is wholly satisfying. That is outside my present province. I will simply say that she at once artistic, graceful and intellectual.

Her Terpsichorean accompaniment to Chopin, Schubert, and Grieg carry with them a sense of spontaneity, a suggestion that she is moved and inspired wholly by the music, and this was very marked in her rendering of Schubert's "Moment Musical" in the first three movements of the "Peer Gynt" Suite.

This sincerity is charming. Maud Allan's sincerity and belief in herself makes those who come to pray remain to pray.

I do not think she was so successful in the last movement of the "Peer Gynt" Suite, which takes place, it will be remembered, in the Hall of the Dwarfs and which the analytical program for which six pence is charged - says represents "the ponderous tread of the Dwarfs." Dwarfs with a ponderous tread is something new. After this we may expect dainty footed giants and gazelle like elephants.

The music of the last movement suggests the "earth man" and breathes with burlesque and diminutive pomposity. Under its marvellous inspiration we see these gnomes stimulated to wild and abandoned dance, to an orgy under which they succumb through sheer exhaustion. While opening quaintly enough, Miss Allan's abandon toward the zenith of the crescendo rarely develops beyond the digital stage. But the dancer was exquisite in a "Romance in E Flat" by Rubinstein and in the "Blue Danube" waltz although in this she did not impress me as much as one of the three sisters Eisenthal, who looked like a veritable driaid of the Danube in her blue and green draperies. In a morsel of an encore, Miss Allan was a sheer delight.

Her company is made complete with Miss Alice Lonnon, who gave a quiet Ingoldsby-like recitation dealing with the love of Pyramus and Thisbe, and some dozen other items, grave and gave. She is quite a good reciter, with an incisive manner of delivery and a talent for getting laughs; and Mr. Vurgo Kihl, the pianist, who has many technical excellences and a power of expression without any greater temperamental show.

There is not the slightest doubt of Miss Allan's success and, at this altitude, I can only say she earned it.