

Marvel of Caruso's Voice Traced by Scientist to Resonance Contributed by Entire Body

Throat Was Not an Unusual One and Was Frequently Congested, Declares Dr. Mario P. Marafioti, Close Friend and Medical Adviser—Vocal Cords Soft and Too Large for Tenor; Arch of Palate Not Exceptional—Bones and Cavities Vibrated Like Fine Wood of Stradivarius Violin

THERE was nothing really exceptional in the throat of Enrico Caruso that explained the unique quality and incomparable beauty of his voice, according to Dr. Mario P. Marafioti, the New York throat specialist who was one of the departed tenor's warmest friends as well as his frequent medical adviser, the relation extending over a period of many years. But there were other physiological reasons which combined with psychological factors in making him the greatest singer of them all, as noted by Dr. Marafioti in his years of association with Caruso. These, the doctor stated to the writer, pertained chiefly to the resonating cavities, not so much those of the head as of the entire body.

"Caruso's throat was just an ordinary throat," the specialist said. "It could not, in fact, be compared with many better throats of other singers. Caruso told me, laughingly, how he had gone in his youth to Massei, one of Italy's most famous laryngologists, for expert opinion on his voice apparatus. The famous physician shook his head when Caruso told him of his desire to be a singer. 'Take up something else,' Massei said; 'You have not the throat for a singer.' Caruso liked to comment on this incident. 'If I had meekly agreed, 'Yes, doctor'; and had gone my way,' he would say, 'there would have been no career for Enrico Caruso.'"

Throat Was Often Congested

CARUSO'S throat was often congested, especially his pharynx. He smoked too much, and seemed reluctant to accept advice on this point. Sometimes the vocal cords, too, were con-

gested. On such occasions Caruso used to sing better than usual. His explanation was that he was more careful and not as generous as usual in giving his voice. He had a wonderful power of recovery and an even more wonderful will power in relation to his duty at the opera. He would go to any length not to disappoint the audience or the management.

"Here is an instance. You may remember the benefit performance, made up of scenes from various operas, in which he sang one afternoon two seasons ago, appearing as *Canio* in the first act of 'Pagliacci.' He was to go on the stage about four o'clock. All day, up to that time, he was in bed with an acute case of tonsillitis, scarcely able to speak. He had come back from Pittsburgh ill, and I found his throat badly swollen and full of white spots. Did he remain in bed? Not Caruso. Allowing himself just time to get to the opera house, he donned the motley and sang his rôle as usual—only with increased beauty of tone. And this was the man who could scarcely speak! General Manager Gatti-

Casazza spoke to me. 'Keep that man sick all the time,' he said, 'if it makes him sing like that.'

Vocal Cords Large and Soft

THERE was one peculiarity about his vocal cords. They were too big and too thick for a tenor voice, and their consistency was rather soft. This last circumstance partially accounts for the characteristic mellowness, and the velvet, flute-like quality of his voice; and the large size of his vocal cords for its extraordinary range. He could sing as a bass and a baritone as well as both a dramatic and a lyric tenor.

"But I cannot agree with those who say Caruso was a baritone who had acquired a tenor's upper voice. Nature did not make him a tenor, a baritone, or a bass. It made him a singer, and endowed him with this exceptional range. If there was some difficulty with his highest notes in his youth, the reasons were psychological, not physiological. He was timid, a prey to disturbances that restricted his utilization of his endowment. But the tenor range was natural to him from the first.

Had Remarkable Control of Tongue

OF the other physical factors commonly considered in connection with a singer, it can be said that while the palate was well arched and more so than with some singers, it was not exceptional and I have looked into mouths of many other vocalists with more in their favor in this respect. Caruso had a really remarkable control of his tongue.

"It was his servant, and, without constraint, he could shape it any way he

pleased. As a 'stunt,' he used to keep the center of the tongue flat, and curl the end and the sides up so that it was cup-shaped. His diaphragm was strong, as was every muscle of his body. But its strength came from years of singing. He did not unnaturally develop the diaphragm, as many singers do, by deliberate tension. The column of air flowed naturally; he sang as he spoke—intuitively, with automatic naturalness and obedience to nature's laws.

"As I have said, there was nothing really exceptional in Caruso's vocal apparatus. Too much stress is given to the throat in such matters. The throat is not the organ that characterizes an exceptional voice. That is related more to the resonating structures. I have seen very beautiful throats, possessed by singers whose voices were of limited efficiency and beauty. The exceptional things in Caruso, the rare things which made of him a phenomenon, were two factors: one, physiological, the striking power of resonance of his body, which he used to full advantage; two, psychological, the intense pathos of his voice. His singing was free and perfect from the standpoint of voice production, but the volume, the quality of his voice, the two very exceptional attributes, were due to the resonance of his body, which was like the wood of a Stradivarius violin.

Caruso's "Musical Bones"

SOME years ago a prominent London physician startled the musical world by saying that Caruso had musical bones. At least, that was what he was quoted as saying. There are, in truth, no 'musical bones,' but there is the possibility of human beings possessing organs made of exceptional resonating property, which is dependent, perhaps, on the quality and constructive essence of the cells from which they were made. I know, from personal knowledge, that parts of Caruso's body had a power of resonance which was startling. By tapping the mastoid behind his ear a sound was produced that could be heard a considerable distance. He himself used to astonish persons by the loud noise he made by thumping the lobule of the ear. Of his bones I would say that they were com-

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