

**OPERATIC SINGERS.**

(Continued from Page 17.)

theatres, and offers from Nice, Marseilles and Malta were before him, when he met Signor Hazon and was induced by that gentleman to come to this country, which he was very desirous of visiting.

The Grand Opera Company opened its Australasian tour in Sydney in March, its members being under a six months' engagement to Mr. J. C. Williamson, who has the option of their services for another six months. At the close of their New Zealand tour (the South Island has still to be visited) they go to Melbourne. Mr. Blamey has appeared here as Lieutenant Pinkerton in "Madam Butterfly" and as Don Jose in "Carmen." In Sydney, where he appeared also in "La Boheme," he created the part of Rudolph. Don Jose is his favourite character, as he says it gives the tenor such a fine chance. He confesses that the thing that charms him most is not so much the magnificent Flower song, although he revels in that, as the little interlude that immediately follows it. "It is really," he said, "my favourite bit of music of all."

Mr. Blamey says he is delighted to have come to this country. He likes New Zealand immensely. The people have shown themselves to be so sympathetic. "They are so English in their ways," he said, "and so patriotic. As an Englishman that appeals to me most of all. And," he added, "everybody is so nice. It is quite a pleasure to sing to your Auckland audiences; they are so sympathetic, attentive and appreciative. I cannot say the same thing of Sydney audiences. They are too blase, and while we played there for a month to crowded houses, and it seemed as if we could have gone on playing for another month—we played "Butterfly" for three weeks on end—the people were not nearly so attentive, and appeared more coldly critical than the Auckland people. Not that I think you Aucklanders are less critical, but it seems to me you love the music more."

Mr. Blamey returns to England with Mrs. Blamey at the end of the Australasian Grand Opera season, having a number of engagements booked for concert and oratorio work in London. Mrs. Blamey is travelling with him. She is a fine musician and a great help to her husband. "She helps me so much," Mr. Blamey said, "and it is so nice to have her with me."

**BORN TO SING.**

**HOW SIGNOR GIOVANNI ZERGA GRADUATED IN OPERA.**

"I CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN I DIDN'T SING."

Signor Giovanni (Anglice John) Zerga cannot remember the time when he did not sing. It may almost be said of him that he was born singing, his earliest recollections being associated with a table upon which his father used to stand him while the little fellow, scarce more than a baby, sang to a select audience of friends.

Signor Zerga is an Italian only by parentage. He is a native of Boston (U.S.A.), where he was also educated at the Eliot School, the circumstances of his parents being such, however, that he was unable to remain at school as long as he desired, but, "while working in the day time he gave his evenings to study and was presently rewarded by an appointment to the treasury service in the custom house, where he was made an examiner. It was while at his work there (we quote from a Boston paper) that the beauty of his voice that had so often charmed his companions and friends, attracted the attention of a visitor. Zerga was singing, as was his custom, while at his work, when the visitor came in. After listening a while he approached the young man and told him that he ought to have his voice cultivated. This recognition roused in Zerga a desire to improve his gift and he put himself under teachers and gave all

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his spare means to the opera, where he might observe the famous musicians and take note of their manner of singing." In time the spirit of emulation, which was strongly at work within him, prompted action. He sang before the late Mr. Conradi, Director of the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, who told him that if he went to Italy and studied operas and sung there, he would give him an engagement on his return to America. This promise acted as fuel to the fire already kindled in the breast of the young singer, and, proceeding to Milan, he studied with Cesari Rossi, taking all the operas in which the most celebrated tenors sang, and also under Cavalier Emile Matello, who produced "Carmen" on its first presentation at the Royal Theatre, Madrid.

Signor Zerga made his debut as an opera singer in "Faust," on 23rd June, 1906, and has since added 25 operas to his repertoire, singing in 16 of them in Italy, Austria and Switzerland. Following "Faust," he appeared in "Saffo," one of the quaintest of Pacini's old operas which is but little understood to-day. He sang next in "La Boheme," with Signorina Maria Pampari, and has been in active association with that little lady ever since. He also sang in "Lohengren," "Forza Del Destino," "Lucia di Lammermoor" and a number of other operas. Mr. J. C. Williamson visited Milan last year, travelling from London to that city, expressly to hear him sing, and was so pleased with his performance that he engaged him for the principal tenor part in the production of "Madame Butterfly" in Australasia. It was then Mr. Williamson's intention to only run the one opera, but hearing Signorina Maria Pampari in "La Boheme," he decided to add that and other operas to the repertoire of the Grand Opera Company he was then forming, this necessitating the engagement of other tenor artists to alternate in the productions.

Signor Zerga achieved much success in Italy, the press comments upon his performances being markedly sympathetic and appreciative. He achieved the somewhat unusual distinction of being accorded a "Night of Honour" in every city in which he sang. These "Nights of Honour" are equivalent to our benefit nights, and it is customary for the box-holders, on such occasions, to present the artist thus honoured with an address, setting forth his or her qualities as a singer and artist, the box-holders subscribing their signatures to the document. Signor Zerga showed the writer two of these interesting documents, which are printed on a broad sheet and distributed to every person attending the "Night of Honour."

Another custom that prevails in Italy is very interesting. Before any artist can take part in opera, his or her name has to be submitted to the House of Editors (really the publishers or owners of the opera rights). The aspirant for operatic honours has to gain the approval of the editors before he can secure a copy of the musical score or take part in any operatic performance. Signor Zerga holds certificates and letters from La Casa Ricordi, approving of his appearance in opera, and one of the recommendations

thus furnished to him for presentation to a personal friend of Tito Ricordi's, reads as follows (the translation being in free English) "Very dear D'Ormeville, I have the pleasure to present to you and to recommend very warmly l' egregio Signor Giovanni Zerga, who possesses a very fine tenor voice and merits your warmest sympathy and support. Thanking you in anticipation for the care of the one I recommend, I pray you accept my cordial greetings." Signed, Tito Ricordi."

Signor Zerga sang in all the principal cities of Italy during his five years stay in that country, and also in Austria and Switzerland. At Correggio, which is the capital of the Reggio Emilia district and one of the most critical musical centres in Italy, Signor Zerga had the somewhat unusual experience of following three tenor artists who had been "protested." It is customary at that centre, where no artists can appear except with the consent of the "House of Editors," for the audience at an operatic performance to exercise the critical faculty to the extent of "protesting" against the appearance of any artist with whose singing they are dissatisfied, and once "protested" an artist is not permitted to reappear in the Correggio Opera House. It happened, as already stated, that Signor Zerga followed three tenors who had been thus "protested." His triumph was, therefore, the greater in that he secured the cordial and enthusiastic appreciation of his audiences, and was awarded the usual "Night of honour."

Signor Zerga is well pleased with his reception in this country, and hopes, at some future date, to renew his acquaintance with New Zealand audiences.

**ONE WAY AT A TIME.**

Seven-year-old William had become the proud owner of a pet pig, and insisted upon having all the care of it himself. After a few weeks, as the pig did not seem to thrive, his father said to him:

"William, I'm afraid you are not feeding your pig enough. It does not seem to be fattening at all."

"I don't want him to fatten yet," William replied knowingly. "I'm waiting until he gets to be as long as I want him, then I'll begin to widen him out."

**HAD CONSIDERED THAT POINT.**

In Illinois there is an old law on the statute books to the effect that in criminal cases the jury is "judge of the law as well as of the facts." Though not often quoted, once in a while a lawyer with a desperate case makes use of it. In one case the judge instructed the jury that it was to judge of the law as well as the facts, but added that it was not to judge of the law unless it was fully satisfied that it knew more law than the judge. An outrageous verdict was brought in, contrary to all instructions of the court, who felt called upon to rebuke the jury. At last one old farmer arose.

"Jedge," said he, "weren't we to jedge the law as well as the facts?"

"Certainly," was the response; "but I told you not to judge the law unless you were clearly satisfied that you knew the law better than I did." "Well, jedge," answered the farmer, as he shifted his quid, "we considered that pint."

**MICK'S RETORT.**

Mick O'Mulligan (in hospital operating room just recovering from effects of chloroform): "Och, be the powers, where am I? Where is it I am, at all, at all?"

Surgeon Sawbones (with a wink to his assistant): "In heaven."

Mulligan (looking around): "Thin I'd like to know pwhat the pair of yez is doin' here?"

**THE DULL ONE.**

"Yes," said Mrs. Wordsworth; "the family are most interesting. John dances divinely, Tom sings like an angel, David is a famous footballer, Susanne paints with great taste."

"And Henry?" "Oh, Henry! Well, he's rather a dull sort of a fellow, you know. He only works and supports the others."


"Our politicians have their fling, Of course," said Dismal Dan "But can't agree on anything. Beshrew me if they can!" Said Cheerful Charles: "You've got the blues; But needn't make things bluer! They all agree to take their screws. And Woods' Peppermint Cure."

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