MABEL WAGNALLS

STARS OF THE OPERA

Mabel Wagnalls

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Содержание

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Stars of the Opera / A Description of Operas & a Series of Personal Interviews with Marcela Sembrich, Emma Eames, Emma Calvé, Lillian Nordica, Lilli Lehmann, Geraldine Farrar & Nellie Melba

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARCELLA SEMBRICH

Early in the season of 1898-99 there was a performance of "Traviata" in the Metropolitan Opera-House which might be described as "an occasion of superlatives"—including the largest auditorium, the biggest audience, the finest singers.

Grand opera in itself is a culmination and combination of the greatest efforts of the greatest minds. There is, in the first place, the plot of the libretto, which in the case of "Traviata" was the masterpiece of Dumas, France's greatest dramatist—a man who labored all his life as tho achievement required only work, and who yet possessed such mental power as no amount of work could achieve.

After Dumas comes the librettist who transposed the story into suitable Italian verse to be set to music. And then we have the work, the inmost thoughts, of Giuseppe Verdi, Italy's greatest living composer. There was a day when each of these sparkling melodies that now delight the whole world was born in the soul of Verdi, and heard by him alone. But he patiently put upon paper every note that his years of study and his gifted soul impelled.

The work of the composer, the dramatist, and the librettist belongs to the past, however, and that audience of five thousand people did not bestow much thought on them. Nor did they think very often of the orchestra, composed of fifty thorough musicians, who really worked more during the performance than any of the other participants.

It may be mentioned here that in all grand operas the orchestra plays continually; it is the wall upon which the picture is hung. There may be pauses in the singing, but the conductor's baton never rests.

People seldom appreciate the vast knowledge of music and the remarkable ability in sight-reading which these orchestra players possess. Not one of them but has worked at his art from childhood; most of them play several different instruments; and they all hold as a creed that a false note is a sin, and a variation in rhythm is a fall from grace. The director is their temporary deity who commands the orchestra beneath and the stage above—a little universe of music. He holds all together and dictates the tempo, the expression, and the phrasing. His commands are for the time being immutable as the laws of nature, for any serious disobedience would cause the whole structure to fall to pieces.

The five thousand listeners gave some applause to the director after the playing of the introduction, and they gave a little more to the chorus—those earnest workers who serve grand opera as the stokers do a ship. Then the tenor received a good deal of applause—his reward for training his voice, studying music, memorizing operas, overcoming nervousness, and singing in public twenty years.

But the great applause, the "bravos," the cheering, the excitement, were reserved for the star, the soprano—Marcella Sembrich! It is always impressive to witness such a success. It is inspiring to know that one woman can so stir the hearts of the people.

Madame Sembrich's voice is as perfect a voice as the world has ever heard. Yet her greatness consists more in her art than in her voice. She has not been satisfied merely to use her gift as nature gave it, but she has acquired a mastery of tone-coloring so that every tone has a meaning of its own, and seems to express a distinct emotion. In the last act of "Traviata" the quality of her tones, always beautiful, but ever varying as her art dictates, conveys to the listener surely and truly the approach of death and the hope of heaven. This is great art indeed. No wonder the audience fairly gasps as the last sweet tone leaves the lips of the pale Violetta and soars away into infinite space.

It was the day after "Traviata," when, in response to a knock at Madame Sembrich's door in the Hotel Savoy, a mellow voice said, "Come in."

On my obeying this summons, the singer was "discovered"—as the librettos have it—standing near her grand piano, alone, and as unostentatious as your own sister.

There was no effect of the impressive prima donna, all flowers and frills and *frou-frou*. She was quite alone, just as lesser mortals sometimes are; and she furthermore spared her visitor from any sense of interrupted work, or great haste, or the magnitude of the occasion.

She was just a courteous, quiet lady who seated herself beside the visitor and talked earnestly about music and work.

When asked how early she began to study the art seriously, she replied: "When I was six years old. My father taught me the piano until I was ten. He was a very gifted man. Then I also studied for a while with Dr. Stengel, who is now my husband, and with Epstein in Vienna."

On learning that her visitor was acquainted with Vienna, Madame Sembrich's face lighted up (she has a radiant smile): "Ach! then you speak German?" And from this point she talked altogether in German, which is more akin to her native Polish.

She is fluent, however, in all the continental languages. "We have to know them all, for we need them constantly," she explained. In reply to other questions, the singer told enthusiastically of her early work.

"I can not say I was ever discouraged, for I so enjoyed my art that it was always of absorbing interest; but my whole life has been made up of hard work, always work. I also studied the violin and composition, and I used to rise early and go to bed late, for I worked six and seven hours a day."

Madame Sembrich is one of the most thorough, all-round musicians on the lyric stage to-day, for she is not only a singer, but has played successfully in public on piano and violin. Her rare gift of voice was not discovered until she was seventeen. Then her great knowledge of music enabled her quickly to develop the voice, and it was not long before she appeared in opera and made her first great success in London. When asked if she was ever nervous, the answer came promptly:

"Oh, yes, very nervous! *Now* I am always nervous. But in the early days it was not so bad. When you are young and have a beautiful voice, you think it is all that is necessary, and are not nervous, because you do not realize the depth and extent of art. But as you grow older you appreciate the possibilities of art—you know what it implies, and how perfect you wish to make it; and then you are nervous. It is more nervous work, too, for such artists as Madame Patti, Madame Melba, or myself, who travel about and sing first in one place and then in another, because each time we have to win our audience and make a new conquest. In Europe, at the great opera-houses such as are in Vienna or Berlin, it is different, for there the singers are engaged permanently. The public knows how well they can do, and if sometimes they are not at their best, they know the public will excuse them. I find I am more nervous, too, as my reputation increases, for more is expected of me."

Referring again to her studies, Madame Sembrich counted over thirty-seven full operas that she has learned. It is well to consider for a moment what this implies. Aside from the native gifts of voice, musical talent, and dramatic temperament, there must be years of practise in singing and acting;

then the words of each opera must be memorized, sometimes in three languages. After studying, originating, and mastering the action, the music must be learned, and every word wedded to a certain tone, and every tone to a certain beat of time. Herein the actress has but a slight task compared to the opera singer, for in the drama it matters not if a word comes a moment sooner or later; but in grand opera a second's deviation might cause a discord.

Madame Sembrich delights in the opera "Traviata" because of its intense action.

"But I like, too, the lighter operas. The merriment of 'Rosina' amuses me as I act it."

One more question was asked as her visitor arose to go.

"Is it true, Madame Sembrich, that you walk two hours every day?"

"Yes," she answered good-humoredly. "I had just returned to-day when you came. I started at eleven and got home at one."

Regular and rigorous in her daily life even yet! Upon meeting Madame Sembrich, one receives an impression of graciousness and greatness not to be forgotten.

"Semiramide"

All great prima donnas have in their repertoire the majority of famous operas, but through fitness of physique or temperament or quality of voice they become associated with certain rôles more than others. Sometimes it is merely a caprice of the public that holds them to a particular line of operas. At present Madame Sembrich is regarded as the great exponent of the old Italian school. Among her thirty-seven operas "Semiramide" is one in which New Yorkers have not yet heard her; but it is in some respects the most typical of its kind.

"Semiramide" belongs to the old style of Italian operas. It is light in substance, but glistening with scales and cadenzas that are scattered over it like spangles upon tulle. Rossini's music is always beautiful but conveys little meaning, and it impresses the modern musical taste like a meal of bonbons. Although Semiramis lived hundreds of years before the Christian era, we listen in vain for any ancient atmosphere to the composition or for the "*melodrame tragico*," as designated by the libretto. This music would be as suitable to the "Barber of Seville" as to the "Queen of Babylon." In other words, the old operas were a series of separate songs adapted to a connected story, whereas we now expect the score so thoroughly to embody the text that the two are inseparable.

"Semiramide," however, bears several claims to distinction that prevent the possibility of extinction. It is the opera *par excellence* of duets. They are the delightful, old-fashioned kind, wherein the two voices are side by side, only separated by a perfect third; and when the conductor has whipped up a good tempo away they go like a span of horses, over hills and valleys of scales and arpeggios, bridged-over intervals, and clumps of trills. Differing from all other operas, this one gives as much prominence to the contralto as to the soprano. They must have equal facility of execution; and, indeed, none of the rôles are exempt from this demand. Tenor, contralto, baritone, and bass vie with each other in performing dangerous feats of vocal agility. There are passages where they all, one after another, run up a scale and land on a certain note, like athletes jumping from a spring-board. We smile at such display, and are inclined to regard the opera as one big solfeggio; but let it not be forgotten that this is the old Italian style, and interesting from this point of view.

Another claim to lasting fame is its overture—one of the prettiest, happiest, showiest orchestral compositions extant. It is a stock program piece, being simple enough for any orchestra to perform and yet rousing enough always to elicit applause.

The opening scene represents a temple wherein Oroe, the chief of the Magi, is discovered kneeling before an altar. He has received a celestial revelation of some dark crime that is awaiting vengeance, and his first short recitative refers to this secret. Arising from his knees, Oroe orders the gates of the temple to be opened. The Assyrian multitude enter bearing offerings and garlands, while they sing a light melody that would do for a modern topical song. Idrenus, an Indian prince, also comes in with his attendants, bearing incense and offerings. He is the tenor, but unimportant, because this opera has no love-scene, and consequently little use for a tenor. Assur, an Assyrian potentate, is another devout supplicant at the altar of Belus. We soon learn the occasion of these earnest efforts to propitiate the gods: Semiramis, the queen, will to-day select a successor to the late King Ninus.

A very good example of what we consider the incongruities of the old school is found in these first two arias of Idrenus and Assur. The tenor comes in alone and delivers a flourishing solo, ornate as his costume. Then Assur, the basso, makes his entrance and sings in a lower key the same remarkable pyrotechnics. This antagonizes the fundamental rule of modern opera, which requires each character to maintain a musical individuality. There is some further conversation in the form of a terzetto between Idrenus, Assur, and Oroe, and the fact is disclosed that Assur expects the queen's choice to fall on him.

Another light and bright chorus announces the entrance of Semiramis. She is represented as young and beautiful, altho she is a widow and the mother of a son who mysteriously disappeared

years before the story opens. But radiant as is her appearance, Semiramis opens the ceremonies with uneasiness, for she has determined to make Arsaces the future king. He is a young army officer, and there is no just reason why he should be favored; but the queen has become enamored of him. Arsaces, however, is unconscious of her infatuation. She has summoned him to this ceremony; but he has not yet arrived, and for this reason she hesitates. In a quartet that is worked up like a rondo upon a very pleasing theme, the others urge her to begin. She reluctantly steps forward, but at her first mention of the dead king there is a flash of lightning and the sacred fires are extinguished. The people regard this as a dire omen. Oroe glances knowingly at both Semiramis and Assur as he again refers to a crime that has aroused the wrath of the gods. He orders the ceremonies to be postponed pending the arrival of a sacred oracle from Memphis. The queen and her attendants withdraw, and the temple is vacated.

The orchestra plays through several pages of sixty-fourth and thirty-second notes, after which the interesting and important Arsaces enters with two slaves who bring a casket. Arsaces is always a very youthful and impossible-looking general, in spite of his glittering cuirass, for be it known this is the contralto rôle, and, musically speaking, a very great one.

We learn from his first recitative that this casket contains precious documents and relics of the late king which have been guarded and concealed by Phradates, the supposed father of Arsaces. Phradates has recently died, and in compliance with his request Arsaces brings these treasures to the high priest. We also learn that the young general is puzzled over the queen's summons; and last, but not least, we learn that he is in love with the beautiful Princess Azema. The mere mention of her name starts him to singing a rapturous song, bubbling over with brilliant roulades. After presenting his casket to the high priest, Arsaces encounters Assur, who soon makes it known that he also loves the fair Azema. This so maddens Arsaces that he resolves at once to ask Semiramis for the hand of the princess. These rivals cordially hate each other, but Rossini inspires them to sing the same melodies, and their voices mingle in beautiful harmony of tone and rhythm.

The second rising of the curtain reveals Semiramis reclining under a bower in her palace garden. She is surrounded by maidens and slaves who sing languid, luxuriant melodies for her diversion. Rossini's style is well suited to this scene. As the arias are presented one by one, it is like unfolding the contents of an Assyrian treasure-chest full of shimmering silks and glittering jewels. Among this collection there is one gem called the "Bel Raggio," a name as famous in its way as the Koh-i-noor. This musical brilliant belongs to Queen Semiramis, who displays its scintillating beauty with evident pride. The "Bel Raggio" is one of the four great corner-stones of the bravura singer's repertoire, of which the remaining three are: "Una voce poco fa," also by Rossini; the Dinorah "Shadow Song," and Eckert's "Echo Song." When listening to "Bel Raggio" one should never try to follow the words or even wonder what she is saying. Just listen to the music. Those radiant, ravishing, intoxicating warbles and runs tell one plainly enough that she is happy, and this is sufficient.

Semiramis is awaiting Arsaces and the oracle from Memphis. The latter is received first, and bears the cheering words, "Thy peace shall be restored with the return of Arsaces." True to the nature of oracles, this one has a double meaning, and Semiramis construes it in the wrong way. When Arsaces enters there follows a bevy of famous duets. But the conversation is quite at cross purposes. Arsaces tells of a long-cherished love, which Semiramis thinks is for herself. She promises that all his hopes shall be realized, whereupon the two wander off side by side through a forest of cadences, roulades, and scales. They sometimes become separated, when the soprano pauses to run up the scale-ladder and pluck a brilliant high note, or the contralto lingers to pick up tones that are rich and full as fallen fruit; but they finally emerge together, trilling high and low like birds from a thicket.

The third scene represents a magnificent hall in the palace. There are, of course, a throne and other "properties," but most conspicuous is the tomb or mausoleum of Ninus. For a second time the Assyrian noblemen and people gather to hear the appointment of a new king. As they sing a sweeping march, Semiramis enters more gorgeously arrayed than ever. She takes her place at the

throne, and with an imperious gesture commands allegiance to the king of her choice. These regal phrases contain such a prodigality of dazzling colorature that we are reminded of the far-famed hanging gardens devised by this same extravagant queen. In the matter of lavish display the music of "Semiramide" is strikingly appropriate. Assur, Arsaces, Idrenus, and Oroe vow obedience, and their hymn-like ensemble is one of the grandest themes Rossini ever composed. Like the prayer from Weber's "Freischütz," this quintet has long held a place in church choir-books, and a more religious and inspiring melody could hardly be imagined. The soprano scatters delicious appoggiaturas and cadenzas above the steady and noble ensemble like flowers upon an altar. The "Semiramide Quintet" is another one of its claims to lasting fame.

In a lighter vein is the queen's next proclamation, to the effect that the future king shall also be her husband. This arouses general surprise. But when she finally designates Arsaces, the amazement on all sides is loud. Assur demands justice from the queen, insinuating some secret compact that she dare not disregard. He is haughtily silenced by Semiramis, who at the same time bestows upon him the hand of fair Azema.

Poor Arsaces is beside himself. He tries to explain, but the queen will listen to no remonstrances. An altar is brought forward, and the priests are about to pronounce the marriage bans when a hollow, subterranean sound and distant thunder cause consternation. The people are horrified to behold the tomb of Ninus slowly open and its occupant step forth. Turning to Arsaces, the ghost bids him avenge a terrible crime: "With courage into my tomb descend; there to my ashes a victim thou shalt offer. But first obey the counsel of the priest." The ghost disappears, and the act closes with a strong chorus of dismay. Semiramis leads the singing, and for once her music has only prim quarter-notes and half-notes: her colorature is all frightened away.

The next act contains an interview between Assur and Semiramis, wherein we learn about the crime so often referred to. The late King Ninus was poisoned by Assur, who had been promised the throne. But the guilty queen has since preferred Arsaces, and this explains Assur's great anger. He threatens to kill the young favorite; but Semiramis has resumed her ostentatious manner and music, and will not heed his words.

There follows a scene in the queen's apartment. She is still striving to win Arsaces, but her overtures repel him more than ever. He has just returned from an interview with the priest. The contents of the casket have been revealed to him, and he shows Semiramis a paper proving the startling fact that Arsaces himself is her long-lost son. He has also learned that Ninus, his father, was murdered. Remorse promptly overtakes the queen. She weeps and wails in chromatics and scales that quite touch Arsaces. They sing a glorious duet that is like a benediction, so noble and pure are its harmonies. It is called "Giorno d'orrore" (day of horror). Arsaces bids his mother adieu. He is going to the tomb to avenge his father's death, tho he knows not how nor whom he shall strike. It rests with the gods to guide him; he only obeys the command. There follows another smoothly flowing duet resembling all the others in its simple structure, unmistakable rhythm, and prominent melody.

The finale of "Semiramide" has little to commend it, being absurd in action and presenting only one pleasing or noticeable theme. This is a dainty, quaint violin passage that delighted us in the overture, but which we never thought of connecting with a tragic climax. How different is this tomb music from that of Gounod's "Romeo and Juliet!" There the marvelous harmonies are like sweet dreams accompanying the sleep of death, but here we are only conscious of the "deep, damp vault, the darkness and the worm."

The chief absurdity of this scene lies in the fact that it should be too dark for the characters to see each other and yet it must be light enough for the audience to see everything. Another incongruity is the assembling of all the principals and a good-sized chorus in this tomb where we expected Arsaces alone. But it is explained that Assur heard of the hero's coming and planned to follow with the intention of killing him; Oroe heard of Assur's plan and brings an armed guard to protect Arsaces; and, finally, Semiramis follows because she is anxious about everybody and everything.

They enter at different times; grope around among tombs, and pretend not to see each other. Arsaces finally hears and recognizes the voice of Assur. He has no doubt that the gods have sent Assur to be the victim. The hero promptly stabs in the direction of the voice, but because it is so very dark he happens to kill Semiramis instead of Assur. But this mistake does not much affect either the music or the action. The final chorus of the opera is as light and bright as the first.

A CALL ON EMMA EAMES

A call at the Hotel Marie Antoinette is a veritable eighteenth-century dream. A powdered footman in satin knee-breeches and the full court costume of that period flings open the great glass doors as you enter, and another one escorts you around some columns, and through some curtains, and down some steps to the main reception-room, where you wait while your name is announced.

The Hotel Marie Antoinette is very exclusive, so you happen to be alone in this great apartment, with its stained-glass dome and carved-oak walls; alone, excepting for the pretty soft-voiced maid who is arrayed as were the ladies-in-waiting of the Trianon. She assists you in removing your wraps, and at the same time talks enthusiastically about the great personage you have come to see.

"We all here just love her, she is so gracious and appreciative of everything we do, and so kind to us. She gives us tickets to the opera, and she isn't at all proud or haughty. She often comes in here of an afternoon to have tea. There is her corner where she always sits"—and the maid points quite reverentially to a dainty recess curtained with tapestries and dreamily illumined by a huge pendant red globe. As your glance roams on, you find many objects that hold your attention. There are historic cabinets of rare value and workmanship, little tea-tables beside the various couches, bearing trays of antique china and tiny spoons of old silver, all sought and selected from the castles and treasure-rooms of Europe. There is one dainty solid gold clock that belonged to Marie Antoinette and was used in her boudoir. Another one which she also owned is jeweled with turquoise and garnets. Many valuable miniatures of the unfortunate queen and her family are on the desks and writing-tables. In one enticing alcove are two rows of sumptuous volumes bound in red and gold whose mere titles set one to dreaming of court intrigues and palace revels. "The Secret Memoirs of the Court" comprise one set of ten books; ten more are devoted to Napoleon, and "The Life and Times of Louis XV." also occupies much shelf-room; while on the center-table is a collection of engravings portraying the life of Marie Antoinette.

You quite feel yourself a court lady by this time; and when the powdered dignitary again appears and calls out your name in stately tones, you follow him with a sense of importance quite pleasant and unusual. You are led past more columns and through more curtains, until finally he leaves you in a moderate-sized ante-room. Here you wait for some moments, expectantly watching the doorway by which you entered, when suddenly, on the opposite side of the room, some folding-doors which you had not noticed are flung wide open by unseen hands, and behold the queen—of grand opera, Madame Emma Eames!

It was indeed a right royal vision I beheld: a beautiful woman, in every sense of the term, clad in a fawn-colored gown of rich design, and bejeweled with chains of pearls and a brooch of diamonds. She was seated on a pale satin divan, but came forward to greet her visitor, and shook hands cordially. Madame Eames is more than beautiful, for together with regular features and soft curves she has a strong face and a pose of the head that is all determination and force. She is tall and full-figured, her hair is dark, and her eyes are very blue.

She displayed a charming smile as she motioned her visitor to a seat near by, and then followed a rapid sequence of questions and answers. Madame Eames showed a kindly response to her visitor's spirit of earnestness, and tried to tell as much as possible in every reply she made.

First in order of interest is the fact that she was born, August 13, 1867, in Shanghai, China. There's a beginning for you!—enough to crush an ordinary mortal. But Emma Eames took it otherwise; and all who know of her now must admit that to be born under the star of the East on the thirteenth day of the month is after all not bad. As soon as she was old enough to walk she left the land of her birth and came with her mother and father (who was a lawyer of the international courts) to their native home, the city of Bath, in Maine.

Here she studied music with her mother, going later on to Boston and finally to Paris, where she worked with indomitable will studying operas, dramatic action, voice culture, and especially French. This last is very important for those aiming to sing publicly in Paris, for the people there will not tolerate any weakness of pronunciation.

When asked if she ever had time for any social pleasures, Madame Eames answered very earnestly: "I have never done anything in my life but work. I cared for other pleasures just as any girl does, but have always foregone them."

As a result of this ceaseless work she was fitted for the operatic stage in two years' time.

"It was Gounod himself who selected me to sing in his opera 'Romeo and Juliet.' He taught me that music, and also 'Faust.' He was a most lovable old man, so modest, and above all sincere and truth-loving in his music. He often said to me, 'Never degrade music, the one divine language on earth, to express a lie.' When teaching a phrase, instead of dictating, as you would expect so great a man to do, he always asked, 'How do you *feel* when you hear that? Sing it as *you feel it*, not what I feel or tell you.' And he could sing so exquisitely! Yes, old as he was, and he had just the smallest possible voice, yet it was delightful to hear."

Madame Eames's tones were tender and thoughtful as she recalled these reminiscences of her beloved master.

The number thirteen looms up again in Madame Eames's history as the date of her great début. It was the evening of March 13, 1889, in the world's most beautiful opera-house, that the swaying pendants of its great chandelier vibrated to the sound of a new voice and the marble walls of its ornate halls reverberated to the sound of a new name—"Emma Eames, la jeune Américaine."

No wonder she made a sensation; she is the ideal Juliet, youthful, beautiful, and with a voice of golden timbre.

A more lovely scene and more tender tragedy has never been depicted in music than is the last act of this opera. The beholder sees in the somber setting of an iron-barred tomb the white-clad form of Juliet lying upon a bier that is raised like an altar above several steps. There are loose flowers still unwithered scattered near the silent sleeper, and one pale torch burns restlessly in a brazier at her head. No other movement; no change on the stage for many minutes.

But the listeners, in this pause, are brought heart to heart with the gentle composer, who sleeps himself now in the Pantheon of Paris. Gounod has enwrapped this scene in ethereal harmonies that make one think of Death not as the King of Terrors, but as the Queen of Repose. The principal melody is a lulling, loving strain that floats and fades away like a final "hush" to rest.

The classic purity of Madame Eames's beauty impresses itself in these moments perhaps more than any other, and the nobility of her voice reveals itself, in the succeeding dramatic climax of the opera, to the fullest.

In speaking now of her début, the singer says that she was very nervous, "for, before the public has approved, you don't feel sure that you know anything. After this, there is some foundation for your nerves to rest on, altho you realize how much there is still to learn. But I am always nervous even yet, never knowing what trick my nerves may play on me. No, my memory gives me no anxiety, for I fortunately have a very reliable one. If by any chance I forget a word on the stage, I know my health is run down, and I then at once take a rest for several days."

But Emma Eames does not take many such rests. Young as she is, she has already sung in twenty-one different operas with unvarying success, in England, France, and Italy as well as her own country. When studying a new rôle she makes every effort to be accurate in all details.

"I always give great thought to my costumes, but when once I have studied thoroughly into the period represented and feel convinced that my designs are correct, I never change them. When one set is shabby I merely have it duplicated."

Little wonder a prima donna has no time for social gayety when you consider all the accessories to her art. Aside from the study and actual performing, she must take proper exercise for her health,

must attend rehearsals, give time to the costumer—and, also, to the many interviewers. Madame Eames smiled at this suggestion, and said:

"I don't mind any of these, but I do dread having my photograph taken. We have to put on the entire costumes of different operas: wigs, stockings, gloves, slippers—everything as tho ready to go on with our lines, and all just to stand around in a studio and pose. It is terrible; it takes a whole day sometimes."

A question about her method of study brought forth the fact that at one time she was quite misdirected in the use of her voice.

"I was turned entirely in the wrong direction, and it is no exaggeration to say that I have fought the battle out step by step and note by note all alone—or, rather, in the very presence of the public. When I first appeared my voice-control was uncertain; I did not dare take any liberties with my tones. I was in constant anxiety, and miserable because I had not the power of voice-emission that I wanted. I assure you in those days I was sometimes so discouraged that I thought seriously of giving up my profession."

An astounding assertion this will seem to the thousands of listeners enthralled by her voice to-day. But Madame Eames was very serious, and she added philosophically: "After all, I don't think one can attain anything worth having unless one has suffered deeply."

Every summer Madame Eames takes a six-weeks' vacation in her Italian castle near Florence. I was shown a description of this edifice, which reads like a page of old history. The sullen gray stone walls are six feet thick, and the heavy doors with their great iron hinges are all carved by hand, as indeed is all the workmanship on the place. The main hall of the castle is sixty feet long and twenty-five feet wide. There are four massive fireplaces in this one apartment, and a wooden balcony reached by a broad stairway runs all around the second story of the hall. The ceiling is of carved oak, and a reproduction of a famous one in Florence. Everything is in accord with the traditions of the Middle Ages. Madame Eames takes great delight in this castle, and she has with her numerous photographs of it.

There will probably be many guests in those halls; but even if the gifted owner lived there alone it would always seem peopled by a large assemblage, for Madame Eames studies much during these vacations, and the mystic characters of her repertoire may be said to hover ever near. The castle is to be furnished with rich hangings and historic trophies; but most priceless of all should be counted the music furnished by her own rare voice. This will soar out and reecho at all hours; sometimes a memory of Elsa, and again a thought of Sieglinde.

It were indeed a pity to fling the stray tones of a great voice upon crude walls and cramped quarters; let them rather resound and reverberate, and perchance be preserved, by the listening atoms of carved wood and chiseled stone.

If the earth is God's garden and we are the plants that grow, then Madame Eames must be likened to a rare orchid, radiant in the sunshine of great success, and showered with all possible blessings.

"FAUST"

Faust is the opera in which Madame Eames has appeared most often in this country. No less than sixteen composers have used Goethe's poem as a libretto. Many of these works are excellent, and frequently we hear excerpts from them in our concerts. But Gounod has clad the words in musical raiment of such surpassing loveliness that he has almost robbed Goethe of his masterpiece. At this day, on hearing the name Faust we think of the opera simultaneously with, if not before, the poem. He has made of it a "grand opera" in every sense; and yet so abounding in melody that even an untrained ear is captured.

There is no overture. It is a fact without a cause that some operas have overtures and some have not. "Faust" opens with a short orchestral prelude that is somber and subdued—quite suggestive of the doubt and darkness that characterize the scene upon which the curtain rises.

Faust, the philosopher, the student, is seated in his cell, surrounded by books, parchments, chemicals, skulls, and hour-glasses. He has grown old in his delving after the mysteries, and even now he has devoted the whole night to study. The lamp burns low, and all about him is dark and gloomy. He closes his book sadly, and exclaims in tones that seem spontaneous, but are, nevertheless, in accurate rhythm with the orchestra, "In vain!" He does not find the knowledge he seeks; his investigations are without avail. It seems strange to hear these laments sounded by a tenor voice; but this trifling incongruity of high tones and old age does not last long. The character Faust is one of the greatest tenor rôles.

His soliloquy is presently broken in upon by a chorus behind the scenes. It is the song of reapers going to their daily work. The morning light streams in at the window which Faust throws open as he listens. But sunshine itself is not brighter than that song. It is so joyous and light-hearted that the listener fairly inhales the dew-laden air of the fields. This first melody in the opera is as perfect a morceau for its size as was ever written. The solitaire in his cell is also affected by the radiant song, and he envies the reapers for their contentment and for their youth. Yes, *youth* is what he longs for.

Altho Faust has declared his study to be "in vain," he has, nevertheless, acquired the accomplishment of being able to call up Mephistopheles (this is the operatic name for the great demon), and in his present despair he resorts to this power. Mephisto appears without delay. Flaming colors and a bass voice are the essential attributes of this great character. It seems rather hard on our artists who sing to low G that a bass voice is so often chosen to represent iniquity; but such happens to be the case. Mephisto is invariably clad in red from head to toe; exaggerated eyebrows and a fantastic cap with unobtrusive horns complete his diabolical appearance.

In a continuous flow of harmony, Faust informs his visitor of his wants, and Mephisto promptly states his conditions: for the price of his soul after death the philosopher shall now be granted his youth. Faust hesitates at this, whereupon the wily demon causes him to behold a vision. A bright light at the back of the stage suddenly reveals the lovely Marguerite at her spinning-wheel. While the picture lasts there is heard in the orchestra a suggestion of one of the themes that come afterward in the love-scene of the opera; this is accompanied by a soft tremolo on the violins. Forest scenes, moonlight, and dreams are very often represented in music by a violin tremolo. When the vision passes away, Faust is decided, and he drinks the potion Mephistopheles prescribes. Presto! The gray hair and beard disappear; the long robe falls off, and Faust is a young man—tall and handsome, as a tenor should be. He comes forward with an elastic step and sings of youth and its joys, which now are his. The music has undergone a metamorphosis like the singer. It throbs with a life and vigor which were lacking before; and this final song of the first act is one of the best tenor solos in the opera.

The second act is chiefly remarkable for its choruses. It is called the Kyrmess, and represents a street thronged with villagers in festive array and mood. They dance and sing in honor of their soldiers, who start this day to war. The opening chorus is divided among the students, girls, soldiers,

and citizens, the latter being represented by old men, who come forward and sing their delightful refrain in thin, piping voices. Every phrase of this first chorus is a surprise, and each one seems more fascinating than the preceding. It is all in a rapid, tripping tempo, and fairly bubbles over with good humor.

In this act we are introduced to all the principal characters. Siebel, the village youth who loves Marguerite, is already on the scene, and very soon her soldier-brother, Valentine, appears. This is the baritone rôle, and, while not a long one, is still important, and requires a great artist, for he has a splendid death-scene in the fourth act. His first solo begins with the words "O santa medaglia!" ("O blessed medallion!"). He sings to the token which his sister has just given him at parting. He is depressed at the thought of leaving Marguerite alone, for she is an orphan; but Siebel consoles him with promises to protect and watch over her.

Mephisto is the next one to come upon the scene, and, in spite of his satanic make-up, the villagers do not recognize his "name and station." He joins in their merry-making, and soon astounds them with his wizard tricks and actions. He sings a song about "Gold—the lord of the earth." It is one of the three important solos of this rôle, and is a most characteristic piece. One has not the least doubt that he learned it at home! Such eccentric, sardonic intervals and rhythm at once suggest an unholy origin.

The peasants soon become so convinced of this stranger's evil power that they unanimously hold up the hilts of their swords, which are formed like a cross, and before this emblem Mephisto trembles. A very strong and inspiring chorus accompanies this move on the part of the peasants.

Faust, the handsome cavalier, now comes forward. After a short dialog between this master and servant—who we know are under compact to change places in the hereafter—the chorus again take possession of the stage. They sing first a charming waltz song, which of itself seems to start them all to dancing. And then comes the celebrated "Faust Waltz," during which the listener should pay most attention to the orchestra. There is some singing and much dancing on the stage, but the instruments have the most important part. Of this well-known composition it is unnecessary to say more than that it is a splendid waltz.

Its brilliant rhythm is temporarily diverted by the entrance of Marguerite, who is on her way home from church. She carries a prayer-book in her hand, and is dressed in white, which betokens innocence. This costume of the heroine has been considered as imperative as the make-up of Mephisto; but Madame Eames carefully studied old Nuremburg pictures and resurrected the correct style of that period, which somewhat departs from operatic tradition.

On seeing Marguerite, Faust addresses her as "My charming lady," and begs permission to walk home with her. To which Marguerite very properly replies that she is neither "charming" nor a "lady," and can go home "alone." The question and response last only a moment, but the two themes are most exquisitely adapted to the words, and should be noted, as they recur later on in the opera. Especially lovely are these first notes of the soprano; and after so much chorus and bass and orchestra, they soar out like strokes from a silver bell.

Marguerite goes on her homeward way, and leaves Faust more in love than before. Mephisto rejoices, and the waltz is resumed. Thus ends Act II.

And now for the Garden Scene—a veritable bouquet of melodies, flowers that never fade! The first aria is, indeed, called the "Flower Song," but only because Siebel sings to the flowers he has brought for Marguerite. Siebel is the contralto rôle, and therefore always taken by a woman. It is a very short part, but as two of the sweetest songs in the opera belong to Siebel, great artists are glad to take the character. The short prelude by the orchestra before the "Flower Song" is as artistic as any other part. It seems to smooth the brow and quiet the mind, and coax the hearer into just the right mood "to be lulled by sounds of sweetest melody." Siebel's song is indeed "sweetest melody"—so much so that a poor singer can hardly spoil it. That gentle and caressing theme captures the heart every time.

After Siebel has gone, there enter Faust and Mephistopheles (who gains admission everywhere). The latter is in high spirits, and Faust is in love. They look upon the garden with different emotions. Faust rhapsodizes and is lost in romance; but Mephisto's more practical vision perceives the flowers which Siebel has left at Marguerite's door. He goes off at once to procure a present that shall outshine these. During his absence Faust sings the "Salve Dimore." These are the first words of the song, which mean "Hail! dwelling pure and simple;" but this composition is always given its Italian name. It is interesting to note the names by which celebrated arias are known. Some are designated by the subject, as the "Jewel Song," "Flower Song." Then, again, some are known by the rhythm, as the "Waltz Song" from "Romeo and Juliet," or the "Polacca from 'Mignon.'" Then, there are others whose names only indicate the number of voices, as the "Sextet from 'Lucia,'" the "Quartet from 'Rigoletto';" while many are spoken of by their Italian names. The "Salve Dimore" belongs to this class, and, like the "Jewel Song," is so celebrated that many people who have not heard the music are still familiar with the name. The tenor who does not receive abundant applause after this aria may feel that he has lost his best chance in the opera.

After the solo Mephisto reenters with a jewel-casket under his arm. He places this where Marguerite will surely find it, and then the two retire. Now is an expectant moment, for the soprano holds the stage alone for some time, and has in this scene her finest solos. She comes in through the garden gate and walks very slowly, for she is thinking about the handsome stranger who spoke to her in the street. She tries, however, to forget the occurrence, and resolutely sits down to her spinning. As she spins she sings a ballad called "The King of Thule." It is a sad little song, with strange minor intervals that make one feel "teary 'round the heart." Marguerite interrupts her ballad to soliloquize again, in pretty recitative tones, about that "fine stranger," but she soon recalls herself and resumes the song. At last she gives up trying to spin, and starts for the house; whereupon she sees Siebel's flowers, which are admired, but dropped in amazement when her eyes rest upon the jewel-box. After some misgivings she opens it and discovers jewels so beautiful that from sheer joy and delight she starts to trilling like a bird. This trill is the opening of the great aria, which seems to thus poise for a moment and then fly away in the ascending scale which commences the brilliant theme. The "Jewel Song" is as difficult as it is beautiful, and the artist who renders it well deserves unstinted praise.

Before the song is ended, Martha, the matron in whose care Marguerite has been entrusted, comes into the garden, and soon is followed by Faust and Mephistopheles. Hers is a necessary but unimportant character, as she has no solo and is merely a foil for Mephistopheles. She is represented as a very susceptible widow, and he takes upon himself the uninviting task of making love to her in order that Faust and Marguerite may have a chance. The two couples walk back and forth in the garden, which is supposed to extend beyond the limits of the stage. The courting as done by Mephistopheles is highly absurd, and is, in fact, the only touch of humor in the opera.

But very different are the scenes between Faust and Marguerite. Every phrase is full of charming sincerity. But it is after the quartet, after the second exit and reappearance, that we hear their great love duet. The evening shadows have lengthened, and "Tardi si fa" ("It groweth late") are the first words of this superb composition, which is indeed like pure gold. It stands alone in musical literature as the ideal love music. The only work that is ever compared to it is Wagner's duet in the "Walküre." Some writer has ventured the statement that in this "Faust" duo Gounod has "actually discovered the intervals of the scale which express the love passion." The idea is not a wild one nor a new one, for it is known that the Greeks held a similar belief, and even prohibited certain harmonies and intervals as being too sensuous. Be that as it may, there is a subtle charm about Gounod's music that eludes description. When we hear that final ecstatic leap from C sharp to high A, a mystic hush and spell steals over us.

There is little more after the duo. Marguerite rushes into the house, and Faust is aroused by the unwelcome voice of Mephistopheles. The latter's jesting tone is most irritating to the lover. But this dialog is soon interrupted by one of the loveliest scenes in the opera. Marguerite throws open

the blinds of her window and looks into the garden, which she believes is now vacant. The moonlight falls upon her, and she suddenly begins singing. It is a burst of melody as spontaneous and free as the song of a nightingale. The song is not long, and soon the curtain descends; but the picture leaves a lasting impression.

Act IV. comprises three scenes. The first one is short, and depicts Marguerite's grief and remorse. Faust has forsaken her, and the faithful Siebel tries to comfort and console. This second solo of Siebel's is a melody of noble simplicity. The beautiful cadence given to the twice-repeated name, "Marguerita," reveals a heart full of unselfish love.

The next scene represents a street in front of Marguerite's house. There is general excitement and anticipation among the villagers, for to-day the soldiers return from war. They presently enter, amid much rejoicing, and sing their great chorus, called the "Faust March." This march is so popular and well known that people who believe they have never heard a note of the opera will be surprised to find that they recognize this march. It is played by every military band in the country. After the chorus the soldiers disperse to their homes and friends. Valentine is greeted by Siebel, but the brother inquires about his sister, and hastens into the house.

The stage now is darkened, for the hour is late. Presently Faust and Mephisto appear. The latter has brought his guitar, and he assumes the privilege of singing a serenade to Marguerite, while Faust stands to one side in melancholy meditation. Mephisto's song is more insulting than complimentary. As a musical expression of irony, sarcasm, and insolence, this composition is certainly a success. The last three notes of the first phrase are a veritable leer. This is the second important bass solo, and, when well given, is highly effective, as it admits of great variety of expression. But instead of bringing forth the object of the serenade, Marguerite's brother appears at the door, and with drawn sword. He seeks out Faust and challenges him to a duel. The challenge is accepted, and they are soon fighting; but the result is inevitable, for Mephisto uses his demoniac power to protect Faust, and so Valentine is wounded. The noise of the scuffle has aroused the villagers, who hurry in with lanterns and find Valentine dying. Marguerite rushes forward and falls on her knees beside him, but Valentine motions her away. He rises up in his death agony and curses her in tones that are like balls of fire. The villagers look on with awe, while poor Marguerite is stunned by these terrible words from her dying brother. It is the most tragic moment of the opera. When Valentine expires, every one kneels as they sing a solemn prayer, and the curtain falls.

We have next the Church Scene, whose sublime music displays Gounod's special forte. He is perhaps greater as a composer of ecclesiastical music than anything else. His genius finds most congenial soil in religious themes, and therefore is this church scene with its mighty choruses and organ interludes truly grand. We hear the organ tones even before the curtain rises, and when it does Marguerite is discovered kneeling on a prayer-chair, apart from the other worshipers. She tries to pray and find comfort in her despair, but an awful voice mocks her endeavors, and that voice is Mephistopheles, who comes to her now in his true character. He is near her, but she can not see him, while he terrifies and tortures her with fearful prophecies. Vainly and desperately she strives to follow the familiar service, but she can hear only the demon's voice. It draws ever nearer, and its words increase her terror. At last with a cry of anguish Marguerite falls down unconscious. Mephistopheles stands over her, and his face beams with satanic glee.

True to Goethe's story, Marguerite becomes insane from grief and kills her child. The last act finds her in prison. Once again she is clad in white. Her hair hangs loose upon her shoulders, and chains bind her wrists. She is sleeping on a straw pallet as the curtain rises, and Faust enters with his companion. They have come to release the prisoner. But when she is aroused and urged to flee she pays little heed to their request, for she does not recognize them. But the sound of Faust's voice recalls to her that first meeting so long ago, when he said, "My fair lady, may I walk with you?" She sings again the charming phrase as we heard it in the second act; but it is now rendered with a certain pathos and simplicity that bring tears to our eyes.

She presently perceives Mephistopheles, and the sight fills her with terror. She falls on her knees and invokes the angels of heaven to pardon and receive her soul. The fervor of this prayer knows no bounds. A veritable religious ecstasy throbs through the music. The theme is broad and free, and seems to burst asunder every bond. It suggests a glory and splendor that are celestial. Ever higher and grander it grows. Marguerite is now standing with upraised arms; and altho Faust and Mephisto join in the singing, our attention is entirely riveted by that white-robed supplicant. The peerless theme is repeated three times, and always higher than before. Those soprano tones finally reach an atmosphere so clear and rare that they seem to carry the soul of Marguerite with them. The last high B soars up to heaven like a disembodied spirit.

It matters not what occurs after this. We have a dim consciousness of Marguerite falling down, of some words of lament from Faust; but for us the opera was ended with that last supernal note.

"WERTHER"

Madame Eames is the only prima donna whom America has heard in "Werther"—a work which in Paris ranks as Massenet's best. But she does not sing it often, because, as she says, "It all lies in such a low key; and to sing always in one place is hard on the voice." Then she adds, "But the love-music of Werther is beautiful."

Goethe's love-stories find favor with French composers. Massenet has accomplished with "Werther" what his predecessors have done with "Mignon" and "Faust." His work is very recent and altogether unique. The story is not dramatic, and there are no regulation operatic characters,—no gods, no kings, no peasants, gypsies, fairies, demons, villains, slaves, soldiers, and not even a chorus. The scenery is also unconventional; not a palace, nor a mountain, nor a dungeon in the whole play.

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The *dramatis personæ* of "Werther" are taken from "ye lower middle classes," and they are graced with such names as Schmidt, Johann, Sophia, and Katie. We find it agreeable and gratifying to see our own common selves and everyday emotions elevated to the regions of classic music.

It is easy to understand why Massenet was attracted by the story, in spite of its dramatic weakness and lack of stage effects. It offers unbounded opportunities for love-music. Most opera composers must content themselves with one rousing duet and perhaps a solo or two; but in this story the hero sings of love from first to last.

The prelude to this homely opera is like the blessing before a meal. It is peaceful and soothing, and might be called a pastorale.

As the curtain rises we are greeted with the chatter and laughter of childish voices: two innovations at one stroke, for real children and real laughter have never before held a place in grand opera. This first scene of "Werther" forms a pleasing summer picture. We see the garden and terrace of a simple country house, whose owner, the town bailiff, is seated upon the veranda surrounded by his six children, to whom he is teaching a Christmas carol. He seems to be teaching them, but in point of fact he is teaching the audience this charming melody, which must be kept in mind, for it recurs at various intervals during the opera. So the children sing at first very loud and badly. The good-natured bailiff shakes his head and stops his ears. After a second attempt the song goes smoothly, and during this performance Schmidt and Johann enter the garden. These are some tavern friends of the bailiff, who lend variety to the music by giving occasion for the inevitable drinking-song. They compliment the children and inquire after Charlotte. "She is dressing for a ball," answers Sophia, the bailiff's second daughter.

We might tire of this plain conversation and the buffoon manners of Schmidt and Johann, but the accompanying music is of absorbing interest. Massenet makes much use of counterpoint, which has been broadly defined as the art of combining melodies. A crude but familiar example is that wonder-inspiring piano performance of "Yankee Doodle" in one hand with "Fisher's Hornpipe" in the other. It is interesting to follow the various themes in Massenet's orchestra. Sometimes a bit of the Christmas carol combines with the gruff, reeling song of Bacchus, which, in turn, is blended with a broad and noble theme that always appears in connection with the name of Charlotte. Another theme, that might be characterized as severely intellectual, asserts itself whenever the conversation turns upon Albert, her absent fiancé.

Schmidt and Johann go off arm in arm, lustily singing, "Vivat Bacchus."

Sophia enters the house, while the bailiff retires with the children to an alcove on the veranda, where we see him patiently rehearsing that Christmas carol, word for word.

The music now undergoes a transition, like a dreamer turning in his sleep. There are harp-chords, arpeggios, and trills written soft and "dim."

A richly clad traveler enters the garden, looking about him with evident emotion. It is Werther, returned after years of absence to his native village.

"I know not if I dream or wake," are his first words, while the instruments recall that pastoral motif of the prelude. Birds and trees and the limpid brook are all apostrophized in word and tone, until, with a sunburst of rising chords, there is introduced a new and radiant theme, eulogizing—

"All nature, full of grace,
Queen over time and space;"

while under the spell of his emotions—for Werther is a poet and a dreamer—there comes to him, like the song of angels, that blessed Christmas carol which the children are singing softly and with perfect rhythm.

The already familiar Charlotte-theme announces the heroine's entrance. The girlish costumes of this bourgeoise character are unusually becoming to Madame Eames; they present her in quite a new light, and her first entrance gives a pleasing surprise to the audience.

She is embraced by the children, who love Charlotte dearly, for she is to them both a sister and a mother. Regardless of her best gown, she now goes to a buffet on the veranda and distributes slices of bread and butter. This scene has prompted the epithet, "bread-and-butter opera."

In the mean time Werther is welcomed by the bailiff and introduced to Charlotte. Sounds of gay music accompany the arrival of guests who will take Charlotte to the ball. This festive music is unique. The bass presents a defiant repetition of one chord that is stubbornly out of harmony with the bright melody above, like old age shaking his head at youthful gaiety.

It is decided that Werther shall go along to the ball. The dance-theme is resumed, and the merry party go out. Sophia takes the children into the house, and the bailiff goes off to the tavern, humming on the way that comical drinking-song.

The stage grows darker, the music softer, and we hear a fragment of the Albert-theme. It is like seeing the shadow before the person, for Albert soon enters. He has returned unexpectedly. Sophia rushes out to greet him, and she regrets that Charlotte is absent.

Before going into the house Albert sings to the night winds of his love, and hopes that Charlotte on entering the garden will discover the thoughts that he leaves.

The orchestra toys with this melody for a time, but then is diverted by memories of the ball music. Snatches of the bewitching strain flit by in different keys, like belated guests in vari-colored dominoes. They are faint as phantoms—a gentle swaying of the violins, a touch of the harp, and then they vanish. There is a pause. The moon has appeared, and the humble garden seems transformed into a fairy bower.

Like the spirit of a dream is the melody now arising. Ethereal in its beauty but supreme in power, it rules over the entire opera. This is the love-theme. We are not surprised to see Werther and Charlotte enter arm in arm. It is a familiar situation: he is "seeing her home" from the ball. And arrived at their destination, they linger at the gate as couples have done before and since.

Charlotte is of a serious nature, and their talk is never light. She tells of her mother and the terrible experience of losing one so dear. "I believe that she watches over me and knows when I do her bidding." Charlotte's tones are full of pathos, and she becomes abstracted in her memories, while Werther, enraptured by her goodness and beauty, gives utterance to the feelings that enthrall him. The music grows stronger and higher, until it breaks forth in a resounding reality of the love-theme. Over an accompaniment of throbbing chords this superb melody sweeps by like a meteor passing the earth; and during this luminous transition we hear the voice of Werther, "Charlotte, I love thee!" There follows a hush, and then a chilling, awful discord. Some one is calling from the house, "Albert

has come home!" Charlotte staggers at this news. She explains that Albert is her betrothed—it was her mother's wish. "May she forgive me, that for one moment at your side I forgot my vow." Charlotte goes up the steps; she turns once, but then hastens inside. Werther buries his face in anguish at the thought of her wedding another.

Several months have elapsed since the events of the first act. The elm-tree foliage is denser and the situations of the drama have changed, but love and music remain the same.

Schmidt and Johann are discovered sitting before the tavern "of a Sunday afternoon." Their good-natured song of Bacchus greets us like an old friend. The church and parsonage are in plain view, and a solemn choral from within alternates with the drinking-song without. The village is to-day *en fête* in honor of the pastor's golden wedding.

The serious and thoughtful Albert-theme marks the entrance of Charlotte and Albert, who are married. They loiter on their way to church and sit down on a bench under the trees. Very calm and tender is the music of this little scene between husband and wife. The organ resounds the chords of a beautiful hymn, at which summons Charlotte and Albert join the other worshipers.

Werther has been observing the pair from a distance. When they are gone he comes forward, exclaiming with grief and bitterness, "Wedded to another!" The tempestuous chords of the orchestra clash into the holy harmonies of the organ. Jagged fragments of Werther's first song of admiration depict his shattered joy. As one holds together the pieces of a broken vase, sadly recalling its lost loveliness, so does the orchestra again build up that old theme in all its beauty while Werther sings of what might have been. Rebellious at fate, he cries out: "It is I—I alone whom she could have loved!" The succeeding aria is reckless as a steed galloping to his death. It plunges from high tones to a sob, and the singer, flinging himself upon a bench, buries his face in his arms.

Albert discovers Werther thus despondent, and, suspecting the cause, he questions him; but Werther desperately disclaims his love for Charlotte. This interview is musically serious and sad. But suddenly the orchestra gives us a new key, a new melody, a sprinkling of lithesome staccatos falling like a shower of apple-blossoms. With a smile on her lips and flowers in her hands, Sophia enters, unconscious of the surrounding turbulent emotions. She gaily announces that they intend to dance, and that Werther must join her in the minuet. Observing his somber expression, she bids him cheer up, for to-day—

"All the world is gay!
Joy is in the air!"

This song is the most popular one of the opera. It is bright and light, and full of fluttering phrases—a veritable song of spring.

When Albert and Sophia are gone, Werther cries out with explosive candor, "I told a falsehood!" He is wretched beyond compare. He can not cease loving, and he dare not cease lying.

Charlotte comes from the church, and, greeting him kindly, asks if he, too, is going to the parsonage. They speak lightly but feel deeply, as is evidenced by the music. That wondrous love-theme softly surrounds them like the magic fire of the Walküre. The harmonies mount up from the instruments like flames from living embers. A spell is upon them. Charlotte stands mute, while Werther sings of that evening when he touched her hand and looked into her eyes for the first time. Softly and slowly the beautiful melody disappears, giving place to a different chord and motif: "Albert loves me—and I am his wife!" Charlotte has recovered herself. She entreats Werther to turn his heart elsewhere: "Why do you love me?" This hero seems to understand himself, for he answers: "Ask a madman why he has lost his reason!" Then Charlotte urges him to go away for a time, say until Christmas. "Yes, until Christmas—good-by, my friend!" She leaves before he has time to refuse.

Now follows a musical adaptation of Goethe's very poetical and ingenious plea for suicide.

"Do we offend Heaven in ceasing to suffer? When a son returns from his journey before the expected time, far from feeling resentment, the father hastens to greet him; and can it be that our heavenly Father is less clement?"

During this soliloquy we encounter strange chords in the orchestra. Strains of a gay minuet play upon these tragic tones like rainbow colors on the angles of a glacier.

The dance has begun, and Sophia, appearing at the parsonage door, tells Werther that she is waiting. He walks away.

"You are leaving! But you will come back?" cries the disappointed Sophia.

"No—never! Good-by!" and Werther turns down the road out of sight. Either for the lost dance or the lost partner, Sophia bursts into tears. Albert and Charlotte find her thus, and between sobs she tells them how Monsieur Werther has gone away forever. Charlotte stands rigid, while Albert exclaims to himself: "He loves my wife!" The gay assemblage within the parsonage has no knowledge of this brewing tragedy, so the minuet continues till the curtain descends.

The prelude to Act III. is somber and depressing. It clings to the harmonies of that last scene between Charlotte and Werther—the exile motif.

The curtain's rising reveals Charlotte sitting at her work-table, lost in thought while her needle plies.

The soft light of the lamp illumines a *petit salon*; the hour hand of the clock points to the figure five, and the libretto tells us it is the 24th of December. The subject of her thoughts is Werther—always Werther! Why can she not banish him from her mind as she did from her presence? The question is not hard to answer, for we learn that he has been writing to her. As tho drawn by a magnet, Charlotte goes to the desk and reads again the letters she fain would forget. Moaning minors like a winter wind accompany the perusal of these sad and poetic epistles. Werther writes: "If I never return, blame me not, but weep instead, for I shall be dead."

Terrifying tremolos accompany the tragic theme that is now let loose in the orchestra like a strange, wild animal in the arena. It preys upon the emotions, gnawing at the heart of every listener. Massenet delights in startling contrasts.

While Charlotte is grieving over these missives, a happy voice greets her, "Good day, sweet sister!" It is Sophia, come with an armful of toys and a heart full of melody. She is accompanied by the gay staccatos of her "Spring Song." Charlotte hastily conceals the letters; but tears are not so easily disposed of. Perceiving the reddened eyes, Sophia tries to cheer her sister by singing of "Laughter, the light of the heart." The gaiety of this music, with its sparkling scales and tripping tempo, is infectious. But tears again gather in Charlotte's eyes when Sophia mentions the name of Werther. The little sister is very sorry; but Charlotte says never mind, weeping does one good. "The tears we do *not* shed fall back upon the heart, which, altho it is big, is very frail and can break with the weight of a tear."

The music to this sentiment is a tone-poem well worthy of the text. It is written in a low key. Joy mounts upward on the scale, but grief weighs down.

Sophia goes out, and all the bright music with her. Falling upon her knees, Charlotte prays for strength. This supplication is truly grand, with superb crescendos and plaintive diminuendos.

The music now swells out with sudden impetus and the parlor door is brusquely opened. Charlotte turns around and exclaims—with startled tones, "Werther!"

He is leaning against the door as tho wearied in mind and body. "I tried not to come—*mais me voici*!"

With forced calm Charlotte bids him welcome. He looks with fond memory upon the old piano and familiar books. They talk of casual things, and incidentally Charlotte calls his attention to the poems he was translating when he left.

The music of this scene has been unnaturally tranquil; the gentle Charlotte-theme and another phrase, graceful and simple as a nursery rhyme, are used with touching effect. But with the mention

of these poems sudden emotion breaks through the constraint. Werther turns to the unfinished verse and reads aloud.

The ensuing scene is dramatically not a new one. In "Francesca da Rimini" the heroine is wooed and won by the reading of a poem; but added to the charm of verse we here have the enthralling power of music. In both instances the reading ends with—a kiss.

The succeeding aria is a song of soaring ecstasy about "*ce premier baiser*." Werther proclaims that "only love is real!" But Charlotte suddenly recoils at her weakness, and rushing to a side door, exclaims: "We must never meet again! Good-by—for the last time!" and disappears.

The music has assumed a dolorous strain that vividly portrays the pathos of her last words. Werther calls for her to come back. He knocks at the door, but is only answered by the tragic chords of the orchestra. They are furious and fearful, but, strange to say, they adequately express an awful silence. "So be it!" at last exclaims the sorrowful Werther. Crashing chords whirl riot in the orchestra as the hero hastens away.

The stage is vacated, but the music tells us whom next to expect. The Albert-theme, easily recognizable tho a trifle harsher than before, comes forward to preside over the finale of this act.

Albert steps into the room, surprised and preoccupied. He has met the distracted Werther at the front door, and here finds Charlotte locked in her room. In answer to his authoritative call she comes forward looking pale and frightened. He questions her, but she answers evasively. At this moment a message is handed to Albert by a servant. It is from Werther: "I go on a long journey. Kindly lend me your pistols. Farewell." Charlotte knows the import of these words, but dare not speak. Perhaps Albert also knows. He coldly bids her hand the weapons to the servant. Mutely and slowly she goes to the case and delivers the contents as she was bid. That theme in the orchestra continues quietly to move back and forth like a person keeping the death-watch. When the servant has gone, Albert strides angrily out of the room. Charlotte stands for a moment immobile. The music also seems to stand still; then a sudden impetuous outburst of the instruments coincides with her decision. From highest B to lowest F octaves and chords are hurled together, as Charlotte, seizing a mantle, rushes to the door. "Pray Heaven I may not be too late!"

We follow Charlotte in her flight. The scene changes to a view of the village. It is Christmas eve, nearing midnight. The snow is falling in wild gusts, but through a rift in the clouds the moon looks down upon the peaceful town. Roofs and trees are covered with snow, while from some of the windows household lights are gleaming. The church, too, is lighted, but the moonlight and the snow are most prominent. Even these however are not so important as the music. More chilling than hail or snow are those sudden blasts of chords and octaves falling one on top of the other, down, down until they join and melt into the steady tremolo of the bass. Finally, like Death seated on a tombstone, the terrifying tragic theme again looms up.

During this introduction the winter scene on the stage remains the same. The snow continues to fall, and we hear it in the orchestra—a steady movement of double thirds over which play varying melodies like Christmas lights. The musicians turn their leaves once, twice, three times, but still that slowly palpitating accompaniment goes on. There is something appalling in this persistency. What was at first delightful becomes oppressive, for we are somehow reminded that falling snow can bury the living and hide the dead.

A distant bell sounds the hour of twelve. Fierce winds arise, and we see the muffled figure of a woman struggling her way against the gale. The tempest is again heard in the orchestra. Breathlessly we watch the heroine's slow progress, and wonder if she will be too late.

The scene changes to a little room strewn with books and papers. A lamp on the wooden table casts sickly rays upon the surroundings, but we can plainly see a figure reclining on a chair near the open window. It is Werther, pale and unconscious. Charlotte rushes in, and at sight of the dying man is beside herself with grief. She calls him by name, and the sound of her voice revives him. He asks her faintly to stay near him, to pardon him and love him. While he speaks there arises from

the orchestra, like the dim visions of a dying man, that first love-theme so full of summer gladness. Charlotte sings to him the words he has longed to hear. This last love-song ends in a whisper. The instruments, too, seem hushed with that mysterious silence of Christmas night. We can see through the window the bright moonlight, for the storm has abated.

Suddenly the dying man looks up as sweet music greets his ear—

"Noël! Noël! Noël! Proclaim the wondrous birth! Christ the Lord has come to earth!"

"Noël! Noël! Noël!
Proclaim the wondrous birth!
Christ the Lord has come to earth!"

It is the happy children's voices singing their Christmas song in the church. A merry carillon of the instruments accompanies the familiar tones of Sophia's high, bright voice in the distance—

"All the world is gay!
Joy is in the air!"

This startling contrast of life and death has never been more beautifully portrayed.

Werther sadly smiles, murmuring that it is his song of deliverance. He dies in Charlotte's arms. She cries out, despairing, inconsolable, "It is finished!" Death is in the orchestra, in the darkness, in the ensuing silence. But suddenly, like "the morning in the bright light," those far-away voices again sing—

"Noël! Noël! Noël!"

CALVÉ AND "CARMEN"

"Hear Calvé in 'Carmen'—and die," is the motto which heralded this singer's first visit to America. Our curiosity was greatly aroused, for we thought we knew all about "Carmen." We clung to the traditions of our own Minnie Hauk who had created the rôle, and could imagine nothing better than a trim, dainty Carmen with high-heeled slippers, short skirts, and a Spanish mantilla.

Great was our amazement on that memorable night in 1894 when we beheld for the first time a real cigarette girl of modern Spain. Here was a daring innovation that at once aroused attention and new interest in the opera. This Carmen wore high-heeled slippers, 'tis true, but somewhat worn down and scuffed, as they must be if she was in the habit of running over the cobblestones of Seville as she ran to the footlights on her first entrance. And her skirts, far from being well-setting and so short as to reveal shapely ankles and a suspicion of lace petticoats, were of that sloppy, half-short length, which even the street girls of London wear to-day. But most astounding of all departures was the absence of any sign of a mantilla! How could one be Spanish without a mantilla—any more than one could be Russian without fur! But this Carmen had an eye to color—she could hardly otherwise be a coquette—and in her hair at the nape of her neck was deftly tucked a large crimson flower. Her hair, however, was carelessly pinned, and even tumbled quite down later on—a stroke of realism which was added to by the way she coiled it up and jabbed it into place again. A strange performance to behold in a grand opera setting; and we might have resented such defiance of the code had we not been forced to admit that it was all absolutely correct, and this Carmen was more truly Spanish than any impersonation we had seen. Even her voice seemed tropical; such richness of tone, warmth, and color had never before been combined in the singing of Bizet's opera. Had Bizet only lived to this day he might have died happily, for Carmen, the child of his brain, found no favor with the public when first introduced.

After the surprise of Madame Calvé's costume and then of her voice, New Yorkers awoke to the fact that Carmen had never before been acted. This performance was a revelation, a character study of a creature who recklessly holds that it is *right* to get all the pleasure you can, and *wrong* not to have what you want.

It was the evening after one of these great Carmen performances when a knock at the prima-donna's door elicited the Parisian response—"Entrez." Mme. Calvé's salon was brilliantly lighted and richly furnished, but it seemed only a sombre setting to the singer's radiant self. Not that she was gaudily gowned; on the contrary, her dress was simple, but her personality, her smile, her animation, are a constant delight and surprise.

Mme. Calvé is thoroughly French, and thoroughly handsome, and appears even younger off the stage than on. She is tall and of splendid figure; her complexion is fresh and clear, with an interesting tinge of olive, and her eyes are black as her hair, which was arranged very pompadour.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.