

David Bispham Recalls Amusing Mishaps in His Operatic Career

ONE of the most amusing incidents in my operatic career took place on the opening night of a revival of "The Flying Dutchman" at Covent Garden, London, relates David Bispham in the *New York World*.

As you know, the *Dutchman* makes his entrance on the deck of a ship which is so maneuvered that he can step off on the shore and begin his song. The ship is on wheels, and usually the stage hands only have to push it about. But on this occasion one of the wheels got stuck in a crack on the stage before the ship reached the proper position and I was left standing on the deck unable to reach the shore and begin my song. To jump was out of the question, and to climb down and walk across the water equally absurd; so I kept my place. The conductor threw down his baton and tore his hair. The musicians in the orchestra, not knowing what had happened, began standing up and peering over the footlights. The audience, of course, was beginning to wonder at the delay and for a few moments it looked like a terrible disaster.

However, one of the stage hands came heroically to my rescue. In full view of the audience he placed a plank between the shore and the boat, and in an audible whisper announced:

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"Now you may step off, sir."
I never heard an audience laugh as loud and as long.

But that was only one of the mishaps of that same performance. It's a tradition among the German singers that things never go right at Covent Garden.

At the close of the third act *Senta* is supposed to throw herself into the sea to join her lover. Well, the boat was moored so close to the shore—the first act setting is used in the third act—that Mme. Galski, who was the *Senta* that evening, was unable to find a space large enough for her to disappear in. She had to climb over the boat, and then, the distance being too great to jump, she carefully lowered herself over the rail and dropped to the stage.

Maurice Grau, the former director of the Metropolitan Opera Company, was prodigal in some respects, but niggardly in many others. When we went on tour, for instance, he disliked to carry more scenery than he had to.

One night we gave a performance of "Lohengrin" in Cleveland with stock scenery. The local manager had assured us that he had a river drop in the theater, and so our first act drop for "Lohengrin," showing the River Scheldt near Antwerp, was left in New York. Imagine my surprise, when I turned around after finishing my first song, to discover the River Thames filled with boats as during the regatta week at Henley!

The first night I sang *Falstaff* at Covent Garden, Beerbohm Tree—he is

Mme. Matzenauer and Ferrari-Fontana
Delight Providence Hearers

PROVIDENCE, R. I., Dec. 24, 1915.—The opening concert of the Steinert series of four to be given through the winter enlisted the services of Mme. Margarete Matzenauer, the noted mezzo-soprano of the Metropolitan, and her gifted husband, the tenor, Edoardo Ferrari-Fontana. Although it was the first Providence appearance of both artists, their fame had preceded them and there was a large audience to welcome them at Infantry Hall on Sunday afternoon. Of such an artists as Mme. Matzenauer it is difficult to speak calmly. Such tone and such phrasing and the absolute control with which she handled her superb voice were truly a delight. Signor Ferrari-Fontana,

now Sir Herbert, of course — helped me to make up for the part. He had played the famous rôle himself, and he was anxious to have my make-up above reproach, for we were great friends.

In those days—it was more than a dozen years ago—papier mache noses were not in use as they are to-day. *Falstaff's* huge, bulbous nose had to be built up out of "nose paste"—sticky stuff, very much like putty.

If I do say it myself, my make-up was a work of art. But my costume was so heavy—I was padded out with a dozen suits and a huge stomacher—that I was perspiring copiously long before I made my first entrance. However, the applause I received when I went on made up for my discomfort until, in the midst of my most important song, I felt my nose slipping from my face! I tried to put it back, but without success. In spite of everything I could do it fell to the stage, in full view of the audience. A titter began in the orchestra chairs and soon grew into a roar of laughter, for in my efforts to kick the paste nose out of the way my foot slipped on the sticky stuff and I fell flat on the stage floor!

While mishaps were more frequent at old Covent Garden than here in America, we used to have our share of them at the Metropolitan. I remember one performance of "Tannhäuser" in which I appeared. In the first act, you remember, there are several transformation scenes while *Venus* tries to persuade *Tannhäuser* to remain longer with her. When the drop curtain was raised to reveal *Leda* and the swan I was dumfounded to see a huge stepladder leaning against the Wartburg. The stage hands had not been quick enough to remove it, and there it stood, leaning up against the mountain in all its yellow ugliness.

though somewhat handicapped by a slight cold, nevertheless gave a splendid account of himself and sang with typical Italian fervor, governed by artistic restraint. Gennaro Papi was a most capable accompanist. G. F. H.

George Edwardes' Influence Upon Light Opera

The death of George Edwardes is a fatal blow to musical comedy in London, says the *Manchester Guardian*. His most serious and most intelligent rival, Robert Courtneidge, is committed to opera for some time to come, and it would not be in the least surprising if the musical comedy furnished by Mr. Edwardes were to set just as English opera is beginning to rise. It is not, of course,

that the two are mutually exclusive. There is room for serious and for light opera. But musical comedy was a danger to opera in so far as, being a paying and comparatively long established concern, it had a tendency to draw to itself singers whose right place is the opera stage. Webster Millar, the Manchester tenor, is an example in point. In musical comedy his fine voice and talent for dramatic expression were utterly thrown away, for the music of Mr. Edwardes's productions was as uninteresting and as little varied as their titles. This was the cause of the Edwardes failure to establish a type of entertainment which will endure. If he had possessed an ear for good music as well as the eye for scenic effects we might have had English light opera to supplement Lecocq and Offenbach. But he had not even the courage to search for the men to give him the kind of music he needed. Most of his musical comedies had music which was trivial without being in the least gay, while the quality of the comedy depended almost entirely on the skill of the performer.

Another success was scored by the Philharmonic Trio in a concert given recently in the Grace Reformed Church, York, Pa. The members of the trio are A. A. Knoch, Allen S. Bond and W. L. Rohrbach.

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