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rior construction, except as regards acoustic effect, is a great blunder, inasmuch as a large proportion of the seats afford no view of the stage whatever. For this there is no excuse whatever. 64-4

As plans are invited for an edifice for the American Academy of Music in this city, the great mistakes in the New York establishment should be carefully avoided. At the outset we have the advantage of them. The lot for the building, at the corner of Broad and Locust streets, is larger and is central. It is probably not fifteen minutes' walk from the residences of nine-tenths of those who go to the opera, and in the progress of Broad street towards a position as our chief central avenue, the spot chosen must soon be, and continue to be, one of the very best in the whole city. The chief responsibility, therefore, rests on the Building Committee, who should see that no unnecessary outlay on extravagant decorations should be required in the plan they may adopt, and also that the very best provision for hearing and seeing, in every part of the house, should be made. The hard seats, straight backs and cramped knee-room of all our places of amusement, which give a visitor a tolerably correct idea of a night in the stocks, should be forbidden absolutely. In a building such as they can erect, there ought to be room before every row of sitters for the free passage of other spectators. This is not the case in the New York house, where every one in the parquet has to rise, and let up his patent seat, which turns back on a pivot, in order that another person may pass him.

Comfort in hearing, seeing, and sitting should be studied before all other things. These secured, there should be a moderate amount of decoration, simple but elegant, which may fill up all blanks and relieve the edifice from all appearance of want of finish. But excessive gilding, carving and drapery are not at all essential. They consume money which might serve the cause of music much better in another way, and they give that air of sumptuous extravagance which frightens away a plain man and his wife, and often adds to the expense of an opera ticket the cost of a gala dress and the pomp of a carriage. We want a democratic opera or none at all. One where, by the license of low prices and the freedom from all restraint of the exotic etiquette of the opera house that some people seem anxious to naturalize here, a man may go for an evening's amusement without any silly fear of being out of the proper costume, or of having his wife appear less splendid than his neighbor's wife across the way.

If, as we believe to be the case, music, and not display, is the chief object in the Philadelphia enterprise, we have no fears for its success. The class of music-lovers here is very numerous, and they are generous supporters of all good musical entertainments. Over and over again have New York opera managers come here to recruit their fortunes broken at Castle Garden or at Astor Place, and they have invariably succeeded. An instance of this success, where the company, with a couple of exceptions, was very poor, is fresh in the minds of our readers. For a few months of every year—a season, say, as long as that of Paris or London—a good opera company, in a large, commodious house, with low prices, will be handsomely sustained here. The Academy of Music seems disposed to begin properly. That they will continue this course, every one who appreciates the value of pure art, and the importance of having a place of entertainment free from the faults which shut the doors of most other establishments to three-fourths of the citizens, must wish most ardently.

us, is another capital use to be subserved by the enterprise. All of these purposes can only be fulfilled by an Opera House which will hold several thousand people, at a low price of admission, and so arranged and conducted as to avoid all invidious distinctions of classes in the audience.

If the Board of Directors are to be charged exclusively with the selection of a plan for the building, then they will have a duty to perform of grave responsibility. They cannot be too careful and deliberate in their discharge of it. The community will not forgive a fatal mistake in a matter of so much moment to their welfare and enjoyment. It is well known that the majority of those who have contributed their money to this undertaking have done so with no expectation or desire to derive a direct profit or interest from it. They have agreed to give it for a great public benefit, and they will justly require that it shall be so employed as to realize, most effectually, the design they have in view. That can be secured in no other way than by erecting a theatre to accommodate at least five thousand auditors, and letting it upon the simple condition that the lessee shall pay all expenses, and limit the maximum charge for admission to fifty cents. On these terms the establishment will easily support itself, and the public be furnished with a gratifying and elegant means of diversion. *Empressarios* will be eager to get the lease of a house of this description; they can afford to maintain it, for a large part of every year; a company of superior strength and first rate talent; artists will flock here as to the chief centre of musical art in this country, and the highest style of lyric dramatic exhibitions will be naturalized and made a permanent part of our social improvement and enjoyment. We have confined our remarks to-day to the considerations which strongly recommend the construction of a building of the requisite size. We shall have something to say hereafter as regards the architectural details of a plan, and the letting of the contract for the work. 64-2

### Opera Houses. 64-3

It is generally admitted that the new opera house in New York is a failure. Both in construction and in management it disappoints, at the outset, every expectation of its friends. This was the unanimous verdict of an audience of about a thousand, which assembled on Monday night in its immense auditorium, where there was room for four thousand more. Various reasons are assigned for this, some ascribing it to high prices, others to its location, and others to its interior arrangement. Each of these may have had an agency in the matter, but we are disposed to regard the high prices as the chief difficulty, though after this is reformed, the other evils, which are irreparable, must always operate to some extent against the success of the establishment.

The disappointment at this inauspicious opening extends beyond New York; for a failure there must create doubts of the success of similar establishments in other cities. The vast number of foreigners in New York, whose love for music is admitted to be greater than that of other citizens, would alone furnish encouragement for any well-conceived and well-conducted opera house. In the other cities, where native citizens are chiefly to be looked to to sustain such an enterprise, the risk is much greater. But we are far from being discouraged at the New York failure, and we chiefly refer to it in order that the managers of the Academy of Music, in this city, may be induced to profit by the lesson of their New York brethren, and avoid some of the blunders that they have committed.

Extravagance seems to have been the first error in the New York enterprise. Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars have been expended upon the building, and it begins its career with the encumbrance of a heavy mortgage. Much of this has been used for elaborate, beautiful but unnecessary decoration, and the effect in the interior is that of a regally sumptuous festal hall, where any one not in full dress, or rich, or luxurious, or aristocratic, or exceedingly impudent, feels totally out of place. Now the full dress, aristocratic and rich people are not numerous in this country, especially in these hard times, and the impudent are but a poor support for any institution whose leading idea is one of refinement and good taste. So when the Academy of Music was opened, and, in keeping with the original extravagant conception, three dollars were charged for seats, it is rather surprising that even one thousand persons could be found bold enough to face the expense and the pompous luxury of the establishment.

In the site chosen for the edifice another error seems to have been made. Here again the accommodation of the wealthy up-town residents was the chief aim, and no regard was had to the convenience of the masses—the music-lovers of moderate means, the large down-town foreign population, and the sojourners at the various hotels. Upon these any and every musical enterprise must rely as its safest support, and as they cannot often indulge in the extra expense of carriage hire, they are virtually excluded from the opera. The inte-

### The Opera House in Philadelphia.

[From the Philadelphia North American, July 14.]  
Having completed the subscription of the amount of stock required by a resolution of the directors of the American Academy of Music, to be raised before any steps should be taken to erect a building, the next matter for consideration is the plan of construction to be adopted. This is a grave question. It may justly be said to involve the success of the whole enterprise. As we have earnestly advocated the expediency of securing here such a place of amusement and school of art as is contemplated, we deem it proper to express our opinion of the sort of policy and judgment which should govern the action of the company at this important stage of their project. 64-1

We have always understood that the design was to make this proposed opera house a great popular resort; that the only sound and reliable principle on which it can be supported is its accessibility to, and patronage by, the million; that to realize this end, it would be necessary to base it upon numbers and low prices. From this theory it will not be wise or practicable to depart. It would be infinitely better not to lay a stone of the edifice, than to lay it in conformity with any other scheme than the comprehensive and democratic one with which its projectors set out. Experiments, elsewhere, have proved the utter futility of endeavoring to render opera, or other public amusement, an aristocratic affair in this country. The masses must be relied upon to maintain all such enterprises, and most especially that which, of its kind, is the most expensive. Wherever operatic exhibitions have been attempted in America in theatres admitting so small an audience as necessarily to raise the prices so high as to exclude the great body of the people, they have invariably failed. They have, indeed, more than failed—they have swamped the most experienced and prudent managements, and brought heavy losses upon all concerned in such movements. New York has furnished ample illustrations of this kind of folly and disaster. Opera has never paid there, and for the simple reason that it was never thrown open to the multitude. Not long since it was resolved to try the virtue of popularizing the lyric drama. A fund was speedily raised to put up for the purpose a spacious building, capable of holding from four to five thousand people, admissible per head at rates level to the pecuniary means of the many. This was starting upon the right ground, and had it been faithfully adhered to, New York would have enjoyed the distinction of proving that musical dramatic art can be established and sustained in the United States. But the original plan of building agreed upon has been, we understand, reduced, and connecting this circumstance with the enormous rent charged for the house, the public may confidently look for a magnificent failure, where they once had reason to expect complete and brilliant success. Opera in Boston will encounter the same difficulties, and the same result. The structure erected for it, though large, as compared with anything of the sort before attempted, will not be capacious enough to make it meet expenses at popular prices, and without this condition secured, there will be an annual loss on the investment, and the concern must eventually go down of its own weight.

Philadelphia has the advantage of the mistakes of her neighbors. Though starting before them in the same enterprise, she has been outstripped immensely in the prosecution. This, however, may yet be turned to good account. If we have gone along slowly, we may show that our progress has been safe and sure, and if we exercise the proper sort of spirit and discretion in determining the plan upon which to build our opera house, we shall enjoy the credit of having been the first to solve the much vexed problem whether a first rate operatic corps, complete in all its departments and appointments, can be made a permanent and self-supporting establishment on this side of the ocean. What is necessary to do this? There is, in our opinion, but one essential requisite, and that is, an edifice which shall accommodate enough people comfortably to enable the enterprise to support itself at rates of admission which the million may afford to expend for an habitual luxury. This is all that is wanted. This should be insisted on as a *sine qua non*.

Every other consideration is secondary, and should be made to yield and be subservient to this; architectural decoration and beauty are as nothing in comparison to it. The exterior walls of an opera house had better present the most unsightly plainness and monotony than that the popular element in the undertaking should be sacrificed in the slightest degree or particular. The building should be constructed to hold five thousand persons, or not constructed at all. The site selected and purchased is a noble one in every regard. It has length and breadth enough to furnish an *auditorium* for seven or eight thousand persons, if there were any necessity to provide for that number. There is no occasion, then, to contract the dimensions of the structure to suit the ground. If money is needed to put up the fabric upon a sufficiently commodious scale, that undoubtedly can be secured hereafter. But let the theatre, if begun at all, be begun on a plan as to size commensurate with the requirements of the project and the fundamental condition of its success.

Besides the fact that as an aristocratic resort an opera house could not now or ever succeed here, we want it contrived and adapted for the masses, for two or three reasons quite as important as its pecuniary prosperity. It is eminently desirable that all classes of our population should have so delightful and refining a means of amusement put within their reach. The moral influence it would exert is a chief object to be sought. Then, again, culture of a popular taste for music, and the development of individual musical talent, also constitute a valuable part of the utility and beneficence of the institution. Indeed, these two ends, if we may judge from the corporate title of the stockholders, were the principal inducements with the Legislature in their grant of the charter of the "Academy." Thirdly, the promotion of the commercial interests of the city, by affording strangers a source of cheap and agreeable entertainment during their sojourn among