

George R. Greegan Ed. *Through my Monocle: Memoirs of the famous basso Andreas Perello De Segurolo* , Crest Publishing Co, Steubenville Ohio 1981, 484p.

With few exceptions, books written before 1950 by or about singers are inaccurate and should not be regarded as reference works. But this does not detract from their value, either for entertainment, or to give a general idea of a singer and the circumstances under which he or she performed. Even an examination of Kutsch & Riemens reveals numerous mistakes for many entries. This is a situation which has to be accepted as it is, not something for which the perpetrators should be held to account since they were writing at a time when far fewer research tools were available. It must also be recognised that errors, once put into print, tend to be repeated and require a great deal of highly specialised expertise and extensive research to detect and correct.

Where Spanish/Italian singers are concerned much of the research necessary to correct details pertaining to their careers involves the use of Italian theatrical journals which are available only in a few places. The only substantial run for the turn of the century known to be in existence outside Italy is privately owned. To fully research singers such as De Segurolo one would have to go to Milano, Torino (also privately owned), Parma or other Italian cities.

Any review of the De Segurolo book should be done with these considerations in mind. We found the book enjoyable reading and giving a vivid picture of the opera world at the turn of the century and for some decades thereafter. He was a *basso di primo cartello* singing wherever Italian opera

was popular, which encompassed Italy, Iberia, South America, North America and other places. He recollects amusing anecdotes about the big stars with whom he sang, and, even if the facts are not exactly as described, he does come close. For example he gives his debut in Barcelona on April 8 1895, opening the Spring season, while an examination of the *Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica* (Milan) shows it to be the third opera and on April 20 1895. While he is twelve days off, he is much closer than the 1898 given by Kutsch & Riemens. There are numerous other factual mistakes of a similar nature, but it has to be repeated that these are no worse than what has been taken for granted in similar books about other singers. As another example, De Segurolo relates that the most eventful performance he ever participated in was one of *La gioconda* in Lisbon with De Lucia, Theodorini and Delfino Menotti in 1900 or 1901 during which a man in the audience committed suicide. Further research indicates that the most likely performance where this could have occurred was one in which the tenor was Palet, and the baritone either Menotti, or (as a possible explanation to the confusion) Giuseppe De Luca. This sort of thing illustrates the problem - if you are reading the book for entertainment, it is fine. But if you are researching any of the singers named, getting to the truth can drive you insane!

But one does wish that the book would have been annotated and edited to reconcile De Segurolo's factual and textual mistakes (such as the above) with the real facts as far as the results of the latest research into the period can do so. Of course, there are not too many people who would care about the truth sufficiently to do this, and who would also be qualified for the task, and it certainly would have resulted in an increase in the cost and price of the book. A chronology would also have been a necessary adjunct in such an endeavor.

Even more troublesome is what appears to be the almost total absence of proof reading, resulting in an enormous and excessive number of typographical errors (we understand that the book is now provided with an errata sheet).

But, even with these problems, the De Segurolo volume is far superior to some other existing books on singers, for example the latest book on Tamagno. The latter is a total failure when one considers the extent of the data that should have been available to the author. When one remembers that the fame of De Segurolo and the character of the book might have made the potential market too limited to have a major publishing house bring it out, one has to commend Crest Publishing on having undertaken to make this entertaining book available. It is certainly a welcome addition to anyone collecting books on singers. There is also a cassette available. It contains selected De Segurolo records of opera and songs and Caruso's singing of 'Vecchia Zimarra'; it also has an interview with the singer by William Rhine where De Segurolo talks about his career (also very entertaining).