

SCHOOL OF BATTISTINI DYING OUT, SAYS DE LUCA

Modern Operatic Composers Discouraging Beautiful Singing on Part of Baritones by Unvocal Roles Which They So Frequently Write for Them, Points Out New Metropolitan Artist—Puccini Operas as an Example—His Views on Baritone Controversy

NO matter what else happens to Giuseppe de Luca during his first season in America, he will be spared one experience: As he walks along our highways, nobody will say of him, "That must be an opera singer." Scarcely ever was there an individual whose appearance so belied his profession. Further, the countenance of this noted Italian baritone bears hardly any of the characteristic features of Italy's people. Were he called upon to sing the rôle of an up-to-date American, he could "look the part" to perfection. In fact, from his well-groomed appearance and the geniality of his manner, one might fancy him to be a Wall Street broker rejoicing over the recent boom in war stocks.

Thus, when the writer sought out Mr. de Luca by appointment in the lobby of his hotel the other morning, he would have had some difficulty in locating the eminent baritone, had not Gianni Viafora accompanied the expedition—in the rôle of interpreter. This latter service, however, was found to be scarcely needed with the new Metropolitan baritone.

Studied English in Rome

"I have been studying English for three months in Rome," said Mr. de Luca, in response to an exclamation of astonishment as to his proficiency. "My teacher was an English lady, and now I have a hard time to understand the speech of Americans. Did I study by conversation? No, from an English grammar. I know many English words, but it is not easy to use them. Yet I will speak with many American people until I know how."

Mr. de Luca made some pertinent comments upon the discussion which has been raging in *MUSICAL AMERICA*'s "Open Forum" as to who is the greatest baritone. He disagrees, for instance, with those who, while desirous of placing Battistini as the greatest baritone, consider him really a tenor. "No, Battistini is a baritone," he commented, "a baritone of wonderful art, but his tone is more white than that of the ordinary baritone. Yet his voice is a real baritone."

Puccini's Baritone Rôles

Signor de Luca, by the way, is a product of the same teacher as Battistini. "The school of Battistini is dying out," he declares. "Battistini was superb in the old style beautiful singing, but we do not find baritones to-day who can sing the trills and other ornamentations of the old operas. The reason, of course, is that the composers no longer write operas of that style. What chance has the baritone for beautiful singing in the Puccini operas? (And Mascagni is worse.)



Glimpses of Giuseppe de Luca, Past and Present: No. 1, Photograph of Mr. de Luca (on the Right) and Enrico Caruso, Taken in 1902 at Genoa and Showing the Two Artists in Bizet's "Pearl Fishers," Which They Are to Sing at the Metropolitan This Season. No. 2, Giuseppe de Luca in *Every-Day Life*. No. 3, Mr. de Luca as "Hamlet"

Puccini does not write for the baritone. Look at "Tosca"—*Scarpia's* music is harsh all the way through. Then there's "Bohème." Marcello practically doesn't sing—he talks all through the opera. In "Butterfly," yes; in the letter scene, *Sharpless* has some beautiful singing. You see, it seems that Puccini is not interested in the baritone. But Verdi—ah! He always writes for the voice, no matter how dramatic the scene, there is always a chance for beautiful singing. And the classic style of Mozart! His operas and Verdi's, those I love to sing."

If you ask Mr. de Luca as to his favorite rôles, he will start the list with *Don Giovanni* and *Rigoletto*. "Don Giovanni—that is the test of the baritone," he exclaimed. "In this rôle the artist must combine fine singing, good dress, effective action, thorough art and the ability to present the different moods of the *Don*. And as *Rigoletto* the baritone must sing 'from the heart'; his facial expression must show the emotions vividly; in the scene with the courtiers he must laugh when he is really weeping, and later, in the scene with his daughter, he is the broken-hearted father. These rôles I like very much."

Favored Rôles

"Then I like to do *Hamlet* and *Marquis de Posa* in 'Don Carlos.' I have been urging Mr. Gatti to produce 'Don Carlos,' but it will be impossible this year. Perhaps I may sing it here if I return after this season. *Beckmesser* in 'Meistersinger' is another rôle that I enjoy singing. I studied it with Mr. Toscanini. Once when I sang the part at Bologna, many people who were there said that my *Beckmesser* was an imitation of that of Frederick, the great German interpreter of the rôle. But I had never even seen him. (I sing through the nose all the time as *Beckmesser*.) 'Damnation of Faust' is another opera I have sung

all around the world. Altogether I have eighty operas in my repertoire."

Of the operas in the comic vein a favorite of Mr. de Luca is "Don Pasquale." He relates that upon the occasion of his appearance in a revival of the work at the Scala, it had been produced some five months before at a vaudeville theater, in a sort of "ten, twenty, thirty" atmosphere. The lowering of the Scala's dignity by producing an opera that had just been given under such cheap circumstances so nettled the populace, that they came to the theater ready to make trouble. "But the opera was such a success," added the baritone, "that we gave it twenty-four times during the Carnival."

Mr. de Luca was asked: "Simply because, as you say, the operas that call for the old *bel canto* are no longer being written, it doesn't follow that the old art of beautiful singing need no longer be taught, does it?"

Value of Old School Training

"Certainly not," replied the baritone. "The artist who has been trained in the old school will be able to sing effectively all types of parts—the classic, romantic and dramatic and the comic rôles. The case is similar to that of the *ballerina* who has been trained in the old school and who can dance not only the classic works, but the ballets in modern form. Does the old Italian training help even in the interpretation of Wagner rôles? Of course. It aids the singer to get rid of any harshness in the singing. There is 'Tannhäuser,' for instance. I sang *Wolfram* in my début at the Colon, Buenos Ayres. Another Wagnerian rôle in my repertoire is *Alberich*, which I sang in the first 'Rheingold' at La Scala under Maestro Campanini."

Reverting to the subject of the world's greatest baritones, Mr. de Luca mentioned Titta Ruffo, Amato, Scotti and Stracciari. One might supply another name (which Mr. de Luca, in his modesty, omitted) and, to judge from the reputation which precedes him, doubtless many Americans will do so after his Metropolitan début.

Value of Old-School Training in That It Fits Singers to Portray All Manner of Parts—Career of This Baritone Who Has Sung Almost Continuously in Many Countries Since His Debut Sixteen Years Ago at the Age of Twenty—Thrice "Decorated" by Royalty

This baritone does not believe in the phonograph as an infallible test of voices, as, indeed, it has been used by some of the "Open Forum" correspondents in the "greatest baritone" discussion. "There are some voices which sound especially well on the talking machine," he stated, "just as there are certain faces which look the best on a moving picture screen." The speaker here instanced the case of a singer known particularly for his work as a *buffo* whose voice on the talking machine sounds big and resonant. "There are many good singers whose tones do not reproduce well, and for this reason I do not believe that talking machine records can be used as a real test. Besides, they cannot show the dramatic art of the singer, his facial expression, stage presence, etc."

Records Not Infallible

"Therefore, I do not think that, as some of your readers suggest, these records of singers will consistently be of value to posterity in giving a reliable idea of the singers of the present. For example, we have some records of Battistini, but they are not really good records, and will not give posterity an adequate impression of his singing."

Mr. de Luca's own vocal schooling is of the most thorough sort, for he began at fifteen a five year's course of study at the Saint Cecilia Conservatory of Rome, which is his native city. He relates, "My voice was a baritone even at thirteen, when I was discovered by Bartolini, the noted baritone and teacher. Although it was expected that my voice would change after that, it did not, yet Bartolini advised me not to begin studying until I was fifteen. My teacher at the Saint Cecilia was Persichini, who has given seventy-four artists to the world. The ordinary course at the conservatory is four years, but they had me study for an extra year because I was so young."

"I was just a little over twenty when I made my début at Piacenza in 'Faust.' From that time to this—sixteen years—I've practically never stopped singing. I've sung eight seasons at La Scala, eleven at Buenos Ayres (at the Grand Opera and then at the Colon) and three seasons in London (I never sang there in the spring season because I was always engaged for Buenos Ayres). Among other cities where I've appeared are Rome, Barcelona, Vienna, Bucharest, Petrograd and Moscow. This war has cut me out of my Russian engagements," he continued ruefully, "and in Russia a singer can make in two months and a half what it takes him six months to earn here."

Reunion with Caruso

When Enrico Caruso sang "Pagliacci" in Rome last year, Mr. de Luca was the *Tonio*. This was in the nature of a reunion, as he and the famous tenor had sung together in 1900 at the Carlo Felice, in Genoa.

Baritone rôles of several operas have been created by Mr. de Luca in Italy,

[Continued on page 10]

LYRIC DICTION MAY LAIRD BROWN
(AUTHORIZED EXPONENT)
(DORA DUTY JONES METHOD)

Address: 1 West 89th St., New York

RECITALS NOW BOOKING
Season 1915-16

Address J. CARTALL
601-602 Carnegie Hall
New York

MINNA
KAUFMANN
SOPRANO

VOCAL INSTRUCTION
LEHMANN METHOD

GODOWSKY TOUR OF THE UNITED STATES
KNABE PIANO USED
Exclusive Management: R. E. JOHNSTON
1451 Broadway, New York