

The CONTRIBUTING EDITORS' PAGE

The National Sunday Magazine

SECTION

SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE



Miss Mary Garden

THE PRIMA DONNA ON THE JOB

By Mary Garden

MUSIC is more popular today than ever. There is scarcely a family of moderate means that hasn't some kind of musical instrument. In most families the children are taught music, but where such is not the case they have mechanical pianos and phonographs. It would be interesting to know the number of music teachers in the country. I don't believe there's any official list of them obtainable.

It is as natural for the village girl to turn her eyes towards the Metropolitan Opera stage as a Mecca as it is for the farm boy to have presidential aspirations. But the way to the goal is long and devious. While church and concert singing are all right and while the success of the recent enterprise of giving Grand Opera in English has apparently broadened the field of endeavor, a radical change has occurred within the last ten years that at once restricts and broadens this field. Let me explain.

The whole art is changing and so are the conditions surrounding it. As far back as we can remember great singers seem to have come in periods—a group at a time. When Maurice Grau came to the Metropolitan, there was a period of great singers. These seem to have disappeared, retired, or died out. At any rate, that periodical group has gone. Then there came the De Reszke period. These great singers seemed to bring to the surface another galaxy of brilliant stars who also passed away. Time passed and now we have Caruso, Fremstadt, and a number of others. All the Rigolettos, the Romeos and Juliets, and all that sort of thing have gone. In their stead has come Wagner and the new school, which does not so much require voices.

THE singer must have a voice, of course, but it is not the one essential, as of old. She must know how to act. Madame Melba, for instance, could not sing Charpentier's "Louise" because she has not the dramatic skill which it requires. She has the old Italian Bel Canto voice, her work is in great arias. But I would not go and sit through an evening just to hear those arias alone.

The new school has made the opera more difficult. Less absolutely perfect technique in the voice is required. Still, the more operas that are written the greater is the difficulty, since these are composed with a view to dramatic as well as vocal ability in the artist who is to exploit them.

The aspirant today must be an actress as well as a singer. Audi-

ences demand expression by face, gesture, movement, as well as by voice. The girl who has a voice must also have dramatic ability. In that way the field is restricted. On the other hand, she may have a good voice which if it be supplemented by great talent as an actress may justify her aspirations to pre-eminence in the operatic world.

Up to the new epoch a transcendent quality of voice was absolutely essential. That was a very rare gift and made the field very small since such voices only came to the world at rare intervals. No matter how great the opera as a drama, the singer simply sang, made bows, courtesied, threw kisses, and got away with it. True, many opera singers were great actresses, which added much to their attractiveness, but acting then was nowhere near so essential as it is now.

And I think the change in a way is good. It used to be just ideal to go and hear people sing without any emotion, simply to have the ear charmed. Now you go and see people crying in the house—emotion!

Managers, seeing the tendency on the part of the public to demand more than the voice, explored the fields of drama for such plays as would most effectively lend themselves to operatic exploitation.

OF COURSE, during the time when the voice was paramount to everything else, and as there were very few such voices, the field was greatly restricted and salaries soared into the very heavens. But now that acting as well as singing is required the field is broadened again, since there are many more persons who have extraordinary ability as both actors and singers than there are who have transcendent voices.

I warn any girl against being discouraged by what I have said of the difficulties besetting the road to success. If she has any voice at all, by all means let her have it tested by an expert. She may have a rare gem hidden in her throat—a salary of a thousand to fifteen hundred dollars a performance and the opportunity to sing two or three times a week. Beyond this, there is an untold glory in being able to thrill and uplift an audience, for great music is always inspiring. The position of the prima donna is that of a queen—it means the highest quality of fame, social position, money—everything that the ambitious woman craves. Isn't it worth risking a heartbreak for?

Mary Garden

See your architect now

That step insures your greatest satisfaction in the home you build this Spring. Ask him about

Hy-tex Brick

the facing-material which gives the utmost of beauty, permanence, fire-safety and comfort in all extremes of weather. And gives them to you at the greatest economy in the long run.

The following booklets tell you of the superiority of Hy-tex and its adaptability to all styles and sizes of homes.

"Genuine Economy in Home Building"—a handsome, 64-page book illustrated in colors explains these savings in detail. Sent for ten cents.

"Suggestions for Small Hy-tex Homes" is a booklet of helpful plans for homes of moderate cost. Sent for four cents. Write for these booklets today.

HYDRAULIC-PRESS BRICK COMPANY
Dept. S-1 St. Louis, Missouri

Branch Offices: Baltimore, Md.; Chicago, Ill.; Cleveland, O.; Cincinnati, O.; Davenport, Ia.; Indianapolis, Ind.; Kansas City, Mo.; Minneapolis, Minn.; New York City; Omaha, Neb.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Toledo, O.; Washington, D. C.