

THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Music

OPERA FOR THE MILLIONS

BY ARTHUR BRONSON

ONE of the strangest sights of our times — when a war-torn economy has limited hotel, theater, train and labor accommodations — is the flock of opera companies now touring the land. It is a comparatively new phenomenon. We have had touring opera troupes before, of course. One of the current companies, in fact, the San Carlo Opera Company, has been at it steadily for some thirty years. But what is unusual is the present wholesale quantity of these operatic purveyors, and what is noteworthy is a new style of operatic fare that has been added by some of them, to attract an utterly new kind of audience. Between the two styles, old and new, opera has not only been brought to towns and areas that never had it before, but certain communities have even been encouraged to set up their own opera seasons or festivals. It is an

amazing tribute to an art-form that was once considered high-brow and effete. Opera in America is becoming as familiar as pie *à la mode* and as popular as gin rummy. The signs are unmistakable.

Almost every nook of the country, during last season or this, will have been visited by the San Carlo Opera Company, the Philadelphia-La Scala Opera Company, the Philadelphia Opera Company (a quite distinct group from the preceding), the Charles L. Wagner troupes, the Nine O'Clock Opera Company, or the Salvatore Baccaloni troupe. Lima, Ohio; Greensboro, North Carolina; and LaPorte, Indiana, will have had their opera, no less than Boston or St. Paul. College girls from Lansing, Michigan, and canning workers from Raleigh, North Carolina, will have flocked to the revitalized, streamlined type of opera in English done by the Nine O'Clock and Philadelphia Opera companies,

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while their more conservative parents in Cincinnati or Providence will have attended the more traditional presentations of San Carlo and La Scala.

And where only such cities as San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago, outside of New York and Philadelphia, have had regular brief opera seasons of their own in former years, such dissimilar towns as Detroit, Pittsburgh, Dayton, Baltimore, Hartford and Trenton, New Jersey, now also have their own operatic festivals for the first time.

It's a far cry indeed from a couple of decades ago when opera was still something exclusive and exotic. "I had a feed people opera like putting milk donna throat," Fortune Gallo, the bantamweight impresario of the San Carlo Opera, says. "I was a pioneer."

Gallo was making converts to opera right from the start. In his first year as opera impresario, he visited Marion, Ohio, in advance of his company and dropped into a newspaper office to see about his advertisements and publicity. Finished with his job, he invited the shirt-sleeved editor to his performance.

"I don't like opera," said the editor. "I don't understand it. I've never been to one." "Dida you

ever hear Caruso or Schumann-Heink sing?" Gallo asked him. "Sure," said the editor. "Dida they sing in Eenglish?" Gallo inquired. The editor saw the point, and promised to attend. And the next time that Gallo came through town, the editor thanked him. "I liked it," he told Gallo. "I'm going again." The editor was Warren Gamaliel Harding.

This fall the San Carlo company put on a fortnight of opera in October at the Broadway Theater in New York City and then was off on its thirty-second annual tour, from Newark to the West Coast, to last through next May. War-time travel restrictions, Gallo says, hold no terrors for San Carlo.

The San Carlo tours have ranged from Bangor to Vancouver and Los Angeles to Jacksonville, the company in its time traveling by stagecoach and river boat as well as by bus and train. They have given performances in town halls as well as theaters, in converted barns, and once even on a rented showboat. The cast has had to sleep sometimes in strange places. Once in Deadwood, North Dakota, because the hotels were filled, they slept in the City Hall; at Stanford University they were put up in the dormitories, and in Austin, Texas, they were "farmed out" to towns-

folk. Gallo says that once on a Canadian stop he even slept in the city morgue!

Another such indomitable Italian-American is Francesco Pelosi, who founded the Philadelphia-La Scala Opera Company in the Quaker City five years ago. Pelosi has been dabbling in grand opera since 1923. His first operatic venture was put on in upstate Scranton in a tent which a windstorm blew away. His second production, that of *Aida* in the old Phillies ball park in Philadelphia, was washed away by a torrent of rain, Pelosi being wiped out in the bargain. But today, after several setbacks, he has a solid company established in Philadelphia, where it gives ten performances from October to May, to capacity houses. He uses Metropolitan Opera artists like Bruno Landi, Hilde Reggiani and Stella Roman for his leads, with reliable singers for support. His repertory is confined largely to the familiar Italian.

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Last season La Scala tried something new, venturing down to Baltimore during its regular season for four performances. This season they were invited back for four more. Last May La Scala was in-

vited to Pittsburgh for a week's opera festival and gave seven performances in one week to crowded houses. They have been asked to return. This October, prior to their regular home season, La Scala went out to Detroit, and in a vast barn like the 5000 seater Masonic Auditorium, put on eight performances in one week to capacity business, racking up a boxoffice total of \$71,000 for the week, to return home with the astonishing profit of \$20,000. Next fall they will be back. Cleveland, which gets the Metropolitan Opera in the spring (on an exclusive area basis which precludes Pittsburgh and Detroit from also getting it), was so impressed with La Scala's Detroit showing, that it too will have La Scala performances next fall.

Charles L. Wagner, a veteran New York concert manager, four years ago sent out on tour a condensed version of the *Barber of Seville* for a few fall concert dates, using a Metropolitan cast of principals, but with little else in the way of chorus, orchestra or scenery. Two pianos furnished the musical accompaniment. Because of its success, Wagner got up subsequent productions of *Don Pasquale* and *La Bohème*, the operas in four brief seasons playing 200 engagements in seventy-five large and small Amer-

ican cities. This fall, in addition to *Don Pasquale*, Wagner sent out a *Faust* headed by Metropolitan singers Armand Tokatyan, Hilda Burke, Nicola Moscona and Mack Harrell, augmented this time by a large supporting cast and chorus and an orchestra of thirty. *Faust* was given twenty performances in six weeks from Alabama to Arkansas to Pennsylvania. Already in the works for 1944-45 are *Martha* and *Il Trovatore*.

The Metropolitan Opera's comic basso, Salvatore Baccaloni, on finishing his New York stint the last two seasons, toured briefly with a small company doing operatic excerpts. This season Baccaloni has arranged to take out full productions of the *Barber of Seville* and *Don Pasquale* in February, at the end of his Metropolitan commitments. The transcontinental tour, with a cast of twenty-five, complete sets and costumes, was originally set for February and March, but a deluge of requests has forced an extension of the tour through April and May.

The type of opera that San Carlo and La Scala (and to a similar degree, the Wagner and Baccaloni troupes as well) give, is of one style — conventional, stodgy and "old-hat." The stress is on *bel canto*, on singing, to the neglect of such

minor considerations as acting verisimilitude, or dramatic conviction. But because the voices are good, and the opera librettos in themselves gory or dramatic, the productions have always appealed to a certain old-fashioned type of public which ignores a plushy, stolid routine for the sake of a well-sung aria.

The work of organizations like the Nine O'Clock and Philadelphia Opera Companies has attracted another sort of music-lover altogether. For the past two seasons both companies have been touring the country with their lively conception of opera — a streamlined, modern style that stresses staging and acting as well as singing, and that introduces as its artists young, attractive, home-bred Americans. The presentations, all in English, have been good theater as well as good music, and a new type of audience, borrowed largely from the movies, sewing circles and business clubs, has been won to them. In their native city, the Philadelphia Opera Company puts on drives to interest high school and college groups, and office and industrial workers, in their performances. This season, after a fortnight of presentations at home, the Philadelphians are on tour to eighty-one cities in the United

States and Canada, for over 100 performances of *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Bat*, *Faust*, *Iolanthe* and others.

The Nine O'Clock Opera Company, a group of engaging young singers from New York's Juilliard School, has toured two seasons with a condensed, streamlined English version of *The Marriage of Figaro* for over 150 performances. This season they added a version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and will do fifty dates with both works on a coast-to-coast jaunt.

Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* (*The Bat*), which Broadway has enjoyed for a year as *Rosalinda*, seems to be a popular opera for modern presentations. A version under the title of *The Rose Masque*, with two Metropolitan singers, Marita Farrell and John Garris, in the leads, was a big hit on the coast this fall, with a seven-week run in San Francisco and Los Angeles. St. Paul had an English version of *The Bat* in October, staged by a New York tenor named Morton Bowe, which packed the 2800-seater Auditorium for three nights and made local history — the first opera there to make expenses.

San Francisco, in its twenty-first season of grand opera this fall with Metropolitan singers like Pons,

Pinza, Thomas, Thorborg and Peerce, had its finest season to date, with no less than seventeen performances in three weeks. The company also visited Sacramento twice, and Los Angeles for five performances.

Dayton, Ohio, which first gave a series of five operas in April 1943, built around a nucleus of Metropolitan singers like Sayao, Peerce and Weede, found it so successful that a second festival of eight productions was given the following September. War workers, service men, and office workers mingled with top-hats. Hartford, Connecticut, which started two years ago with two opera performances, this season gave six. The Trenton (N. J.) Opera Association, formed three years ago, now gives four operas a season, using its own orchestra and chorus, with visiting "names" as leads.

Add to these bald statistics, Mayor LaGuardia's plans for opera at New York's Civic Center; the talk about a supplementary Metropolitan Opera Company as a touring unit; the plans of the New Opera Company for a touring company of *The Merry Widow*, and you have an idea of opera's new appeal for Americans. An awakened public has found it very easy to take.

Agriculture

KNOW YOUR SOYBEANS

BY ROSS L. HOLMAN

THE humble soybean, unknown to Americans as recently as twenty-five years ago except as an insignificant hay crop, has emerged as a kind of agricultural hero of this war. You might as well learn something about it now because it will be inescapable in the years ahead. In one form or another you will be eating it, wearing it, riding in it, using it in endless processes and in endless substitutions. Already the tiny soybean ranks fourth among the country's grain crops, our output amounting to 200 million bushels, or one-third the world's annual soybean crop.

What explains the soybean's heroic stature is an extraordinary versatility that has made it the Number One stop-gap in a time of critical shortages. Not only is it the most concentrated natural food known, but also among the most vital raw materials in modern industry.

As a food, it can take the place of meat, eggs, butter, milk, oils and many vegetables. Soy flour can

help heighten the nutrition value of cocoa, ice cream, macaroni, mayonnaise, soups and any number of other staples. Used as a raw material in industry, the soybean can provide us with automobile bodies, steering-wheels, paints, buttons, rubber, candles, linoleum and explosives. Spun into fiber, it makes excellent wool for clothing. And its future uses as a plastic will include clocks, chairs, houses, fountain pens and virtually all the other synthetic industrial products devised by modern chemistry. This variegated usefulness is matched by the ease and economy with which soybeans can be grown. They can be planted anywhere, in any climate, at any time. They will grow even without sunlight in a jar of chlorinated water placed in your kitchen or back porch, where the dried beans, within three to five days, will produce highly nutritious sprouts an inch or more in length.

Although the soybean was a food staple in China 5000 years ago, we did not discover its unique values until the last war. Since then,

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