

IN THE EDEN-SETTING OF CARUSO'S TUSCAN VILLA

Tenor's Return to "Villa Bellosguardo" Recalls to Maurice Halperson Vivid Memories of His Sojourn There — Mansion Commands Magnificent Scenic Picture—Famous Home of the Counts Pucci Explored from Inside—Caruso in the Rôle of Squire and Head-Farmer

By Maurice Halperson

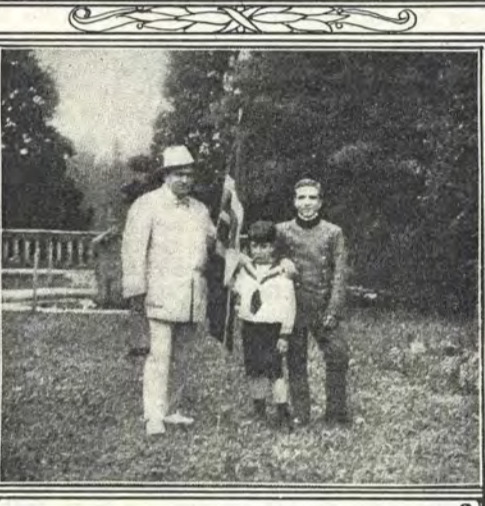


Maurice Halperson

A BOAT is floating over the blue waves bound for *la bella Italia*. It carries aboard the idolized pet of two worlds, a man who has been bidden adieu here with all honors becoming a king and who will be received in his native land with the same ardor

and sincerity. Enrico Caruso, who seemed to be a sure prey of death for many months, has left our country, which may well be called his "second country," a convalescent, and there is all hope that Italy will send him back to us in full possession of his health and artistic powers. And then we shall give him a truly royal welcome, as no artist ever could boast of in this or any other country.

It was in the summer of 1911, on one of those transparent, unspeakably beautiful summer nights of Tuscany. I had the privilege of being a guest of Enrico Caruso in his beautiful "Villa Bellosguardo" ("The Beautiful View"), near Florence, for five days. Pausing to dream at the celebrated marble group of the "Del Tritone" fountain which Gabriele D'Annunzio has immortalized in one of his dramas, after a stroll in the park with its wonderful groves, clumps of giant trees, fountains, ponds, magnificent specimens of the cypress and other kinds of trees of the Southern woods, I thought regretfully that on the following day the time will have come to bid farewell to this charming spot.



Courtesy of the "Theatre Magazine"

No. 1—Park of Caruso's Beautiful Estate in Italy. No. 3—Mr. Caruso and His Friend, Enrico Scognamiglio, on the Tenor's Estate. No. 2—Caruso on His Estate with "La Sacra Famiglia." No. 4—Caruso as "Turridu" in "Cavalleria Rusticana" in 1895

While I listened to the voices of the night in the woods, I heard a glorious burst of song rising from the balcony of the villa to the skies. It was the touching *romanza* from the last act of "Tosca" which Caruso sang to himself, the condemned *Cavaradossi's* farewell to life.

And when the news of Caruso's critical condition was brought to me I could not help thinking of that poetic scene in the enchanted park flooded by moonlight I still heard them in my mind, the last golden notes: "E pur non ho mai tanto amato la vita" ("And still I never loved life as much as just now!")

Caruso did not die; Death, kinder than

Scarpia, spared him for us, and now he is on the road to his complete restoration, on the road to his adored Italy, to his beloved Tusculum in the poetic mountains of Tuscany.

I can follow the great singer step by step to all his favorite spots in the gardens of this Eden. It is an ideal place for resting, for concentrating, for forgetting life and its evils, and for storing up energy, and so we may hope that he will make in the near future his triumphant re-entry into this country.

As it might interest the readers of MUSICAL AMERICA to know more about "Villa Bellosguardo," I shall tell of my

stay there, which forms one of my most delightful recollections.

I HAD seen Caruso in Milan, in the "Galleria," of course, in June, 1911, and his invitation to pay him a visit at his famous villa upon my return from Rome, where I was bound in order to witness the operatic festival on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of *Italia unita*, had such a cordial and sincere ring in it that I stopped at Florence on my way from Rome to Vienna in order to call on Caruso.

On my arrival at Florence I hurried at once to the station from which the train goes to Empoli. The trip is charming, the road running through field and wood. We reached Signa Lastra in about twenty minutes. There we entered an automobile, and a delightful trip took us through flower-grown meadows and up the hills to Caruso's famous villa "Bellosguardo." They seemed to be plaiting straw wherever we passed. Everywhere women, young and old, sat in the shade of the trees working the fine straw into Florentine hats, the celebrated *pagliette*, with agile fingers.

But here is the villa! Proudly crowning a noble elevation is a noble façade in the shape of a splendid colonnade. Its many colors gleam with a warm azure tint in the glowing sunlight and yield in the center to a handsome portal.

"Villa Bellosguardo," which the famous tenor purchased fourteen years ago for 300,000 lire—a genuine bargain—has been marvelously transformed, according to people who remember it as it was. Not only did Caruso add largely, and in a manner calculated to appeal to the imagination, to the historic old castle which belonged for centuries to the noble Counts Pucci, but he also erected, as a counterpart to the original structure, a building of the same dimensions and with corresponding decorative externals on the other side. He then made of the two edifices one imposing ensemble by the erection of the monumental colonnade al-

sidering that I've been ill for five months."

"How long are you going to be away?"

"Till I feel strong again. I don't know just how long that will be. I lost sixty pounds but I have gained back fifteen of it."

"Will you be at the Metropolitan next year?"

This question sobered the tenor for a moment. Then, again smiling, he said: "I hope so! I hope so more than anything else in the world. It all depends if I am all right."

"Are you singing any now?"

Sings for the Reporters

This awoke the joker in Caruso. Taking a deep breath, he sang on a high A, a "No!" that belied what he sang, as it could have been heard a block away.

He then asked all the newspaper men to express to the American public his keen appreciation of the interest taken in him during his illness and the sympathy expressed, and with a cheerful smile all around retired to the suite prepared especially for him and which he had visited the day before. Shortly after five-thirty when the steamer was clear of the dock, the tenor again stepped on deck and waved his hat. A cheer as from one throat went up from the dock: "Viva Caruso!"



Mr. and Mrs. Caruso, and Baby Gloria, Photographed as They Departed Last Saturday for Italy on the Presidente Wilson

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Finally, leaning on Mrs. Caruso's arm, he came on deck and sitting in a steamer

chair, smiled at everyone.

"How do you feel?" was the first question he was asked.

"Fine!" was the answer. "That is, con-

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