

Palestine in Song

Opera in Hebrew

Interview for the *Zionist Record*

WITH

Mr. Giorgio Giorini



As Eliezer in "The Jewess" by Halevy.

ECHOES of the success of the Palestine Hebrew Opera have often reached this country and there were many who could not quite grasp how the famous Italian and French operas could be interpreted in the language of the Bible. The arrival in South Africa of the leading tenor of the Palestine Opera in the person of Mr. Giorgio Giorini led a representative of the *Zionist Record* to call upon him in order to ascertain some particulars of this musical development in Palestine and also to learn the nature of Mr. Giorini's mission here.

Mr. Giorini is a gifted dramatic tenor. He has had over fifteen years' experience on the operatic stage in Russia, Italy, Poland, Roumania and America, where he sang the leading parts in some of the most popular and classic operas. In 1923 he came to Palestine at the invitation of Mr. M. M. Golinkin, the founder and conductor of the Hebrew Opera of Palestine, to act as the leading dramatic tenor of the company. The success of the Hebrew Opera in Palestine was due not only to the excellence of the music, or to the high standard of the performances, but perhaps mainly to the beauty and flexibility of the Hebrew language in musical expression. It is noteworthy that a number of visitors from Italy and France, who were present at the performances of the Palestine opera of "Traviata," "Il Pagliacci" and "Faust" admitted that these operas were as beautiful in Hebrew as they are in the original languages.

Needless to say it required the almost super-human devotion of such enthusiasts as Giorini and others, to "blaze the trail" and to make Hebrew opera not only a source of enjoyment to the Jewish and non-Jewish public alike in Palestine, but also one of the central pillars of the cultural activity of the Jewish National Home. The Hebrew opera in Palestine had to struggle for years, and eminent artists who could have lived in luxury had they continued to appear on the operatic stage outside Palestine, were content to live practically on bread and water in order to carry through this beautiful idea of opera in Hebrew. It is hoped that it will be possible, at no distant date, to erect a permanent opera house either in Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem, which in turn will promote the expansion of symphonic orchestras, choirs and many other musical and cultural achievements of a big opera house.

Mr. Giorini was asked as to whether the company of Palestine opera singers ever performed in other countries, to which he replied that owing to the enormous expense involved it had not been found possible to do so. There are, however, plans afoot and it is hoped that the idea will be carried out at no distant date.

"In view of the difficulty in bringing out the whole company, I have come to South Africa alone to demonstrate, as a leading artist of the Palestine opera, the flexibility of the Hebrew tongue in operatic music.

"In 1928 three of us—Mr. M. Golinkin, his late wife, the leading dramatic soprano of the opera, and myself—went to America where our performances were

very well received and we made a great success. Owing to the fact that at present the opera season in Palestine is over, I felt I would like to bring to my brethren in far away South Africa an idea of Hebrew music in the form of opera. It is the policy of the leading artists of Palestine opera to utilise the vacation period to travel in various countries. Next year I am hoping to go to the Argentine on the same mission.

Mr. Giorini indicated that he hoped to give his first concert in Johannesburg. Asked as to the arrangement of his programme, he said that the first part of the programme would consist of general operatic items in which he would give excerpts from famous operas, in all of which he had made professional appearances in various parts of the world.

"Of course, I shall sing these in Johannesburg in the same language as I did in Palestine—that is in the language of the Bible. It will be of interest, I am sure, to South African Jews to hear how beautifully our ancient tongue can sound when used in connection with interpretation of the tunes in great operas."

With reference to the second part of his programme, Mr. Giorini said that this would be devoted to the interpretation of a large number of Palestinian songs indicative of the new spirit in the land. In these will be included Chaluzim and Yemenite songs and also some Arab folk songs translated into Hebrew.

"In these times of stress," remarked Mr. Giorini, "people are liable to assume that Palestine Jewry is very despondent. Well, all I can say is that this is far from being the case. If you want to judge the temperament of a people, if you want to look into its soul, the best way in which you can achieve that is to listen to its music and especially to its folk songs. In Palestinian songs, and among these I include many that have come into being in the quarries, on the roads, in the fields, on the threshing floor, in the orchards, in the reading rooms, the central note is that of courage, determination, devotion—I might even say of defiance. I shall try from the platform to convey the spirit of our true national music, the music that is born and nurtured on our national soil and in our national atmosphere.

"My whole programme," concluded Mr. Giorini "will be completely in Hebrew and in this way the concerts should be unique in the musical history of Johannesburg."

Mr. Giorini expressed the hope that his mission will be generously supported by South African Jewry.