

ANNA MARIA ALBERGHETTI (Continued from page 11)

"She has a true sound," he said to Mother, "a definite vocal talent. I could teach her to become a great singer."

"It's such a little voice," Mother protested, "and she's too young. Teaching her now would be a complete waste of time."

But Father was determined—and Mother wasn't too surprised.

Father started to give me lessons immediately, and within a year I was studying four or five hours a day with him. By the time I was six years old and gave my first concert, I had, impossible as it may sound, three solid years of training behind me.

AT THE TIME of my first concert, World War II was on and the bombing raids on our island were increasing each week. Father, who was director of the Rhodes Musical Conservatory, appealed to the military governor to allow us to return to Italy.

Once the war ended, we moved to the city of Pesaro, Italy, where Father had been born, and my serious musical studies began again. Father himself taught me (he was suspicious of other voice teachers and would say, "If anybody's going to ruin my children's voices, it's going to be me").

Our family had little money, and Father would often go into debt to hire a hall for my early concerts. Once, all the members of the local orchestra refused to accept money, knowing Father was having trouble meeting his bills. Years later, Father insisted that we return to Pesaro to give a special concert from which all the money was turned over to the musicians.

Even if I was the center of attention on stage, my important role at home was being a member of our family. I tried acting superior once, and my little brother Paul said, "What do you think? That you are important because you can sing? Well, you couldn't without Papa!"

Though I loved Mother, I spent three times as many hours with Father and was much closer to him. Music was our special bond, and I could talk to him as a friend as I could never talk to Mother.

As I became more accomplished, Father began to arrange concerts all over Europe and eventually the United States. Shortly after my 13th birthday, I stepped onto the stage of Carnegie Hall in New York for my first appearance in America. The critics gave me wonderful reviews, and as a result Ed Sullivan invited me to appear on his television show.

FATHER WAS suspicious of movies, so when he was later approached for "Here Comes the Groom," with Bing Crosby and Jane Wyman, he almost turned it down. A studio vice president had to come and argue for days. Father agreed only after he was promised free round-trip tickets to Hollywood for all five Alberghettis.

If Father was demanding when it came to my contracts, he was equally hard in what he expected from me as a performer. Whenever I gave a bad concert, he stopped being

a father the moment we were alone. "I wouldn't pay 25 cents to see the concert you gave tonight," he would snap. "You should be ashamed to come out on a stage and sing the way you did!"

These quarrels were mainly professional, and they were healthy. We had the same Italian tempers that boiled over quickly. But we were able to forget the arguments just as quickly.

Never, in those years, did I conceive of a world without my father. When the doctors told me in 1956 that he was seriously ill, I couldn't believe it. But suddenly I discovered new responsibilities were dropping on my shoulders.

The first important decision was whether my father should undergo an operation. Mother felt that because Father and I had such similar temperaments, I would know best what he would want done.

"Talk to the doctors," she said. "Then you decide. I can't."

Unfortunately, however, the operation did not stop the disease, and the doctors said that Father had only six months to live. They tried to say it as gently as possible, but the brutal fact had to be faced.

FATHER DIED in 1957. After the funeral, I wandered around in a daze. Then, one evening, Mother came into my room as I was getting ready for bed.

Mother said, "You know, Anna, when God sends us something as terrible as your father's death, He also sends along with it a great strength to endure the grief and come out of it. If you don't try to keep on living and working, you will make this thing much harder for yourself."

When my manager called a day later to remind me of a contract I had been postponing for months with one of the big Las Vegas hotels, I said I'd try to play the date. That evening, I sat down with Carla, who was just launching her own career as a singer, and said, "You've got to come and work with me. I can't do it alone."

Tears were in Carla's eyes. "If you really need me, of course I'll help," she said.

Opening night in Las Vegas was frightening, yet I felt strangely calm. As we stood off-stage and the master of ceremonies began to introduce us, I felt Carla put her hand in mine. Though I knew Father was no longer with me physically, I realized he would never be completely gone.

Carla and I were a hit in Las Vegas. Now I'm living in New York alone, acting and singing on Broadway in the musical comedy, "Carnival."

Of course, I talk to Mother, Carla, and Paul in California practically every day on the telephone. I realize now that while Father had been giving his strength and wisdom to me he had also been giving to the others in my family.

When I needed help, they had stepped forward to give me strength. In a sense, my father is all about me—in the faces and love of my family.



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