

Operas Are Okeh but Neapolitans Are Nuts; They Sing From Bath, Balcony, Soldiers Find

By KENNETH L. DIXON
NAPLES, Dec. 4.—(Delayed)—For years operas about the people of Naples have been slandered by crass characters who contended they were unnatural. Even the most dimwitted dough-boy today can testify that this was the basest libel. The operas were okay. It's the Neapolitans who are nuts.

The opera obviously is merely an opportunity for a lot of Neapolitans to jump from the balconies, collect on one stage and carry on in perfectly normal manner, which means singing and shouting at the top of their lungs, waving their arms, laughing and crying, praising and damning, living and loving and hating and dying to a lot of hitting lyrics.

(Cries—They even got me doing it now.) Let us take singing, which even war's terrors could not completely still. Neapolitans would rather sing than eat. But after generations of malnutrition they discovered that such a system soon saps the strength for singing, so they compromised. As a result, no restaurant scene in this comic opera city is complete without a couple of colorful customers bursting into classical ballads between the soup and the salad.

If the customers won't cooperate, the cafe provides its own song, usually some starved looking soul who drifted in off the street and unleashed a couple of syllables of "Santa Lucia" in a voice faint with hunger.

In the Bersagliera cafe, down on the waterfront, there is such a singer. His suit is frayed to a point near indecency. His shoes would frighten housewives away from a rummage sale, but Pietro, if that really is his name, glows with joy as he tosses his cape in a grand entrance and bows before the applause. Was he not singing at the same cafe where the child Caruso got his start?

Admittedly his voice causes many a sensitive Neapolitan to look furtively for Il Ricovero—the air raid shelter—but the kind-hearted patrons concede that a cafe which once conceived a Caruso can afford to coast on its rep for at least another quarter of a century.

Speaking of air-raid shelters brings up the song the irrepressible Neapolitans composed while huddling in the air raid shelters during allied bombings.

The children of Naples, who start learning collective and individual insanity at an early age in order to qualify as Neapolitans as soon as possible, sing it as they scam to the shelters when the sirens scream. It starts out something like "Here we go to Il Ricovero," but its air makes the whole

project sound as much fun as Saturday night at the county fair.

The words of the song also cheered the American airmen, but you learn to take the words with a pinch of salt. They aim to please and they'll parody any tune that strikes their fancy to make the words fitting for your ear.

Take "Lili Marlene" for instance. It is a German song about a lonely sentry and the lovely lass who meets him in the night. Its sad, mournful tune is one of the most popular melodies of the war, so naturally the Neapolitans must sing it. But naturally the Neapolitans hate the nazis, so they reined the lyrics somewhat.

As they sing it, the tune is the same sweet and powerful song, but if you understand even a little Italian the parodied words make it plain that the sentry is the sort of a skunk who would slit his sweetheart's throat for 10 lira and that the neighbors certainly had been talking about the carryings on of that young Marlene trollop.

Even their political opinions are presented in song. They parodied the fascist party song and the martial tune dedicated to the mighty Mussolini. Both are done with gestures and a grand Neapolitan manner which leave no doubt as to how blackhearted the blackshirts are, and how

utterably silly was the erstwhile balcony boy with the big chin. But they probably sang the original song with the same light hearted gusto.

Everything they do is sung from balcony and bath, taxicab and carriage, from bicycle and donkeyback. The Neapolitans sing all day and into the night, and their constant choruses are accompanied by the wild impassioned gestures which characterize everything they do.

For the first time since he came overseas, irrepressible Johnny doughboy has found a people who do not consider him crazy. They top his most cockeyed antic and eventually force from him the grudging admission that "these Neapolitans are r-e-a-l-l-y nuts."

Marion Gets \$93,136 School Funds

Marion county school fund and elementary school fund, totaling \$93,136.08, apportioned to school districts December 6, were distributed Monday from the office of County School Supt. Agnes C. Booth.

Mrs. Cora E. Reid, county school superintendent officer, who figures the apportionments, said late reports from one or two districts had caused the minor delay in mailing checks.

The elementary school fund, income-tax derived, which amounted to \$54,449.53 for the fall apportionment this year, compared with \$53,165.87 last year and \$47,042.41 in December, 1941.

Of this fund, Salem district received \$18,061.72; Silverton \$2,791.36; Woodburn, \$1641.97, and Mt. Angel, \$985.18. All apportionments of this fund are made on the basis of the number of teachers employed.

Largest apportionments of the \$38,686.55 county school fund went to Salem district, which received \$12,075.41; Silverton, \$1,868.10; Woodburn, \$1131.65, and Mt. Angel, \$985.58. Division of this fund, derived from the county general tax, is on the basis of the number of pupils in the various districts.

Seabees Make Jap Daggers

SEATTLE, Dec. 13.—(AP)—As makers of "Japanese daggers," complete with inscriptions, the Seabees are good.

"Oddly enough," explained Cmdr. S. E. Mittler today, "The marines on Guadalcanal will buy the imitation in preference to the genuine article, even though they know the difference. They say the Seabees' daggers look more Japanese."

Cmdr. Mittler, just returned from visits to the special navy construction battalion units which were organized under his direction for South Pacific duty, explained in an interview that the Seabees started making the daggers for barter with the natives.

"At first," he said, "They thought they'd make exact replicas, but they decided they wouldn't look realistic enough as the Jap ordnance mark is just three plain circles. So they picked up some Japanese characters at random and inscribed them on the daggers. The only trouble is they didn't exercise any discretion in picking them."

Consequently the daggers inscriptions may say "This side up" or "canned pineapple" in Japanese.

Service Men Would Rather Play Santa Claus

PORTLAND, Dec. 13.—(AP)—The 400 service men who are pinching at Portland's short-handed postoffice agreed today that playing Santa Claus is easier than army drill. Besides they get every evening off.

W. W. Schuldt, foreman of parcel post delivery, commended the soldiers, who are loaned from nearby bases and paid only their regular army checks.

"If it wasn't for them," he said looking at the mountains of mail, "we wouldn't get it out."

Scarlet Fever Reported

PORTLAND, Dec. 13.—(AP)—Forty-one cases of scarlet fever last week brought the year's total in Portland to 239 cases with one death, the city health bureau reported today.

The same period last year had only 94 cases with one death.

Around Oregon

Collapse of a sewer tunnel they were building killed Roy Gearhart, 40, and seriously injured Edward John, both of Reedsport.

The Oregon High School Speech league named Walter Eschebeck, Klamath Falls, president, and planned a series of speech and drama activities for the interscholastic program of the Oregon High School Activities association.

Maj. Donald E. Good, oft-decorated bomber pilot, arrived at his Eugene home with his Australian bride, the daughter of a petty officer in the royal Australian navy. Dr. S. S. Chambers, Portland, was elected president of the Oregon Optometric association. A shipyard mishap cost the life of Arthur Nilsson, 68-year-old Portlander.

The war labor board began study of the demand of employees in Swift & Co.'s Portland plant for a wage boost of 15 cents an hour. Delilah Endicott, Eugene woman who was teaching in Manila when the city was captured by the Japanese, was reported safe in a Philippine internment camp by Mrs. H. D. Kneedlers, who returned to this country on the Gripsholm.

Controlled distribution of milk and cream in the Portland area has worked so satisfactorily that point rationing probably will not be necessary, Paul G. Adams, chief of the war food administration (WFA) milk order advisory committee, declared. The estate of Anna Locken, who was electrocuted last year while gathering mushrooms on the Baker county property of the Cornucopia Mine company, was awarded \$7,500 by a federal court in Portland.

Employees at the Mt. Emily sawmill, La Grande, who walked out Friday in protest against the discharge of a fellow-worker, returned Monday upon the promise of Federal Conciliator Guy V. Lintner that the west coast lumber commission would consider reinstatement of the dismissed employe.

Mrs. McCrae's Death Found 'Natural'

OREGON CITY, Dec. 13.—(AP)—A coroner's jury determined that Mrs. Marian McCrae, 74-year-old ex-newspaper woman who died November 10 in the Restwell sanitarium near Oswego, had succumbed from natural causes.

An inquest was ordered after two persons charged that Mrs. McCrae had been mistreated. Mrs. Mable Coleman Burge, sanitarium proprietor, testified that bruises on the woman's body had been caused by a fall from her bed.

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