

# The Jew in Metropolitan Opera

## A Series of Great Achievements in America

By Haynes A. Gilbert

THE Metropolitan Opera House of New York is celebrating this year its fiftieth anniversary, and as we glance over its glamorous history we realise forcefully what an all-important role the Jew has performed in establishing it as the foremost operatic institution in the world.

Glancing over the long list of distinguished conductors who have wielded their batons from the orchestra-pit, we notice that some of the greatest conductors of the Metropolitan have been Jews. In 1884, a great Jewish musician, Dr. Leopold Damrosch, approached the directors of the young institution with an idealistic plan to inaugurate a year of German opera. They decided to follow out Dr. Damrosch's plan—and the first great year in the Metropolitan's history came into being.

Dr. Damrosch reintroduced to the audiences the wealth of German opera so long neglected in New York. The sudden death of Dr. Leopold Damrosch the following season resulted in having two Jewish conductors to resume his excellent work. His son, Walter Damrosch, officiated at the conductor's platform until a suitable substitute could be found to carry on his father's work. That substitute proved to be Anton Seidl, one of the immortals of the baton—and when Dr. Seidl came to the Metropolitan, Walter Damrosch became his assistant conductor. Dr. Seidl's performances of German opera at the Metropolitan made operatic history.

Between 1902 and 1915, the Metropolitan boasted of two other distinguished Jewish conductors. The first of these was Alfred Hertz, who officiated at the Opera House during all those years—creating an enormous reputation for himself and his Wagnerian interpretations. The other conductor was Gustav Mahler, the great composer, who came to America in 1907 for a visit.

In 1915, Artur Bodanzky came to the Metropolitan. He was a young conductor who brought with him an enormous reputation from abroad.

AMONG the tenors, who have made the halls of the Metropolitan ring with immortal music, several Jewish names stand out in importance. Maurice Renaud was, perhaps, one of the greatest tenors in the history of the Metropolitan. This French Jew was for many years an idol in New York.

Herman Jadlowker, who came to the Metropolitan in 1910, also created a marked impression during his years here. At the time he was at the very peak of his career—possessing a voice of remarkable plasticity and volume. Herman Jadlowker made his most memorable impression in New York when he created the principal tenor role of Humperdinck's *Königskinder*. The critics, then,



BRUNO WALTER.

The great Berlin conductor, who was driven from Germany by the Nazi regime, and who now heads the orchestral activity at the great Metropolitan Opera House in New York.

spoke rapturously about his remarkable interpretation. Jadlowker, incidentally, has recently deserted opera—and is now a cantor in one of the principal synagogues of Hungary.

Other tenors of the Metropolitan deserve comment. James Wolfe—who has recently endeared himself to Jewish audiences because of his excellent performance in the pageant, *The Romance of a People*—has been with the Metropolitan for more than a decade, appearing in a remarkable variety of French and Italian operas. His voice has a seductive loveliness, and what it lacks in power and strength it adds in refinement and delicacy. Armand Tokatyan is a Palestinian tenor, whose performances in *La Bohème* of Puccini and *Rigoletto* of Verdi, are familiar to opera audiences in New York. He is, today, one of the mainstays of the tenor section of the Metropolitan. Three other tenors who appear in smaller roles—but whose work has always been distinguished—are Mark Windheim, Max Altglass, and Arnold Gabor. It is essential, in a great performance, that the minor roles be performed as faultlessly as the great ones—and for this reason singers like Windheim, Altglass and Gabor are of inestimable importance to the institution.

IN speaking of sopranos, one name immediately comes to the fore—one of the giants of the Metropolitan Opera House—one of the greatest sopranos of all time—and certainly the greatest Wagnerian soprano the world has known. I allude, of course, to Lilli Lehmann.

Lilli Lehmann was one of the glories of the musical world. Like

Caruso, Toscanini, Rubinstein, Liszt, she is an inseparable part of that glamorous tradition which ever inspires contemporary artists and which is ever a yardstick with which the future can measure its own achievements.

While Lilli Lehmann was, no doubt, the greatest Jewish soprano to appear at the Metropolitan, she was by no means the only one who was idolised by opera audiences. Sophie Braslau, who appeared at the Metropolitan in 1913, created an enormous sensation when she appeared in *Boris Gudonoff*, where she revealed a sensitive and beautiful voice.

Alma Gluck, who from 1909 until 1915 was a star of the Metropolitan, distinguished herself in the principal soprano roles of *La Bohème*, *Bartered Bride* and *Faust*. Marie Rappold, who was brought by Henrich Conried to the Metropolitan in 1906, is best remembered for her inspired performance as Sulamith in Goldmark's *Queen of Sheba*—although she has more than twenty famous roles to her credit. Other outstanding sopranos include Nanette Guilford, who added a charm of personality and a histrionic talent to her beautiful voice; Ellen Dalossy, who stepped from the stage of musical-comedy to arouse considerable enthusiasm in the opera; Pearl Besuner, a newcomer, who distinguished herself because of her musicianship; and Philine Falco, who in the minor roles has proved to be one of the important mainstays of the Metropolitan cast.

Among the baritones, the greatest name is, of course, Friedrich Schorr—the world's foremost Wagnerian baritone, whose interpretations of *Wotan* are known all over the world.

Among the contraltos, Maria Olszewska—a great Wagnerian singer—should be singled out especially. Having created a great European reputation, Olszewska came to New York last season and triumphed. As Brangane in *Tristan* she is a unique experience for the opera-goer.



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