

From Near And Far

By Ben Dor

RETURN OF AN OPERA STAR

TEN years ago a young opera star sang to a large audience at the Empire Theatre, Johannesburg. Last night she sang in Johannesburg again in the opera at His Majesty's Theatre. Ten years ago her voice was strong and rich, and held forth great promise; last night it was scintillating and mellow, the very acme of perfection . . .

Madame Mabella Ott-Penneto, the dramatic contralto, who enthralled her listeners with her magnificent portrayal of Amneris in Aida, the opening opera of this season, was born in Cape Town and brought up in Oudtshoorn—that enchanted Karoo town that has given to South Africa more than its share of artists, writers, singers and great men.

Oudtshoornites will recall the vivacious Mabel Lewin who used to be the "life of the party" with her songs at picnics, at school concerts, at social functions—Mabel Lewin the girl who was always singing, and under the name of Madame Mabella Ott-Penneto was to capture and hold the tradition-steeped opera houses of Berlin, Berne and Vienna.

She received her early training at the South African College of Music in Cape Town under Evelyn Fincken, and in 1932 set out for overseas. She toured the cities of Europe and was acclaimed wherever her golden voice was heard. In 1935 she entered the international singing competition of the Vienna State Academy, gaining a first place among 395 entrants.

The following year she returned to South Africa and gave some very successful concerts in Cape Town and Johannesburg. She also revisited her home-town, and will be remembered for her charming gesture in giving a special concert at the Oudtshoorn Girls' High School. She was the local girl who made good, and those of her town showed her that they knew it and were very proud.

She left South Africa for Switzerland for the second time in 1937, and June, 1939, found her in London. But for the outbreak of war she would probably have had the opportunity of singing "Carmen" at Glynnebourne where the famous Busch was conducting. Returning to Switzerland, she dedicated her art to the service of Allied soldiers, refugees and escaped P.O.W's., and as a token of appreciation received a special address of thanks from the British Government; a memento of which she is rightly proud.

Madame Ott-Penneto is also very proud of owning the original texts of Wagner's Lohengrin and Tannhauser. Her husband's grandfather, the composer, Wilhelm Baumgarten, was a personal friend of Richard Wagner from whom he obtained the two priceless scores, both of which are now family treasures.

While in South Africa Madame Penetto will have the opportunity of being once more reunited with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. I. B. Lewin, who have lived in Oudtshoorn for many years. The family may certainly be described as "musical," her aunt being Fraulein Augusta Lenska (her father's sister) who, too, was born in Oudtshoorn, toured the world, and sang, among others, at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, and at the Queen's Hall, London.

During her travels, Madame



Penetto has met numerous Jews who are prominent in the musical world. Perhaps the most outstanding of these was Kletzki, the Polish-Jewish conductor, who was forced to flee from his country and was eagerly snatched up by the United States, where his baton has inspired some of the greatest orchestras in the world.

It would be interesting to record some of the reviews on Madame Penetto's performances by the overseas press—a press that takes the question of musical criticism very seriously and does not dispose of the work of every artist by the all too hackneyed clichés of "brilliant," "delicate" and "excellent."

The "Tagensanzeiger," of Zurich, has written: "The fascinating art of Mabella Penetto is an experience in itself. Her singing is easy and fluent, wonderfully balanced throughout, a phenomenal instrument whose luminosity and power lends convincing intensity to the music . . ." and the "Tagblatt" of Switzerland: "Her unusual vocal qualities cannot fail to cause something of a sensation for she is gifted with a contralto of outstanding amplitude and rarely equalled dark timbre . . ."

South African opera audiences will acclaim her!

A New Cure for Headaches!

IN an interview with a reporter of the "Cape Argus" last week, Mr. Jacob Maresky, of Kimberley, told how his translating of the Talmud helped to cure him of ill-health.

Three years ago Mr. Maresky suffered very badly from stomach trouble. To distract his mind from the pain, he told the "Cape Argus" reporter, and following the old Hebrew proverb "If you suffer from a headache, read," he started translating the Talmud into English.

Mr. Maresky said that from the knowledge gained in his research he was able, within a few months, to cure himself, so that to-day he is a fit man. He then proceeded to give a few medical hints recommended by the rabbis of old, many of which he had followed to good effect.

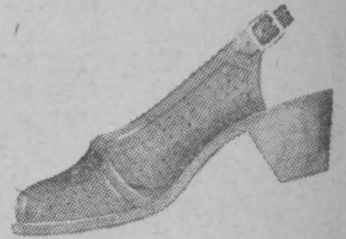
"Hundreds of years ago Rabbi Chona stated that kummel (caraway seed) was good for heart trouble. Penicillin, hailed as one of the latest cures, is mentioned as a fungus growth that is good for skin diseases. Rabbi Meir records that there is no worse curse on earth than liquor."

After giving several other examples culled from the Talmud, Mr. Maresky gives the following information:

While Halley's comet was first noticed officially in 1910, Jewish astronomers 2,000 years ago refer to "a comet that appears every 70 years and diverts ships' courses."

A form of telephone existed in the world about 150 years ago, for at Mertz, in 1789, a number of rabbis ruled that "especially concerning the apparatus which is installed for talking to one another over long distances, we are unaware of any prohibition to talk on it on the Sabbath."

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