

## Books

Dudley Cheke *Joséphine and Emilie: Stars of Bel Canto in Europe and America, 1823-1889*  
Jon Carpenter, Oxford 1993 [£35]

With forward by Richard Bonyngne... "Mr Cheke gives us much fascinating information not readily obtainable elsewhere about the operatic and concert world of some seven decades of the 19th century, and provides us with much contemporary criticism, sometimes quite hilarious."

Readers of *Joséphine and Emilie* will find this one of the most intriguing biographies about those divine creatures...the *prime donne* of the last century, God Bless 'em. Those women who came from a time when operatic heroines ruled supreme, when Divas like Pasta, Giulia Grisi and Sontag swept across the stage singing the glorious music of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini. Divas such as the liberated Maria Malibran - a legend in her own time - and the puritanical Jenny Lind. It was the Romantic Age, the Age of Bel Canto. Italian Opera was the rage in Paris and London, and all the singers gravitated towards those two cities.

In the first part of this book the author skilfully covers the harrowing adventures that beset two young sopranos - Elisabeth Féron and Joséphine de Méric, who had the misfortune to marry the same man...Joseph Glossop, a bigamist, with disastrous results. First, Joseph Glossop was the founder of the Royal Coburg Theatre of London (later the Old Vic). Then he took over the management of La Scala in Milan and the San Carlo in Naples for a short time from Barbaja, 1823-24, all this led to financial ruin and he ended-up in the Bankruptcy Courts of London. Both wives shed him fast with not much difficulty but not before he had fathered a few children. A daughter Emilie by Joséphine, and a son by Elisabeth. This son, Augustus Glossop Harris became Stage Manager at Covent Garden and was in turn the father of Sir Augustus Harris, the impresario of the Royal Opera House. When the unhappy trio split, Féron fled to New York with Augustus, while Joséphine survived alone with her daughter Emilie de Méric.

The second part of the book documents the opera career of Emilie; a talented contralto she married Nicola Lablache - one of the sons of the famous *basso cantante* Luigi Lablache. Covering Emilie's life from her Paris début in 1848 at the Théâtre-Italien in Donizetti's *Maria di Rohan* Dudley Cheke gives us a fascinating insight into the life of one of those rarer songbirds - the contralto or mezzo-soprano. Emilie enjoyed one of the longest operatic careers, spanning over half a century, taking her over three continents. She was given the title of "Russian Court Singer"; she made quite a niche for herself singing Azucena in *Il trovatore* in St.Petersburg, Vienna, and later in the USA; she sang *Lucrezia Borgia* in Vienna with Medori, and she continued singing there for four years in *Linda di Chamounix*, *Maria di Rohan*, *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore* and many more. Proving herself quite a trooper in 1855 when her perfect record was interrupted briefly by the surprise birth of baby Louise Lablache, mid-season and a bit early; she was back on the stage in a month for Thalberg's *Christina*\*

Most interestingly, she and her daughter Louise sang with the impresario Colonel Mapleson and Her Majesty's Opera tours of England and the United States, bringing the opera *Carmen* to most American cities from Boston to San Francisco (1886). Louise Lablache created Marthe at the Gala Opening of the Metropolitan Opera in *Faust* in 1883.

This is a large book and the artistic layout is excellent, profusely illustrated with lots of wonderful prints, playbills and drawings from the time. A must for the opera connoisseur's library. The only small criticism: I should have loved a Chronology and notes.

We must thank the author for his enthusiastic research which resulted in bringing the lives of these 19th century singers into focus. Painstakingly putting the biographies together, partly from family history (his wife was a de Méric). Dudley Cheke died on 20 August 1993; he will be sadly missed.

Clarissa Lablache Cheer

\*Tom Kaufman *Italian Performances in Vienna* Donizetti Society Journal 4 (1980)

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John Frederick Cone *Adelina Patti: Queen of Spades* Amadeus Press, Oregon. 400pp [\$39.95]

The name of Adelina Patti invokes the (unfortunately) bygone Golden Age of the Composer and Singer as Robert Tuggle points out in his introduction. At the height of her career she was the favorite of three continents, revered by composers like Rossini, Auber, Meyerbeer and Verdi and the

highest paid entertainer.

This is the first full-length biography in English since 1920 and provides a full account of her early years and final decades. Dr. Cone, author of two other excellent books *Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company* and *First Rival of the Metropolitan Opera* has done one of the most scholarly, well-researched, and appealing books.

The first chapter begins with a recollection of her last concert and dwells upon her parents, childhood and first concerts. The reader then follows the soprano through her operatic debut at the Academy of music, her ascent to superstar status, her unfortunate marriage to de Caux, her affair - and later marriage - to Nicolini, his death, her third marriage to Cederström and her final years at Craig-y-Nos. The book describes her career in lively fashion with many invaluable contemporary quotations, reviews and letters. The references are fully documented. We can only compliment Dr. Cone on another outstanding work. There are many fine and rare illustrations.

Record collectors will find "The recorded Legacy of Adelina Patti", by William Moran describing how she came to record fascinating. Besides listing all her records the discography also includes a discussion on playing speeds. The book ends with a Chronology of Patti's Appearances and a list of her operatic repertoire. The author of this, Tom Kaufman, is one of the world's leading authorities on this type of study. He was the author of the Caruso Chronology, also published by Amadeus. He elaborates on the problems he had to face when dealing with Patti's appearances as compared with Caruso's. He lists - according to him - only about 50-75% of her concerts, listing more would have required years of additional research, delayed publication of the book, and would not have added more meaningful information on Patti's career.

In summary, this is another fine achievement by Dr.Cone and the Amadeus Press.

Francois L.Nouvion

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John Steane *The Grand Tradition, seventy years' of singing on Record 1900-1970*, second edition Amadeus Press, Oregon 628pp [\$49.95]

This is a reprint of the 1974 edition with incorporation of many corrections. It has not been brought up to date. Mr.Steane is working on a companion volume which will examine recordings from 1970-1990 and redress omissions and singers' undervaluing in the present volume. One major flaw of the first edition was the omission of record numbers; in the new preface Mr.Steane is still unrepentant. The book is divided into three parts:

Part I The Golden Legend: pre-electrical recordings 1900-1925 (146pp)

Part II Decline and Survival: the electrical 78 1925-1950 (171pp)

Part III Renaissance: the long-playing record 1950-1970 (225pp)

With conclusion, and appendix (essays in comparison, where different singers interpreting the same aria are compared), the book runs to 628pp.

In view of the wealth of material the author has to deal with it is quite an achievement. Like everybody else, Mr.Steane has strong likes and dislikes. Depending on your view you will either love or not love the book. If we take, for example, the case of *tenors* Mr.Steane seems to dislike the big voices.

He dismisses the records of Erich Schmedes, despite his long association with Mahler, as numerous and nasty. He is slightly kinder to Burrian and Slezak. O'Sullivan's output is described as loud and deadful. Luccioni is not even mentioned. He briefly comments on the brilliant ring of Vezzani's voice, but nothing else. Surprisingly, he has positive things to say about Escalais. About Paoli, one of the great dramatic tenors of the century, he has nothing good to say about his recording of 'No, Pagliaccio non son'. On the other hand, he describes Anastasios Vrenios, an over-parted *tenorino* in *Les Huguenots*, singing 'Plus Blanche' as pleasant lyricism and clever in florid music. In the listing for Raoul mentioned here, he forgets the two singers that sung the role most often this century: Palet and O'Sullivan.

If you do not have the first edition, I recommend this book as a reference, but Mr.Steane's views should be enjoyed or taken with a grain of salt.

Francois L.Nouvion