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WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT: DIVAS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW YORK

by

ANDREA SAPOSNIK

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts, The City University of New York

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Abstract

WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT: DIVAS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW YORK

by

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Clara Louise Kellogg (1842-1916), Emma Abbott (1850-91), Minnie Hauk (1851-1929), and Emma Thursby (1845-1931) were successful American sopranos who performed extensively in post-Civil War New York City. The city was a cultural hub, and the musical flux of the period enabled each singer to find her niche. The pursuit of such a career, however, was not easy for a woman in Victorian America. The nineteenth-century New York woman was expected to focus on husband, children, and domestic duties and shun all attention in public. Any woman who wished to work outside the home and venture forth independently in nineteenth-century New York was confronted by society's restrictive mores. Imagine then what a woman who wished to appear on the public stage would face. Clara Louise Kellogg, Emma Abbott, Minnie Hauk, and Emma Thursby had their work cut out for them. Yet, each in her own way, triumphed over society's

strictures and won fame, fortune, and critical acceptance. These women were groundbreakers in Victorian America; they demonstrated that a woman could achieve remarkable success by employing her talent outside of the home. Further, she could retain society's approbation while doing so. For each of the sopranos in this study the road to success was different. Common to all was a need to craftily juggle repertoire choices, career moves, and men. And common to all was the New York press's assessment of their every move.

Preface

This is a study of four American sopranos who were born, grew up in, or spent their adolescence in New York City and who were active performers in New York during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Each triumphed over society's strictures and won fame, fortune, and critical acceptance. In examining the lives of Clara Louise Kellogg, Emma Abbott, Minnie Hauk, and Emma Thursby, this study explores the choices the women made regarding career moves, repertoire and venues, and family life. The success of each woman's distinct course is assessed through examination of her reception in New York newspapers.

In order to compare the singers on an equal footing, the study focuses on criticism from the years 1873 through 1882. During this ten-year period all four divas performed regularly in New York City, and all made major decisions regarding their careers. Primary focus on reviews from three major newspapers of the time--the *New York Herald, New York Post*, and *New York Times*-- permits further comparison. For Emma Thursby, who was from Brooklyn and who performed there regularly throughout her life, criticism from *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Brooklyn Daily News*, and *Brooklyn Daily Union* is also surveyed, presenting contrasts between Thursby's reception in New York City and in Brooklyn.

In addition to the press, this study utilizes both primary and secondary sources in striving to determine each singer's career aspirations, courses of action, and successes. Many of these sources were either written in the nineteenth century, or were culled from nineteenth-century works. As such sources tend to be somewhat unreliable, the veracity of biographical details about each singer may be questioned. In particular, the autobiographies of Kellogg and Hauk likely present each singer as she would like to be remembered--not necessarily as she actually was. Similarly Sadie Martin, a close friend of Emma Abbott, certainly wanted to display that diva in the most positive light possible. Most authoritative is probably Richard McCandless Gipson's *The Life of Emma Thursby*. Published in 1940 by the New York Historical Society, the work provides detailed information on Thursby's life, including a comprehensive list of Thursby's performances.

This study, thus, draws together biographical information and critical reception and hypothesizes about the career goals and tactics that led to each singer's success. Such hypotheses are contextualized within the framework of nineteenth-century America's views on women and their roles within society.

I am grateful for the insights and expertise of Professors John Graziano, Barbara Hanning, and Adrienne Fried Block; and for the help and encouragement of Professors Peter Basquin, Zdravko Blažekovic, and David Olan. I also wish to thank Lucille Field Goodman and the Baisley Powell Elebash committee for their invaluable support.

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Introduction

New York is known today as the place where singers go to build a major career in the United States. The auditions, the training, the connections are all in New York City. Performances in the world-renowned venues are critical, and reviews by the New York press are essential building blocks. For a singer of the nineteenth century this phenomenon was no less true.

New York has ranked as one of the chief opera centers for well over 150 years. Italian opera first reached New York in 1825 when a company led by Manuel García (1775-1832), the Spanish singer and teacher, performed a season of operas at the Park Theatre. García's performances, including works by Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868), Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli (1752-1837), and García, himself, marked a shift from the makeshift adaptations that had previously characterized Italian opera in New York.

New York's first opera house, the Italian Opera House at Leonard and Church streets, opened 18 November 1833. Performances were poorly attended, financial problems ensued, and the house burned down in 1839. Other opera houses came and went. In 1844 Ferdinand Palmo opened Palmo's Opera House, and in 1847 the Astor Place Opera House was founded by a group of wealthy New York men. Most influential in introducing opera to a broad New York public were likely the performances at the Castle Garden Theatre, built on a small island beside Battery Park. Not only did this theater present the New York debut

of Jenny Lind[1] (1820-87) in 1850, it also hosted touring opera troupes, who entertained large audiences at modest prices throughout the 1850s.

Impresarios dominated the operatic history of mid--nineteenth-century New York. Max Maretzek[2] (1821-97), who conducted at the Astor Place Opera, became a frequent conductor at the Academy of Music, which opened at Irving Place and 14th Street in 1854. The brothers Maurice[3] (1825-87) and Max (1835-92) Strakosch, active in New York from 1857, Maurice Grau (1849-1907), and James Henry Mapleson[4] (1830-1901), who directed at the Academy of Music from 1878 to 1886, were also prominent and influential impresarios of the period. In the mid-nineteenth century great singers began to appear in New York from Europe. In addition to Lind, this list included Henriette Sontag (1806-54), Marietta Alboni (1823-94), Mario (Giovanni Matteo, 1810–83), Giulia Grisi (1811-69), and Elena d'Angri (1824-after 1860). All were heralded for their vocal talents by a New York public eager to embrace the operatic art.

Soon, however, New Yorkers had more to cheer about: they began to produce native singers who rivalled their European counterparts. Four singers who were integral to this development were Clara Louise Kellogg (1842-1916), Emma Abbott (1850-91), Minnie Hauk (1851-1929), and Emma Thursby (1845-

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[1] Swedish soprano nicknamed "the Swedish nightingale." Lind 's operatic career was primarily limited to England and Germany and ended in 1849. From 1850-52 Lind toured in the United States, performing recitals and oratorios. Americans thronged to see her and she was a smashing success. Her career provided inspiration to numerous American divas.

[2] American conductor, impresario, and composer of Czech birth. In 1849 he began his career as impresario. He conducted and managed companies in New York City, primarily at the Academy of Music.

[3] American impresario, pianist, coach, and composer of Czech birth. He arrived in New New York in 1848 and later married Amalia Patti, Adelina Patti's sister. Strakosch managed Adelina Patti, as well as Kellogg, Minnie Hauk, and Emma Thursby.

[4] English impresario. His company performed at Her Majesty's Theatre, the Academy of Music, New York, and on tour throughout the United States. His American career declined after the opening of the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1883.

1931). The four were world-famous New Yorkers in their day and great singers of their time. All four singers flourished in post-Civil War New York. The city was a musical hub, and the musical flux of the period enabled each to find her niche. Also helpful to each was the availability of music criticism at this time in New York. With more than twenty newspapers circulating, each leading singer was virtually guaranteed constant coverage and, subsequently, increased popularity.

However, one aspect of Victorian New York society did not make life easy for these singers: its prudish view of women. For, in the nineteenth century, middle-class New Yorkers witnessed a growing dichotomy between the sexes. As G. J. Barker-Benfield asserts in *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America*: "Industrial growth and the phenomenal shaping of American history in the nineteenth century were inalienable from the male attitude that demanded not only that the two styles of life, male and female, be separate, but that women should remain subordinate, and in the home."[5] The prescribed role for a woman was thus twofold: she was to concern herself primarily, if not exclusively, with the domestic sphere, and she was to be subservient. *The young lady's counsellor, or, Outlines and illustrations of the sphere, the duties and the dangers of young women*, written by Daniel Wise and published in the 1850s, elucidates these notions:

> What is the sphere of woman? Home. The social circle. What is her mission? To mould character,--to fashion herself and others after the model character of Christ. What are her chief instruments for the accomplishment of her great work? the affections. Love is the wand by which she is to work moral transformation within her fairy circle. Gentleness, sweetness, loveliness and purity are the elements of her

[5] G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 20.

> power. Her place is not on life's great battle-fields. Man belongs there. . . . [W]oman must abide in the peaceful sanctuaries of home, and walk in the noiseless vales of private life. There she must dwell, beside the secret springs of public virtue. There she must smile upon the father, the brother, the husband, when, returning like warriors from the fight, exhausted and covered with the dust of strife, they need to be refreshed by sweet waters drawn "from affection's spring," and cheered to renewed struggles by the music of her voice.[6]

A woman's talents, including her voice, were to be manifest only at home, and only to soothe the men in her life.

When a woman did step outside the home she was to be submissive and avoid attracting attention. John F. Kasson notes [in *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America*] that "etiquette advisers defended a feminine ideal of uncompromising modesty, particularly in public. Once breached, descent was swift and sure."[7] A New York woman was to adhere to such rules of decorum, not only on the street, but also at the theater. In the early nineteenth century, an unescorted woman at a performance was assumed to be a prostitute or otherwise of dubious respectability. Thus theaters restricted women's attendance, as evidenced by the playbill on opening night of the Astor Place Opera House in 1847: "No lady admitted unaccompanied by a gentleman."[8] Though by the 1860s women could attend Saturday matinees without compromising respectability, their freedoms remained limited.

The nineteenth-century New York woman was to focus on husband, children, and domestic duties, shun all attention in public, and remain dependent upon her male escort. Most women followed these strictures. By the end of the

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[6] Daniel Wise, *The young lady's counsellor, or, Outlines and illustrations of the sphere, the duties and the dangers of young women* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1851), 88-89.
[7] John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991), 128.
[8] Kasson, 227.

nineteenth century more than 90 percent of all American women were married,[9] and though a small percentage of women—mostly from the lower classes—were employed, their jobs tended to mirror those of the domestic environment: sewing, cleaning, and teaching.

Any woman who wished to work outside the home and venture forth independently in nineteenth-century New York was confronted by society's restrictive mores. Imagine then what confronted a woman who wished to appear on the public stage; as Kellogg recalled, "in those days the life of the theatre was regarded as altogether outside the pale. One didn't know stage people; one couldn't speak to them, nor shake hands with them, nor even look at them except from a safe distance across the footlights. There were no decent people on the stage."[10]

How then did these women do it? My examination of each singer's career will illuminate four distinct strategies. Clara Louise Kellogg, Emma Abbott, Minnie Hauk, and Emma Thursby, each in her own way, triumphed over society's strictures and won fame, fortune, and critical acceptance. These women were groundbreakers in Victorian America; they demonstrated that a woman could achieve remarkable success by employing her talent outside of the home. Further, she could retain society's approbation while doing so. For each of the sopranos in this study the road to success was different. Common to all was a need to craftily juggle repertoire choices, career moves, and men. And common to all was the New York press's assessment of their every move.

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[9] Erna Olafson Hellerstein, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen M. Offen. *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1981), 121.
[10] Clara Louise Kellogg, *Memoirs of an American Prima Donna* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 11.

Chapter 1

Clara Louise Kellogg

Chronology

1842	Born in Sumterville (Sumter) South Carolina
1855	Family moves to New York City
1861	Operatic debut at New York's Academy of Music as Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*
1867	Travels to London to perform at Her Majesty's Theatre
ca. 1870	Returns for tour of North America
1873	Founds English Opera Company
1876	Dissolves English Opera Company
1879	Performs *Aida* in London
1880-81	Sings in Paris, Vienna, and St. Petersburg
1881	Returns to America
1887	Retires from singing
1887	Marries Carl Strakosch
1913	Publishes her memoirs (*Memoirs of an American Prima Donna)*
1916	Dies of cancer in New Hartford, Connecticut

Born in Sumterville, South Carolina, in 1842, Clara Louise Kellogg was a gifted musician from a young age: "Everyone knew I was naturally musical from my constant attempts to sing . . . even when I was so little that I could not reach the key-board."[1] However, she recognized at a young age that it was not typically acceptable for a girl to pursue a career on the stage. Reflecting on her first voice lessons in New York, she noted that she had no intention of going on the stage and that, in fact, "the girl who aspired professionally was almost unknown."[2] Kellogg was already aware of the distinction in Victorian society between the domestic sphere—studying voice in order to fulfill one's domestic role, and the public sphere—studying voice in view of a vocation: "Most of my fellow-students were charming society girls . . . . The idea of my going on the stage would have appalled the families of these girls. In those days the life of the theatre was regarded as altogether outside the pale."[3] However, although Kellogg recognized a gulf would open between her friends and herself if she chose to pursue a career, she also "realised that [she] was improving sufficiently to justify some definite ambitions."[4] She recalled her announcement to her friends in her autobiography of 1913:

> Girls, I've made up my mind to go on the stage! I know just how your people feel about it, and I want to tell you now that you need n't [*sic*] know me any more. You need n't speak to me, nor bow to me if you meet me in the street. I shall quite understand, and I shan't feel a bit badly. *Because I think the day will come when you will be proud to know me!* [her emphasis][5]

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[1] Clara Louise Kellogg, *Memoirs of an American Prima Donna* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 3.
[2] Kellogg, 11.
[3] Kellogg, 11.
[4] Kellogg, 12.
[5] Kellogg, 21.

While believing that she would lose the respect of her society friends, Kellogg was determined to follow her talent and her passion.

It is possible that a recollection of another diva was in the back of Kellogg's mind—a diva who had won success, fame, and the warm approbation of society. When she was eight years old, Kellogg heard the famed Swedish soprano Jenny Lind (1820-87) in New York. This likely inspired Kellogg musically, while also providing her with a model of an independent, successful, and respectable woman. As John Dizikes notes in *Opera in America: A Cultural History*, The memory of Lind's performance certainly reminded Kellogg that a "public role was possible for women in the theater . . . especially in opera."[6] Kellogg carried this realization to its full extent. Not only did she brave the disdain of society in order to follow her professional aspirations, she also became, in her words, the "first American *prima donna*,"[7] as well as manager of her own opera company in which she starred, directed, produced, arranged scores, and translated librettos. As Lind had inspired Kellogg, so Kellogg and her successful career paved the way for future American women singers. The life and career choices made by Kellogg and her reception in mid-nineteenth-century New York illustrate her success—in her own eyes and in those of society.

Kellogg began her career singing bel canto roles and the lighter Verdi heroines; she would continue to flourish in such roles throughout her career. She made her debut as Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto* (1851) at the Academy of Music, New York on 26 February 1861. She was well received, and in the years 1861-1863 she sang roles in twelve more operas, including Amina in Bellini's *La*

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[6] John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 137.
[7] Kellogg, 41.

sonnambula (1831), Elvira in Bellini's *I Puritani* (1835), Linda in Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix* (1842), Marie in Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* (1840), Lucia in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835), Paolina in Donizetti's *Poliuto* (1838), Lady Harriet in Flotow's *Martha* (1847), Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust* (1859), Jeannette in Victor Massé's *Les noces de Jeannette* (1854), Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787), Amelia in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* (1859), and Violetta in Verdi's *La traviata* (1853). All of these operas were performed in Italian.

Persona and Career

Kellogg sang in the Brooklyn premiere of *La traviata* in 1862. Her joy at being involved in this performance lends insight into her dedication to her art and profession despite the restrictive mores of society. For, in addition to risking censure for working in a male-dominated society and for appearing on the stage, Kellogg challenged society to accept her portrayal of Violetta, a "fallen woman." This subject matter was clearly abhorrent to the culture of the period. As Kellogg stated regarding the performance in 1862:

> It was really funny about *Traviata*. In 1861 President Chittenden, of the Board of Directors of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, made a sensational speech arraigning the plot of *Traviata,* and protesting against its production in Brooklyn on the grounds of propriety, or rather, impropriety. Meetings were held and it was finally resolved that the opera was objectionable. The feeling against it grew into a series of almost religious ceremonies of protest and . . . it took . . . a year of hard effort to overcome the opposition. When, at last, in '62, the opera was given, I took part; and the audience was all on edge with excitement . . . . Every clergyman within travelling distance was in the house.[8]

[8] Kellogg, 69.

Unlike Emma Abbott, who for many years refused to sing the role of Violetta and when she did "was so afraid of allowing it to be suggestive that she made it so,"[9] Kellogg claims she "never thought of that side of it and consequently never forced [her] audiences to think of it either."[10] She thus not only demonstrated that a woman could perform professionally without being a disgrace to society, she proved that a woman could portray a "fallen woman" while still maintaining respect and dignity.

In fact, far from being viewed as a fallen woman, as June Ottenberg notes in *Opera Odyssey: Toward a History of Opera in Nineteenth-Century America*, Kellogg maintained a reputation as "prim and prudish."[11] The press apparently recognized her as much for her talent as for her ability to maintain certain Victorian notions of womanhood. In 1873 she received an award honoring her for uniting "in her bright career all that gives grace and dignity to womanhood."[12] The award read "In this instance, dear lady, respect is mingled with affectionate regard, not because of the national honor reflected by your career, but because of the home associations of your life and the pleasure your visits have given us."[13] Kellogg's role as a symbol of virtue, womanhood, and domesticity was at least equally important to her public as that of a successful singer. Another award in 1877 depicts a continuation of this reception; Kellogg was honored "not only for her talent and art, but also her pure, noble and womanly character."[14]

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[9] Kellogg, 70.
[10] Kellogg, 70.
[11] June C. Ottenberg, *Opera Odyssey: Toward a History of Opera in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 181.
[12] *New York Post*, 4 June 1873.
[13] *New York Post*, 4 June 1873.
[14] *New York Post*, 17 November 1877.

Kellogg must have believed that cultivating a persona of virtuous womanhood was essential to her success. The press would review her positively, she thought, if she not only displayed her talents as a singer and actress, but also created a private life compatible with nineteenth-century society's views of a respectable woman. Being strictly chaperoned by her mother encouraged this reputation. As Peter Davis mentions: [in *The American Opera Singer: The Lives and Adventures of America's Great Singers in Opera and Concert from 1825 to the Present,*] "[a]s far as one can tell, Jane Kellogg consented to her daughter's career ambitions so long as she could act as vigilant chaperone. Stage kisses were permitted on the forehead only, and, once, when a tussle with a villainous baritone became too realistic for Mrs. Kellogg's taste, the good woman quickly stepped in and cried, 'Don't you dare touch my daughter so roughly!'"[15] While Kellogg recognized her mother's good intentions, she also felt confined. "My mother's way was to guard me eternally; she would have called it protecting me. But, really, it was a good deal like shutting me up in a glass case . . . . It is all very well to be carefully guarded and to be made the archetype of American virtue on the stage, but there is a great deal of entirely innocuous amusement that I might have had."[16] Her mother continued to be her chaperone through the final days of Kellogg's career, severely limiting her social contacts and refusing to allow her to travel alone.

Kellogg herself made it clear that men could not be a part of her life as long as she was pursuing her career. The press was instrumental in revealing her views on marriage and men to the public. Influential in the lives of young

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[15] Peter G. Davis, *The American Opera Singer: The Lives and Adventures of America's Great Singers in Opera and Concert from 1825 to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 59.
[16] Kellogg, 108-9.

American women singers, Kellogg repeatedly advised young prima donnas not to have beaus because men would distract the singers from their professional duties and true passion of singing. This view provoked criticism. In a letter to the editor of the *Boston Globe* entitled "What is the matter with Clara Louise Kellogg?" an unnamed author rebukes Kellogg for her advice, stating that the success of specific singers in operatic roles is attributed to their passions for particular men. Further, the author chides Kellogg for her emotionless performances, which would be enlivened by a more personal experience with passion.[17]

Yet Kellogg clearly believed that if she allowed herself to have romantic contact with men she would not have been as well received, nor as respected by her public. In response to a rumor that she was to marry, Kellogg told a reporter in 1878, "You may say, if you please, that there never will be any truth to any reported engagement of Miss Clara Louise Kellogg to marry anybody. I am in love with myself, and I do not think I shall ever get married . . . . I have one noble ambition which I intend to accomplish before I die, if possible, and that is the establishment in New York of a Conservatory of Music to which young American girls can go."[18] Interestingly, while she perceived the importance of retaining qualities of womanhood in her persona, she also likely earned respect in the traditionally male world of financial security and professional success by cultivating an all-business, no-emotion attitude. Kellogg cleverly circumvented the restrictive Victorian view on acceptable female behavior; she triumphed as an

[17] *Dwight's Journal of Music*, 9 January 1875.
[18] *New York Post*, 27 February 1878.

independent professional woman, while at the same time she placated her public.

The English Opera Company

Kellogg's ability to comprehend and satisfy her public's desires was key to her success. After establishing a substantial European and American reputation, Kellogg, ever the pragmatist, began to think about the possibility of reaching an even wider American public by performing opera in English.[19] Her venture into English Opera with C. D. Hess was announced in the newspapers of July 1873. As the *New York Post* declared: "The friends of Miss Kellogg for several years have advised her to sing in English opera, and there is no doubt that the result of the enterprise will fully justify their counsel."[20]

Opera performed in English had a long history in the United States. In the 1830s and 1840s English opera companies were generally vehicles for one or two star performers. The Seguin Operatic Troupe, founded by the British singers Anne (1814-88) and Arthur (1809-52) Seguin dominated English opera performance in the United States from 1841 to 1847.[21] Two of the most prominent English opera companies in America in the late 1840s and early 1850s were troupes assembled to showcase the British sopranos Anna Bishop and Anna Thillon. Bishop (1810-84), a high soprano, was quite successful on concert tours of the United States. However, though she traveled with several English companies between 1848 and 1854, none survived beyond a single season's

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[19] Davis, 63.
[20] *New York Post*, 19 July 1873.
[21] Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825-60* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 218.

tour. Thillon (1812-1903) toured North America in the years 1851-54 with the Thillon Opera Company. Her husband directed the troupe's performances in New York, and Thillon, praised more for her great beauty than her singing voice, was the prima donna.

In the middle and late 1850s English opera flourished alongside Italian, each drawing its own audience. As Katherine Preston suggests: [in *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825-60*,] "[t]he increased and deliberate appropriation of Italian opera by the wealthy, especially in urban areas of the Northeast, exacerbated by the growing perception that going to Italian operas was an elite pastime, fueled the debate over Italian versus English opera. In many ways, this increased the appeal of the latter to middle-class Americans."[22] English companies of the period capitalized on this middle-class audience. The Pyne and Harrison Company, featuring Louisa Pyne (1832-1904), was one such company. Pyne was the first English soprano to tour the United States for long periods in a full-sized English opera company that included secondary singers, chorus, and orchestra director.

In the 1860s, several touring prima donnas starred in and managed their opera companies. The Richings company was founded in 1859 by the actor Peter Richings (1797-1871) as a means of showcasing his daughter, the British soprano Caroline Richings (1827-82). Upon Peter Riching's retirement, Caroline took over management of the company. Another touring company, the Parepa-Rosa Company, was run by Euphrosyne Parepa de Boyescu (1836-74), who first came to the United States in 1865. Her company toured the United States from

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[22] Preston, 244.

1872 until her death. As Preston notes, "[o]n the foundations that these troupes laid was erected a substantial English opera movement in the United States—a movement that espoused 'opera for the people,' that featured fabulously successful companies headed by such American prima donnas as Emma Abbott and Clara Louise Kellogg."[23]

Kellogg's English opera venture thus arose out of a well-established tradition, although the majority of English troupes before Kellogg were formed for British singers. Kellogg was one of the first American singers to gain fame as both prima donna and impresario of a touring company. Kellogg embarked on her English opera venture with an established reputation in the United States as an accomplished prima donna. Thus, when Kellogg formed her English troupe, it was generally conceded that she would "give to English opera a standing and popularity it has never yet enjoyed."[24]

Always interested in the idea of presenting opera in English, Kellogg believed that just as German operas were translated into French in Paris, and French operas into German in Berlin, so foreign operas would be made more accessible in the United States if translated into English. While conceding that translated librettos are never as good as the originals, Kellogg believed the benefits of translation far outweighed this drawback. Her goals were twofold: first, she wanted to bring the "best music to the comprehension of the intelligent masses,"[25] thus encouraging the advancement of music in the United States. Second, as Kellogg asserts in her autobiography, she "gave employment to a large number of young Americans, several of whom began their careers in the

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[23] Preston, 257.
[24] *New York Post*, 19 July 1873.
[25] Kellogg, 256.

chorus of the company and soon advanced to higher places in the musical world."[26]

Though certainly altruistic in her desires to aid young singers and introduce opera to a wider audience, Kellogg probably also had her own professional reasons for making the switch to English opera. An immediate trigger may have been the rise of Christine Nilsson[27] (1843-1921). Having premiered the role of the tragic heroine in Gounod's *Faust* at the Academy of Music in 1863, Kellogg quickly became the preeminent Marguerite. In fact, her portrayals of this role were so well known that critics eventually stopped commenting on her performance in any detail. As a critic from *The New York Post* at one time stated, "Miss Kellogg was favorably received by the audience, and performed the part of *Marguerite* in her accustomed manner, which has been frequently discussed."[28]

However, as Dizikes notes, Kellogg made the role of Marguerite "her own [only] until the advent of a greater singer, Christine Nilsson, in the 1870s."[29] Nilsson, billed as the "new Swedish nightingale," became known for the "dreamy beauty"[30] of her performance of the role, and quickly dislodged Kellogg from her position as the reigning Marguerite. It is likely that Kellogg perceived that she was losing ground to the new prima donna and sought a means to continue her successful career. In turning to English opera, Kellogg carved out a new niche for

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[26] Kellogg, 256.
[27] Swedish soprano who had a successful operatic career in Europe and the United States. She sang in the first New York performance of Ambroise Thomas's *Mignon* at the Academy of Music in 1871. Her voice was reputed to be brilliant in timbre, extremely flexible, and perfectly even for two and a half octaves.
[28] *New York Post*, 28 January 1875.
[29] Dizikes, 175.
[30] *New York Post*, 15 October 1873.

herself and remained in the public eye; with her own company, she was guaranteed starring roles in any opera she chose.

In developing her company, Kellogg was also able to exploit talents that extended beyond performance. As manager of the English Opera Company, she not only starred in the productions, but also created new translations of the Italian, French, or German texts herself, and oversaw the direction, scenery, costumes, and rehearsals for each production. Kellogg's English opera repertoire included Thomas's *Mignon* (1866), Meyerbeer's *The Star of the North* (1854), Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), Gounod's *Faust*, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), Benedict's *Lily o' Killarney* (1862), and Balfe's *The Rose of Castille* (1848), *The Bohemian Girl* (1843), and *The Talisman* (completed after Balfe's death by his friend Michael Costa [1808-1884] and premiered in 1874). Although Kellogg's enterprise met with considerable criticism and discussion, usually the opinions of the public and the press were favorable. Kellogg was able to translate operas without losing the lyricism of the original work, and her performances were well produced, directed, and sung. Kellogg also maintained a steady roster of talented singers, including William Castle, Joseph Maas (1847-86) Henry Peakes, Jennie Van Zandt, Agneta Montague, and Anne Seguin (1809 or 14-88).

Kellogg's English company made its debut in New York City on 21 January 1874 with a production of Donizetti's *Lucy of Lammermoor (Lucia di Lammermoor)*. Kellogg sang Lucy, a role for which she was well known in its Italian original. Reviews of this performance from New York City newspapers of

the time shed light on Kellogg's success in her new venture. The *New York Post* praised the production:

> Miss Kellogg made her metropolitan debut in English opera, before a very large audience, at the Academy of Music last night. There was less display of dress in the house than on Italian nights, but a great deal of solid appreciation. The professional element was largely represented. Lucy afforded to Miss Kellogg an ample opportunity for the display of her vocal charms, and from her lips the English words fell so sweetly that the absence of the delicate Italian vowels was not very perceptible. In the opening aria, in the concerted music of the second act, and in the mad scene, Miss Kellogg sang with all her old finish and brilliancy, and with a superadded warmth and color. Her Lucy was altogether a most delightful personation.[31]

The critic clearly deemed Kellogg's English opera venture a success. Notable again are the descriptions of Kellogg that emphasize "womanly" attributes: her "charms," the English words falling "sweetly" from her lips, her "delightful personation."

The *New York Times* had a mixed review of the English production. The critic agreed that the audience was large and appreciative. However he also contended that, as the audience was different from that attending Italian opera, Kellogg's company was able to present inferior productions:

> The season of English opera at the Academy was entered upon auspiciously last evening. We say it was entered upon auspiciously for the performance was one which evidently afforded great pleasure, and the audience was very large. . . . The spectators had not gathered in the expectation that their recollections of Italian opera would be effaced by the labors of the newcomers, and when their hopes of a conscientious rendering of "Lucy of Lammermoor" were fulfilled, they were satisfied. Comparisons, it has been said, are odious, but they are the soul of criticism, notwithstanding. This admitted, we are constrained to say that the interpretation of Donizetti's work would scarcely bear criticism. In our judgment we have lately had amid us, in

[31] *New York Post*, 22 January 1874.

> Mme. Nilsson, the greatest of *Lucias*. . .To apply these standards to yesterday's [performance] would be fatal. But as the patrons of English opera are not those of Italian opera, we hardly think the parallel is required.[32]

Nilsson once again reared her head--this time in the role of Lucia, another role made famous by Kellogg. And once more, Nilsson was deemed a finer Lucia. Kellogg's intelligence in switching to English opera is apparent. Her Lucia in English was unrivaled and attracted a new audience. Her business savvy prevailed.

Though also acknowledging its positive reception by the large audience, the critic from the *New York Herald* spoke less favorably of *Lucia*'s transformation into English:

> Considering the disagreeable state of the weather last evening, the opening of the English opera season may be regarded as a success as far as the audience is concerned. The Academy of Music was fairly filled, the only blanks being in the box circle. The opera selected was "Lucia," a work which, since its first production at Naples, forty years ago, under Donizetti's own direction, has held a prominent position in popularity everywhere on the Italian stage. Regarding its adaptability for the English *repertoire* we cannot speak in commendatory terms. The florid character of the music needs the smooth, elastic tones of the Tuscan tongue to give it its due meed of brilliancy and expression.[33]

The *Herald* critic believed the opera lost quality in translation. However, he agreed that English rendered the opera more accessible. Thus, in terms of Kellogg's career, the venture was still seen as a success. This fact is further evident in his discussion of Kellogg's performance:

> Miss Kellogg's voice has gained considerably in volume of tone and breadth of expression since her last appearance in this city in Italian opera . . . . The opening air, "Silence o'er all was reigning" (*Regnava nel silenzio),* was delivered with an intelligence and effect that it rarely

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[32] *New York Times*, 22 January 1874.
[33] *New York Herald*, 22 January 1874.

> receives, Miss Kellogg introducing a very brilliant and trying cadenza at the end, the execution of which was faultless. Her rendering of the florid cabaletta showed flexibility of voice and intelligibility of phrasing . . . . In the mad scene, with its exuberance of florid vocalization, Miss Kellogg excelled her previous efforts, and in acting and singing left nothing to be desired.[34]

The critic felt Kellogg's performance was stellar, despite the ungracious medium of Italian opera translated into English.

These three contrasting reviews from 1874 reveal much about Kellogg, her company, and her audience at this moment in her career. As a performer, Kellogg appears to have been at her peak, though perhaps not at the level of Nilsson. English opera as a concept received mixed reviews. The *Post* critic regarded it as a positive enterprise, gaining in audience appeal without sacrificing beauty of text. The *Times* and the *Herald*, on the other hand, both viewed the English adaptation as inferior to the original Italian, focusing on the loss of fluidity of text. Regarding the success of Kellogg's new venture, all three critics agreed that a different audience had been reached--an enthusiastic, open-minded public, delighted with Kellogg and her enterprise. Kellogg tapped into a middle class that was eager to enjoy opera that was more accessible than its Italian counterpart. As Ottenberg states, "This energetic and determined woman gave careful attention to all details. Her solid training, intelligence, and European experience enabled her to create convincing performances that drew in enthusiastic audiences."[35] Like the impresarias before her, Kellogg proved that she could not only succeed as a performer, she could excel in the powerful position of company manager. This was no mean feat in the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century.

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[34] *New York Herald,* 22 January 1874.
[35] Ottenberg, 121.

Later Ventures

Kellogg's English Opera Company lasted, in various forms, until 1889[36] (though Kellogg retired as a singer in 1883). After several years of performing almost exclusively with her English opera company, Kellogg began to incorporate Italian performances into her repertoire once again. In 1878, Kellogg appeared as Lucia in New York City. This time, however, the performance took place at Booth's Theatre, and the language was Italian. Critics from the *New York Post,* the *New York Times,* and the *New York Herald* were once again there. As it had four years earlier, the *Post* viewed Kellogg's performance favorably:

> Whatever may be said about Miss Kellogg's voice, and we hear it said now and then that it is worn, that she has lost command over it, and also that is has grown harsh, there can be no two opinions as to the superiority of the fuller and better rendering of her *Lucia* as she gave it last night to what we heard years ago. In the terribly exacting first half of the last act there were no signs of fatigue, no breaks in the purity of her tones, no want of the sweetness of former years; and added to this sweetness was the dramatic force which rounds the whole creation in a fitting manner. The audience grew enthusiastic over the mad scene, and called Miss Kellogg again and again before the curtain.[37]

The critic saw improvement in Kellogg's Italian Lucia from her portrayal several years earlier in English. Though no reference is made specifically to the change in performance language, it is possible that the "fuller and better rendering" of Kellogg's Italian Lucia is due to the suitability of the Italian language for this music. In contrast to its review of Kellogg in 1874, the *Times* raved about this new Lucia:

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[36] Dizikes, 263.
[37] *New York Post,* 30 March 1878.

> *Lucia*, if not Miss Kellogg's very best rôle, is at all events equal to any of her happiest efforts . . . . The artist's clear and powerful tones, fluency of delivery, correct and elegant phrasing, and skill in the illustration of gentler emotions . . . are admirably suited. In "Lucia," the prima donna is particularly favored by the composer, for what is generally known as the "mad scene" gives prominence to the finest characteristics of her style . . . . Nothing could be more touching from a dramatic standpoint, or more finished as a vocal effort, than Miss Kellogg's representation of *Lucia* in this well-known portion of the opera . . . . The songstress' ripened experience appeared to infuse into her work an amount of feeling—translated, too, by a variety of methods—which place her performance upon a far higher plane than it ever held before. The manifestations of delight, during and after the "mad scene," were of a spontaneousness and heartiness seldom indulged in by an American audience, and [there was a] profound silence in which Miss Kellogg's sharply-cut *staccati*, fluent and brilliant runs, and perfect trills [were executed] . . . . At last, her easy victory over the technical, but no less fascinating, difficulties of the cadenza . . . was followed by applause, recalls, and encores without number.[38]

Significantly, these reviews no longer refer to Kellogg as simply "charming" or "sweet." Her "ripened experience" has earned her respect and the honor of being referred to in more professional terms: "dramatic," "elegant," "brilliant." The audience, perhaps a combination of the former Italian opera audience and Kellogg's English opera fans, was appropriately receptive.

It is hard to believe that the critic from the *New York Herald* was at the same performance. While he agreed with the *Times* in its positive impression of Kellogg's sound, the two critics diverged sharply regarding Kellogg's rendering of human emotion. While the *Times* critic found her engaging and convincing, the *Herald* critic deemed her cold and stiff. After applauding the brilliancy and precision of Kellogg's singing and acknowledging the large and appreciative audience, the critic catalogued Kellogg's deficiencies:

> It always unfortunately remains to be wished . . . that our American prima donna had some soul-depth in her tones. Her voice is pure as

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[38] *New York Times*, 30 March 1878.

> crystal—and as cold. The *fiorituri* of the Italian school she renders with marvellous fluency, no matter what the difficulties. You are startled into admiration by the impact of wonderful notes on the ear, but the chords of sympathy that need a subtle quality in the tones to set them in vibration are silent when she sings. If she had that quality in her voice, it would react upon herself, sway her physically, making the expressed emotions visible, and she would be a fine actress. We are not complaining, therefore, that she did not look a pallid, heart broken bride when she told us so in exquisite song last night, but we simply state that she did not and cannot picture strong emotion.[39]

The review is reminiscent of the aforementioned letter to the editor, which cited Kellogg's lack of passion as a result of her refusal to enter into romantic liasons. The *Herald* critic too appears to have felt that Kellogg lacked passion—that she could not picture strong emotion. The *Post* and the *Times* critics, though noting improvement in Kellogg's dramatic abilities, concurred that this was an area of weakness for Kellogg.

Such reviews reveal the dichotomy between Kellogg's intentions and their realization on stage. As Davis notes, "[t]hroughout her career Kellogg always considered dramatic presentation just as important as vocal accomplishment, a credo she shared with . . . numerous other American singers of the period."[40] However, it appears likely that Kellogg's sheltered life prevented her from fully understanding her characters and, thus, rendering them as believable. We are reminded of the choices that Kellogg made in balancing her personal life with her career. In refusing to associate with men, she may have felt she fostered her career, but, in so doing, she may also have sacrificed real emotion in her performances: If she lacked romantic passion in her operatic portrayals, it could be because she did not experience such passion in her life.

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[39] *New York Herald*, 30 March 1878.
[40] Davis, 55.

Although Kellogg generally sang lighter roles, such as Marguerite in *Faust,* Agathe in *Der Freischütz,* and the title role in *Lucia di Lammermoor,* in 1878 she added two new roles to her repertoire, perhaps in order to foster her acting skills: Bizet's Carmen and Verdi's Aida. As Davis suggests, [i]n spite of the pains she took over her impersonation, Kellogg never made much of an impression as Carmen."[41] As one critic wrote after a performance in Chicago, "Fancy Kellogg, the sedate, the self-conscious, the queenly, the dignified, the much-arrayed Clara Louise Kellogg, frisking about *à la bouffe!*"[42]

Aida was likely an even greater challenge for Kellogg. The role demanded far more vocally from the prima donna than any she had sung. In moving to this dramatic repertoire, Kellogg may have sought a means to rekindle the attention of her public, much as she had done with her English Opera venture. Certainly, such a change in repertoire would not go unnoticed.

Noticed it was. Kellogg's March 1878 performance of Aida at Booth's Theatre (in Italian) stimulated provocative and dissenting discourse among critics. The *Post* deemed Kellogg's foray into this more dramatic repertoire a success:

> Considering that Miss Kellogg's *Aida* is a revelation to opera-goers here who know her sweetness and her grace, but are yet ignorant of the degree to which she has developed her latent power for tragic singing, we do not hesitate to say that . . . our own American singer succeeded in making . . . this [an] exacting and tragic [portrayal]. Miss Kellogg has lost none of the purity of voice which first made her a favorite; she still sings in perfect tune, a delightful habit which is not so common as it might be; with plenty of powerful and forcible gesture there was no tendency to exaggerate or to rant; neither was what was intended to be pathetic at all weak.[43]

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[41] Davis, 65-6.
[42] *Dwight's Journal of Music*, (7 December, 1878), 349.
[43] *New York Post*, 19 March 1878.

The *Times* also acknowledged Kellogg's growth as an actress:

> Miss Kellogg . . . was not in the best vocal form on the occasion we refer to. Still it was plain that she has gained much as an actress and lost nothing as a dramatic songstress since last welcomed to this City, and, in the impassioned "L'insana parola," in the first act, in the subsequent duet . . . , in the delicate romance in act the third . . . , and especially, in the duet . . . there was abundant evidence of skill and plenty of easily-recognized eloquence.[44]

The *Herald* barely reviewed the performance, only briefly mentioning who performed each role.

The following year, in January 1879, Kellogg again sang *Aida* in New York. During the year between these two performances, Kellogg performed the role widely in Europe. The 1879 performance elicited more dissension among critics. Though improvements were acknowledged, vocal and dramatic deficiencies were also noted. Even the *Post*, typically positive regarding Kellogg's performances, found fault with this portrayal of Aida:

> Miss Kellogg is a hard worker, and hard work seldom goes for nothing. The improvements in her *Aida*, which may be mentioned, concern her dramatic points rather than anything else. The music of "Aida" is too heavy and too exhausting, physically, for her to give full significance to it with her beautiful, but not powerful voice. Neither can we say that Miss Kellogg fulfils our conception of what *Aida* should be; but it is asking a great deal of a light soprano whose most congenial parts are found in "Faust" and "Martha," to assume *Aida* at all, and that Miss Kellogg should do it even acceptably well is matter for some surprise and congratulation.[45]

Certainly, the role of Aida requires a far more dramatic voice than that for Marguerite, Lucia, or Martha. The *Tribune* reiterated the inappropriateness of this repertoire for Kellogg:

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[44] *New York Times*, 19 March 1878
[45] *New York Post*, 7 January 1879.

> Miss Kellogg, we believe, holds *Aida* as one of her favorite roles. We cannot concur in her judgment . . . . She is best in the delicate music of the two duets of the third Act, least impressive in the passionate dramatic passages which do not lie within the effective range of her voice.[46]

The *Herald* criticized Kellogg's acting skills, but applauded the dramatic power of her voice:

> It had been noised abroad that Miss Kellogg, since her appearance in the part of "Aida" at this house last year, had improved her acting of it until it had become a fine performance. She has certainly thrown herself into the character more determinedly . . . but with the best intentions she has not succeeded to the measure of her expectations. We have better emphasis and more gesture—in fact, too much. It would be ungallant to say that the prima donna gives us grimaces instead of frowns, but we may say that a habit of literally "showing her teeth" when Aida feels revengeful would be well modified. It is within the knowledge of a good many that the sex frequently mistake petulance for passion, but in art it is unacceptable. As to Miss Kellogg's singing of the part it is, as before, beautifully true, her clear soprano ringing high above the tempest of sound in the weightier scenes.[47]

These reviews elucidate how subjective and whimsical perceptions of performance may be. To the critics of the *Post* and the *Tribune*, Kellogg was a weak Aida vocally, but a much-improved Aida dramatically. The *Herald* found the reverse to be true: Her voice was powerful enough to be heard over the dense orchestration, but her acting was overblown and inappropriate.

It is interesting that the *Herald* critic saw fit to critique female emotion in general in his review of Kellogg. He seems to have suggested that women are not truly capable of knowing or expressing their own emotions—that they turn passion into "petulance." Such stereotyping was typical during the Victorian era. It may be that the critic noticed the same lack of passion in Kellogg that others

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[46] *Tribune*, 7 January 1879.
[47] *New York Herald*, 7 January 1879.

noted. Yet rather than citing this as a personal fault of Kellogg, he broadened the critique to include all women.

Shortly after this run of *Aida*, Kellogg decided to return to Europe where, aside from a few sporadic appearances in the United States, she concluded her career. In honor of her departure, a testimonial benefit concert was arranged for her on 20 April 1879. An announcement read: "Among the women of America few can lay claim to greater distinction than Miss Clara Louise Kellogg. It is therefore particularly fitting that on the eve of her departure for Europe, for an absence of several years, she should be offered a farewell benefit concert by the ladies of New York. At Steinway Hall, on the 19th of this month, a grand concert will be given, and one week later Miss Kellogg will sail."[48]

The concert was a great success and a wonderful send-off for Kellogg. Significantly, Kellogg returned to the lighter repertoire for which she was best loved. On the concert she sang a scene from Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Marguerite's "Ah! je ris de me voir" from *Faust*, and the American composer Frederick Clay's "She Wandered Down the Mountain Side." The *Times*, the *Post*, and the *Herald* all presented glowing reviews of this performance, perhaps because the repertoire was ideally suited to Kellogg's voice and dramatic capabilities, perhaps because the event was set up as a tribute and the critics wanted to remain positive and reverential; they seized the opportunity to assess Kellogg's assets and applaud a long and fruitful career. The *Times* declared:

> Miss Clara Louise Kellogg is undoubtedly one of the most popular artists now before the public. Whenever she appears on the stage, her audiences always know that she will give her best effort and that she will not seek to evade the responsibility she has assumed. It is this

[48] *New York Post*, 11 April 1879.

> artistic conscientiousness which is one of the secrets of her success. No one ever fears, when he sees Miss Kellogg's name on the programme that the performance will fail to satisfy the requirements of exacting criticism. Now that the lady is to leave us for a prolonged season in Europe, the musical public will perhaps realize the value of this blessing as it takes its flight.[49]

The *Post* concurred:

> The testimonial concert given to Miss Kellogg at Steinway Hall on Saturday evening was one of the most successful ever given in this city. A very large audience, composed of many of the most distinguished people of the city, filled the hall, and the performances were marked by an animation and interest that is seldom witnessed.[50]

The *Herald* reiterated these sentiments, referring to "the warm greeting with which hundreds of her friends and admirers testified their appreciation of one who has done so much at home and abroad to illustrate her beautiful art."[51]

Over the course of her career, Kellogg's reception by the New York press was fairly consistent. Certainly individual critics' opinions differed regarding specific performances and roles, but overall themes in the reception of Kellogg may be discerned. As evidenced by her choice of repertoire in her farewell concert, Kellogg was most successful in roles for light lyric soprano, such as Marguerite in *Faust*, Agathe in *Der Freischütz*, and Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. As one critic noted, the "mad scene" in *Lucia* gave "prominence to the finest characteristics of her style."[52] Enumerated repeatedly in the New York press, these qualities included agility, elegance, faultless execution, and crystal pureness of tone.

On the other hand, critics often linked the vocal precision and clarity that Kellogg displayed in *fiorituri* passages with a lack of passion and dramatic

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[49] *New York Times*, 20 April 1879.
[50] *New York Post*, 21 April 1879.
[51] *New York Herald*, 20 April 1879.
[52] *New York Times*, 30 March 1878.

integrity. As the *Herald* critic asserted regarding Kellogg's 1878 Lucia performance, "You are startled into admiration by the impact of wonderful notes on the ear, but the chords of sympathy that need a subtle quality in the tones . . . are silent when she sings. If she had that quality in her voice, it would react upon herself . . . and she would be a fine actress."[53] This dichotomy between Kellogg's vocal skill and her acting was reflected in the New York press throughout her career.

Overall, the reviews of Kellogg reveal her success in defying society's strictures and making a name for herself as singer, manager, and independent woman. It is significant that reviews frequently refer to Kellogg's hard work. Such drive and dedication may have been her chief assets. For though Kellogg was clearly intelligent and naturally talented, it was her perseverance and willingness to work hard that enabled her even to attempt roles such as Aida. This determination was evident before Kellogg's career even commenced. She had a goal and was willing to risk the loss of friends and society's derision in order to reach it. She was also willing to sacrifice a social life and any association with men. As she states, "While it is true that there is nothing that should be chosen less lightly than an artistic career, it is also true that, having chosen it, there is nothing too great to be given up for it."[54] Appropriately, upon her retirement in 1887 at the age of forty-five, Kellogg was ready to marry. Carl Strakosch, nephew of her manager, Maurice Strakosch, (1825-87) became her husband, as well as her first romantic relationship made known to the public. The couple

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[53] *New York Herald,* 30 March 1878.
[54] Kellogg, 371.

remained together until Kellogg died of cancer in 1916, shortly after their silver wedding anniversary.

As she had predicted, Kellogg, rather than scandalizing her friends, made them proud to know her. In so doing, she paved the way for future generations of American women singers. As she stated late in life, "In our big, young country of America there are the possibilities of many another singer greater than I have been. I shall be proud and grateful if the story of my high ambitions, hard work, and kindly treatment should chance to encourage one of these."[55] Certainly Kellogg was successful in attaining these goals. She not only inspired younger singers as a model, she also promoted and financially assisted young singers of exceptional talent. One of the most famous recipients of Kellogg's generosity was the soprano Emma Abbott, whose career is discussed in chapter two.

[55] Kellogg, 371.

Chapter 2

Emma Abbott

Chronology

1850	Born in Chicago, Illinois
1853	Family moves to Peoria, Illinois
1865	Moves to Chicago to study voice
1867	Sings for Kellogg in Toledo, Ohio
ca. 1868	Moves to New York City
1871	Professional debut at benefit concert in New York City
1872	Begins studies in Milan and Paris
1876	Covent Garden debut as Maria in *La fille du régiment* in Italian
ca. 1876	Marries Eugene Wetherell
1877	Returns to New York
1877	Debut at Academy of Music, New York as Amina in *La sonnambula*
1878	Forms Emma Abbott English Grand Opera Company
1880s	Tours America with company
1891	Dies of pneumonia while on tour in Salt Lake City, Utah

In contrast to her mentor, Emma Abbott never received critical acclaim for her vocal merits. Like Kellogg she was a hard worker, and, in fact, her earnings eventually exceeded those of Kellogg. Yet Abbott was never well received in New York. Rather, her success was largely confined to the American heartland, and even within this heartland, Abbott's appeal stemmed largely from factors other than her voice. With a unique blend of morality, piety, and business savvy Abbott won the hearts of the American people and won herself a fortune.

Beginnings

Abbott was born into a working-class Chicago family on 9 December 1850. In 1858 her family moved to Peoria where her father, a singing teacher and violinist, became choir director of the First Baptist Church. Like Kellogg, Abbott was always drawn to singing. However, unlike her mentor, whose family moved to New York in order to further her musical training, Abbott, from a young age, was required to assist her family financially:

> An early newspaper states that Emma made her stage debut in 1859, playing her guitar and singing before an audience of coal miners in a small school house at Edwards, Illinois. The little building was crowded, but windows and doors were left open so that many listening from the outside could hear her sweet voice as she sang heart stirring tunes of the day. No admission was charged, but appreciative miners took up a substantial collection.[1]

This early focus on financial success fueled Abbott's passion for singing. Unlike Kellogg, who refers to her early singing as merely social and denies early visions of fame and fortune, Abbott had a career in mind from the start. This contrast in vision between the two prima donnas may partially be attributed to class

[1] Oakford, Aaron Wilson. *The Peoria Story*, Peoria 1949-1957, 18 volumes.

differences. As a woman from a poor family, Abbott knew that she would have to work to earn a living. Kellogg, on the other hand, was middle class; she, thus, not only did not have to work, she was expected not to. As Alice Kessler-Harris asserts: [in *Women Have Always Worked*,] "[t]he relatively leisured lives of [urban middle class women] contrasted sharply with the daily existence of those who had to earn their own livings. . . . [The domestic code] established proper roles for women that regulated the behavior of the well off and toward which poor and immigrant women could only aspire."[2] Most women of Abbott's class would have worked in factories or domestic service. Abbott recognized that she had talents that could release her from this life of servitude. She poured all her energy and talent into a career that would lead to fame, fortune, and personal satisfaction.

Abbott met Kellogg when the latter performed in Illinois with her English opera troupe in 1867. In her memoirs, Clara Louise Kellogg recalled her first impressions of the sixteen-year-old Emma: "She was poorly clad. She owned no warm coat, no rubbers, no proper clothing of any sort. I questioned her and she told me a pathetic tale of privation and struggle. Of course I, who had been so protected, was horrified by all this."[3] Kellogg encouraged the young soprano, aiding her financially and introducing her to important people in the world of opera. With Kellogg's assistance, Abbott made her way to New York where she began studies with the famous voice teacher Achille Errani (1823-96) (who also taught Kellogg). Abbott sang at Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church in Brooklyn and Edwin H. Chapin's Church of the Divine Paternity. Although she performed in small venues during this period, it was agreed that she needed

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[2] Alice Kessler-Harris. *Women Have Always Worked* (New York: Feminist Press, 1981), 61-2.
[3] Kellogg, 272

European finishing. In 1872 Dr. Chapin's congregation raised the necessary $10,000 to send their singer to Europe, where she studied and performed.

Europe

The five years Abbott spent in Europe (1872-77) were formative ones: she established herself as a singer, she made significant life choices, and she acquired a value system that would serve her for the rest of her career. Abbott faced the same challenges as Kellogg and the other prima donnas of her day: she had to convince a patriarchal and prudish American society that it was acceptable for a woman not only to work in a man's world, but to perform on the stage. Abbott's responses to these challenges were uniquely her own; her professional success was contingent upon a number of non-musical factors. Her morality, nationalism, marriage, and business savvy defined her career, enabling her to succeed and flourish.

Abbott first grappled with many of these issues on her European sojourn. Her morals were challenged in London when James Henry (Colonel) Mapleson (1830-1901) contracted her to sing Violetta in *La traviata* at Drury Lane during the 1876-77 season. Abbott refused to sing the role, claiming that the heroine was "a wanton who was wicked simply because she loved sin."[4] Her contract was summarily canceled.

From the outset of her career Abbott presented herself to the public as a proper moral woman. One wonders how much of this presentation arose from Abbott's true nature and how much was calculated to further her quest for fame

[4] John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 264.

and fortune. Was it only a sense of morality that prevented Abbott from attempting the role of Violetta early in her career? Or could it also have been that Abbott knew her own vocal and dramatic limitations, didn't want to admit them, and, thus, chose to shield herself beneath the banner of morality? Certainly, such an excuse would have been not only tolerated by nineteenth-century Americans, but applauded.

Even this early in her career, Abbott may have recognized that such a moral stance could fuel her career. As her close friend and biographer Sadie Martin explains in *The Life and Professional Career of Emma Abbott the Queen of Song*, "This refusal to sing a role she considered immoral cost the singer a three years' contract she had signed, but . . . it proved a bit of valuable advertising, and won for her hundreds of friends who did not hesitate to commend in the highest terms a young woman who, in the beginning of her career, voluntarily sacrificed money rather than principle."[5]

By claiming she was too proper for the role of Violetta, Abbott apparently retained her respectability, while protecting herself from the critics' likely condemnation of her vocal and dramatic inadequacies. Abbott performed the role later in her career, but only when it had been altered in a manner that appeased her moralistic public, and only when she knew her fame and fortune were secure. Mention of these later performances of *La traviata* is scarce. It appears that the role never suited Abbott vocally, nor did it gel with her established persona.

Abbott's patriotism was another integral component in her career package; this, too, was first revealed in Europe. In Milan, Abbott appeared as Amina in

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[5] Sadie E. Martin, *The Life and Professional Career of Emma Abbott the Queen of Song* (Minneapolis: L. Kimball Printing Company, 1891), 43.

Bellini's *La sonnambula*. As she did throughout her career, Abbott interpolated a popular American tune, in this case the American Civil War hymn "Nearer my God to Thee," into Bellini's work. Though the hymn was primarily linked with the Confederacy, both the South and the North used it to incite the American public to rally behind their troops. The hymn, thus, was strongly associated with American patriotism. Most Europeans were less than thrilled by Abbott's Americanism. When she sang the hymn, "the Milanesians were greatly incensed, hissed, and uttered violent threats."[6] Abbott responded by interpolating Italian songs, which appeared to placate her audience.

Abbott's stance on marriage also colored and shaped her career. Unlike Kellogg, who refused all social contact with men throughout her career, Abbott's marriage became key to her business success and the womanly persona that she cultivated. In 1875, while singing in London, Abbott married a New York druggist, Eugene Wetherell. It appears that she initially worried that public knowledge of such a union would thwart her career aspirations. As Martin recalls, "Their marriage was kept a secret from all but the Abbott household for nearly two years."[7] However, the marriage ultimately enhanced Abbott's reputation in the United States. Abbott would present herself to the American public as a happily married woman who prized fidelity and a wife's proper role.

New York

In 1877 Abbott returned to the United States, where her reputation had preceded her. The members of the Church of the Divine Paternity, who had

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[6] Martin, 34.
[7] Martin, 37.

provided the money for Abbott's European stint, had closely followed her doings abroad. Regarding Abbott's refusal to perform Violetta, *The New York Times* noted that "the members of Dr. Chapin's church were delighted with the stand taken by their protégé and with the pluck she had manifested. They were not so well pleased, however, when they learned that Miss Abbott had married Eugene Wetherell, and they congregated in something akin to an indignation meeting. All this discussion of the question, however, was an excellent advertisement for Emma Abbott, and when she soon afterward returned to America . . . there was great curiosity to see her."[8] The congregation apparently feared that marriage would derail Abbott's career plans: they need not have worried.

Abbott's first public appearance in New York was in a benefit concert for the Chapin Home for the Aged at Chickering Hall on February 7. The performance was much anticipated: "Great curiosity has been manifested in this city to hear Miss Abbott sing," the *New York Post* reported, "and there is little doubt that the hall will be crowded on the occasion of her first concert."[9] Abbott performed arias from Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* (likely "Robert, toi que j'aime" from Act 4) and Bellini's *La sonnambula* (likely "Ah! Se una volta sola...Ah, non credea...Ah, non giunge" from the final scene). She also sang a duet from Donizetti's *La fille du regiment* in Italian with the tenor Ferranti, which may well have been the popular love duet from Act I, "A voti cosi ardente."

New York critics seized upon the opportunity to evaluate the young singer in her official New York debut. The *Times* reviewed Abbott positively, focusing on the "rags to riches" story of her development. The review begins by describing

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[8] *New York Times*, 5 January 1891.
[9] *New York Post*, 6 February 1877.

the "young American songstress whose name and misfortunes have been before the public for many months."[10] Such words foreshadow the significant role that nationalism would play in Abbott's career. In alluding to Abbott's misfortunes, and how far she had come to be able to appear on a New York stage, The *Times* tapped into a theme bound to win sympathy among audience members: the American dream fulfilled. Naturally, a positive review followed:

> It is pleasant to record that [her performance] was at all points successful. . . . . Miss Abbott has apparently studied considerably, and to good purpose. She is most fortunate, in the first place, for she has a voice of rare beauty and power, which has been made as equal throughout its compass as it is strong and pure. The full tone is of perfect roundness and penetrative force, and the *mezza voce* is of delicious quality. A possession of this sort is half the battle a prima donna has to wage and hence Miss Abbott goes forth remarkably well equipped.[11]

The *Times* allows that Abbott's style was not flawless, that her Italian was a bit nasal and her phrasing occasionally flawed. However these faults were attributed to her youth and inexperience. It was believed that Abbott's true talents would be revealed when she appeared on the operatic stage; then, Abbott would prove that she was "unquestionably the most promising American songstress that [had] trod the stage these 10 years."[12]

The *Herald* also gave Abbott's debut a largely positive review, focusing primarily on the audience's reception of the singer: "The lady had no reason to complain of her welcome. 'Charming,' 'delightful,' 'exquisite,' 'wonderful,' were the criticisms heard in every direction. They were brief, but to the point."[13] Such a reception helped Abbott to overcome a "slight nervousness" and to regain her

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[10] *New York Times*, 8 February 1877.
[11] *New York Times*, 8 February 1877.
[12] *New York Times*, 8 February 1877.
[13] *New York Herald*, 8 February 1877.

"perfect self-possession." This critic, like that from the *Times,* believed the true test of Abbott's vocal and dramatic abilities would occur on the opera stage:

> She has a fine voice, powerful and piercing in the upper tones, but in the lower register deficient both in quality and strength. Its compass, however, is large, and it has far more of flexibility than is usual. We cannot say that it is a sympathetic voice, there is something harsh and steel like in its tones which the intelligence of the artist conceals. There are some singers who in pathetic music seem to have tears in their voices, but the sorrows of Amina and Isabella seem more simulated than expressed by Miss Abbott, but still we know that it would be unjust to expect the same passion on the concert stage that we find on the operatic. It will not be till Miss Abbott appears in opera that her merits can be accurately measured.[14]

The *Post* did not believe Abbott should appear in opera at all. Like the *Times,* the *Post* agreed that "Miss Abbott possesses a voice of considerable compass, in which her highest notes are much the best. They are both strong and brilliant."[15] However, unlike the *Times*, the *Post* deemed Abbott's middle and low register "neither strong nor of noticeably good quality."[16] The overall effect of Abbott's voice and acting led the critic to conclude that the conert stage was the only venue for Abbott:

> She has a natural and winning manner, and possesses to an unusual degree those qualities which go to make a popular concert singer; and, in a word, this is what we believe Miss Abbott to be destined to become. But she has neither the strength, nor the presence, nor the power of voice to become an opera singer of the first rank. She would indeed be pleasing, but she would not, so far as we can judge, be great. She can immediately take her place in the foremost rank of concert singers. She will never take that rank as an opera singer.[17]

These early reviews of Abbott and her voice raise issues that remained throughout her career. How much of her appeal was due to the Horatio Alger

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[14] *New York Herald,* 8 February 1877.
[15] *New York Post* 8, February 1877.
[16] *New York Post* 8, February 1877.
[17] *New York Post*,8 February 1877.

story of her life? Did she have a voice and technique that could rival those of European opera singers? Was her voice expressive? Could she ever hope to rank as a leading diva? Such questions likely circulated in Abbott's head much as they did in the press.

Two weeks after the Chickering Hall concert, Abbott made her New York opera debut. On 23 February 1877 Abbott performed the role of Marie in Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* in Italian at the Academy of Music. The performance drew "an uncommonly large audience, . . . and the reception of the débutante indicated that the spectators were as well disposed as they were numerous."[18] The *Times* again found Abbott's performance solid:

> The impression of her performance yesterday was at least as good as that of her earlier efforts in the concert room, for she acts with a great deal of ease and vivacity, and the applause was just as generous. . . . Her *Marie* must be set down as a personation of rare sprightliness in a dramatic sense, and as quite as impressive vocally as the opportunities accorded the prima donna allowed it to be.[19]

The reviewer mentions that Abbott interpolated "I dreamed that I dwelt" and "Home Sweet Home" into Act II of the opera, but reception of these additions is not noted.

The critic's only negative comments involved Abbott's choice of repertoire. While *La fille du régiment* was still entertaining to French audiences, the critic asserted, the Italian version, with its "heavy recitatives," was laborious for the listener. Further, the character of Marie did not give Abbott ample room to display her talents.

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[18] *New York Times*, 24 February 1877.
[19] *New York Times*, 24 February 1877.

The *Herald* reiterated many of its comments from Abbott's Chickering Hall concert; again, the critic found her to be a capable singer and an audience pleaser:

> Miss Abbott achieved a genuine success. She was applauded throughout the opera and frequently recalled. Flowers, of course, were given to her in profusion. . . . . The opinion we advanced of Miss Abbott when she first sang in Chickering Hall is justified by her performance in "The Daughter of the Regiment." Her voice is neither great, nor strong, nor sympathetic; but it has brilliancy, true intonation, flexibility, and has been well trained.[20]

Unlike the *Times*, the *Herald* found her repertoire choice ideal:

> In such *rôles* as Maria [her voice] is heard to its best advantage. The familiar gay music of Donizetti is like a gliding stream on which her sweet voice floats swan-like on the surface. She should not sing *La Traviata* for musical as well as moral reasons. The passionate, intense declamation of Verdi would overweigh her power.[21]

It is interesting that the critic alluded to "moral reasons" that should prevent Abbott from performing the role of Violetta. Numerous young sopranos of the day, including Kellogg, retained pure reputations, while successfully performing this role. Was there, perhaps, something in Abbott's demeanor that led the critic to conclude that Violetta was too immoral a role for her? Or was he simply recalling her previous refusal to perform the role in London? The critic does not explain his "moral reasons," but, rather, the vocal and dramatic ones—that the passion and intensity of Verdi would overweigh Abbott's power. One wonders if the critic is using "moral reasons" as an excuse in order to avoid focusing solely on Abbott's deficiencies as a performer, much as Abbott herself may have done. For the *Post* critic, Abbott's operatic debut lent credence to his previous assertion that she was not suited to opera:

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[20] *New York Herald* 24 February 1877.
[21] *New York Herald* 24 February 1877.

> When Miss Emma Abbott appeared in concert here a few weeks ago we expressed the opinion that her place musically was to be in the front rank of concert singers, because she possesses the qualifications of a concert singer, but, as an opera singer, we ventured to say that she would not succeed, because she has neither the voice, the presence, nor the stamina to win success in that more exacting sphere. . . . Last evening the opportunity came to judge Miss Abbott as an operatic artist, and it is with sincere regret that we are compelled candidly to say that our previous judgment is confirmed. We do not propose to criticise specifically the performance of this gifted young singer as *Marie* in "La Figlia del Reggemento [sic]," because criticism cannot change the conditions which impede her success, since nature is principally to blame; and it seems to be sufficient that our readers should know that Miss Abbott's lack of success last evening was due to these general causes. Much of her singing was careful and sweet. But her performance was, on the whole, weak and unsatisfactory, both musically and dramatically.[22]

Abbott's early performances in New York City thus received mixed reviews. While the *Times* viewed her positively, the *Herald* noted her lack of vocal strength and expression, and the *Post* deemed her unsuitable for an operatic career. These latter two reviews appear to be more typical of Abbott's critical reception in New York. Despite such criticism, her New York engagement was a financial success, and she performed for sold-out houses. As Abbott asserted, "Either the New Yorkers possessed horrid taste, and were unable to distinguish between good work and poor, or else the critics were unduly harsh and unjust in their reviews of my singing. Now which was it?"[23]

English Opera

Whatever the answer to that question may have been, since it appeared unlikely that New York would ever fall at her feet, Abbott reevaluated her career path. As Kellogg had done when she found her career in jeopardy, Abbott turned to opera in English. In June 1877 it was announced that she would be the prima

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[22] *New York Post*, 2 February 1877.
[23] Martin, 25.

donna of C. D. Hess's English Opera Company starting in 1878.[24] Soon thereafter, Abbott bought Hess out and formed the Emma Abbott English Grand Opera Company with Eugene Wetherell, her husband, as business manager.

Like her predecessor and mentor Kellogg, Abbott oversaw most aspects of production, including repertoire selection, staging, scenery, props, and costuming. Martin catalogued her friend's efforts:

> When all the costumes and properties . . . were decided upon, and work thereon had begun, the songbird settled down to a most rigid course of study and drill under the best musical and dramatic teachers of the old world. Thus while others of her profession were recreating at Long Branch, Saratoga, and Newport, or making a pleasure tour of the continent, Emma Abbott might always have been found absorbed in planning for her next season's appearance, or engaged in the most enthusiastic and earnest study.[25]

In addition to Abbott, Marie Stone, Zelda Seguin, Pauline Maurel, Tom Karl, William Castle, Walter Temple, A. E. Stoddard, W. H. McDonald, Ellis Ryse, and Arthur Seguin performed with her troupe. The company performed a standard repertoire that included English versions of Donizetti's *La fille du régiment*, Gounod's *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette,* Flotow's *Martha*, Michael William Balfe's (1808-70) *The Bohemian Girl,* and the French composer Victor Massé's (1822-84) *Paul et Virginie.*

Opera in English would capitalize on Abbott's strengths; she could lure the American public with her nationalistic pride and her Puritanical morality and tap into a vision of the American dream fulfilled. Further, working alongside her husband, she would reveal her strong faith in marriage and fidelity. From the start, her touring company was successful in many regions of the United States.

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[24] *New York Post*, 17 June 1878.
[25] Martin, 44.

As Martin recalls, "The pleasing voice and manners of the operatic star, and her sympathetic nature seemed at once to attract towards her the hearts of the public. She was from the first very popular, and after the first year there were many who watched, waited and longed for her annual appearance, as for that of an old friend."[26]

Abbott's reception by New York critics continued to be more reserved. In September 1879, her company opened a two-week season at the Grand Opera House with the New York premiere of the English version (translated by Caryl Florio) of *Paul et Virginie.* Massé's opera, with a libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré after the story of the same name by Bernardin St. Pierre, relates the story of two young lovers, torn apart by fate, and finally by the drowning of the heroine. The work was premiered at the Théâtre Lyrique, Paris in 1876, with the famous Victor Capoul (1839-1924)--who attended Abbott's English premiere--appearing as Paul and the lesser-known soprano Cécile Ritter as Virginie. The opera was largely unknown to Americans before Abbott's performance, though subsequently other sopranos, such as Kellogg, would add the work to their repertoire.

Reception of Abbott's English version of this successful French opera was mixed. The *Herald* critic, most positive of the critics in his assessment of the performance, focused on Abbott's repertoire choices and reception rather than on her as a performer:

> Miss Abbott received such an enthusiastic welcome as must certainly show her that her efforts to popularize English opera, or opera in English, whichever we choose to call it, in this country, are thoroughly

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[26] Martin, 43.

> appreciated. She certainly has won for herself one of the most flattering positions in the limited realm of popular operatic favorites.[27]

The critic praises Abbott for making significant operatic works more accessible to an American audience, thanking "Miss Abbott for giving us the opportunity of hearing a new operatic work of such acknowledged merit as 'Paul and Virginia.' It is to be hoped that she will continue in her ambitious endeavors to interpret to the American public, in their own language, the masterpieces of the great modern composers."[28]

The *Post*, on the other hand, found Abbott's English rendition of *Paul and Virginia* far from satisfactory: "As to the work itself, it would be unfair to judge it by last night's performance; the composer . . . would not have owned this English counterfeit of his . . . work. . . . The 'Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company's' version of 'Paul and Virginia' is a dreary mass of dramatic and musical twaddle, which is tiresome when it is not ridiculous."[29] The critic likewise attacked Abbott's performance, acknowledging Zelda Seguin's "remarkable brilliancy," in contrast to the "surrounding incompetency:"

> All the other singers [aside from Seguin] betrayed disheartening crudences, both in singing and in acting; and we can except none of them from this seemingly harsh verdict—not even Miss Abbott, whom the programs set forth as 'America's most successful and popular *prima donna assolute*, whose triumphant career of the past season stands unparalleled in the history of English opera in America.' . . . Miss Abbott has learned something of singing and acting since she last appeared in opera here, but what she has learned, compared to what she has yet to learn before she can take rank with first-class singers, is as the mole-hill to the mountain. She uses her cold, weak voice with but little intelligence and with the taste of an automaton. Her acting is worse than her singing—conveying to the spectator nothing whatever of the sweet beauty and tenderness of de St. Pierre's story. If a line can be "phrased" so as to sound awkwardly Miss Abbott

[27] *New York Herald*, 9 September 1879.
[28] *New York Herald*, 9 September 1879.
[29] *New York Post*, 9 September 1879.

more attention, albeit far from effusive. The *Herald* addressed the deficiencies of the former:

> New York has seen so many brilliant presentations of this opera that a company must have many very positive merits to sustain comparison. . . . Mignon is not by any means a great part, but it has dramatic opportunities which are not to be made the most of by Miss Abbott's methods. It has anger, jealousy, joy and pathos which Miss Abbott expresses in a variety of well intentioned tones and gestures, producing effects more surprising than impressive. . . . The house, however, felt kindly to the American girl and did not dwell critically on the misfortunes of the score.[34]

This dichotomy between the critic's view of Abbott's performance and the audience's reception is reiterated by the *Times* critic: "During the progress of the opera the same faults were observable as have been already noticed in other representations by this troupe. Miss Abbott was rewarded with considerable applause, though her performance, from an artistic point of view, did not entitle her to special praise."[35]

Abbott's audience appeal, despite her shortcomings, is explored in greater detail in the *Herald*'s review of *Faust*. In the opera, Abbott starred as Marguerite, a role, we may recall, made famous by Kellogg:

> Miss Abbott appeared last evening in the Fifth Avenue Theatre as Margaret, in Gounod's *Faust*, before a large audience. Miss Abbott did not satisfy the more critical part of her audience, failing to realize the quiet grace and poetic sentiment of Goethe's heroine, and failing as well to follow the absolute rules of vocal art in singing Gounod's music; but her earnestness, her confidence, her determination to make a success of the evening, and the fact that she was an American girl singing in the language of her people, carried the popular vote against the critics . . . and Miss Abbott's Margaret was frequently and heartily applauded by the greater portion of the audience.[36]

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[34] *New York Herald*, 28 January 1881.
[35] *New York Times*, 28 January 1881.
[36] *New York Herald*, 27 January 1881.

Abbott's audience appears more interested in her character than her talents. Her determination, nationality, and plucky spirit have earned her the popular vote. The critic continues:

> Miss Abbott's career in English opera has been a successful one financially, while artistically she has been as unwisely praised as she has been severely commented on by those who have heard her. There are those who can see no faults in her—largely because of her nationality—and declare her 'the American representative of song,' an opinion which is utterly ridiculous. This wrapping of ourselves in the American flag and shouting ourselves hoarse over our own people because they are our own is utter nonsense. . . . Miss Abbott's being an American girl has nothing to do with the question as to whether she can sing correctly, and when we look at it from an artistic point of view she should not be less severely judged because she happens to have been born in our own country.[37]

Abbott's successful career was powered by factors that reached beyond her vocal, dramatic, and artistic talent. As indicated in the above reviews, critics did not find Abbott improving and developing as her career progressed. Yet, her popular appeal and fortune grew exponentially. Despite the critics' reviews, operagoers in New York appreciated Abbott's efforts. Outside of New York, however, Abbott's appeal surpassed that of any other prima donna. As George C. Odell (1866-1949) asserts in his *Annals of the New York Stage*, Emma Abbott was "never long resident in any of our theatres, though very popular in what we today call the hinterland of the American stage."[38]

Abbott evidently recognized that she could not compete on the New York stage. Whether the public liked her or not, the critics would never perceive her on the level of Adelina Patti, Christine Nilsson, and the other great divas of her day. Though her pitch was good, her voice appears to have been weak, particularly in

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[37] *New York Herald,* 27 January 1881.
[38] George C. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1927-49). Vol. XI, 50.

the lower register, and lacking in warmth and range of emotional expression. Abbott's insistence on presenting herself as American--interpolating hymns into operas, proclaiming her morality and patriotism on stage and off--likely also proved embarrassing to New York critics and the more refined audience members. As Odell states, the prima donna "was long popular in regions less richly blest"[39] than New York. Abbott presented a combination of middle-class morality and business savvy that won over America's small towns. New York sophisticates sneered at such marketing tactics, and were galled by what they viewed as Abbott's crude popularization of an art form that represented European culture at its highest and most pure.[40]

Abbott capitalized on what the American people wanted to see, and she gained adoring audiences in hundreds of towns and cities outside of New York. According to Martin, she "had the honor of 'opening' or dedicating more opera houses than had any other singer in the world. And it was an honor, won by the extreme generosity, kindness, endeavor to please, and sterling womanhood, for which she had gained a reputation."[41] Abbott also was extremely successful financially. As Kellogg asserts, though "she was reported to have made five times more than she actually did . . . her earnings were considerable, for she would sacrifice much—except the character—to money getting. Indeed, she was a very fine business woman."[42]

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[39] Odell, vol. X, 304.
[40] Davis, 74.
[41] Martin, 97.
[42] Kellogg, 274.

The All-American Girl

Just what was it about Abbott that so pleased the American people, and how did Abbott proceed in cultivating a persona that led to fame and fortune? We are reminded of the character Abbott established in Europe: a devoutly patriotic, moral woman with business savvy who believed marriage would enrich both her personal life and her public persona. It is interesting to examine each of these essential ingredients in turn.

Abbott's strong nationalism likely arose out of her own heritage: she was a daughter of the American heartland, a home-grown diva, who presented opera for Americans in ways they could appreciate.[43] Thus, audiences, even critics, outside of New York could relate to Abbott. She was one of their own, not a haughty, inaccessible diva from Europe or New York. In addition to her heritage, Abbott's performance of opera in English also welcomed the less erudite members of the American public. Like Kellogg and other divas before her, Abbott introduced opera to millions of Americans who could not come to New York to hear an opera. In producing opera in the American vernacular, she fueled the nationalist sentiment surrounding her persona.

However, Abbott carried her patriotism farther than did most other divas. As in her Milan performance of *La sonnambula*, Abbott added American songs and hymns to her performances. This habit of interpolating sentimental ditties into every opera she sang was likely one reason why East Coast critics never took Abbott seriously as an artist. Yet, in the West and South, audiences were charmed by Abbott's patriotic additions. As an article in the *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* read, Abbott "was a singer of the people. If the critics condemned the

[43] Dizikes, 264.

interpolation of "Nearer My God to Thee," into *La sonnambula*, the "Lullaby Song" into *The Mikado*, and "The Last Rose of Summer" into *Crispino* [e le Comare], the people did not; and it was to the hearts and tastes of the people she appealed."[44]

Abbott's morality was strongly tied in with her nationalism, as evidenced by the religious American songs she chose to interpolate. From the time of her refusal to sing Violetta in London, Abbott continually placed her religious and moral sentiments before the public. A story is often told of Abbott attending a small-town Presbyterian Church service while on tour. The pastor, hearing that Abbott's troupe was in town, presented a sermon on "sinful amusements, and bore down with especial emphasis upon the stage and the opera in particular."[45] Seated unnoticed in the back of the church, Abbott rose and addressed the pastor:

> I cannot refrain from expressing my indignation that a minister ordained to preach Christ should so far forget his mission, and so far depart from truth as to make the assertions to which I have listened, regarding the profession of which I am, I trust, an honored member. There are among us men and women who have sinned, as there are men in every calling of life who have disgraced their profession. I have known men who had taken upon themselves the vows of the clergy, and been ordained to that holy calling, who have fallen as low as man can fall, and I have known, I know to-day, men and women in my own profession against whom no breath of suspicion or slander has been cast. There are Jenny Lind, Christine Nilsson, Clara Louise Kellogg, Miss Cary, Pauline l'Allemana, Charlotte Cushman, Parepa Rosa, Mary Anderson, Madame Rhea, Mrs. W. J. Florence, Georgie Drew, and Emma Abbott, if you will. Find a stain on the character of one of these, or of scores of others I might name, before you denounce a profession which can be followed with hearts as pure, and loves irreproachable as may your own.[46]

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[44] Martin, 154.
[45] Martin, 71.
[46] Martin, 72.

Abbott's sense of morality was linked with a philanthropic sensibility. Martin reported that "she never forgot a friend, and gave away vast sums of money,"[47] and that in her will she gave eleven churches of different faiths $5,000 dollars each.[48]

Critics have asserted that Abbott's strong morality may have hampered her career. As Ottenberg declares, "Abbott never completely rejected, or outgrew, her rather restrictive sense of morality to move into the larger cultural world that opera could have offered."[49] However, it appears likely that this morality enabled Abbott's successful career; it fused her with the middle-class American heartland.

Abbott's choice to marry, and indeed the marriage itself, drew her further into the heart of the American people. As Martin recalled, Abbott and Eugene Wetherell were not only successful business partners, they presented the public with a vision of marital bliss:

> Of the domestic life of Mr. and Mrs. Wetherell much may be said that is tender and true. To him, she was more than Abbott the star, who was to bring him wealth and fame, she was the ideal woman and wife, loving, kind and faithful. . . . He often said, 'But for her hopefulness and faith in the future, I would more than once have lost heart during our first years out. . . . To his wife, Eugene Wetherell was not as are the husbands of many stage stars, merely a manager who saw in their union the way to a fortune; but the one of all the world that her heart as well as her reason chose; he was king of her little world, and the love and admiration he lavished upon her for so many years, was repaid by fidelity in word, thought and deed. . . . In hours of adversity she cheered him, his prosperity she joyfully shared, and stood ever ready to second his efforts in any enterprise he might undertake.[50]

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[47] Martin, 153.
[48] Martin, 154.
[49] Ottenberg, 123.
[50] Martin, 83.

Interestingly, though Abbott was the one having a major career and making the money, many of the qualities mentioned above reflect traditional views on men's and women's roles in nineteenth-century America. Abbott is described as the "ideal woman and wife—loving and faithful," Wetherell as the "king of her world," whom she assisted in *his* enterprises. In truth, Wetherell assisted Abbott with her career, but the average American of the period would likely be quite uncomfortable with the notion of a financially dependent husband who fostered his wife's career. Again, Abbott tapped into nineteenth-century American ideology and capitalized on it. She excelled as a performer while presenting a vision to her American public of domestic bliss, womanly virtue, and traditional gender roles.

Abbott's support of marriage went beyond her own; she encouraged her company members to marry, stating "I know what a safe-guard a husband is to a woman in my profession, when that husband is one's constant companion. Where both belong to one company, their tastes, their aims and expectations are one; and they are as a rule more contented. . . . I should prefer, however, that none of my company marry outside the profession, because under such conditions both are discontented and annulment of contract is apt to occur."[51] Thus, Abbott believed marriage should occur only if it facilitated one's career; the business of performance must always come first.

This feel for business further assisted Abbott's career in America's heartland. Because of her background, Abbott knew how to put on a show that working-class men and women would appreciate; she provided the type of diverting entertainment that hardworking Americans who lived outside the big

[51] Martin, 51.

cities wanted. Her popularity was reflected at the box office, where the net profit was sometimes as much as $10,000 a week.[52]

One tactic Abbott used to lure and retain her public was the practice of interpolation. Abbott also employed another highly successful publicity stunt: the "Abbott kiss." As Davis notes, the kiss apparently referred to a moment when "the beauteous prima donna was actually kissed onstage, . . . first introduced into Massé's *Paul et Virginie* and later incorporated into Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, and virtually every other opera in the repertory."[53] However, always careful to maintain her appearance as a moral and decent woman, "Miss Abbott always said that she really did not kiss the tenor in this scene, but only created an optical illusion by placing her closed lips just below his lips and holding them there."[54] Whether real or feigned, Americans thronged to the box office to see their native sweetheart perform the "Abbott kiss."

Abbott's business savvy served her well. As her contemporary Henry C. Lahee recalled in *Famous Singers of To-Day and Yesterday*, the diva eventually made "a fortune estimated at half a million dollars."[55] In addition to her knack for public relations, Abbott was a wise investor. The *Herald* described her as "a woman of uncommon shrewdness and a very successful speculator. She studied the market very closely and whenever she saw the opportunity for a good investment she at once telegraphed her agent to make it for her."[56] Such talents were not typical for women of the time, but Abbott managed to amass a fortune

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[52] Davis, 74.
[53] Davis, 74.
[54] *New York Times*, 5 January 1891.
[55] Henry C.Lahee, *Famous Singers of To-day and Yesterday* (Boston: Page, 1898), 198.
[56] *New York Herald*, 6 January 1891.

without jeopardizing her womanly reputation. It appears likely that Abbott's philanthropy enabled the American public to retain its view of Abbott as a moral, upright woman despite her business savvy and wealth.

Mourning

On 5 January 1891 Abbott, only 40 years old, died from pneumonia in Salt Lake City while on tour with her company. Ever the businesswoman and crowd-pleaser, Abbott performed until she collapsed. On December 30, when her temperature was 104 degrees, Abbott was to perform the role of Elvira in Verdi's *Ernani*. She "insisted that she was well enough to finish her part, and, in spite of the protest of her medical adviser, stepped to the footlights."[57] The demands of the performance drained Abbott of her strength, and she spent the final days of her life in bed.

Virtually every major newspaper in the country printed an obituary for the popular American singer. Those in the *Times*, *Post*, and *Herald* were substantial in length, and appeared in the main section, rather than the arts section. After reviewing Abbott's childhood and facts of her career, the obituaries listed her repertoire and her wealth. Little discussion of Abbott's talents or reception was included, the only mention being the *Post*'s comparison of the diva's success in New York with that in America's heartland. The critic states, "Her popularity throughout the country, especially in the West, was great, but in New York she was unable to hold her own against artists of the first rank. She was essentially a popular singer."[58]

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[57] *New York Times*, 6 January 1891.
[58] *New York Post*, 5 January 1891.

Appropriately, heartland newspapers sang the praises of their prima donna more exuberantly. An obituary written on the same day in the *Little Rock Gazette* reiterates America's love for Abbott:

> For thirteen years hers has been the best-known and most successful of American opera companies. She contended against professional rivals who spoke her name only with sneers, and for years she received more blows than caresses from the critics, who declared she could not sing, while others on whom their praises were showered, rose, strutted their brief hour on the stage, and disappeared from view. Emma Abbott was the people's prima donna. She sang to and for the masses. She came up from the people, the poor, humble but honest of earth. Her broad, generous sympathies were with them, and she never forgot the dark days, when to her a plain, simple fare and a humble home were luxuries. She could well defy the critics, who abused her because it was the fashion, for she was the singer of the millions who never grew weary in applauding 'Honest Little Emma,' in whose conscientious efforts to please and succeed they recognized the progress of an American woman, who appealed to them as a sister and friend.[59]

Within the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century, Abbott carved out her own niche. Based largely on persona and drive rather than vocal talent, Abbott's popular appeal was unparalleled for an American prima donna. Abbott placed before the eyes of Americans one of their own. She seduced them with morality, patriotism, and traditional views on marriage. Whether Abbott really believed all that she espoused, or whether she employed her feminine, moralistic persona as a mask for her ambition remains ambiguous. Whichever the case, the American public rallied behind their native songstress. Martin summarizes this sentiment, "Perhaps she might not have been a success outside the United States. It matters little whether she would or not. She was nothing if not

[59] Martin, 150.

American. She never aspired to be anything but what she was . . . a womanly woman."[60]

[60] Martin, 170.

Chapter 3

Minnie Hauk

Chronology

1851	Born in New York City
Late 1850s	Family moves to Sumner, Kansas
ca. 1860	Family moves to New Orleans, LA
1862	Family returns to New York City
1866	Debut at Academy of Music, Brooklyn as Amina in *La sonnambula*
1867	Debut at Academy of Music, New York as Prascovia in *L'Étoile du Nord*
1869	Goes to Europe
1869-78	Performs in Paris, London, The Hague, Moscow, Vienna, Berlin, and Budapest
1876	Meets Wagner and attends first complete performance of *Ring* cycle at Bayreuth
1878	Returns to New York to perform *Carmen* at the Academy of Music, New York
1881	Marries Baron von Hesse-Wartegg
1880s	Performs primarily in America, touring extensively
1891	Performs *Carmen* at the Metropolitan Opera as final New York appearance
1896	Retires to Triebschen, Switzerland with husband
1912	New York newspapers erroneously report Hauk's death
1925	Publishes memoirs
1929	Dies in Triebschen

Like Abbott and Kellogg, Minnie Hauk carved out her own distinct path to acceptance, success, and fame. For Hauk these factors included her persona as an American savage turned cultured European, her views on and relations with men, her intelligence and temperament, and her emphasis on dramatic integrity over beautiful singing. Each of these qualities defined Hauk, and, as we will see, they coalesced in Hauk's most successful role, that of the title character in Bizet's *Carmen*.

Beginnings

Perhaps of all of the famous American singers of the period, Hauk became the most thoroughly Europeanized: she eventually married an Austrian baron, and her permanent residence for the last third of her life was in Triebschen, Switzerland. Yet Hauk's childhood and background were distinctly American. Born Amalia Mignon Hauck in New York City in 1851 to a father of German descent and an American mother, Hauk's early childhood was spent on the Kansas prairies (mid-late 1850s) and in war-torn New Orleans (1860-62). She came from a well-educated family, though sources conflict as to whether her father was an instructor of mathematics[1] or a carpenter,[2] and she spent much of her time as a child playing with American Indians ("dark-skinned savages,"[3] as she later referred to them) who lived near her home. Alarmed when they discovered how their daughter was spending her free time, Hauk's parents sent

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[1] Oscar Thompson, *The American Singer* (New York: Dial Press, 1937), 95.
[2] Peter G. Davis, *The American Opera Singer: The Lives and Adventures of America's Great Singers in Opera and Concert from 1825 to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 88.
[3] Minnie Hauk, *Memories of a Singer* (London: Philpot, 1925), 15.

her to a seminary school from which she was expelled for producing secret theatricals and being "an incorrigible scamp."[4]

At nine years old, Hauk began singing lessons; shortly thereafter she performed Bellini's "Casta diva" from *Norma* and florid arias from Auber's *Les Diamants de la Couroune* and Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra* at a charity concert for wounded soldiers in the New Orleans Grand Opera House. With her training in mind, the Haucks returned to New York City in 1862, where Hauk, like Kellogg and Abbott, began vocal studies with Errani. In contrast to the Abbott family, the Haucks were of a social and economic class that enabled them to assist their daughter in her musical endeavors. In turn, Hauk's vocal prowess and eagerness to show it off helped open the doors of New York society to the Haucks.[5]

Her precocity and talent, guided by Max Maretzek's (1821-97) management, led to her public debut as Amina in *La sonnambula* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on 13 October 1866; Hauk was sixteen years old. The debut was intended for the Academy of Music in Manhattan, but a fire caused the production to be moved. Hauk followed this appearance with a quick succession of performances, mostly under the management of Maretzek, including the title roles in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833), Norina in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* (1843), the Zerlinas of Daniel-François-Esprit Auber's *Fra Diavolo* (1830) and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Prascovia in *L'Étoile du nord*, and Marguerite in *Faust*. All of these operas were performed in Italian, as was the American premiere of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* in 1867, in which Hauk sang the role of the heroine. For all of these early performances Hauk retained

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[4] Davis, 89.
[5] Davis, 90.

her full birth name: Amalia Mignon Hauck. Soon she was to drop the "c" in Hauck, as well as her first name.

The American Savage

Like other American prima donnas of her day, Hauk's next step was a trip to Europe. In 1868, at the age of 18, she ventured abroad, accompanied by her mother, and financed by the music publisher Gustav Schirmer. Unlike Abbott, Hauk flourished in Europe. Initially this success was likely due to the clever marketing of her teacher and manager, Maurice Strakosch. American singers were still considered exotic by European opera audiences in the 1860s. Strakosch capitalized on Hauk's childhood on the American prairie and her associations with American Indians through advance publicity to the European press that exaggerated her unusual upbringing. In Parisian newspapers of 1869, Hauk was described as "a kind of half-civilized Pocahontas, who, back in the wilds of her homeland, was accustomed to riding a mustang bareback and being worshipped by the continent's aborigines as a 'dusky daughter of the sun'."[6] Such marketing tactics were extremely successful. Hauk remained abroad until 1878, performing at all of the major opera houses in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, and Russia.

Minnie, Mother, and Men

Hauk's success abroad was accompanied by increasing attention from men. Reminiscent of Kellogg, Hauk's mother allowed her no contact with the

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[6] Davis, 87

other sex. Hauk recalls in her autobiography, "As to suitors, they were to be found in every city, but nowhere as numerous as in Moscow. Suitors of every kind, old and young, of all classes, down to bashful students, who admired me from a distance, parading under my windows . . . . I rarely got even as much as a glimpse of all these unwelcome beaux, for they were invariably waylaid by Mamma and quickly dispatched."[7] This shunning of male attention extended onto the stage, itself. Like Kellogg's mother, Mrs. Hauk would not permit stage kisses. The result was Hauk being nicknamed "the American Icicle."

As with Kellogg and Abbott, one wonders if this sense of prudishness added to Hauk's mystique and, thus, her popularity. For such a dichotomy between Hauk's supposed savage nature and her coquettish disdain of male attention must have been intriguing and alluring for operatic audiences. Further, her refusal to let men get in the way of her career-- "I never thought of such a thing as matrimony. I was . . . impervious to all offers of marriage, which came in endless numbers,"[8]--may have gained her respect as a businesswoman, much as it did for Kellogg. In 1881 Hauk accepted the proposal of the Baron Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg[9] (1851-1918). By this time, her career was well established, and she did not need to concern herself so much with society's whims or dictates. Further, in marrying a European baron, Hauk solidified her European persona. She never, however, disengaged her performing career from her mother. When her mother died in 1896, Hauk immediately retired with her husband to a villa in Triebschen, Switzerland.

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[7] Hauk, 67.
[8] Hauk, 102.
[9] An Austrian nobleman. He travelled around the world several times, including trips to Serbia, the Balkans, Palestine, South America, North America, Korea, and Japan. He wrote books about his trips, several of which were bestsellers.

The Singing Hawk

Dubbed "the Singing Hawk" by the press because of her drive and temperament, Hauk likely also gained popularity because of her antics. As Thompson asserts, "She slapped faces before or behind the curtain, dictated what operas she should sing and who should sing with her, spoke her mind about conductors, stage manners, tenors, and sisterly sopranos."[10] While Hauk's colleagues likely dreaded working with the prima donna, such behavior certainly increased her fame. Kellogg recalled the diva's temperament:

> Minnie Hauk was very pushing and took advantage of everything to forward and help herself. She never had the least apprehension about the outcome of anything in which she was engaged and, in this, she was extremely fortunate, for most persons cursed with the artistic temperament are too sensitive to feel confident.[11]

This combination of drive and self-absorption led to numerous scuffles with colleagues, the first being with Kellogg herself. In the 1866 production of Meyerbeer's *L'étoile du nord*, in which the young Hauk sang Prascovia to Kellogg's Catherine, a skirmish occurred regarding a bouquet of flowers. Kellogg insisted that whenever she sang this role a shy man in the audience tossed her a bouquet of the same flowers. After this performance, however, Kellogg recalled, the 16-year-old Hauk swept all of the flowers from the stage, including "in her general haul my own special unmistakable bouquet! I recognised it, saw her take it, but, as there was no card, had the greatest difficulty in getting it away from her. I did, though, in the end."[12]

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[10] Thompson, 93.
[11] Kellogg, 103.
[12] Kellogg, 103.

Such clashes with colleagues continued abroad, and came to a head in Russia. Hauk believed that her youth and American heritage was causing her to be victimized by her colleagues, in particular by the leading soprano, Désirée Artôt (1835-1907). During a performance of *Don Giovanni*, Artôt's husband, the baritone Mariano Padilla y Ramos (1842-1906), jerked Hauk's hand at the end of their Act I duet, "La ci darem la mano." Hauk, certain that the baritone was trying to cause her high note to crack, turned and slapped him on the face. The audience was thrilled and gave both singers ovations.

Hauk's diva antics continued when she returned to America. She and both Henry Mapleson, Jr. and Maurice Strakosch constantly squabbled over roles and salaries. Newspapers of the period were full of items recounting these sagas. "Miss Minnie Hauk has expressed . . .her firm intention of severing her connection with the Mapleson Opera Company,"[13] the New York Post announced on 4 February 1879. Two days later the squabble was updated. "Matters between Miss Hauk and Mr. Mapleson have, it is said, been satisfactorily arranged."[14] Strakosch too had his share of trouble with Hauk. In 1882 the Post proclaimed: "By her desertion Mr. Strakosch has been left in an unenviable position at Montreal. The prima donna refused to sing three hours before the house opened the second night, and after the seats were sold out."[15]

In addition to her clashes with management, Hauk continued to fight with her colleagues. One of her most celebrated quarrels was known as "the Great Dressing-Room disturbance," in which she refused to appear on stage because a rival singer had the dressing room that she wanted. *Le nozze di Figaro* was

[13] *New York Post*, 4 February 1879.
[14] *New York Post*, 6 February 1879.
[15] *New York Post*, 6 December 1882.

Hauk appears to have had no such problem. Perhaps in emphasizing her acting, Hauk clearly delineated the line between herself and her character.

Further, while certain members of the press had deemed Violetta "inappropriate" for Abbott, no such sentiment was expressed about Hauk. In fact, her appearance as Violetta was highly praised. As the critic from the *New York Herald* asserted:

> The chief interest naturally attached to the appearance of Mlle. Minnie Hauk, the prima donna of the occasion, first, because she returns to her American home after many years of absence, during which she has scored many successes as a vocalist, and secondly, because an original interpretation of the part of Violetta in some particulars was expected at her hands. . . . She has a clear, ringing, resonant, soprano voice, full of many delicious notes that linger pleasantly in the ear, but they are not all equal. There were times during the evening when her execution was apparently faultless, and again phrases in which . . . she failed to compare favorably with some of her predecessors.[18]

Thus, though receiving a strong welcome from her native country, Hauk's voice was found inferior to those of other recent sopranos. Not so her acting abilities. The critic continued: "In dramatic action she was generally excellent, and showed the results of careful study with her European masters."[19]

Although noting the "fulness [sic] and strength" of Hauk's voice, The *Tribune* critic likewise devoted much of his review to Hauk's acting abilities.

> In the character of *Violetta* she has an opportunity to display some of the most telling qualities of her voice, and some of the best points in her free and impassioned acting. It is for the death scene, of course, that the prima donna always reserves herself, and Miss Hauk made this scene impressive, and as little unnatural as such a product of poetic nightmare ever can be made.[20]

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[18] *New York Herald*, 17 October 1878.
[19] *New York Herald*, 17 October 1878.
[20] *New York Tribune*, 17 October 1878.

The *New York Times* reiterated these sentiments, asserting, "She is an artist of the highest rank, with dramatic power that should place Miss Hauk at once among the leading actresses of the world."[21]

Shortly after the *La traviata* performance, Hauk performed as soprano soloist in the Oratorio Society of New York's production of Händel's *Messiah*. It was bold for Hauk to attempt success in this foreign arena: opera singers and concert singers of this period rarely crossed the line into each other's venues. Reviews suggest that such a move was not advantageous for Hauk. Hauk was a singing actress: the beauty and stylistic accuracy of her singing were not her chief merits. The *Times* critic asserted:

> It was natural that the chief interest in the performance of this quartet should centre in Miss Hauk, for the others have been heard before, and there was no doubt as to what their singing would be. It was certainly courageous in the young lady to undertake such a work, for to do it well she must prove herself to be an artist of uncommon versatility. Oratorio singers . . . are made and not born. That Miss Hauk was not up to the highest standard is not to be wondered at. The very qualities that make her so excellent in her own line of operatic characters prevent her from achieving a success in such a role as the solo soprano part of *The Messiah* . The serious character of the music, which demands the matured powers of a practiced artist thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the composition and without a suggestion of the consciousness of the actress, does not find an interpreter in Miss Hauk. She exerted herself faithfully and was in excellent voice . . . but it cannot be recorded of her that she added to her laurels. In the aria "I know that my redeemer liveth" she was most disappointing in her phrasing and vocalization, but it would be expecting too much to demand of her a perfect performance of such a test of the singer's art.[22]

Thus, in terms of pure vocalism, Hauk falls short of her peers. It is in the dramatic realm of opera that she is able to shine.

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[21] *New York Times*, 17 October 1878.
[22] *New York Times*, 29 December 1878.

The *Post* critic viewed her performance in a somewhat more positive light, though he still emphasized Hauk's chief talent as an operatic actress:

> Very naturally the interest . . . centred in Miss Minnie Hauk's singing of the soprano solo numbers. Within the limitations imposed by her essentially operatic education she did remarkably well. If she had succeeded in checking her tendency toward redundant embellishments—entirely in Miss Hauk's style and not in Handel's—as thoroughly as she suppressed her evident longing to throw off the restraints of the concert room, and to indulge in a stage swing . . . she would have done better.[23]

The *Tribune* critic reiterated these sentiments, while further clarifying the distinction between operatic and concert singers:

> Hauk has won so much distinction on the operatic stage that she might well be chosen to add lustre to the concert-room. The methods of the opera and the oratorio, however, differ so widely that it is almost unheard of for a singer who passes her life in the practice of the one to achieve sudden distinction in the other. . . . The reason is not far to seek. In the opera there is a continual striving for effect; the actress is necessarily on the alert, not so much to interpret character and emotion—because in many of the most popular operas the character is a perfect blank, and the emotion indicated by the text is radically inconsistent with the sentiment of the music—but to "make points," to exhibit a fine voice, to give emphasis to a musical embellishment, and gracefully round a melodious period. In the oratorio all the arts of the spectacle ought to be forgotten. . . . .There were phrases in all [Hauk's] solos, where she was theatric, exaggerating the emphasis, or disturbing the rhythm for the sake of more striking expression.[24]

Subsequent concert appearances for Hauk were few and appear to have been barely acknowledged by the press. Of an 1881 concert the *Post* states, "Minnie Hauk will be soloist at the first Saalfield concert next Saturday at Steinway Hall. .

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[23] *New York Post*, 30 December 1878.
[24] *New York Tribune*, 30 December 1878.

. . As there will be two cornet solos, the *Evening Post* will not pay any further attention to the concert."[25]

Hauk knew that her strengths did not lie on the concert stage. She was an actress and wanted to exploit her talents to the fullest. Ever resourceful, Hauk found a way to incorporate drama in her concerts. In discussing the 1882 season of concert touring in America, Hauk recalled:

> I was rather fond of singing occasionally in concerts and musical festivals, and I have appeared frequently in oratorio, both in England and America. But, nevertheless, I dreaded the monotony of a prolonged concert season. With this in mind, the thought came to me that my programme could be varied and made much more interesting if I gave one act from some grand opera, in full costume and with appropriate stage setting, in the second part of my programme. . . . Thus, I became the originator of operatic concerts.[26]

Above all else Hauk wanted drama.

Carmen

It may be said that Hauk's career ideals, talents, and personality traits culminated in her portrayal of Bizet's *Carmen* (1875). In terms of Hauk's performance ideals, no role of the period could offer her more in the way of drama or reveal her acting talents more profoundly. Carmen required Hauk to fight, dance, seduce, love, hate, and die. An actress could not ask for much more. Further, aspects of Carmen's character likely resonated with the American singer. For Hauk had spent time running on the prairies with Indians in her childhood and subsequently been labeled wild and exotic in Europe. These experiences may well have led Hauk to be attracted to the physicality and

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[25] *New York Post*, 5 December 1881.
[26] Hauk, 189.

"savageness" of Carmen. Unlike most divas of the period, she could draw on her own past to personify the gypsy woman.

Her reputation as an "American icicle," though certainly different from Carmen, also contained certain parallels. For both Hauk and Carmen attracted men and then ignored them. While Hauk may or may not have seduced men intentionally, she probably knew that she aroused and angered the men who courted her. Further, she developed a mystique as the unapproachable, yet wild woman; Carmen's power was fueled by this dichotomy. Hauk's argumentative, self-centered, and fiery temperament also found its counterpart in Carmen. What other character on the operatic stage at this time stabs one of her colleagues as Carmen does at the opening of the opera? It is no wonder that Hauk embraced this role like no other. It is also not surprising that Hauk was the reigning Carmen in America and abroad for much of her career.

Once Hauk had become acquainted with Bizet's opera, she knew the title role was meant for her. She recalls her thwarted desires while singing with the Berlin Opera in 1876:

> I had made up my mind to sing *Carmen*, and the *Intendant-General* would not hear of it. I had told him repeatedly that I would seize the very first opportunity of leaving the Royal Opera, in order that I might realize my ambition to sing *Carmen*. In this, however, he did not take me seriously, for he never thought it possible that I would sacrifice my brilliant engagement simply in order to gratify my longing to sing the heroine of Bizet's opera. But he was mistaken.[27]

In 1878 Hauk's dream was realized when the Brussels Opera hired her to appear in a French-language production of *Carmen*. Not having sung in French before, Hauk coached the language for weeks with a private instructor, she polished her

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[27] Hauk, 144.

acting, and she designed her costumes.[28] The production opened in February 1878, and as Hauk recalled, "my success was instantaneous. There was . . . nothing but unstinted praise of my singing, my acting, my costumes."[29]

Shortly thereafter, Hauk negotiated with Mapleson to present *Carmen* at Her Majesty's Theatre, London. This time the opera was produced in Italian, still the operatic *lingua franca* of the British. Mapleson allowed Hauk to choose her supporting cast: Italo Campanini (1845-96) as Don José, Giuseppe del Pente (1841-1900) as Escamillo, and Alwina Valleria (1848-1925) (a fellow American) as Micaela. All of these singers initially refused the roles, insisting that they were not worthy of their talents. Eventually, however, Mapleson convinced them to participate, and the opera was produced on 22 June 1878. Though Hauk noticed the initial shock of the audience--"It takes the average Englishman some time to understand and digest anything that is new to him or out of the common,"[30]—she watched the audience's hesitation change to a warmly enthusiastic "tumultuous scene"[31] of waved handkerchiefs and curtain calls.

Such *Carmen* fever was no less contagious in America. On 23 October 1878 Mapleson led the same cast in a production of the opera at the Academy of Music, New York. Although there is some debate as to whether this was the first performance of *Carmen* in America (Kellogg claims she performed the role before Hauk), according to critics the performances by Hauk and the Mapleson troupe introduced the work to New York. In not so modest terms Hauk described the work's impact:

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[28] It was common practice during this time for singers to provide their own costumes.
[29] Hauk, 149.
[30] Hauk, 163.
[31] Hauk, 163.

> In New York, as in London, a new era of operatic art dawned with our advent, and the Mapleson opera performances, old Italian and modern French on alternate nights, opened the eyes of the New Yorkers as to the merits of good acting combined with good singing.[32]

In Hauk's eyes she had found the perfect vehicle for her talents.

As may be expected for this period, the press was largely disdainful of the character of Carmen, a gypsy woman who toys with men and love, and who appears licentious and full of rage. As John Dwight asserted of the October performance, "the plot was very disturbing to the audience."[33] The *New York Times* critic agreed:

> As to Carmen, she is a young person in whom we can take no interest. If, in real life, a woman, having flirted with an officer, although of inferior rank, and won his love, and having been greatly served by him, prefers a bullfighter or the like, it is her affair. . . . But when in a drama, opera, novel, or other like work this goes on before our eyes it very seriously affects the interest we take in that young woman as a heroine.[34]

Interestingly, though critics panned the character of Carmen, the woman who brought her to life received no condemnation for portraying her. As previously discussed, Hauk, unlike Abbott, never feared that her respectability would be equated with that of her characters. She viewed acting as an art, and this is how the critics perceived her. The same critic addressed Hauk's performance:

> Mlle. Minnie Hauk's *Carmen* was a very clever, indeed quite an admirable performance, full of character conceived well from instinct; equally well wrought by art. The *paysanne* character of her pretty face, its saucy . . . expression fit her well for the impersonation of the half wild, self willed, reckless, rebellious, impassioned and withal thoroughly vulgar gypsy girl. Miss Hauk's acting was so fine last night . . . that we could not but think if nature had bestowed upon her a better voice we should have had a great prima donna. . . . As to the music of "Carmen," she sang that quite as well as it needs to be sung and

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[32] Hauk, 172.
[33] *Dwight's Journal of Music*, 23 November 1878.
[34] *New York Times*, 24 October 1878.

> better. There is not a passage in her part that is worthy of special effort on the part of a vocalist of reputation.[35]

The *Post* critic largely mirrors this sentiment (though he appears to find the music more satisfactory), and further elucidates the dichotomy between the depravity of Carmen and the talents of Hauk. He describes Carmen's music as "weird, savage, and extremely beautiful in an illegitimate, unlawful sort of way"[36] and the character, herself, as "depraved."[37] For Hauk, however, he had nothing but praise:

> To Minnie Hauk . . . belong the laurels. Not a phrase was ill-sung; there was not a gesture but was replete with bewitching grace. The line which separates the delicate exaggeration necessary to true acting was not once broken through. . . . Upon the score of the music she failed once or twice in catching the pitch and in bringing out the full meaning of the phrase, owing to the frequent recurrence of notes too low for her voice.[38]

The final sentence of this review raises an interesting point: Carmen is not a soprano role. Much of the opera sits in the lower part of the female voice—ideal for a mezzo-soprano, or even a contralto. Hauk was not daunted by this dichotomy between the vocal demands of Carmen and her own vocal gifts. For as we have seen, Hauk viewed the role of Carmen as the ultimate realization of her acting abilities. In the character of Carmen, Hauk, thus, accomplished her goal: she triumphed as an actress in a role where vocal brilliancy and beauty were deemed secondary considerations.

Subsequent performances of *Carmen* with Hauk in the title role elicited similar reactions from the critics. Most agreed that "Miss Hauk . . . created the

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[35] *New York Times*, 24 October 1878.
[36] *New York Post*, 24 October 1878.
[37] *New York Post*, 24 October 1878.
[38] *New York Post*, 24 October 1878.

rôle of Carmen, and in this, as in the other parts assumed by her, shows her great power of adapting herself to any character in which she may be cast. In the words of the London *Times* 'She does not play *Carmen*; she is *Carmen.*'"[39]

Over the next several years, critics generally agreed that Hauk reigned as the supreme Carmen. Of a performance at the Academy of Music in New York on 7 November 1881, the *Times* reiterated that "Miss Hauk is admitted to be the best representative of Carmen that has ever appeared on the stage."[40] Similarly, of her portrayal on 12 December 1882, the *Post* critic asserts that Hauk "both from a vocal and dramatic point of view [is] by far the most perfect *Carmen* ever heard here. Her merits and peculiarities are so well known that it would be superfluous to point them out again."[41]

Reviews of Hauk generally praised her acting over her singing. However, Hauk's less-than-beautiful voice may have been a further asset in her success as Carmen:

"Hauk had a mocking, strident and vicious tone that distinguished Hauk's angry Carmen from all others,"[42] Thompson remarked. Likewise, the noted critic Herman Klein (1856-1934) claimed that though her voice was not remarkable for its sweetness, "somehow [its] rather thin, penetrating timbre sounded just right in a character whose music called for expression of heartless sensuality, caprice, cruelty, and fatalistic defiance."[43] Hauk craftily turned a deficiency to her advantage; she made *Carmen* her own.

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[39] *New York Post*, 9 November 1878.
[40] *New York Times*, 8 November 1881.
[41] *New York Post*, 12 November 1882.
[42] Thompson, 107.
[43] Thompson, 117.

Rival Carmens

Other prima donnas performing the role of Carmen at this time had difficulty extricating themselves from Hauk's shadow. Every soprano believed that a review of her performance would invariably lead to comparison with Hauk. They were not mistaken. In 1879 Selina Dolaro (1849-89) attempted Carmen at the Academy. The critics were not thrilled: "With the best wishes in the world not to bear down unduly upon a new singer, who, beside being overweighted with a part made famous by the very perfect and spirited creation of Miss Hauk, there is but little to be said in Mme. Dolaro's favor."[44] The *Post* critic continues, "As an actress Mme. Dolaro makes nothing of a part in which both Minnie Hauk and Miss Kellogg found opportunities for fascinating picturesqueness."[45]

However, Kellogg couldn't shake the Hauk cloud either. She apparently chose to imitate Hauk in her portrayal of Carmen. The *Post* critic was not impressed:

> The copy of Miss Minnie Hauk's *Carmen* is close, and yet falls far short of the grace and naturalness of Miss Hauk's marvelous picture of the dissolute but bewitching Gypsy. The swing which Miss Hauk effects throughout "Carmen" is grace itself, and is decidedly not a swagger. Miss Kellogg swaggers through certain parts of the work and the effect is commonplace. The swing and dash of Minnie Hauk's *Carmen* are part of *Carmen*'s strong physical health and animal spirits; these must find expression in singing and dancing. There is no suggestion of loose limbs in her swing, and there is more or less of it in Miss Kellogg's. In fact so far as Miss Kellogg copies Miss Hauk she is weak and ineffective.[46]

Again we are reminded of the parallel between Hauk's childhood on the prairie and "savage" characterization in Europe and her unique portrayal of Carmen.

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[44] *New York Post*, 28 October 1879.
[45] *New York Post*, 28 October 1879.
[46] *New York Post*, 18 January 1879.

Kellogg, raised in upper class New York, would not have grown up in a culture that permitted her to develop the physicality and freedom of spirit that came so naturally to Hauk.

Gradually, however, the excitement aroused by Hauk's Carmen began to fade, and in their comparisons, critics began to find Hauk inferior in her portrayal of Carmen. One critic preferred the "more womanly *Carmen*"[47] of Anna de Belocca, and several critics viewed Pauline Lucca (1841-1908) as the ultimate Carmen. As one put it, "This rôle admits of various interpretation, but of all we have heard Lucca's is by far the best. . . . Minnie Hauk is also an excellent *Carmen*, but the odds are against her, because her personal appearance does not favor her to such a degree as it does Lucca. Her vivacity seems slightly forced, and her mimic expression too conscious."[48]

Later Roles

Such unfavorable reviews, combined with her own desire to avoid being labeled as a one-character actress, led Hauk to seek dramatic opportunities in other repertoire. In the spring of 1882 she appeared at the Academy of Music as Elsa in Wagner's *Lohengrin* (1850) and as Alice in Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831), both performed in Italian. Unfortunately, Hauk did not regain the spotlight she had had with her early performances of *Carmen*. Reviews of these performances were decidedly mixed. Of her Elsa, the *Times* asserted:

> Miss Hauk's Elsa was not the greatest success this lady has made on the stage. She appeared to be acting the part, and not to be natural, and was constrained, and consequently ineffective. The character, in a word, demands both dramatic and vocal qualities of which Miss

[47] *New York Post*, 26 January 1880.
[48] *New York Post*, 20 October 1881.

> Hauk is not yet the mistress, and consequently, her labored effort fails to excite sympathetic recognition.[49]

The *Tribune* painted a similar bleak picture of Hauk's performance:

> Of Madame Minnie Hauk's performance of *Elsa* it might be said that while it shows a considerable knowledge of the dramatic intentions of the poet-composer . . . it is too inflexible vocally, too opaque, too monotonous in sentiment and feeling. Wagner has given all his heroines a noble ideality, but the *Elsa* of last night reflected little of it.[50]

According to critics, Hauk's acting--in addition to her singing--fell short in this production. Hauk appeared to be losing her hold on New York critics, and possibly her audience.

A review of Adelina Patti as Lucia on the same page of the *Tribune* as the Hauk review underlines Hauk's declining appeal. In contrast to the lukewarm review of Hauk, Patti's performance was deemed "a phenomenal display of a phenomenal voice. . . . Here in dramatic expression, as well as in singing, she was simply perfection."[51]

Reviews of Hauk as Alice further depict Hauk's waning reputation. "Mme. Minnie Hauk's *forte* is not Meyerbeer," [52] the *Post* critic noted. "Like everything that this clever vocalist undertakes, her *Alice* showed careful study, intelligent conception, and conscientious execution. But there was an occasional lack of that spirit and animation which pervades the work of a musical artist when she feels herself in her proper sphere."[53] The *Tribune* and *Herald* critics enumerated her vocal deficits, stating that "the music carried her voice beyond its best compass and called too frequently on her highest register"[54] and bemoaning the

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[49] *New York Times*,14 March 1882.
[50] *New York Tribune*, 14 March 1882.
[51] *New York Tribune*, 14 March 1882.
[52] *New York Post*, 20 April 1882.
[53] *New York Post*, 20 April 1882.
[54] *New York Herald*, 20 April 1882.

"moments of praise-worthy excellence alternating in a tormenting manner with others of very inferior spirit."[55]

Return to Europe

Such reviews may have been further impetus for Hauk to cultivate her career and life abroad. Unlike Kellogg and Abbott who were proud of their American heritage and wished to bring opera to the American people, Hauk was far happier in Europe. As she stated:

> [S]omehow, the longer I remained [in New York], the more my enthusiasm for New York continued to wane. Everybody seemed to be engaged in money-hunting. The men had no interest in anything else. . . . New York appeared to me to be nothing more than a commercialized city."[56]

Though she continued to perform sporadically in America, including one season at the Metropolitan Opera, Europe was where Hauk's heart remained. From 1892 until her mother's death in 1896, Hauk performed exclusively in Europe. Following her mother's death, she and her husband took permanent residence in their elegant villa in Lucerne. An obituary for the prima donna erroneously appeared in New York papers in 1912. Hauk, quite alive at the time, took the opportunity to write an autobiography, thus rectifying information that "was only moderately veracious."[57] Hauk died for real in 1929, poor due to bad investments and alone, likely due to a few too many spats with colleagues.

Despite the sad ending to her life and her less than perfect singing, Hauk's career was one of the most successful of any American singer of the period.

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[55] *New York Tribune*, 20 April 1882.
[56] Hauk, 112.
[57] Hauk, 292.

From the mid-Western plains emerged a diva who sparkled in cities all over the Western world. Like Kellogg and Abbott before her, Hauk was intelligent and shrewd. Hauk knew what she wanted, and she knew how to get it. She cultivated her talents, minimized her weaknesses, and chose the perfect vehicle to present her at her best. It is no wonder the "singing hawk" has been termed "the greatest single inspiration to the American singer that this country had produced."[58]

[58] Thompson, 117.

Chapter 4

Emma Thursby

Chronology

1845	Born in Williamsburgh, New York
1850	Sees Jenny Lind
1857-59	Attends Moravian Seminary in Bethlehem, PA
1860s	Performs in church venues in Brooklyn and New York
1868	Performs first complete oratorio--*Die Schöpfung*--at Lee Avenue Reformed Dutch Church, Brooklyn
1871	Begins singing lessons with Achille Errani
1872-3	Travels to Europe. Begins studies with Francesco Lamperti in Milan
1874	Performs with Theodore Thomas and the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra at the Academy of Music, Brooklyn and with Patrick Gilmore's Twenty-Second Regiment Band at the Bedford Avenue Reformed Church, Brooklyn
1875	Tours America with Gilmore's Band
1875	Begins studies with Erminia Mansfield-Rudersdorff
1878-87	Performs in Europe and North America
1883	Moves to Gramercy Park, New York City
1888-95	Performs in North America
1886	First "Thursby Friday"
1894	Attends Greenacre Congress in Maine
1895	Final large public performance, Chicago, Illinois
1895-1931	Teaches voice lessons
1931	Dies in New York City

Kellogg, Abbott, and Hauk all developed strategies that enabled them to appear on the operatic stage while retaining the respect of society. By contrast, Emma Thursby avoided the conflict between operatic performance and respectable womanhood altogether. From her earliest performances in small churches to her famed concerts in theaters world-wide, Thursby never once donned a costume and portrayed an operatic heroine. Rather, she chose to stand alone as the premiere concert singer of her day.

Thursby's career choice was commended by the puritanical society that challenged the morals of opera singers like Kellogg, Abbott, and Hauk, and she enhanced this appeal by cultivating a persona that meshed perfectly with that expected of a nineteenth-century middle class woman. Religious, family-oriented, kind, and hard-working, Thursby won society with her simple, pure, and innocent values and singing; she met society's terms, while in the process winning both international recognition and substantial wealth.

Thursby never married and, apparently, barely dated. Thursby, like Kellogg, seems to have believed that marriage would not only thwart her career aspirations, it would also sully her innocent reputation. Only twice in Richard McCandless's extensive biography of Thursby, *The Life of Emma Thursby,* does the subject of romance arise.[1] Once a young clergyman on leave from his duties as rector at an American church abroad proposed marriage to Thursby. Very fond of the man, Thursby struggled with her decision, but, in the end, chose not to marry and return with him to Europe.

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[1] Richard McCandless Gipson, *The Life of Emma Thursby: 1845-1931* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1940), 108, 237.

Later in Thursby's career, in 1879, the issue of men and marriage would arise again in the form of a rumor that Thursby was engaged to Henry F. Gillig, the proprietor of the American Exchange in London. In this instance, Thursby's manager at the time, Maurice Strakosch, insisted that Thursby would never marry: "Miss Thursby," he asserted, "will remain wedded to her art."[1] And so she did, in the public's eye, at least, appearing forever pure and virginal.

Thursby's personality was, thus, ideally suited to the field of concert work, and by pursuing such a career, she virtually guaranteed the approbation of society. Other factors, however, likely also contributed to her career choice. One such influence on her decision may well have been her lack of dramatic talent. Throughout her career, New York and Brooklyn critics enumerated recurrent weaknesses in her performances: monotony, deficient dramatic expression, and frigid delivery. Significantly, all of these shortcomings appear to have related to Thursby's theatrical presentation--not to her voice. Though such flaws could have resulted from a lack of dramatic training and experience, it appears likely that such deficiencies were inherent in Thursby and that she realized this. A concert career met all of Thursby's needs; it allowed her to showcase her beautiful voice, retain her morals and values, gain the respect of her society, and protect herself from competition--and likely defeat--in the opera world.

Early Days

Like Abbott, Thursby's ambitions were defined at a young age. However, while Abbott sang to earn money, Thursby was born into a well-off family; she sang to praise God, to bring joy to her family, and to realize the gift that God had

given to her: a beautiful voice. Born in Williamsburgh,[2] New York, in 1845, Emma Cecilia Thursby had two main loves as a child: her family and the Old Bushwick Reformed Church. Her family was a large one, and aunts, uncles, grandparents, parents, and siblings doted on Thursby and instilled in her a love of home and family. Thursby's early experiences at church similarly shaped her. As Gipson suggests: "Whether by fire and brimstone or by picnics and suppers, Emma Thursby early learned a keen awareness of God."[3] The church not only provided Thursby with a social life, it also provided her with her first singing opportunity—that of chorister in the choir. This link between her voice and the worship of God was essential to her childhood and remained so throughout her life.

In addition to the importance of God and family, the Thursby household stressed hard work, generosity, and amiability. Emma Thursby absorbed such values like a sponge: "Indeed, childhood taught her, in terms she could easily understand, that kindness and industry and resourcefulness were the unfailing currency of her heart's desire."[4] Such values became vital to the career of the coloratura soprano.

Jenny Lind's Influence

By the age of five, Emma Thursby had decided to be a professional singer. Integral to this decision was the arrival in New York of the famed "Swedish Nightingale," Jenny Lind, on 1 September 1850. Thursby was thrilled to see Lind, whose voice, she had been told, would "put birds to shame and sinners

[2] The City of Williamsburgh merged with the City of Brooklyn in 1854.
[3] Gipson, 14.
[4] Gipson, 14.

to rout."[5] American families followed the successes of Jenny Lind and aspired to similar careers for their daughters.[6] John Thursby, Emma's father, no less enthralled than the rest of America, instantly sought a proper musical education for his singing daughter. This link between the appearance of Lind and Thursby's musical beginnings was auspicious, for Thursby would later be perceived as Lind's American counterpart, nicknamed, at the height of her career, the "American Nightingale."

Several similarities between the divas aroused such comparison. For one, their voices appear to have been quite similar; "high," "bright," "light," and "bird-like" were adjectives used to describe both singers throughout their careers. Further, the two possessed similar demeanors and moral outlooks, and, thus, made similar career choices. Although Lind performed opera early in her career, before coming to America she renounced it, claiming that it drew her mind away from the Bible.[7] Also like Thursby, Lind possessed a light voice and mild, pious temperament; thus, she may also have feared failure on the operatic stage. Such similarities clearly struck a chord with Thursby, and it is evident that Lind's visit was the impetus for Thursby's musical training: Lind provided the young singer with a powerful role model she would never forget.

Growing Pains

In accordance with his decision to further Thursby's musical education, John Thursby decided in 1857 that his musical daughters were ready for a more challenging education. Emma and her sister Alice were enrolled at the Moravian

[5] Gipson, 17.
[6] Gipson, 17.
[7] Davis, 34.

Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, a school renowned for its solid musical and academic education. In addition to these merits, the Thursby's were attracted to the values the school espoused, believing that Moravian would teach their daughters the necessary manners of young womanhood, and instruct them to be God-respecting and God-fearing. At Moravian Emma Thursby was introduced to the music of Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, and Mendelssohn. She was thrilled with her new school and was counted among one of the most talented musicians Moravian had seen.

Thursby's musical bliss, however, was soon to end. The illness and death of John Thursby in 1859 forced Emma and Alice to leave Moravian Seminary, and the subsequent ten-year financial crisis in the Thursby family and the economic instability of the Civil War years postponed Thursby's musical development. She was forced to work at home, assisting her mother in running a boarding house. Once again, Thursby's life was defined by family, hard work, and the church. While Kellogg and others were boldly moving onto the operatic stage and training in Europe, Thursby remained a soprano little known beyond the confines of the church.

The Church

Though financial stress clearly impeded Thursby's musical career, it becomes apparent during this time that her avoidance of the operatic stage was largely by choice. In addition to her own possible doubts about her suitability to opera, Thursby's religion and the community of her church were also influential. It is further likely that the death of Thursby's father, a deeply religious man,

strengthened her resolve to devote her life to the worship of God through song and to avoid a career of which he would not approve.

Thursby was not imagining the social ramifications inherent in pursuing an operatic career. In 1860s America, as we have seen in the careers of Kellogg, Hauk, and Abbott, a woman performing on the operatic stage risked estrangement and condemnation. For a religious woman such as Thursby, so closely tied to the church, which frowned on any consideration of the opera, the idea of an operatic career must have been terrifying. Much as Kellogg before her operatic debut called her friends to her and told them she would understand if they chose not to speak to her again, Thursby knew that if she made such a move she would be perceived as one who "renounced the Saviour for the Devil,"[8] that to pursue opera would not only mean the destruction of an abstract principle, but also of her own moral fiber.

Thus Thursby, ever hard-working, strove to earn a living in the secure, but modest field of church work. She took her first regular position in a choir at Dr. Porter's Bedford Avenue Reformed Dutch Church in Brooklyn in 1865, where she earned $150 a year. She soon moved to the North Presbyterian Church in New York City where her salary was $400 a year, and in 1867 she moved to Dr. Spear's South Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, where she earned $700 a year, and where her prestige and popularity rapidly grew. To supplement her income she gave private lessons, which enabled her to begin her own voice lessons with Julius Meyer (1830-93), a famed voice teacher and recent German immigrant.

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[8] Gipson, 68.

Gradually Thursby's audience widened. In 1868 she appeared as the soprano soloist in Haydn's *Creation* with the Brooklyn Musical Association, and in 1869 she joined the famous Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, where she was engaged as soprano soloist. Her appearances at Plymouth Church led to associations with other musicians, and to members of the New York upper class. Gradually, Thursby became known in important circles, and she was soon in demand for concert engagements throughout New York State and New Jersey. Concert appearances in 1870, 71, and 72 took her to most of the well-known churches and auditoriums in New York City and Brooklyn, and remuneration ranged from $25 to $100 a concert.

In 1871 Thursby began studies with Errani, who, as noted, also instructed Kellogg, Abbott, and Hauk. With his encouragement, Thursby departed for Italy on 26 June 1872 to begin European studies—believed essential, as we have seen, for all serious American singers at the time. Thursby studied with Francesco Lamperti (1813-92) in Milan and later with Antonio Sangiovanni (1831-92), who was also teaching Abbott. Once again, however, Thursby appears destined to have been drawn back to her home. When a singer colleague also from Brooklyn, Lottie Smith, died suddenly in Milan in April 1873, Thursby, true to her values of family, friends, and loyalty, escorted her friend's body home and remained in Brooklyn with her own family.

An American in America

Unlike many of her contemporaries who built careers in Europe and then won success in America through their European reputations, Emma Thursby, like

Abbott, began the slow and arduous task of building a reputation among Americans, as an American. The development of her career can be traced in the press.

As with Kellogg, Abbott, and Hauk, the press was eager to review Thursby's singing after her brief studies abroad. On 25 November 1873, her hometown press had the opportunity when Thursby gave a concert at Plymouth Church. At this early stage in Thursby's career, the crowds were not thronging to hear her. As the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* critic puts it:

> The attendance at Plymouth Church at the concert complimentary to Miss Thursby, late soprano at that church, but recently returned from Italy, where she has been prosecuting her musical studies, was not very large. But the concert was excellent, even if the audience was small.[9]

The critic continues, noting that "Miss Thursby was received upon her appearance with every demonstration of favor."[10] Thursby's singing is little mentioned save that 'Ah! fors e lui che l'anima--Sempre libera', an aria from Act I of Verdi's *La Traviata,* was too difficult for her and out of her vocal range.

The review from the *Brooklyn Daily Union* is quite similar. The critic comments on the half-filled church and on Thursby's ineffective interpretation of the Verdi aria: "Miss Thursby's voice has improved by cultivation in Europe, but though her effort was creditable, she is not yet equal to the professional interpretation of the 'Ah fors lui' [*sic*], from *Traviata*, which she essayed last night."[11]

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[9] Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 26 November 1873.
[10] Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 26 November 1873.
[11] Brooklyn Daily Union, 26 November 1873.

The *Brooklyn Daily Times* critic was far more effusive, declaring the audience "large" and Thursby in "excellent voice." He continued "'Ah! Fors e lui,' from *Traviata* was splendidly rendered, Miss Thursby's sweet, clear, well-modulated voice proving equal to the most difficult passages."[12] The critic praised Thursby further, noting her "distinct enunciation" in the "simple ballad" she performed as an encore.

Thus, two critics found her operatic selection inappropriate. The third, though more positive regarding Thursby's rendering of the aria, described her in terms that would seem inappropriate for an operatic diva. "Sweet, clear, simple"--such words recall the values instilled in Thursby as a child; we are again reminded of the strong link between Thursby, the kind, pious daughter, and Thursby the singer. This critic appears, at the beginning of Thursby's career, to have grasped the essential allure of her singing: in addition to a fine voice and technique, Thursby embodied kindness, simplicity, and generosity—traits ideal for the concert stage, but perhaps not as suited to the operatic sphere.

Perseverance and Pay-offs

Thursby continued her studies with Errani and was gradually engaged for more concerts in New York and Brooklyn. At this early stage in her career, she arranged most of her own concerts: "In fact I was my own manager—and I fancy a rather good one, for I think I was always successful. Each time I would get more prominent artists, and always made it pay."[13] Such efforts are evident in

[12] Brooklyn Daily Times, 26 November 1873.
[13] Davis, p. 77.

Thursby's concert on 28 May 1874 at Bedford Avenue Reformed Church, for which Thursby was artist, impresario, and ticket seller. Thursby's "prominent artists" for the concert were none other than Patrick Gilmore's Twenty-second Regiment Band, one of the most popular musical groups in the country, and virtually guaranteed to fill the house. As evidenced by the press, the concert was the success that Thursby had wished for.

The *Brooklyn Daily Union* critic believed the concert was "to be numbered among the successful entertainments of the season."[14] The critic praised the fine singing of Thursby in Proch's 'Air and Variations' and Bishop's 'Echo Song,' and concluded that "the programme was unexceptionably well rendered, and Miss Thursby . . . [is] to be complimented upon the excellence of her concert."[15] The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and *Brooklyn Daily Times* critics were equally impressed. As the *Eagle* critic noted, "A numerous assemblage evinced the appreciation in which the talented singer is held generally, likewise by the frequent plaudits bestowed upon her vocalization."[16] The *Times* critic reiterated such sentiments: "Miss Thursby was in fine voice, and sang with her usual spirit and precision in Proch's 'Air and Variations' and Bishop's 'Echo Song.' The applause following these selections was quite enthusiastic, and the lady was obliged to respond to the demand for an encore, giving after the first selection the 'Last Rose of Summer' in a very feeling manner, and after the second, 'Kitty of Coleraine.' Miss Thursby received a fine basket of flowers and an elegant bouquet."[17]

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[14] Brooklyn Daily Union, 29 May 1874
[15] Brooklyn Daily Union, 29 May 1874
[16] Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 29 May 1874.
[17] Brooklyn Daily Times, 29 May 1874.

Thursby's arduous job of making a career for herself in America had begun to pay off. In 1875, Gilmore, impressed by what he had heard at the Bedford Avenue Church, engaged Thursby as soprano soloist for an extended tour of the states with his sixty-five-piece band. Like Kellogg, Hauk, and Abbott, Thursby was chaperoned throughout the tour by either her mother or sister. This tour was fundamental in introducing Thursby to the American public and represents a turning point in her career. The successful tour sharpened her sense of responsibility to her career, and demonstrated that it would no longer be possible for her to spare the time for giving vocal lessons. She was now in great demand for concert appearances and found herself choosing rather than seeking.

Thursby soon began studies with Erminia Mansfield-Rudersdorff (1822-82), a prominent voice teacher who became a major force in Thursby's career. Though torn about leaving her family and friends, Thursby was convinced by Rudersdorff that it was time for her to audition in Europe. Rudersdorff strongly encouraged her to prepare operatic repertoire: "add: some Operas, say *three*: *Sonnambula*, *Mignon*, and either Ophelia or Marguerite. Believe me, my dearest child, you will surely be tempted to go on the stage, and you had better be prepared. Why throw away *thousands*, which you might earn?"[18] Though Thursby followed Rudersdorff's advice regarding Europe, she remained set in her refusal to sing opera.

Rudersdorff was also instrumental in negotiating and drafting a contract offered to Thursby by the impresario and musician, Maurice Strakosch. The

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[18] Gipson, 152.

contract provided that Thursby sing as "Prima Donna Assoluta" in 120 concerts in the United States, Canada, and Europe during the year commencing 1 April 1877. Thursby was to receive $24,000, or $200 for each concert, together with all traveling and hotel expenses for herself and a companion. The contract acknowledged Thursby's religious beliefs, stating that if she were required to sing on Sunday nights, she would sing in oratorios only. The musical world soon learned of the largest concert fee ever offered an American singer, referred to as the "$100,000 Thursby Contract," which reflected the multi-year sum she had been offered.

Though Strakosch and Thursby continued negotiations and Strakosch worked for a time to line up performances for Thursby in Europe, he dissolved the contract several months later. In a letter to Thursby, Strakosch asserted that his efforts in Europe to meet the terms of the contract had failed. He lamented:

> I cannot tell you how sad and aflicted [*sic*] I feel in writing you this letter. Since I left you I have done all my possible [*sic*] in order to prepare your career in Europe and to obtain engagements for you here. But I am very sorry to inform you that I have not succeeded. I have of course spoken to all managers and all interested in Music with all the enthusiasm I feel for your splendid gifts, but the conditions of your engagement with me are of such a nature, that I have not been able to obtain anything like the terms of your engagement with me.[19]

Strakosch concluded his letter by imploring Thursby to release him from the contract and encouraging her to come to Europe to sing without his management.

Rudersdorff explained the breach in contract in two simple words: Adelina Patti. Recently separated from her husband, the Marquis de Caux, Patti had

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[19] Gipson, 169.

renewed contact with her former teacher, Strakosch. Always a shrewd businessman, Strakosch, Rudersdorff declared, could not possibly turn down the opportunity to manage the world-renowned opera diva in order to promote a little-known concert singer.[20] Rudersdorff appears to have been correct: the following winter witnessed Strakosch managing Patti in a successful tour of Italy.[21] Thursby was, once again, left fighting her way to the top by herself.

We can imagine that certain prima donnas, including Abbott and Hauk, would have been outraged by the offensive actions of Strakosch. We can imagine them retaliating through the press or responding with a letter of reproach. Not so with Thursby. Ever wanting to be kind and forgiving, Thursby was anxious to forget the breach of contract. The personal values integral to Thursby's career, thus, once again become evident. While certainly not the norm for operatic divas of her day, such qualities served Thursby the concert singer well. Not only did her public warm to such displays of modesty and self-effacement, as we shall see, Thursby would later rejoin forces with Strakosch, earning fame and fortune under his management.

In the meantime, Thursby's self-promotion continued to pay off, and each of her concerts received more and more notice by the press. On 19 April 1877 Thursby appeared as soprano soloist in the Oratorio Society of New York's performance of Haydn's *Creation* at Steinway Hall, under the direction of the society's German conductor and founder, Leopold Damrosch (1832–85). Reviews of this concert demonstrate Thursby's growing talent and popularity in New York. The *New York Times* critic raved about the performance:

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[20] Gipson, 172.
[21] Gipson, 173.

> Miss Thursby sang with exquisite fidelity, delicate shading and unaffected sentiment. Her experience in church and concert singing has given her a method, which in its breadth of phrasing and dignity is peculiarly adapted to oratorio music. "On Mighty Pens" she delivered in a noble manner, declaiming it in warm and penetrating accents, and electrifying the house with the clearness, sweetness and power of her higher notes.[22]

Again the terms "warm," 'sweet," and "clear" were used to describe the Brooklyn diva. Certainly, as we have noted, these qualities were integral to Thursby's persona. However, it also appears possible that Thursby was recognizing such traits as her drawing card. The press and the public expected her to be and loved her for being warm, sweet, clear, and pure. Why not strive to please them? The *New York Herald* critic reinforced the notion that Thursby's pure, unaffected singing was her greatest asset. He noted:

> Miss Thursby . . . is already so well known to fame for the purity of her voice and style of singing, we need but add that in this oratorio she had ample opportunity for displaying her powers of execution. The well known air, "With verdure clad," was sung by her with exquisite taste and finish, also the air, "On mighty pens," which she rendered without affectation or mannerism. In this we wish some of our concert singers would follow Miss Thursby's example.[23]

The *New York Post* critic likewise praised the "beauty and clearness" of her "delightful" singing.[24]

Shortly after her *Creation* appearance, Thursby took part in one of the most important concerts of her career, one which made her a household name. On 11 May 1877 Ole Bull, the renowned violinist and a close friend, invited the soprano to participate in his farewell concert at Booth's Theatre, New York. For

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[22] New York Times, 20 April 1877.
[23] New York Herald, 20 April 1877.
[24] New York Post, 20 April 1877.

Thursby to be linked with such a prestigious performer as Ole Bull was no small accomplishment. Certainly she gained approval from her public and the press simply through this association.

However, it is evident in the critics' reviews of the concert that Thursby was impressive in her own right. As the *New York Herald* critic put it, "Miss Thursby—undeniably the best bravura singer on our concert stage—rendered her very difficult selections with that surety and apparent ease which are the marks of a finished artist."[25] A little-known church singer just ten years earlier, Thursby had become a polished artist, unrivaled on the concert stage.

No event more revealed Thursby's blooming career than the concert she arranged for herself on 29 October 1877 at the Academy of Music, New York. She invited Theodore Thomas and his orchestra, the tenor Pasquale Brignoli (1824-84), and the pianist S. B. Mills (1839-98) to join her in the performance. As clear from the reviews, however, the star of the evening was Thursby. The *New York Post* critic elaborates:

> In the first place, Miss Thursby's appearance was charming—her dress, her manner, and that face of hers, so rich, as Wordsworth would express it, in blended brightness of record and of promise. Simplicity added pleasantness to it all. . . . Her singing, it seems to us, was never nearer perfect. Some of the pieces that she had chosen were among the most difficult in a modern singer's *repertoire.* Her rendering of them was ease itself. The highest notes, the most urgent staccatos, the passages that made largest drafts upon her intonation, her register and her expression, were given as if they had been the simplest strains of a popular song, so pure and unspasmodic was her style, so skillfully taken was her respiration. It was finished singing that we heard last night.[26]

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[25] New York Herald, 12 May 1877.
[26] *New York Post*, 30 October 1877.

The *New York Herald* review, though brief, presented a similar positive assessment of Thursby's performance:

> The grand feature of the evening . . . was the singing by Miss Thursby of an aria from *L'Etoile du Nord* [likely the mad scene in act 3], by Meyerbeer, a composition that calls for the display of the highest art, and which received thoroughly artistic treatment at her hands. . . . Miss Thursby sang in her simple, yet magnificent way, "The Last Rose of Summer." If any one could have doubted the supreme ability of this lady on the concert platform, the doubt would have been set at rest last night.[27]

The *New York Times* critic had mixed views on Thursby's singing. Yet, the sheer length of the review indicates the prominence the soprano had attained in New York musical life. He began with an assessment of Thursby's assets:

> This artist is exceedingly "popular," and there are good grounds for the favor with which she appears to be regarded. In the first place, she is the fortunate possessor of a soprano *sfogato* [a high, light voice]—a very rare voice in the United States, and, indeed, the world over. In the second place, she has a sympathetic presence and a manner marked by much simple elegance, and there can be no doubt that the influence of face and bearing is of no mean potency. And, finally, the lady sings unaffectedly, and, as a rule, with facility and truthfulness of intonation. When it is borne in mind—humiliating though the admission may seem—that there is not a single first-rate soprano, except Miss Kellogg now before the American public, it will be readily understood that the gifts and acquirements of Miss Thursby, as set forth above, ought to have quite as general recognition as they are securing.[28]

The critic, thus, viewed Thursby's prominence as merited. He also warned, however, that her abilities were limited. He continued:

> On the other hand, while it is perfectly proper to assign to Miss Thursby a high rank among American songstresses, it is just as well not to overestimate her value. Her voice is of excellent quality, but its value is limited. Its brilliancy, shown especially in passable staccatos, pales beside Mme. di Murska's[29] or Carlotta Patti's.[30] Her execution is

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[27] *New York Herald*, 30 October 1877.
[28] *New York Times*, 30 October 1877.
[29] Ilma di Murska (1834-89).

> not invariably faultless—her trilling in particular, being sometimes . . . nothing more than a vibrato, while her ascending scales . . . were far from perfection. The chief defect in Miss Thursby's work, however, is its total lack of expressiveness. If we did not take into account the sweetness inherent to the tone of the voice, we should say that the lady piped rather than sang her numbers, for there is just as much feeling in one of the organs with which the birds in the Black Forest are taught their tunes as in her frigid delivery of words and notes. . . . Miss Thursby, in brief, is not yet a great songstress—and it is just as well to place an opinion on the subject on record at once.[31]

Though this final review does not present an unqualifiably positive assessment of Thursby, all three reviews indicate Thursby's significant progress in reaching her career goals. Further, her net return from the concert, $1671.01, was unmistakable indication of her success.[32] Her "charming," "sweet," "pleasant," "simple," "sympathetic" presence had enabled her to thrive in America as an American, without an established European reputation.

Europe Bound Again

Yet, as she had assured Rudersdorff she would, at the end of the successful 1877-78 season, Thursby made plans for a European sojourn. Before departing, in keeping with the New York musical tradition, Thursby sang two farewell concerts: one at Plymouth Church, Brooklyn on 2 May 1878, the other at the Academy of Music, New York on the following night. Interestingly, the critics in her native Brooklyn were not as effusive as one might expect. Of the May 2nd concert, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* posits:

> [The performance] suited the not over critical audience present . . . [however] Miss Thursby's rather too ambitious attempt to render the Paccini variations might have been replaced with something more within her vocal grasp. In contrast to the cultured rendering of "In

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[30] Carlotta Patti (1835-89). Sister of Adelina Patti.
[31] *New York Times*, 30 October 1877.
[32] Gipson, 179.

> questa tomba" by Miss Drasdil . . . the efforts of Miss Thursby in the Mozart rondo and the aria following it placed the latter at a disadvantage.[33]

The critic concludes his review on a more positive note, asserting that, "Brooklyn has produced many nightingales and Miss Thursby is amply able to support her city's fame in the Metropolis of the Old World, whither she is going."[34] Though the critic of the *Brooklyn Daily Times* is less negative about Thursby's singing, he complains about her audience and devotes only a sentence to the native soprano:

> Miss Thursby's farewell concert last evening was well attended, a large proportion of the audience consisting of her friends from the Eastern District, who made their presence known by the most untiring and persistent applause whenever the popular singer made her appearance. She sang the Mozart recitative and rondo, "Mia Speranza Adorata," an air with variations by Paccini-Artot with violin obligato, one of these light florid things which she renders with so much elegance and ease .[35]

Thus concludes this critic's assessment of Thursby in her send-off concert. One wonders why the critics of Thursby's natal borough would not devote more words of praise to the singer.

New York critics were similarly unforgiving in their judgment of Thursby's performance on 3 May at the Academy of Music, New York. The *New York Herald* refrains from any negative commentary, but likewise devotes little space to the diva's performance: "The Academy of Music was fairly filled last evening by the friends and admirers of Miss Thursby, and the audience heartily entered into the spirit of the 'goodby' which was the object of the occasion. Miss Thursby

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[33] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 3 May 1878.
[34] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 3 May 1878.
[35] *Brooklyn Daily Times*, 3 May 1878.

sang admirably."[36] The *New York Post* and *New York Times*, while including more lengthy reviews, were also more critical of Thursby's deficiencies. The *Post* reports:

> Among our native songsters there are but few who have succeeded in working their way into the affections of the public as Miss Thursby has done without the recommendation of a phenomenal voice, a gift which this young lady probably does not pretend to have. For while we acknowledge her wide compass, the purity of her tones, and the perfect accuracy of her notes, we must also say that her middle register is weak, her style deficient in breadth, and that her voice is not a powerful one. Miss Thursby goes, we believe, to Europe to sing, and, we hope to study; with so good a voice . . . and great intelligence, it would be a pity not to aim higher than musical gymnastics and catching ballads.[37]

The purity and accuracy of Thursby's voice once again are praised, while her lack of expression and breadth of style are criticized. The *Times* critic mirrors these sentiments:

> Miss Thursby, who will depart for Europe by to-day's steamer, gave a "farewell" concert at the Academy of Music last evening . . . . After all that has been written of Miss Thursby in these columns, there is no occasion to dilate upon her latest efforts. Her rendering of Pacini-Artôt's "air and variations" last night, revealed considerable skill in execution, but her voice is very uneven, and she is totally deficient in expression. Her delivery of "she Wandered down" with the composer of the song at the piano [Frederick Clay, 1838-89] was far inferior to that supplied by much less gifted songstresses, and the want of accent and the variety of color of her tones were unpleasantly conspicuous throughout the performance.[38]

Though viewed by the critics as not fully formed, in 1878, as Thursby embarked for Europe a second time, the soprano was enjoying great popularity with the New York public. The values that defined her persona and career continued to serve her well: the pureness and sweetness of her voice mirrored the kindness of

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[36] *New York Herald*, 4 May 1878.
[37] *New York Post*, 4 May 1878.
[38] *New York Times*, 4 May 1878.

her person; the skillful execution demonstrated her commitment to hard work; and the repertoire she chose, in particular the ballad of Clay, reflected her attachment to family and her native heritage.

The American critics continued to find fault with Thursby's singing, citing her monotonous vocal color, deficient dramatic expression, and frigid delivery. Interestingly, these qualities deemed lacking in Thursby were those likely to be associated with a more dramatic, or operatic, persona and repertoire. In America it remained clear to Thursby and her press that she was not an operatic diva; she thrived as a pure, innocent, monochromatic concertizer. As we shall see, Europe was not so quick to pigeonhole the diva.

Thursby's second trip to Europe proved far more successful than her first. Both England and France greeted the American singer with open arms and unremitting praise, comparable to that of her home country. However, whereas Americans appeared content to hear their native singer solely on the concert stage, the Europeans urged Thursby to make the leap to opera. In France opera lovers imagined her as the perfect Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*, seconded by Gounod, himself, after hearing her in a Pasdeloup Concert.[39] Rudersdorff again urged Thursby to seize the opportunity: "If you *would but study* for the Opera," she exclaimed, . . ."what a fortune you would make in no time! Speranza, child, think *seriously of it!!* It really is not a thing to throw away."[40]

Rather than face such challenges in Europe, Thursby chose to return to America in 1879, the issue of whether she would appear in opera accompanying her back to her native land. Maurice Strakosch, her new manager strove to guide

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[39] Gipson, 214.
[40] Gipson, 226.

the American public in a statement to the press, claiming that Miss Thursby had declined persistent offers of operatic engagements in Europe because she had no ambition to go on the operatic stage. He quoted the soprano as saying, "My ambition is satisfied when I can look in the faces of a sympathetic audience, and, whether singing classical music of an oratorio or a simple ballad, realize that I have fulfilled the original plan and purpose of my life."[41]

Though Thursby may well have said such words, Strakosch was wise in defining his new star thus. For if, in fact, the soprano was lacking in dramatic integrity and emotional expression as the press had noted, her career on the operatic stage would likely not have been noteworthy. Further, why risk losing money on a gamble? Thursby was unrivaled on the concert stage. In the opera world dominated by gifted sopranos such as Kellogg, Hauk, Abbott, Adelina Patti (1843-1919), Emma Albani (1847-1930), Pauline Lucca (1841-1908), Marcella Sembrich (1858-1935), and Etelka Gerster (1855-1920), what would be Thursby's chance? Success was unlikely, especially when the press already had determined that Thursby did not have the voice or temperament for such an undertaking. No, Strakosch asserted, Thursby would continue to shine as one of the greatest divas on the concert stage; and Thursby assented.

Homeland Success

Back in America in 1879, Thursby's career as a concert singer continued to flourish. She toured extensively in the next year, performing in Brooklyn, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Toronto, St. Paul, St. Louis,

[41] Gipson, 237.

Louisville, Omaha, and Topeka, as well as in towns in Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio. In 1880 she returned with her manager to Europe for two years, where she added positive receptions in Spain, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway to her list of laurels. She was received by royalty in every country she entered, and was the first American to receive a commemorative medal from the Société des Concerts of the Paris Conservatoire.

On 9 September 1882, Thursby returned to the U.S. Her fellow Brooklynites and New Yorkers reveled in the chance to hear her once again. The *Brooklyn Daily Union-Argus* summarized such feelings in the following ode:

A Greeting to Miss Emma Thursby

Welcome to thy native land, fair songstress from abroad.
Strew flowers in the path of her whom Europe doth applaud.
O wondrous gift! a voice, that melts two continents in one.
All hail to thee, fair cantatrice, thy triumphs have begun.
Thou hast won alien hearts, and gained a royal name;
May every year as on it rolls add lustre to thy fame,
Yet, though with foreign laurels decked, thy heart can ne'er rescind
Thy love of native land and home, Columbia's Jenny Lind![42]

The critics also welcomed the singer back, though the reviews remained mixed. Some of the first such reviews appeared at a welcome-home concert on 4 October at Chickering Hall. The *New York Times* critic found Thursby much improved following her European performances:

> Miss Thursby's first essay was the jewel song from Gounod's *Faust*. As a piece of delicate and tasteful vocalization it was well near perfect. She phrased it admirably, her trill was accurate and very beautiful, and the girlish light quality of her voice was entirely suited to the score. . . . In the past two years Miss Thursby has gained strength in her art and

[42] Gipson, 326.

> the finish and poise of a trained singer. Her voice last night was clear and sweet, and her enunciation distinct and above the usual quality of the best of our concert performers.[43]

The *Post* and *Herald* critics were less impressed with Thursby's post-Europe performance. The *Post* critic again notes her lack of dramatic talent:

> Miss Thursby sang the "King of Thule" ballad and its accompanying "Jewel Song," Liszt's "The Loreley," a Spanish song, arranged by Mme. Viardot, and some English ballads, displaying throughout, although of course in varying degree, a curious inability to invest her work with either the musical color or the dramatic weight which might be expected from a singer of far less reputation. Our fair fellow-citizen is fortunate in the possession of a voice having the beauties of a winter moonlight—it is clear and silvery; but it chills rather than warms the listener.[44]

The *Herald* critic reiterated these sentiments, carrying them a step further by asserting that Thursby did not have the talent to appear on the operatic stage:

> It was a very pleasing and creditable performance in a concert singer and was full of refinement and nice taste, but it betrayed the lack of those essential vocal qualities which enable a singer to appear to advantage in grand opera. After listening to Miss Thursby . . . one concluded, "This is a very delightful voice, pure and flexible, and the lady has a certain elegance of style which adds a charm to whatever she does, but the voice is suited to ballad music rather than to that of the operatic stage."[45]

Thursby's return performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music elicited similar reactions from the critics. Noting her vocal improvements, the Brooklyn critics nonetheless concurred with their New York colleagues that Thursby's singing continued to lack expressive color and dramatic interest. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* critic also believed that Thursby was not meant for the operatic stage:

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[43] *New York Times,* 5 October 1882.
[44] *New York Post,* 5 October 1882.
[45] *New York Herald,* 5 October 1882.

> That Miss Thursby has improved greatly in vocalization is undoubted, but it is also plain that the improvement has been effected at the expense of expression. Her voice retains all of its old time sweetness and birdlike quality, and there can be no hesitation in according her a first place among the concert singers of the day.[46]

The *Brooklyn Daily Times* critic likewise perceived Thursby as a sound singer, but not one to attempt the operatic sphere:

> Miss Thursby sings well. She always did. She is a facile executant. She trills like a bird, her technique is the result of years of earnest effort and conscientious study. Her voice is sweet and there is a smooth, silken quality . . . that greatly soothes the ear. But . . . there is still lacking the artistic fervor that contributes so largely to the making of a great singer.[47]

Despite her European studies and successes, Thursby continued to be viewed in much the same light that she always had been in New York and Brooklyn; while the Europeans begged her to sing opera, American critics enumerated her dramatic weaknesses. A certain snobbery in New York may at least partially explain such diverse receptions. Late 20th-century classical performers are well aware of a stigma associated with American training without European finesse. Such American artists are viewed as inferior to their European counterparts--unsophisticated, unpolished, brazen. It is likely that similar biases existed in post-Civil War New York. Thursby, who had spent very little time in Europe, based her entire persona on homey, American values. In this light, we recall the struggles of Emma Abbott, another native songstress who, though likely less vocally gifted than Thursby, also shunned European training and cultivated her Americanness. She, too, never pleased the New York press.

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[46] *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 7 October 1882.
[47] *Brooklyn Daily Times*, 7 October 1882.

The qualities and values upon which Thursby built her career, thus, left her pigeonholed in her native cities. She continued to soothe with her sweet, gentle presence and to impress with the rewards of a good American work ethic. This is all the American people and press wanted from their native songstress, and this is what she delivered.

Later Years

Thursby toured in America for the next couple of years, aware that if she returned to Europe she would again be urged to pursue opera. She was successful in her tours and increased her fame throughout the United States and in Canada. In January 1883 Thursby appeared in "The Grand Historical Concert Cyclus" of five concerts under the direction of Strakosch. In the series, Thursby sang an extraordinarily broad range of repertoire: from Bach to Bizet, from Beethoven to Boito. Few singers of the time could have offered such an extensive repertoire, and Thursby's performance impressed musicians around the world, adding to her status as America's greatest concert singer.

In June 1883, after a tour of the midwestern United States and Canada, Thursby again found herself in a quandary over future plans. Strakosch advised from Paris that she should only come to Europe if she was determined to sing opera. However, Thursby still could not bring herself to attempt opera and, instead, requested that Strakosch return to manage an American tour. As the tour progressed, she discovered that her fame had grown such that her name had become a household word throughout America. Her success, in fact, enabled her to buy an apartment in the first cooperative apartment building in

New York. Ever loyal to her family, she moved them from their Brooklyn home to the new place at 34 Gramercy Park.

The opening of the Metropolitan Opera in 1883 had an impact on Thursby in several ways. For one, she became a devoted member of the audience at the opera productions. Second, the appearance of the Metropolitan seemed to cause a shift in the views of the New York critics. Suddenly the press urged the Metropolitan managers to prevail upon Thursby to sing opera, declaring it would be a remunerative undertaking for the managers and a gratifying event for the community. However, though Thursby would likely have demurred once again, the Metropolitan, artistically successful, but financially devastated at the time, did not proffer a contract.

Perhaps the most important influence of the Metropolitan Opera on Thursby was its role in the establishment of the "Thursby Fridays." On 23 February 1886 Thursby's friends organized a testimonial concert in her honor at the Metropolitan Opera. Though the concert was a success, the most noteworthy event stemming from the concert was the reception on the 20th given by Thursby and her sister Ina at their Gramercy Park Home. This reception, attended by leaders in New York society, business, and musical circles would prove to be the first in a long and brilliant series of musical receptions, later to be known as the "Thursby Fridays." Run by Thursby, who also often sang in them, these musicales resembled European salons of the time. Important society figures, artists, and musicians met to discuss aesthetics and art and to share the joys of music.

Gradually, and in part due to the deaths of her mother (1884) and Strakosch (1887), Thursby began to perform less on the public stage. Ever true to her values and moral upbringing, Thursby became concerned with how she could continue the mission of her life—to serve others—while performing less. As she stated in a letter to a friend, "I am continually asking myself what work there is in the world for me to do."[48] Her Friday receptions provided her with one means of assisting others, for, aside from sharing her voice with her guests, the majority of these concerts were for charity rather than prestige or profit.

However, the friendly intercourse of her Fridays was not enough to satisfy Thursby's altruistic sensibilities. She struggled to determine what else would enable her to share her gifts with others. Unexpectedly, her answer came at a Greenacre Congress held in Maine in 1894.[49] Devoted to comparative studies in religion, philosophy, ethics, and sociology, the conference enabled Thursby to meet with others who shared her values. Though she talked with many people at the conference, she became particularly attracted to the Vedanta philosophy as taught by the young Hindu monk, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). With his assistance Thursby determined her next mission in life: teaching.

The next 37 years, until her death in 1931, found Thursby vacationing often in Europe, singing occasionally for charity, continuing to host the "Thursby Fridays," and teaching voice students at her Gramercy home. Although Thursby trained and nurtured a number of successful singers, her most successful student was the wonderful lyric soprano Geraldine Farrar. Unlike Thursby, who

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[48] Gipson, 366.

[49] The Greenacre Congresses were held in Maine in the 1890s. The conferences were organized by people of the New Thought movement. The founders of the movement, which emphasized unity of mind, body, and spirit, were attracted to and influenced by the religions of the East, particularly Hinduism.

Conclusion

Victorian New York society maintained narrow views on what was acceptable behavior for women. As Maureen Montgomery states in *Displaying Women*, "Codes of etiquette placed powerful constraints on women's behavior in public, especially insofar as they reinscribed the dominant nineteenth-century categorization of women as either respectable or fallen."[1] A woman in public was always under surveillance, and her respectability was assessed by how well she complied with society's strictures. Just what constituted acceptable genteel behavior was debated; however, certain mandates remained constant. The nineteenth-century New York woman was to focus on the domestic sphere, shun attention in public, and remain dependent upon a man. She most certainly was not expected to don a costume, perform on the stage, manage a company, or earn a fortune.

Yet, Clara Louise Kellogg, Emma Abbott, Minnie Hauk, and Emma Thursby were able to engage in such behaviors while maintaining the approbation of society. Each soprano carefully weaved a persona that earned her respectability and enabled her to thrive in the male-dominated working world of Victorian America. Kellogg, Abbott, Hauk, and Thursby all emphasized similar personal qualities: purity, morality, and industry. However, each was led in a different direction by these values. Kellogg, from an upper class family, was willing to take chances. She recognized that an operatic career might mean the

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[1] Maureen E. Montgomery, *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 15.

loss of her upper class friends, but nevertheless took the risk. She strove to assuage society by repeatedly avoiding contact with men (aided by the strict chaperonage of her mother), impressing her public with her upstanding womanhood.

Though Abbott espoused many of the same moral values as Kellogg, she acted upon them differently. From a poor, working-class family, Abbott had more to lose if society turned its back on her. She needed the money she was earning and was careful not to rock the boat by offending Puritanical society. While Kellogg performed *La traviata*, unconcerned that society would link her with the opera's heroine, Abbott initially refused to sing the role of Violetta. In so doing, Abbott set the stage for the remainder of her career, in which she would continue to emphasize a strict morality and deep piety.

While Kellogg publicly avoided men in order to maintain an upstanding reputation, Abbott chose another route. Like the vast majority of nineteenth-century American women, Abbott married at a young age. In her marriage, Abbott always emphasized subservience to her husband—strange, perhaps, as she was the chief breadwinner, but essential, she apparently believed, to a successful career. Thursby, also moral, pure, and hard working, likewise cultivated a subservient demeanor. As a young woman, Thursby's career was largely determined by her father's wishes; later Maurice Strakosch became her manager and protector. Throughout her career, rather than determining her own moves, Thursby heeded outside guidance, be it her family, her manager, or her religion. In so doing, Thursby cultivated a gentle, moral, and kind persona that coalesced with society's expectations. Thursby, like Kellogg, had little or no

social contact with men during her career, quickly refusing marriage the two times she was asked. Unlike Kellogg, who married at the end of her career, Thursby remained single throughout her life, maintaining her persona of virginal pureness to her deathbed.

Minnie Hauk, like Kellogg, was strictly chaperoned by her mother: she was allowed no social contact with men and, like Thursby, refused a number of marriage proposals during her early career. Only when her career was well established did Hauk assent and marry a European baron. While Abbott appeared to use her marriage to demonstrate her womanly, subservient virtues, Hauk may have married to further her reputation as a cultivated European. For unlike the three other singers, Hauk's successful persona revolved around her transformation from wild American "savage" to European diva. What better way to solidify such a reputation than to choose a wealthy, titled European as a husband? Hauk retired in Europe after a long career singing in the major capitals of the world.

Kellogg also found success in Europe. Yet, though she began and ended her career in Europe, she was inspired to perform for her native countrymen in their own language. Thus she formed her English opera troupe, for which she was manager and prima donna. Her decision to channel her talents in this direction likely resulted from numerous factors, including her desire to make opera accessible to Americans and her fear that she could no longer compete with the major prima donnas of the world. Kellogg's popularity grew out of these English-language performances and proved her to be a competent entrepreneur, as well as a singer.

Abbott and Thursby also capitalized primarily on an American audience. Abbott, like Kellogg, brought opera in the vernacular to her people. A shrewd businesswoman, Abbott made her fortune in the heartland of America, where audiences received her with the warm approbation denied her by the New York critics. Her strong nationalism and hard work made her the jewel of everyday Americans' eyes. Similarly, Thursby also defined herself as a wholesome woman with strong American values. While Europeans pressured her to sing opera, native Americans were delighted with Thursby as they perceived her: a pretty, unassuming, non-dramatic songbird.

Thursby recognized that her morality, piety, and Protestant ethics endeared her to the American people and that operatic performance might be ill received. Likely her religious upbringing also caused her to wonder if she could sing opera and remain true to herself. Thursby also understood that her true talent lay in her voice, not in her emotiveness. Even in her concert performances, critics occasionally mentioned her lack of dramatic expression. Thursby surely understood that this would be a major drawback to operatic success, and chose not to sing opera: her character, morals, and talents fed this decision and gained her fame and fortune as a great concert singer.

Though she did, of course, perform on the operatic stage, Kellogg likewise appears to have been a stronger singer than actor. Reviews indicate that Kellogg and Thursby had similar voices--light, high, and bell-like. Kellogg, like Thursby, was often criticized for the lack of drama accompanying her glorious soprano sound. It is likely that Kellogg's vocal and managerial merits brought her fame despite her dramatic weaknesses.

Hauk's career reflected the reverse scenario. As she herself asserted, Hauk was first and foremost an actress. Much as Thursby may have marketed herself as a concert singer because of dramatic limitations, so Hauk portrayed herself as an actress because of vocal limitations. Similarly, much as Thursby's personality did not lend itself to the operatic stage, Hauk's was a natural fit. Temperamental, outspoken, and showy, Hauk thrived in dramatic presentation. She recognized that one role would fulfill her dreams and bring her the success she desired: Carmen. A dramatically challenging role, in which vocal beauty and showmanship are secondary to the action, Carmen became Hauk's greatest triumph; her personality and talents had perfectly coalesced.

In the eyes of the New York critics, Abbott excelled as neither singer nor actress. Rather, her drawing cards were her fervent American morality and patriotism and her strong business skills. Such skills were warmly embraced in America's Heartland. A native of Illinois, Abbott embodied a rags-to-riches story to which her audience could easily relate. Her interpolation of hymns in operas made these strange, often European, works accessible to her own people, and they were thrilled that one of their own had struck it big.

In fact, Americans, and New Yorkers, in particular, were delighted that each of these four women had earned fame. For not only did the women gain personal success, they also added to nineteenth-century New York's relatively new reputation as a cultural rival to Europe. Kellogg, Abbott, Hauk, and Thursby gained fame and fortune equal to or greater than those of many prominent European singers of the nineteenth century. Such success was profoundly important to a burgeoning New York musical culture.

Further, the four sopranos paved the way for subsequent generations of American divas. As role models and as teachers, they demonstrated that an American woman could, indeed, succeed on the stage: she could follow her dream, realize it with hard work, and bask in triumphant success.

Appendix

Repertoire performed in New York City, 1872-83
(omissions possible where programs not available)

Clara Louise Kellogg

Composer	Title	Role	Language
Auber, Daniel François (1782-1871)	*Fra diavolo*	Zerlina	Italian, English
Balfe, Michael William (1808-70)	*The Bohemian Girl*	Arline	English
	The Rose of Castile		English
	The Talisman	Edith	English
Beethoven, Ludwig van (1770-1827)	*Fidelio*	Leonora	English
Bellini, Vincenzo (1801-35)	*I Puritani*	Elvira	Italian
	La sonnambula	Amina	Italian, English
Benedict, Julius (1804-85)	*The Lily of Killarney*	Eily O'Connor	English
Bizet, Georges (1838-75)	*Carmen*	Carmen	Italian
Donizetti, Gaetano (1797-1848)	*La fille du régiment*	Marie	Italian, English
	Linda di Chamounix	Linda	Italian, English
	Lucia di Lammermoor	Lucia	Italian, English
Flotow, Friedrich von (1812-83)	*Martha*	Lady Harriet	Italian, English
Gounod, Charles (1818-93)	*Faust*	Marguerite	Italian, English
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus (1756-91)	*Don Giovanni*	Zerlina	Italian, English
	Le nozze di Figaro	Susanna	Italian, English
Meyerbeer, Giacomo (1791-1864)	*L'Étoile du nord*	Catterina	English
	Les Huguenots	Valentine	Italian, English
Rossini, Gioacchino (1792-1868)	*Il barbiere di Siviglia*	Rosina	Italian, English
Thomas, Ambroise (1811-96)	*Mignon*	Mignon	Italian, English
	Mignon	Philine	Italian, English
	Hamlet	Ophelia	Italian
Verdi, Giuseppe (1813-1901)	*Aida*	Aida	Italian, English
	Un ballo in maschera	Amelia	Italian
	Ernani	Elvira	Italian, English
	Rigoletto	Gilda	Italian, English
	La traviata	Violetta	Italian, English
	Il trovatore	Leonora	Italian, English
Wagner, Richard (1813-83)	*Der fliegende Holländer*	Senta	Italian
Wallace, Vincent (1814-1865)	*Maritana*	Maritana	English
Weber, Carl Maria von (1786-1826)	*Der Freischütz*	Agathe	Italian

Emma Abbott

Composer	Title	Role	Language
Auber, Daniel François	*Fra diavolo*	Zerlina	English
Audran, Edmond (1840-1901)	*La mascotte*	Bettina	English
Balfe, Michael William	*The Bohemian Girl*	Arline	English
	The Rose of Castille		English
Bellini, Vincenzo	*Norma*	Norma	English
	La sonnambula	Amina	Italian
Donizetti, Gaetano	*La fille du régiment*	Marie	Italian

	Lucia di Lammermoor	Lucia	English
Flotow, Friedrich von	*Martha*	Lady Harriet	English
Gounod, Charles	*Faust*	Marguerite	English
	Roméo et Juliette	Juliet	English
Massé, Victor (1822-84)	*Paul et Virginia*	Virginia	English
Planquette, R.J. (1848-1903)	*The Chimes of Normandy*	Germaine	English
Rossini, Gioacchino	*Semiramide*	Semiramide	English
Sullivan, Arthur (1842-1900)	*The Gondoliers*	Gianetta	English
	H.M.S. Pinafore	Josephine	English
	The Mikado	Yum-Yum	English
Thomas, Ambroise	*Mignon*	Mignon	English
Verdi, Giuseppe	*Un giorno di regno*	Giulietta	English
	Rigoletto	Gilda	English
	La traviata	Violetta	English

Minnie Hauk

Composer	Title	Role	Language
Bizet, Georges	*Carmen*	Carmen	Italian
Goetz, Hermann (1840-76)	*Der Widerspänstigen Zähmung*	Katharina	Italian
Gounod, Charles	*Faust*	Marguerite	Italian
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus	*Don Giovanni*	Zerlina	Italian
	Le nozze di Figaro	Cherubino	Italian
Meyerbeer, Giacomo	*L'Africaine*	Selika	Italian
	L'Étoile du nord	Catterina	Italian
	Robert le diable	Alice	Italian
Rossini, Gioacchino	*Il barbiere di Siviglia*	Rosina	Italian
Thomas, Ambroise	*Mignon*	Mignon	Italian
Verdi, Giuseppe	*Aida*	Aida	Italian, English
	La traviata	Violetta	Italian
Wagner, Richard	*Lohengrin*	Elsa	Italian

Emma Thursby

Complete Works

Composer	Title	Role	Language
Handel, George Frideric (1685-1759)	*Acis and Galatea*	Galatea	English
	Messiah	soprano	English
Haydn, Joseph (1732-1809)	*Die Schöpfung*	soprano	English

Single Arias and Songs

Composer	Title	Language
Arditi, Luigi (1822-1903)	"Il bacio"	English
Beethoven, Ludwig van	"Mignon"	German
Bellini, Vincenzo	"Ah, non credea...," *La sonnambula*	Italian
Bishop, Henry Rowley (1786-1855)	"Echo Song"	English
	"Home Sweet Home"	English
Bizet, Georges	"Tarentelle"	French
Clay, Frederic (1838-89)	"She Wandered Down the Mountain Side"	English
Flotow, Friedrich von	"Letzte Rose," *Martha*	English
Frankenfield, H.G.	Within a mile of Edinboro' Town"	English
Gounod, Charles	"Ah! je ris de me voir," *Faust*	French
Herold, Ferdinand (1791-1833)	"Air," *Le Pré aux clercs*	French
Liszt, Franz (1811-86)	"Die Lorelei"	German
Meyerbeer, Giacomo	"Prayer and Barcarolle," *L'Étoile du nord*	Italian
Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus	"Batti, batti," *Don Giovanni*	Italian
	"Deh vieni non tardar," *Le nozze di Figaro*	Italian
	"Mia speranza adorata," K.416	Italian
	"Ma che vi fece", K.368	Italian
	"O zitt're nicht...," *Die Zauberflöte*	Italian
Proch, Heinrich (1809-78)	"Ombra Leggiera," *Dinorah*	English
Schubert, Franz (1797-1828)	"Heidenröslein," D.257	German
Taubert, Wilhelm (1811-91)	"Bird Song"	English
Thomas, Ambroise	"Je suis Titania," *Mignon*	English
Verdi, Giuseppe	"Ah! fors e lu," *La traviata*	Italian
	"Caro nome," *Rigoletto*	Italian
Weber, Carl Maria von	"Und ob die Wolke," *Der Freischütz*	English

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