AMERICAN PRODUCERS
III. DAVID BELASCO

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"DAVID BELASCO presents Mrs. Leslie Carter!"

I read no more. The faded playbill on my desk set whirring the subtle mechanism of memory, and presently I was launched on a little excursion into the past. Psychologists tell us that we live forward, think backward; a formula that neatly divides the past from the future; two aspects of one and the same thing. So the old-time announcement that headed this theatre programme served the purpose of liberating from my frozen subconsciousness a cloud of recollections which swarmed like moths about a summer lamp. David Belasco was the lamp, and my memories of him the incessant moths; a mere piece of paper that became as potent as some antique and muttered conjuration whose magic evokes the wraiths of vanished years. I saw, crystal-clear, a young man with raven-black hair, eyes so large and luminous that their iris had no defined color, the thick lashes and eyebrows a color-note for the face; the delicate aquiline nose that seemed less Syrian than Assyrian, and a profile that had something archaic and Eastern. You may see such sharp silhouettes on Babylonian or Egyptian tablets and tombs in the British Museum. Exotic, yes; but the vitality that burned in the eyes of the man and his few, significant gestures revealed an intense concentrated nature, one that could be stopped by nothing short of extinction. And the personality of David Belasco to-day is not a whit altered—if anything it is intensified; not mellowed, because he was born without angles. He is as much a riddle as he was three decades ago. Personality is an eternal enigma.
On this and the following pages appear designs by Nicolas Roerich for the Chicago Opera Company's forthcoming production of Sogna na stelka. The suggestion of the primitive is evident in the group of "Locals in Summer," transcribed above.

A winter group from Sogna na stelka.
ALL Art is one—indivisible; only the mode of expression is different.

Just as a tree may have many branches, and each branch many leaves, yet all united in and growing from the same root, so it is with Art. Art also has its many branches, and each one may be subdivided into leaves and blossoms; yet all are one, drawing strength from the same sap, springing from the same great root—the eternal sap of inspiration.

This is an especially important truth in all work connected with the theatre. I have painted much for opera, ballet and drama, and have derived the greatest inspiration from being closely associated with the other great arts. I would, however, never paint scenery for opera or ballet without first having an intimate knowledge both of the drama and the music in question. I study both deeply—not so much from the purely musical or dramatic point of view, but to get at the soul that lies behind both, which must be one and the same if the work is to be great. Having steeped myself in the great idea, the inspiration that gave birth to the work, and let it take entire possession of me, I try to express the same thought, the same inspiration in painting, that others have already expressed in music and words.

Especially I feel myself related to music, and as a composer, when writing, chooses a certain key to write in, so I paint in a certain key—a key of color; or perhaps it would be better to say a leitmotiv of color on which I base the whole. Thus, when I painted scenery for the Valkyrie for the Russian Opera, I felt the first act as black and yellow. This was my ground tone, for it seemed to me to be the ground tone of the music with its deep tragedy and its sud-
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den flashings of brief happiness of Siegmund and Sieglinde. So much I felt this ground tone that I placed the hearth not at the side where it is usually found, but towards the centre, so that when Siegmund relates the sad story of his lonely life, he and Sieglinde at one end of the table sit bathed in the light of the fire, the yellow flames shining on their golden hair, their heritage from the gods, while Hunding, at the other end sits, a black silhouette outlined against the glow, like a sombre presence of evil.

In the last act I painted under the influence of the "Feuerzauber." This music impressed me deeply, and at the performances that I saw, the stage arrangements with Brunnhilde lying right on the front of the stage and the ridiculous little spurts of flame, no bigger than a lit match might give, always angered me with their utter inadequateness of expression as compared with the music. I placed Brunnhilde's resting place right at the back, on the topmost pinnacle of the rocky summit of the mountain, so that when Wotan puts her to sleep, covered with her shield, she lies raised far above the rest of the scenery on the very top of the mountain. Also I discarded the usual spurts of real fire, and made my flames of the finest transparent silk, which, with the draught of the ventilators and strongly lit up from underneath, gave, in the darkness of fallen night, a perfect illusion. Moreover, I arranged them so that we could have the same crescendo on the stage as goes on in the orchestra, and as the music builds up and up to a huge climax, so the flames leapt higher and higher and spread with the music, until at the end Brunnhilde's mountain is one vast sheet of flame. So I felt the music, and so I painted striving to attain the effect of one vast chord composed of music and color.

In the same way I strove to attune myself to Ibsen or Maeterlinck when I was painting scenery for their dramas, painting in soft shades what they so delicately express in words.

This has always been my theory: Art is one—indivisible; but, like the sun it beautifies the earth with many different rays. It is quite impossible to understand the extreme specialization in art of modern times. The same art we may express today in fresco, tomorrow in theatrical decorations, then in mosaic, or ceramics. And the button or the fork sculptured by Cellini is on the same level of art with the fresco of Leonardo. The classification of art, as high art, or commercial, or industrial art is created only by our modern mechanical civilization. Do imagine the astonishment of an old Italian master on apprehending this strange classification in art. There may exist a true art or false art, but what other classification may there be in the supreme region of art. But culture is coming!

Nowadays we hear so many diverse opinions on the Theatre. Sometimes we see a few indeed fine productions, but, in general, the masses are under the influence of the ugliest aspects of the Broadway Cinema Theatres. Nowadays the chief problem before a true artist is to enter fearlessly those houses of ugliness, and to show light amid surrounding darkness. Art for all. Everybody must enjoy true art. The greatest harm is to give to the masses false and conventional art. The gates of the "sacred source" must be wide open for everybody. And this light of art will inflame innumerable hearts with new love for Beauty!

First this feeling will come unconsciously, but after all it will purify human consciousness. And I know how many young hearts in America are searching for something real and beautiful. Give it them!

Do listen to what says a Hindu Saint: "In the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, (the greatest realization) the essence, the Brahman experience, Beauty, Art, Science, and all that which is divine as the essence of human knowing and striving, appear as rays of various light in the rainbow of that Divine transcendent consciousness. Coming out from this experience, the Saint sees Brahma, in a super-exalted manner of feeling, in everything, saying: 'Verily Art is Brahman; Verily Science is Brahman; Verily all Glory, all Magnificence, all Greatness is Brahman.'"

Do realize those wise words!