

# Opera Audiences of To-Morrow

## America to Become a Music-loving Nation Through Radio Broadcasting

By Lee de Forest, Ph.D., D.Sc.

**O**UR recent national awakening to the art of radio and to the possibilities of transmitting music on the Hertzian waves, brings the subject of radio broadcasting very close to the music lovers of America. Certainly, notwithstanding very crude attempts in broadcasting Broadway jazz, the time has come when we may give immediate concern to the opportunity offered by radio in making known the beauties of orchestral and grand-opera music.

We Americans are by no means a musical people—that is, in such measure as are most of the European nations. Familiarity with and liking for operatic music unfortunately is limited to a very small percentage of Americans. Every effort heretofore attempted to make opera at popular prices self-sustaining has met with failure in almost every instance. Excellent organizations, like the Gallo Grand Opera Company, fail to draw even fair houses for longer than a few weeks in any city.

To turn Americans into an opera-loving people, notwithstanding the yearly influx from Europe, would, in the natural course of events, require decades, perhaps centuries. Not that we cannot quickly learn to appreciate good music; but to induce the audiences to go first to hear, and then again to hear, then to appreciate, to understand, to love good music is the great difficulty.

So, to one whose greatest joy and relaxation was to hear good opera, this ability of the radiophone to bring into every home—not second-class opera; not phonographic reproductions—but the actual voices of the highest-salaried artists of the Metropolitan and Chicago Opera companies, appealed to me with strange fascination and aroused a faith which today is as keen, as strong, as when the idea was born.

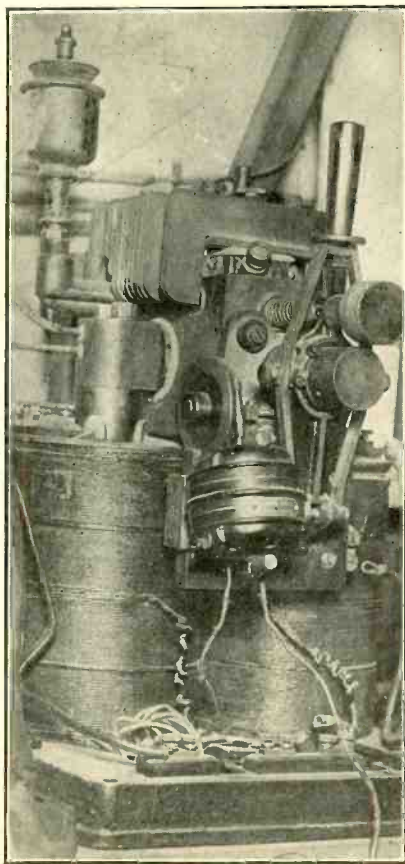
When, in 1907, I first prophesied the era of radio broadcasting, I laid prime stress on what it would mean to the public generally, and to producers of grand opera especially, to send this form of inspiring music to every corner of the land.

Opera impresarios and directors do not, should not, fear that if their

productions are heard in every home in New York or Chicago their box office receipts will suffer one whit. For every twenty who thus hear the arias and more or less fragmentary gems at home, without seeing the gorgeous stage pictures which accompany them, one, at least, who would never otherwise know what beauty he is missing, will be constrained to go to grand opera. Thus the number of opera goers and lovers will be greatly increased. Nationwide education in the best of opera, repeated familiarity with the actual voices of the best artists, can not immensely benefit opera.

I am certain therefore, that, when

### Once the Boss!



(C. Central News Photo Service.)

The Poulsen arc, formerly used almost exclusively for radiotelegraphy but being rapidly displaced by the vacuum tube. It requires pure alcohol for its operation.

the time arrives, opera directors will be ready to co-operate to their utmost to place in the wings and in the orchestra pits the properly designed sound-collectors which will convert the music into perfectly modulated telephone-currents, to be transmitted by wire to the distant high-power radiophone transmitter; say, to four or five scattered throughout the United States. The United States should set aside a special zone of wave lengths—reserved exclusively for opera and symphony orchestras—so that, on every night of the musical season, a listener may tune in to the Metropolitan or Chicago operas, or to the Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Philharmonic, Kansas City, or San Francisco symphony programs—and, at his own fireside, drink in the very best of the world's music.

If this were the only application of the radiophone, its ability to educate the people in good music, that alone would amply justify the Government, or our musical societies, in endowing and maintaining such a service as I have just described.

In this field of opera and symphony, of high-class concert and chamber music, secrecy of radiophone transmission is quite unthinkable. The better the music, the more general its value, the more the necessity for making the service quite free to all who can hear. The musical organizations which give freely of their product will suffer no loss; on the contrary, they will earn the grateful interest of multitudes who would otherwise never learn of this superb art. And from these new ranks will flock new patrons, new recruits, new lovers of music who will next seek to hear and to know their new found friends face to face.

What will this exquisite musical service mean to the American people, hitherto strangers for the most part, to that fine element in life and education? Maintain this service for ten years and we shall see a national musical awakening the like of which history cannot record! Then, and not until then, will we see a genuine American opera—one worthy to rank with those of Verdi, Bizet, or Puccini—one destined to live!