

How Mary Turner Salter Composes Her Songs

Words and Music "Just Come" at Unexpected Moments, She Explains—Husband and Wife Preside Over Musical Destiny of Quaint Massachusetts College Town—A Double Interview

By HAZEL GERTRUDE KINSELLA

WILLIAMSTOWN, MASS., is an old village, and the comfortable homes of the college folk—for Williamstown is the home of the oldest small college in



Mary Turner Salter

the country, built far back from the village street in the midst of their large lawns—have a happy, peaceful look. The home of Dr. and Mrs. Sumner Salter is no exception to the general rule, and here I was met at the door by the friendliest of women, Mrs. Mary Turner Salter, so well known by singers as the composer of melodic and singable songs.

To attempt a separate interview for either Mr. or Mrs. Salter would be entirely impossible, their work and pleasures and tastes are so intermingled.

My first question asked them in regard to songs was, "What do you consider the chief characteristic of a good song—melody, rhythm, or the words?" To which Mrs. Salter answered: "To me, the words! If they have no meaning the song is, to me, not effective. It is more or less difficult to have words that sing well and fit to the music and at the same time mean something."

Said Mr. Salter: "The mood of the song is created as the direct result of the words. For an aria it will do if there are only syllables enough to fit the number of notes, but lyrics and ballads are very different. They are inspired by the text, as for instance, 'Hark, Hark the Lark.' That melody could have no other words put to it."

"I don't like an over-developed song," added Mrs. Salter. "To repeat lines of words over and over again just to give complete form or complete musical idea should not generally be done, but repetition may wisely be made for the emphasis of some special idea." Added Mr. Salter: "Just as in verse."

Said Mrs. Salter, "I always write short songs, often writing both the words and music. It is my most pleasurable pastime. I fear they are over-melodic, because I sang much as a girl, and now sing inwardly. Melody holds one so, and the composer told, I felt, the secret of the great success of her writings. 'Part-writing is very effective, but I see, first of all, the melody. It fits itself to the verses, and sometimes, quite frequently, both words and music come to me at once, as in the instance of my song, 'The Sweet of the Year.' I really wrote that on the back porch while cleaning the house. I tried my very best not to write it, but the words kept coming. It was in the spring and the cherry trees were all in bloom, as were my lilac trees and my neighbor's daffodils. I kept going out to the back porch and just looking at the 'sweet o' the year.' I would dust a while, and then stop and play it over, and after I had it all done I still said I wouldn't write it out. But I had to before I could forget it."

"I wrote my 'Pine Tree,' both words and music, in much the same way. I walked over to Central Park in New York at Seventy-sixth Street, and saw the single pine tree growing there, and immediately the words came to me, 'Oh, Pine Tree lonely, standing outlined against the blue.' The song was short but entirely complete in my mind before I went home and played it, even to the part in which I should finish the accompaniment with its unexpected ending, different than at the first presentation of the theme." That Mrs. Salter's "Pine Tree" has won many friends is attested by a charming framed photograph of a lone pine tree, taken out on a Western desert by a friend of the song and sent to Mrs. Salter, and on the card slipped within the frame are written the words of the song-poem. "I saw that tree," wrote the sender, "and immediately thought of your pine tree."

"The Swan" was also 'written' or composed in Central Park," went on Mrs. Salter. "I had gone over to the Park with Billy, my boy, who was riding his velocipede about. While watching the swan the lines came, 'what seest thou below.' I came home and finished it, writing down a song being my only way of getting rid of it. My husband made fun of me, and said I was writing on all the months as seen in Central Park."

Here Mr. and Mrs. Salter both smiled, and she added: "Mr. Salter has been the inspiration of my best songs. We sang in the church choir together before we were married. My first song was dedicated to him, although he would not then let me write his whole name on it, but only the initials 'To S. S.' No one ever had such a good time doing things as I do, it is such fun!" And the writer was given a glimpse of that enthusiasm and spontaneity which have been so great a part of the charm of the Salter songs.

Mr. and Mrs. Salter spend many happy hours reading piano duets to-

gether and consider it an interesting and profitable occupation, "but," Mrs. Salter added, "singing seems to me the most delightful and spontaneous thing to do."

Mrs. Salter has also written two groups of children's songs and several song cycles, including the "Sappho" Lyrics, the Japanese Cycle, "The Lover of Damascus" and "Love's Epitome" (of which the Requiem was the last to be written). Of the Oriental cycle the composer said that she had the words on her



Sumner Salter, American Composer and Organist

pin-cushion for a long time before she used them. Then one day, while the family was moving, and the furniture was partly in and partly out of the house, the melody for the words came to her, and she stopped in the middle of her packing and completed it, sitting so long at the piano that her mother called to her, "Mary, what are you doing?" as Mrs. Salter recalled with quiet amusement. Among Mrs. Salter's works just completed, and shown to the writer still in manuscript, are "Early Nightfall" (words by Scharnel Iris); "Mourning," a war song, a setting to the poem by Gertrude Knevels, and "An Incantation,"

Mr. Salter's College Work

Mr. Salter's work in composition is of equal interest, and fills a much-felt need. Williamstown is the home of Williams College, and here Mr. Salter is organist and has entire charge of the college choir of thirty-six men, the choir singing once each week day, and two services on Sunday in the college chapel. When Mr. Salter took up the work he found there was available very little, if any, music for men's voices, of a churchly, dignified style, and so set himself the task of supplying it, having since written much part-music for male choir and much service music. Much of his work has been entirely original, besides which he has arranged others' writings for male voices, as Martin's "Who So Dwelleth." He recently won the *Etude* song-prize by a setting to "The Sword," Michael Barry's words, this a part-song with free accompaniment. The Salter Te Deum for male voices is used by the West Point choir and accompanied by the West Point Band, and strikingly successful have been his Jubilate and "The Lord Is My Light," as set for male voices.

"Part singing makes one musical," said Mr. Salter. "Diction is the first point in singing to be considered. So few young

people sing nowadays. The singer's voice should be so responsive that if he sings the words properly the music will take care of itself and convey the impression desired. Much drill is necessary to a good ensemble in choir work, and here at the college we solve one difficulty met in some colleges by making choir membership somewhat of an object to the men. The members are chosen with regard only as to vocal ability, each man is paid fifty dollars a year, and is then expected to be present at all rehearsals and services. This makes possible well-directed work and a careful preparation. It is killing to the proper effect ever to have to accompany a *capella* music."

"There is also a great field for really proper and appropriate organ music," added Mr. Salter. "Much that is written by modern composers is good for the 'movies,' but not for the church. There are too many 'meditations' and 'berceuses' written which are not at all suitable for church use, and tempt the young player to too little *real* playing and too great use of the solo stops."

Mr. Salter has, I believe, given over 500 recitals on the Williams College organ, and before leaving, the writer was privileged to see the books in which the programs of these recitals have been preserved. What a boon to many organists over the land it would be if such books of programs could be published and become available to the profession at large! And the writer parted with regret with Mr. and Mrs. Salter, two splendid artists whose combined efforts have played so prominent a part in the advancement of American music.

(All rights reserved.)

Philharmonic to Play Morris's "Poem"

Harold Morris's "Poem" for orchestra, based on verses from Tagore's "Gitanjali," will be presented by Josef Stransky at the concerts of the Philharmonic Orchestra scheduled for March 6 and 7. This work was played with much success earlier in the season by the Cincinnati Orchestra, Eugen Ysaye, conductor.

Mr. Morris will appear in a program of his own compositions, assisted by Lambert Murphy, tenor, before the MacDowell Club on Feb. 23.

Clef Club Gives Concert in Honor of Fifteenth Regiment

The Clef Club of New York gave a special concert in Carnegie Hall on the evening of Feb. 15 in honor of Colonel Hayward and 171 members of the old Fifteenth Regiment. A gala program was arranged. The sixty gifted members of the organization were heard in Southern folk-songs, and Negro Spirituals.

Martha Atwood recently made several interesting appearances. One of these was before the Eclectic Club on Feb. 12, when she sang numbers by Vanderpool, Forsyth, Holmes, Mabel Daniels and Trevalka. Another was for the Franklin Hooper Memorial in Brooklyn, when she appeared with John Barnes Wells. She gave excellent interpretations of modern works.

GANAPOL SCHOOL

of Musical Art An Institution of National Prominence
Detroit, Mich. Faculty of 50 Teachers Boris L. Ganapol, Director

MARIA CLAESSENS

Mezzo Soprano
With Chicago Opera Co. 3rd Season
Formerly Metropolitan and Boston Opera Companies
AVAILABLE FOR CONCERTS and RECITALS
Personal Address: MEDWAY, MASS., R. F. D.

Julius L. Schendel

PIANIST
Concerts—Recitals—Instruction
STUDIO: 14 West 107th Street New York

San Carlo Opera Co.

Union Hinge Binding Co.
120 West 42nd St., New York
Hinge and Ordinary Bookbinding, Scrapbooks, etc.



LOUIS PERSINGER

"In his tone is voiced a spiritually poetic quality that is Ariel-like in its delicacy and grace. This quality suffuses all that he does, and transforms his most brilliant moments with its softening glow."—*San Francisco Examiner* (Ray O. B. Brown).

For terms, dates, etc., address
JESSICA COLBERT,
401 Hearst Bldg., San Francisco

Adelle Kayes
concert pianiste
acompanist-instruction
studio: 249 E. 68 St. N.Y. City
phone: rhinelander 2749

Frederick Gunsker
TENOR
Exclusive Management:
HAENSEL & JONES
Asollan Hall, New York

CHALIF'S MAGNIFICENT AUDITORIUM — Specially adapted for Concerts, Musicales, Recitals, Lectures, Etc.
163-5 West 57th St. (Opposite Carnegie Hall) For terms and full particulars apply to L. H. Chalif