

EMOTIONAL JOURNALISTS BESIEGE MME. OBER AS EXPERT IN SUBTLE ART OF LOVE-MAKING

German Prima Donna's Success as a Suitor in "Der Rosenkavalier" Prompts Many Reporters for Women's Magazine Pages to Interview Her—Her First Impressions of Singing at the Metropolitan—Moving-Picture Concern Makes Overtures to Secure Her Services

"MME. MARGARETE OBER speaks only German."

This condition presents itself to those who would speak with the latest addition to the ranks of prima donna *contraltos* at our Metropolitan Opera House. So if you plan to have the distinguished artist discourse with you on what she believes is modern music, on her impressions of America or what not, you had better muster up all the courage you possess, summon up the results of those academic days when you were one of many who repeated in unison such classic sentences as *Mein Bruder hat seinen Ring verloren* in your German class, and truly concerned yourself about such momentous things, as the endings of nouns and the conjugation of irregular verbs.

You will need all you can possibly enlist to aid you, for the German *contralto* has not added a single sentence of English to her repertoire. She admits knowing a few words, but she is rather afraid to say them.

It is an engaging personality which this singer, new to American shores, presents as she advances stately and gracious to greet you in the music-room of the spacious and artistically furnished apartment which she and her husband have taken while they are in New York. Strikingly gowned the singer makes an imposing figure "off stage" as well as on. She received a representative of MUSICAL AMERICA late one afternoon last week, only three or four hours before she had to sing. Yet one might have believed that an evening of leisure was before her, so calmly and contentedly did she conduct herself, with none of the affectations of the prima donna, who on days when she "appears" sits in her boudoir reading the *Meditations of Thomas à Kempis* to bring peace to her soul.

"I simply haven't been able to learn English so far," lamented the singer; "not that I do not wish to, but it is hard for me. I can, of course, say a few words, but I always feel that some one is going to laugh at me when I say them and so I don't try these days. Besides, I have so much to do that it is impossible for me to study it. Next Summer I am going to take it up seriously." Mme. Ober thinks that Americans have a certain way of holding the jaw when speaking and she believes that not until she has acquired this will she be able to master our language!

The Wonderful Toscanini

Thoroughly pleased with the manner in which she has been treated in America by Americans is the former *erste Altistin* of the Berlin Royal Opera. "The people I have met are lovely, and everybody has been so kind and agreeable to me at the Metropolitan. In spite of this I have *Heimweh*, which I suppose is natural enough, isn't it? I am terribly enthusiastic about Maestro Toscanini. What a wonderful man he is! I can tell you that I actually trembled on coming to America because of him. I had heard how strict he is, how he demands enormous tasks of his singers and I was afraid. But he is so fair, so helpful and he has been very kind to me, so that it is a pleasure to work under his baton. To be sure, he demands that the singer give him her best and only her best work. I feel now that those artists who do so will find him, as I have, a great master and a genial man."

Mme. Ober's success as *Amneris* in "Aida" following on her splendid *Ortrud* surprised many music-lovers. Here was a German singer who accomplished an Italian rôle in Italian in a manner quite as noteworthy as her performance in her own tongue. Surely she had not sung Italian operas in the original abroad. "Only once had I sung *Amneris* in Italian," declared Mme. Ober, "and that was when Mr. Caruso came to Berlin last Fall. I sang it there with him and so it was natural enough for me to sing it here. Why should I not sing Italian? I have in my repertoire all the standard Italian operas—of course there are no parts for my voice in the modern Italians, like Puccini, otherwise I should have them too,—barring 'The Masked Ball.' That I shall add ere long. I like

to sing Italian, it is such a beautiful language, and I am told that I sing it well.

"Ordinarily I have little or no trouble in learning a part in it. Yes, you are right, I had to learn the part of *Marina*

that the people who come to hear it enjoy it. Of course, I cannot tell from the viewpoint of the audience, since I have never listened to it from in front. But from the stage it seemed to carry to the audience. Not even in Berlin did I hear

Mme. Ober as "Amneris"



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in 'Boris' since my coming to America. It was the exception, for the Italian to which it is sung here is a translation and it does not fit the music any too well. It caused me a bit of worry, but I mastered it long before it was time to appear.

"And to-night I go over to Brooklyn to sing the *Haze* in Humperdinck's 'Königskinder.' I had to learn it all over again. You see I sang it when it was first given in Berlin, but the last two years there I became such a favorite that they absolutely refused to allow me to sing anything but the biggest parts. So I have not sung it since the first year it was produced in Berlin. It is a very beautiful opera and I am happy to know that it is so well liked by New York audiences."

Food for Emotional Journalists

Those critical commentators who in their reviews of the recent premiere of Richard Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier," in which Mme. Ober sang *Octavian*, dwelt on the charm of her love-making in the first act with the *Marschallin* and impressed their readers with her intensity of dramatic expression little dreamed that a bevy of "woman's page" reporters and society editors would besiege the singer and beg her to tell them "how she did it." "They came all day long," confided Mme. Ober, "and they all asked about the first act and what I had done to be so excellent in it, which they said they had been told I was. Several wanted me to write articles on 'How to Make Love,' but there was one woman who thought I ought to champion the reversal of the approved custom and insist on women proposing to men. Where they got these things from, Heaven alone knows. It was all new to me, for in Europe such things are unheard of.

"Do I think the Strauss opera was a success? Decidedly. At the second performance there was even much more enthusiasm than at the first and I think

it. And there we sang it as much as three and four times a week. We had three casts, three *Octavians*, three *Baron Ochs*, etc. I think it will keep its place in the repertoire.

"I have noticed that an artist must be ever watchful in the Metropolitan, as the critics come to every performance. In Berlin the critics go only to the premiere of an opera. Then if there should be an important change of cast, a new singer in a new part or something like that, they go too. *Für die Premiere nimmt man sich zusammen* (One 'bucks up' for the premiere) and then one may relax, since the press is not present. But here your critics are writing reports after every performance, it seems to me. It would be impossible for the Berlin critics to do likewise, since they have twenty concerts a night sometimes, so that they can just run in, hear a single song and then move along to their next concert."

The size of the Metropolitan Opera House has been known to cause many singers from abroad much annoyance on their debuts here, for few of the opera houses on the Continent are as large. It often has taken a month for a singer to become accustomed to the house and its acoustic properties. Mme. Ober expe-

rienced no such difficulties. "I only missed the big illuminated chandelier which hangs from the middle of the ceiling in the Kaiser's Opera House on the night of my debut at the Metropolitan, but beyond that I found it not unlike Berlin. It is somewhat larger, to be sure.

"I sing *lieder*, of course, and next year perhaps I shall make a number of concert appearances here. I understand that it is very profitable," remarked the singer, with a merry twinkle, for she has been told doubtless by some one how quickly the public turns out to hear admired operatic singers in concert.

In this singer is to be found another "movie" devotee. But thorough person that she is she has reasons for her



Margarete Ober, Contralto of the Metropolitan Opera Company

liking them. "I have no time to go to concerts here as yet, though I wanted to go to hear Julia Culp the other day. What with rehearsals, performances, resting at home and sleeping I cannot go out in the evening much if I have to make an extensive toilette first. So there you are. One puts on one's coat, steps around the corner—every block has its *Kinloip* (that's what we call them in Berlin)—and enjoys an hour or two in a most informal manner looking at the pictures.

A Plan to Appear on the Screen

"I may even appear in some myself. Before I sailed I was having my picture taken at a photographer's who owns a film factory. When the pictures were finished he made me an offer. He wants me to act a play which is to be 'especially written for me'—of course, that goes without saying—next Summer in the films. A very handsome offer it was too and the man is persistent; he has written me several letters to America since I am here, asking me to decide and I don't know just what to do. I haven't asked him: if I would have to go into a lion's cage in the play, but I suppose that that would not be the worst thing for me to do, judging by the way in which it was featured in your newspapers last Fall when Mme. Destinn did it. You like your singers here in America to do things in addition to singing, don't you?"

If Mme. Ober decides to accept this "movie" man's offer she will doubtless only act in the Summer. So that the chance of Margarete Ober, contralto of the Metropolitan Opera Company, being metamorphosed by next Fall into Margarete Ober, "Queen of the Movies," is very slight and need cause no one of her myriad admirers in this country any loss of sleep or restless nights.

A. WALTER KRAMER.

Mme. Ober as "Ortrud"