

GRAND OPERA FOR PROFIT: The San Carlo Opera Company (of America), 1913-1955 by Cardell Bishop. Published by the Author at 7735 Atlantic Avenue, Cudahy, California, 90201. Soft bound; 8.5 x 11 inches, Typescript, 259 pps, illus. U\$S 13.50 including postage (foreign or domestic).

For several generations of North American opera lovers, the name "San Carlo Opera Company" brings, instead of a picture of sunny Naples, fond recollections first of anticipation and then the annual immersion into a veritable orgy of Grand Opera provided by the touring opera company of impresario Fortunato Gallo. For more than 40 years, Mr. Gallo brought live opera performances to dozens of cities and towns throughout the United States and Canada. The annual repertoire was usually 12 to 15 different operas, and the local "season" ranged from one-and two-night stands to three or four weeks: for many of the smaller population centers the San Carlo provided the only access to live opera; in the larger cities, 50¢ would buy a seat in the balcony, which meant that the young opera lover could attend every single performance, and usually did. Most of the performing repertoire was pretty standard stuff; Carmen, Lucia, Faust, Pagliacci, Cavalleria, Hoffman, Boheme, Butterfly, Tosca, Barber, Aida, Rigoletto, Traviata, Trovatore, Martha, and Lohengrin. Now and then, depending on available singers, we were treated to the odd Andrea, Romeo, Gioconda, Samson, Forza, Otello, Tannhauser or the Jewels of the Madonna, and on rare occasions even a L'Oracolo, Thais, and Secret of Suzanne.

In its heyday the company boasted some world famous voices: Bori, Gerville-Reache, Constantino, Bonelli, de Cisneros, Ruffo, Martinelli, Paoli, Schipa, Jeritza, Ljungberg, to name but a few; other singers returned year after year and became great favorites with San Carlo audiences: Agostini, Lindi, Saroya, Koyke, Morelli, Rayner, Roselle, Onofrei, Ferrabini, as well as many others who came from time to time on their way up or on their way down.

The San Carlo Opera Company paid its own way by ticket sales alone: there was no government subsidy! The company stayed alive and active throughout the great depression of the 30's by cutting corners. Because the company transported its chorus, orchestra, and sets, the latter were usually constructed not only for ease in transport but also to fit all manner of stage facilities which might be encountered: certain economies had to be observed. The top of Aida's tomb might provide the landing place for Otello in Cyprus; the ballroom in Capulet's house in Verona usually bore a strong resemblance to Alvisse's palace in Venice or Scarpia's apartment in the Farnese Palace. A garden was a garden, be it outside Marguerite's lowly cottage or Rigoletto's house ... what matter? For years Lohengrin's swan wore an ill-disguised bandage to hide a splint which had been used to repair a broken neck; when a new swan finally made its appearance, old timers broke into applause, but only because it signified an unusual financial opulence. Each year it seemed touch and go whether the company would be back next year! Tired sets and aged swans never bothered the San Carlo family circle, which included the company's loyal audiences across the country: what did matter was that the orchestra was made up of professionals, the

conducting staff was generally excellent, and vocal standards were maintained to a remarkable degree. The San Carlo Opera Company still remains, to many, a personal introduction to a life-long love of things operatic, and we remember it, with all its weaknesses, with sincere affection.

One of these true aficionados is the Los Angeles-born opera fan and veteran record collector, Cardell Bishop, and the work here reviewed has been produced by him as a genuine labor of love. By means of many hours of searching through old library files of newspapers and musical periodicals, and with the assistance of many San Carlo friends, he has reconstructed much of the history of the itinerant phenomenon which was The San Carlo Opera Company, from its birth in New York in 1913 to its final season in Boston in 1955. The book has been arranged in a convenient format; a separate chapter is devoted to each season, beginning with a list of the singers and conductors. Next follows a section entitled "Notes on the Singers", in which the author gives a few biographical highlights as each new singer is mentioned for the first time. The next section is devoted to Recordings, which gives a brief run-down on known recordings left by the new singers for each season. Collectors will find this section fascinating: it will give identity to many a previously unknown singer, often found on obscure labels. Each chapter is concluded by notes culled from newspaper and periodical reviews, with operas performed, contemporaneous critical remarks, etc. A very important and most useful part of the book is found at the end where a complete list of the operas presented during the life of the company is given, with the seasons in which they were performed. Following this is a complete listing of San Carlo performers, with the seasons in which they sang: some 14 single-spaced pages. Mr. Bishop deserves much credit for the bibliography, which appears next, which shows the sources for the data given for each city he lists. This automatically gives the scope of the research which went into the present work, and becomes a starting point for anyone who wishes to carry on what could be an almost endless research project.

Mr Bishop not only researched this history of the San Carlo Opera Company and compiled all data which was available to him, but he typed the original pages from which the book was reproduced by offset, and acted as his own publisher. He is also distributing the book himself. The author freely admits that there is much missing from his history, simply because reviews of each and every production given by the company are just not available. The mainstays for his research cover the company's seasons in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, with occasional notes on other performances which became available: as noted, these sources are all listed in the bibliography. There are several composite plates of photographs of San Carlo singers, which add interest to the book. The work is a valuable one for reference, and although the section on recordings is not always complete, the book should be looked upon as a starting point for further research. It is unfortunate that this strictly amateur production did not have the benefit of a professional proof-reader, as many spelling errors

have crept in. But, as the author points out, this work is but a beginning (and a very formidable one, I might add) and hopefully it will eventually be revised, corrected and expanded. As such a revision might be a long time in coming, I urge all those interested not to delay in obtaining a copy of the present work: the edition is a very limited one.

W. R. Moran