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GETTING ON THE CONCERT STAGE

BY MISS LESLIE ROZE

IN these days, when "what to do with our girls" is a problem almost as difficult of solution as "what to do with our boys," the concert platform is often selected as a natural and suitable feminine way of earning a living—especially in the case of young girls endowed with good voices—little thought being given to the qualifications which make for success as a public singer. A youthful appearance, a pleasing voice, and a desire to shine, are often considered quite sufficient equipment to enter one of the most difficult of professions—that of a public singer. Is it any wonder that there are so many failures and that after a brief, inglorious career so many leave the profession embittered and disappointed—casting the blame on the malice of managers, or the inability of the public to recognize talent—on anything but the real cause, their own unpreparedness for the work. Let there be no mistake about it. No woman should become a professional singer unless she feels drawn to that calling by an irresistible fascination, by a love strong enough to face hard work, heartbreaking disappointments, sometimes failure. But if there be such an one let her take heart. The road is long, the path is thorny, but the reward is great. Given a fairly good appearance, a voice of average quality (it need not be phenomenal) and an artistic temperament, there is no reason why a girl should not enjoy at least a fair measure of success as a public singer. It is true the profession is overcrowded, but then so is every other profession open to women. The singing profession is certainly not overcrowded with good, capable, reliable performers. It is to the former class one must belong. You see just the same sort of thing in the business world. There is the typist getting a few dollars a month, and not worth that, and there is the capable clerk earning a good salary. Another objection frequently urged against this profession is the uncertainty of the voice. As a matter of fact, the voice is, in ordinary circumstances, more certain than anything else. How often do we hear of a public singer losing his, or her, voice, except temporarily as in the case of illness, and illness means loss of work in any calling. I cannot remember a single instance, whereas I can readily call to mind a large number of public singers, past middle life, who are still charming audiences and, incidentally, drawing good salaries. I do not mean such stars as Mme. Patti, but just ordinary, capable artists. Their name is legion. There is yet another objection urged against the profession, and a more serious one; that is, the incidental temptations. The existence of these cannot be denied, and that is one reason why a love of art and a determination to succeed are so essential. This is no profession for the feather-headed. It must, however, be borne in mind that temptations have to be faced by most good-looking girls who have to get their own living, although those who are able to live in their own home, enjoy a certain amount of protection on this account. I do not think that in this respect the public singer is any worse off than any other girl who has to make her way without the shelter of a home.

I have dealt somewhat fully with the objections, usually raised as many prejudices exist: and this is an attempt to put the prospects of the concert stage fairly and squarely.

Assuming that it has been decided to adopt singing as a profession, how should the young aspirant to fame proceed so as at least to deserve success, which, after all, is the best way to ensure it?

In the first place, nobody should attempt to sing in public professionally without a systematic course of adequate training. To do so is to court disappointment. Even supposing the voice to be of exceptional quality and power, a knowledge of breathing and correct tone placing is absolutely essential. Without this, loss of voice and failure are inevitable within a few years. Speaking generally, it has been the singers who have worked the hardest who have been the most successful. It was Madame Melba's custom, every year after the opera season was over, to repair to Paris in order to resume study and to have corrected any errors of production which she might have contracted. Hard work—that has been the secret of Mme.

Melba's success. It was not achieved in a day, as some suppose. Mme. Melba was by no means received with acclamation on her debut. The critics were not particularly kind on her first appearance. She was merely referred to as a promising artiste, and that is all she was at the time. It is by patient, conscientious study that she has climbed to the highest pinnacle of fame. And if you read the lives of celebrated artistes you will find that that is the road all must travel. Sometimes success has only come after grievous and repeated failures. Witness the late Madame Jenny Lind, for example. Let no one who feels the call be discouraged. The measure of failure is often the measure of success and the only way to learn is by making mistakes.

Very well, then! Have the best instruction obtainable. No teaching at all is a lesser evil than bad teaching. It does not invariably happen that the most expensive teachers are the best, but it generally is so for the reason that people won't go on paying high fees unless they feel that they are getting value for their money; so that in the end the most expensive lessons are usually the cheapest. If you can't afford to pay for training, either give up the idea of entering the profession or work at something else to get the money. The writer began life as a clerk, and never had one single lesson before just earning the money to pay for it. The length of time necessary for adequate training varies so much that it is impossible to lay down any hard and fast rule. Generally speaking, at least a year should be devoted to study. It takes from five to seven years to produce a perfectly finished singer. Santley studied for seven years, but look at the time he was able to sing. The best plan is to put oneself in the hands of a conscientious professor and to be guided by his advice.

We will suppose then that a sufficient preparation has been undergone, and that the young artiste is pronounced fit for public appearance.

And here I might, perhaps, give a few useful hints, tested by personal experience. Don't forget that it is the addition of words that gives the singer the advantage over the instrumentalist; and see that you deliver them to the audience clearly. It is the business of the singer to interpret the text by means of vocal sound, not merely to produce beautiful tone, although that also is essential. An audience has a right to expect at least to know what the song is about, and nothing irritates an audience more than not being able to

hear the words. I have seen more than one promising young artiste fail from this comparatively slight cause. When on the platform adopt a persuasive attitude. If you are naturally awkward, have a few lessons in gesture and deportment from some good actor or elocutionist; also always present as good an appearance as possible. Take the trouble to dress your hair becomingly, and have a gown that shows you off to advantage. It need not necessarily be of expensive material, but it should be well cut. Remember, all eyes are upon you; and the concert singer has not the help of scenery and stage effects.

Now comes the important question of engagements. How to get them? What is the best way to set about matters? Well, possibly, the professor will introduce his pupil in the proper quarters; if so, she will find the start easier. But all professors do not do this. In that case, several courses are possible. She may elect to try for a position as soloist to one of the churches—and this is not a bad beginning, for in this way experience can be gained in facing audiences; and the consequences of an occasional failure or mistake are not so serious. The young artiste will probably be able to supplement her church work by a few concert engagements and some teaching. The salaries for these appointments, in Canada, range from \$200 to \$600 according to the size and importance of the church and the work involved. In the States, the salaries range from \$600 to \$1,000, but probably experience would be required.

Or, she may go to a concert agent of repute and ask him to give her a hearing. If the result of the trial is satisfactory he will likely book her for a concert tour. For this she will receive about \$40 a week, travelling expenses will all be paid, but living on tour will cost from \$10 to \$15 a week. This work should only be undertaken by the strong. It means travelling



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