

Secrets Behind the Scenes in the Grand Opera

Mlle. Amazar, the Pretty Soprano and the Sweetheart of the Russian Baklanoff, Tells of the Rapid-Fire Romances Among the Singers



Emma Eames, who is now Mme. Gogorza.

READERS of this page last Sunday will remember the interesting revelations of Mlle. Elvira Amazar, the pretty young soprano of the Chicago Grand Opera Company, who told the Federal authorities in Chicago that she had been imported into this country by the Russian baritone Baklanoff contrary to our morality laws.

Elvira Amazar is a charming little Russian woman, turned twenty-two years of age, with golden hair, a retroussé nose, blue eyes and a dainty figure. She has been closely associated with Baklanoff for five years, as she admits, and the rights of his wife and seven children in Russia did not disturb their perfect artistic communion.

Mlle. Amazar says that the great genius Baklanoff promised to marry her, but has made no effort to do so. In a moment of jealousy or despair she caused his arrest at Chicago the other day by the Federal authorities for bringing her to this country when he had a wife and seven children living in Russia. She had discovered that this was wrong under the American law, but she had, perhaps, forgotten that it was also wrong for a woman to come to this country under the same circumstances.

She was, therefore, questioned herself on a similar charge. Mr. Georges Baklanoff, the romantic baritone, denied that he had imported this interesting feminine inspiration contrary to the laws of the United States.

"It is a jealous outbreak," the baritone declared. "She loves me madly. Even against the walls, a bureau, anything at all she can get jealous."

Continuing her interesting revelations of men and women and things behind the scenes in grand opera circles, Mlle. Amazar said:

"Grand opera is a land without law. Like the painted scenery, it is all unreal—untrue to the standards of the rest of the world. The men, the women, the chorus all are actors. They are Romeos and Julietts in their stage parts, and they are Romeos and Julietts after they have taken off their costumes. They embrace, kiss and sing madrigals to each other in grease paint and costumes—and they keep right on embracing, kissing and singing madrigals to each other whether they have the grease paint and the costumes on or not. Grand opera is a land without law.

"Mr. de Koven, your great American composer, complained that there is too much foreign element in the opera in America. But we of Italy, France or Russia are not the only ones with temperaments. Your own American singers very soon learn the ways of the opera.

"There is the charming American diva of recent fame, Emma Eames. She is now the wife of Emilio de Gogorza, the great Italian baritone. But before that she was married to Julian Story, the distinguished American painter. She breathed the atmosphere of the grand opera and she divorced Mr. Story.

"Once Mme. Eames spoke of 'artistic affinity' in singing and said that Gogorza possessed such a temperament that her finest singing was accomplished when her tones came in reply to his.

"But there was a first Mme. de Gogorza. I have heard that in a suit she told many interesting things." (Mlle. Amazar, no doubt, had in mind the following, which appears in an affidavit made by the first Mme. de Gogorza):

"We lived happily for ten years, and until his concert tour with Emma Eames there were no differences between us and nothing to indicate that we were not temperamentally suited to each other.

"It is false that I am of an extremely jealous and interfering disposition, or that I assumed control and continued a supervision over all his professional engagements. I attended to his business affairs at his own direction. I answered letters according to his wishes and by his direction. I played accompaniments for him by the hour at his request.

"I aided and inspired him in every way



Georges Baklanoff, baritone, in the Opera "Faust."

in my power, and was thus largely instrumental in making for him the career which he now admits he has achieved.

"M. de Gogorza demanded that I should give him a divorce. I refused."

Mme. de Gogorza's mother contributed an interesting affidavit to this suit, in which she swore:

"When my son-in-law returned from his first trip with Emma Eames in December, 1905, he was a changed man. He began to stay away from home at night. He finally went to Europe in 1906. When he returned he saw me and said, 'You were angry with me when I left, and assuredly you had cause to be. I was crazy last year, but this year I am sane. I have had my eyes opened.'

"Mme. Eames returned to America in November, 1906. As soon as she arrived M. de Gogorza resumed his conduct of the previous year. He remained away from home and neglected his wife. He finally told me he was going to Newport, and when I asked him why he did not take his wife with him he said it would interfere with his business."

Continuing, the vivacious little soprano drew this word-picture of the world of opera:

"It all looks as beautiful as the ocean waves dancing in the sunlight. It is as dark as the Chicago River in its most sombre moments. It is sentimental, but it is sordid. Its sentiment is the flimsiest. The artist of grand opera loves gold and girls. He is true to the gold, but he is false to the girls.

"Of the sordidness there was an example in the complaints the other day of two tenors of the Chicago Grand Opera Company. These complaints of graft within the organization followed only a day or two after my own revelation of the sordid side of opera. Alessandro Bonci, the Italian tenor, and Charles Fontaine, a French singer, said that they had been paying from fifty dollars a week to twenty dollars

a performance for applause. They said an assistant stage manager was the head of the clique.

"He obtained their money under the promise of unlimited noise. If they paid the money there would be loud hand-clapping, cries of 'bravo,' 'bis' and 'encore.' If they didn't pay for this artificial applause their popularity would decrease. They might even lose their engagements. 'Their artistic heads would come off,' as one of the grafters was quoted to have threatened.

"Graft prevails from one end of the opera to the other. For myself, I was wealthy and desired to enter grand opera, and I did not mind paying for my debut at the Music and Drama Theatre in Petrograd. Had I not paid I would have had no debut. Everybody knows that it is the common custom. Everybody has to be given a fee. One must begin with the lowly prompter and progress to the stage director. Even conductors, many of them, expected to be paid. Nowhere has money such conversational power as on the operatic stage—the tenor may fill the house with his magnificent high note, but high and above it all the scream of money can always be heard behind the footlights.

"Singers love the flutter of green bank notes a thousand times more than they do the sound of their own golden notes. They roll their eyes and talk of art while they think of contracts and bank balances.

"At gay nineteen I did not even suspect this—but now, broken-hearted and disillusioned, I know it.

"Like all girls who are young and good to look at and have a voice, I wanted to go into grand opera. I thought that it was a life in an atmosphere of beauty, something fine and high and far from the ordinary things of life. Foolish child that I was, I had to learn that most singers are very ordinary persons. I had to learn that they were common persons of little education. I, who had been educated in a convent at Dresden, had learned six languages. My French was perfect. To discover that singers were ignorant or ill-educated was a painful shock to me.

"While I travelled with Georges Baklanoff we shared compartments with other singers and the chorus and were forced to eat with them. When I saw them eat fish with their hands I felt ill. When they pushed their food down their throats with their knife-blades I could have wept. But I bore it for love of Georges Baklanoff. Yet, love him as I did, I could not forget that he was like them—he hadn't had the advantages I had.

"Grand opera is the land of easy lives and easy loves. Prima donnas give out interviews in which they talk of their hard work. But do not believe the life is an ascetic one. The singer and the austere life know each other not. They sing drudgery which one loves to do—it is play.

"Nowhere in the world—not in the jungles—is love as easy as in grand opera. It is like a bird's nest of foolish persons talk of the aviaries. Birds are monogamous.

"If in the outer world a man admires you, he tells you so diffidently; he expresses his ardor with delicacy. But a tenor or baritone sees you. He fancies you, as you say in America. At once, without even an introduction, he tells you he loves you. He does not say, 'Will you be mine?' He says, 'You shall be mine. You are mine.'

"The man does not do all the wooing. If the woman is impressed she says so. She makes the advances. That is very frequently done. Impulse is king in the land that has no law.

"That would be right, perhaps, if one



were seeking a permanent mate. But the singer is not. He has a wife this season and next season there is another. No one is surprised at this. No one in the strange, lawless land expects anything else. These 'season wives' are usually without benefit of clergy.

"Sometimes the singers are married. They have husbands or wives, but that does not matter. They forget it, as they may. No one on the grand opera stage expects them to remember it.

"Romances are fervid—while they last. They end in heartbreak for one or in tragedy. Quarrels are common and terrible, but unless the fervor of the romance has passed reconciliations soon follow. They still talk in Petrograd about a violent quarrel the great Tetrassini had with an admirer on the stage of the Petrograd Opera House. That was twenty years ago, but Petrograd still talks of it and repeats threats of suicide.

"My case is a sad one, but it is not unusual. Grand opera seethes with such cases. It happens only that mine has seeped through the veil that separates grand opera from the outer world. Every prima donna has been broken-hearted—not once, but many times.

"The moment a wife or sweetheart turns her back the man's eyes, in fine frenzy, roll about in search of an object of his flirtatious fancy. It may be a chorus girl or it may be one of the ballet maids. It matters not whom—it is the nearest. To the man in grand opera propriety is opportunity.

"In fact, every one of them would prefer to be detached. The grafters of the opera whisper to those from whom they exact money, 'You must be free. Unless you are free you cannot sing your best.' I have heard them say it, these precious bloodsuckers. One of them said to me, 'To succeed in his art a man must be without ties!'

"There is enough scandal on the stage of grand opera, of course, but men of this grifter type foment it. They couple pairs who would prefer to remain mere friends. Such gossip was not content to let Ger-silina Farrar and Antonio Scotti be mere friends—pupil and teacher. They would have them engaged.

"Love is too easy in grand opera. A man has the opportunity to meet too many

women. The women have the chance to meet too many men. They may be settled and would remain nicely domesticated if they could have only the occasional acquaintances made by persons in ordinary life. But every performance may mean a new temptation. Every new season a score of them. So their temptations are multiplied.

"The silly women who write letters to the men of opera and besiege them with invitations to dinner do no harm. A singer's rivals are in her own world. Prima donnas pillor the kisses that belong to another. A soprano commits grand larceny of a contralto's happiness. It is a dishonest world.

"If I had had, my art to comfort me I would not be so crushed by Georges Baklanoff's cruelty to me. But from the day I fell in love with him at nineteen I have been a creature in chains. He has not wanted me to sing. I was cast in the drama of his life to be a member of his heap of women. For there have been many other women in his life. In my five years of love-bondage to him I have known that, but I have loved my eyes. A woman must close her eyes in that world or die of what she sees.

"To the outside world it seems a land of hearty friendships. Fool! A tenor sings. His voice cracks on a high note. He knows it, but he thinks that others do not know. For other singers come to him. They shake his hand. They say, 'You sang wonderfully to-night.' And they go to their own dressing rooms and mimic him. I have seen them. And they say, 'Why did the management ever engage that freak?'

"I repeat that the opera is a land without law. A man wants something or he does not. He thinks of nothing else. He recognizes no obligations. It is the land of deceit. It is peopled with appearances of friendship, never with the substance.

Mlle. Elvira Amazar, the Attractive Young Russian Soprano of the Chicago Grand Opera Company, who Has Upset the Opera World by Her Frank Statements.

"The man—what was his name?—who didn't want to be a father-in-law of Caruso was right. He said, 'Singers are different beings. They dwell in different worlds.' True, Mr. Father-in-law of Caruso. Cruelly, fatally true.

"I do not mean to say that every single opera singer is like this—that everyone indulges his or her impulses without regard to the laws of society. There are, indeed, some very conspicuous exceptions to the general habits of opera land.

"There is Madame Louise Homer, the famous soprano, who is an ideal wife and mother of a large family. Madame Schumann-Heink, the noted contralto, has made herself beloved by the devotion and self-sacrifice she has shown in raising an enormous family. Marcella Sembrich, another great singer, was equally remarkable for the dignity of her domestic life and freedom from sentimental complications.

"I would not do an injustice to the good women who have resisted the demoralizing tendencies of opera life. Of course, it is among the women chiefly that these shining exceptions are to be found."