



THE METROPOLITAN OPERA *75 years of musical tradition*



How the Metropolitan Opera looks today.

by Jerry Klein

IT HAS OFTEN been described as "the yellow brewery" and, strolling south along Broadway from Times Square, you might very well mistake the building for a dingy old warehouse. But it's the famed Metropolitan Opera House, now marking its 75th anniversary.

When the renaissance-style structure was completed, its doors opened on a lavish interior of ornate gold, marble, and plush. Nevertheless, the lead tenor of the very first production said: "I should advise the directors of the Metropolitan to tear out the inside of their building and rebuild . . . the house is unfit for music."

Apparently the tenor was way off-key. Even though that first season produced a \$600,000 deficit and it has been hard sledding financially ever since, the Met has become a mecca for the entire musical world.

It was in 1903 that the great Enrico Caruso made his Metropolitan debut in "Rigoletto." Over the next 17 seasons, he gave 607 performances in 36 different operas.

While in the past Europe supplied most such stars, in recent years more Americans have appeared; and the



Metropolitan has "exported" native artists to the Old World and presented operas in English. Rosa Ponselle, considered by many the greatest dramatic soprano ever produced, first sang at the opera house in 1918.

Fewer than 4,000 persons can crowd their way into a performance, and tickets are hard to acquire. Yet the Metropolitan has become a national institution: Saturday matinees are carried by more than 200 radio stations of the Columbia Broadcasting System. Indeed, while perhaps only half-a-million music lovers are able to attend the Met during an entire season, the radio audience is estimated at 15 million a week!



Leonard Warren



Licia Albanese



Salvatore Baccaloni

Great soprano Rosa Ponselle (left) in "Carmen," Warren in "Forza del Destino," Albanese as "Manon," and Baccaloni in "Il Barbiere." Below, first-night crowd last Fall.

