

QUALIFICATIONS FOR AN OPERATIC CAREER

FOREWORD

The field of Grand Opera holds a never-ending attraction for students of singing. The glamour of costumed public performance in the midst of realistic scenic effects, orchestral music, and action with its dramatic moments — all tend to accelerate imagination in the youthful mind. From such, springs an intensive desire on the part of the young singer to become a participant in this specialized form of dramatic achievement.

While this urge is understandable, and at times laudable and occasionally ingrained with an actual promise of fulfillment, at such times there still remains the necessity for a careful scrutiny of the more practical elements involved. Due to over-enthusiasm or possible lack of knowledge on the part of the vocal teacher, and the flight of youthful imagination on the part of the singing student, these pragmatic aspects of a career in Grand Opera more often than not are overlooked.

The American Academy of Teachers of Singing believes that there should be set forth in the form of a pronouncement, an outline of the student's physical, vocal, musical and other contiguous basic qualifications which may give evidence of sufficient worth to warrant consistent study and allied preparation towards the ultimate realization of an operatic career. In order to assist the vocal teacher and the singer in evaluating and analyzing, with as much clarity as possible, the foregoing assets or the lack of them, the American Academy offers its beliefs and recommendations as embodied in the following sections:

I

The necessary attributes, including background and general conditions, voice, and personality — for the aspirant to the Grand Opera field; and

II

A comprehensive list of suggested arias, scheduled progressively in the order of difficulty, recommended for study in the vocal studio.

ATTRIBUTES FOR ASPIRANTS TO THE GRAND OPERA FIELD

1. **BACKGROUND.** Love of and encouragement to participate in music in the home is of the greatest help. A college or university degree is desirable but not essential. Such a degree, acquired in the first four or five years mentioned below, should include such basic needs as solfeggio, sight reading, some ability at the piano, harmony, etc. Sound knowledge of French, German, and Italian is vital, and ability to speak one of the three is rather necessary. This training should preferably be acquired privately. Sound knowledge of English grammar and diction is assumed. Early participation in opera workshops and dramatic presentations is helpful and is strongly recommended if the workshop's selection of repertoire is scaled to the vocal development and ability of the singer. A retentive memory is of utmost importance.

With very few exceptions, most young artists are very close to thirty years of age before they attain adequate operatic ability. All of the foregoing points up to the vital necessity of a secure economic and financial background. The first four or five years of study may or may not justify an attempt to qualify for participation in grand opera. If justified, the following four or five years will be spent in continued vocal development and the serious study of the proper operatic roles as selected by a well-qualified and experienced operatic coach and teacher.

During this latter period of preparation it is necessary that the aspirant devote his or her first energies and time to these activities. While it is possible after the first few years to acquire some income from singing activities, it is doubtful if such income would take care of all needs, and it is essential that financial aid is available. Even after one has begun to make a success before the public, particularly in the early years, money is necessary for promotional activity, and it is also true that the young artist never ceases to need professional coaching and vocal guidance.

2. **VOICE.** Must be of definite promise and better than average; an "operatic" voice; voluminous in size and of wide range; flexible and of appealing natural quality, adequate for large theatre and auditorium. Such a voice is rarely identified with any degree of assurance in less than four or five years of continuous study at the rate of from three to five lessons per week.

3. **PERSONALITY.** Attractive appearance; good figure; better than average height; musical taste; willingness to work hard; good health and with a flair for public appearance, and we repeat — a retentive memory.