

MADAME SCHUMANN-HEINK: A LEGEND IN HER TIME

by Richard W. Amero

Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink's life had the before-and-after quality of a fairy story. Born in poverty, she became rich. Considered plain and plump in appearance, on stage she was regal and impressive. When she began singing in public, at age 15, no one thought she would become a professional singer. When she moved to San Diego, at age 48, music critics in Europe and the United States hailed her as "the world's outstanding contralto."

Her parents called her "Tini" and her friends in Germany "Topsy," in reference to her physical size. Her children knew her by the intimate name "Nona." Composer Richard Strauss referred to her by the impersonal "the Heink," while impresario Maurice Grau addressed her by the friendlier name of "Heinke." Those who knew her on the stage or by reputation called her "Mother" or "Madame," reflecting the respect she inspired.

Born Ernestine Roessler at Lieben, near Prague (then part of Austria), June 15, 1861, her mother was Italian-born Charlotte (Goldman) Roessler and her father Hans Roessler, a cavalry lieutenant in the Austrian army. She got her aggressiveness and stubbornness from her father, whom she described as "a real old roughneck." Her softer qualities and appreciation for art came from her mother, who taught her to sing "When I was three," she recalled, "I already sang. I sang what my mother sang. . . . I'd put my mother's apron around me and start to act and sing."

Ernestine became acquainted with Leah Kohn, her Jewish grandmother on her mother's side, when she was five years old. Leah Kohn, who lived in Prague, had been born in Hungary. It must have been from her that Ernestine learned to dance the Czardas, the national Hungarian dance. Leah Kohn was fond of her granddaughter and she predicted that someday she would become famous.

Ernestine and her two younger sisters and baby brother had few comforts. Her father's salary was barely adequate to provide food and clothing. The children were often hungry. To get a piece of Swiss cheese for her mother, then expecting her fourth child, Ernestine danced the Czardas for a dour grocer.

While attending a convent school near Krakow, she had only a bottle of coffee and a piece of black bread for lunch. One day at lunchtime she left the school to explore the marketplace. To her amazement, workers from Italy were setting up a circus. "They were just having the midday meal when I came along. It smelled so good! And I was so hungry. . . . Ach, what must I do to get some of that good food? So I asked them, . . . could they give me something to eat—and I would work for it. They were astounded and roared with laughter, and said, 'If you want to work, little one, clean the monkey cages first, then you can eat!' I suppose they didn't think I'd really do it. . . . but I did it. And what a meal they gave me! I was stuffed like a Strasbourg goose!" Her scandalized father soon put a stop to his daughter's food-begging.

After the family moved back to Prague, Ernestine resumed her studies at an Ursuline convent. Her teachers selected her to sing tenor parts in the Mass. Not knowing how to read music, she sang by ear. While living at Graz, Ernestine's deep contralto voice so impressed retired-singer Marietta von LeClair, that she gave her free lessons for four years. As LeClair was hard of hearing, Ernestine sang at a high pitch, a practice she regarded later as harmful to the voice. She was then thirteen years old.

At fourteen, Ernestine saw her first opera, *Il Trovatore*, with Marianne Brandt as Azucena, a role in which she was later to excel. At fifteen, Ernestine sang the contralto part in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at the Akademischer Gesangverein in Graz. Sponsors of the event paid her 24 marks or about six dollars. Marie Wilt, who weighed three-hundred pounds, was the soprano soloist.

On hearing Ernestine sing at the home of Frau Nina Kienzl, mother of composer Wilhelm Kienzl, La Batt, a tenor, suggested she apply for a position with the Vienna Imperial Opera. Retired Field Marshall Benedikt gave her fifty gulden to make the journey to Vienna. Unimpressed by the poorly dressed young women before him, Von Jauner, the opera director, sneered: "Why with such a face—no personality at all—how can you expect to succeed? My dear girl, you better give up the idea of singing and let the people who brought you buy you a sewing machine and set you to work. You will never be a singer!"

Not long after the rebuff at Vienna, on the recommendation of an agent, an impresario of the Dresden Opera invited Ernestine to try out

Before making her way to Dresden, she secured another 400 gulden from the husband of a friend, bought some clothes, and told her disapproving father she had been invited to the mountains for a week. After hearing her sing the demanding "Ah! mon fils" from *Le Prophete* (Meyerbeer) and "Brindisi" from *Lucrezia Borgia* (Donizetti), the same songs she had sung in Vienna, Director van Platen engaged her at 3,600 marks or about \$900 a year.

On October 15, 1878, at seventeen years of age, the immature young singer made her debut as Azucena, the elderly gypsy, in *Il Trovatore* (Verdi). Overcome by the incongruity of the situation, she could not restrain her giggles as she related how she threw her child into the flames. To supplement her meager income, she sang in the choir at the Dresden Cathedral. Owing to her inability to read music, she often missed cues and came in off pitch. The distressed conductor, Karl Krebs, upbraided her, but his more kindly wife, contralto Madame Krebs-Michalesi gave her free lessons. At last, under the guidance of Madame Krebs-Michalesi, Ernestine learned to read music.

In 1882, at twenty-one, Ernestine Roessler married Ernst Heink, secretary of the Dresden Opera without securing the consent of the management, a condition of her contract. Management responded by dismissing both of them. Her husband secured a post in the Hamburg Custom House while Ernestine remained in Dresden where she continued to sing in the Cathedral.

She gave birth to August, her first son, February 20, 1883. Frau Heink rejoined her husband, in the fall of 1883 when, at the urging of Ludwig Hartmann, a Dresden critic, Bernard Pollini awarded her a contract to sing utility roles at the Hamburg Opera for "a few hundred marks a season." During her first four years at Hamburg she sang bit parts and gave birth to Charlotte (1884) and Henry (1886).

The highlight of these early years came during a festival when she sang the alto part in Brahms's Rhapsody with Hans von Bulow as conductor and Brahms in the audience. Von Bulow hoped Ernestine would sing in a Mozart cycle he was planning, but, on hearing of the expected arrival of Hans, her fourth child, he changed his mind.

Hamburg authorities took away her husband's position as a customs official when they discovered he was from Saxony. Finding himself without work and worried over the birth of another baby, Ernst Heink left for his home province. The task of paying off accumulated debts and supporting the children fell on Ernestine. Despite difficulties, she continued studying and monitoring the work of the lead singers. She practiced the big parts while she was nursing her babies.

Her situation worsened. To satisfy the family's debts, the sheriff took the furniture. Finally, reaching a depth of dejection, Ernestine decided to throw herself and her children in front of a locomotive. She said later it was the voice of her little girl Charlotte crying, "Mamma! Mamma! I love you!. I love you!. Take me home!," that brought her to her senses.

In August 1887, Boetel, a tenor, asked Ernestine to sing without compensation at a benefit in Berlin. She left her three children in a neighbor's care and, pregnant with Hans, she traveled all night third-class. Arriving early in the day in Berlin and unable to afford a hotel, she sat under trees at the Tiergarten until rehearsals began. Her performance of the tormented gypsy Azucena in the evening, now sharpened by her own sufferings, was a sensation.

Meanwhile, back in Hamburg, manager Pollini realized he had to ask Frau Heink to sing a leading role. The way was cleared when his leading contralto, Marie Goetze, refused to sing the role of Carmen. Wearing clothes hastily assembled by members of the cast and singing by ear, Frau Heink astounded everyone. Amused by the situation, conductor Gustav Mahler pointed out that by memorizing the singing and acting styles of the Carmens who had preceded her at Hamburg, Frau Heink had memorized their faults. With Marie Goetze still refusing to sing, Frau Heink stepped into the roles of Fides in *Le Prophete* and Ortrud in *Lohengrin*. Her technical mastery of these roles was amazing, her deeper emotional understanding was to come.

His misgivings now resolved, Pollini awarded Frau Heink a 10-year contract at 800 marks, or about \$200 a month, and made her Hamburg's leading contralto.

In these fledgling years, Frau Heink's impish impulses and headstrong temperament kept her from taking art or herself too seriously. She found that by mimicking the leading

singers she could get a laugh from the audience. As an older woman she told her biographer Mary Lawton, "Well, it is not much to my credit, but somehow I don't regret it even now!"

She developed a dislike for composer and conductor Gustav Mahler. Because Mahler was intensely serious about "art," but, also, because he did not "pay attention to her as a woman," Ernestine spread the report he was homosexual.

From 1887 to 1898 Frau Heink sang in festivals, oratorios and concerts in Berlin, London, Sweden and Norway and, beginning in 1896, at the Bayreuth Festival. Lillian Nordica, a celebrated American soprano and Wagnerian singer, took an interest in Ernestine. Lillian provided her with clothes and jewelry to wear when she sang for high society at the American singer's home in Regent's Park.

Among those who helped Frau Heink perfect her craft were Matilda Brandt, dramatic soprano of the Hamburg Opera, who taught her the restrained style of singing required for oratorios and Cosima Wagner, widow of composer Richard Wagner, who encouraged her to learn to sing in pianissimo.

The singer's increasing successes, her three-octave vocal range from low D to high B, and her self-assurance on the stage brought her the roles of Adriano in *Rienzi* (Wagner), Amneris in *Aida* (Verdi), Brangane in *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner), Erda in *Das Rheingold* and *Siegfried* (Wagner), Fides in *Le Prophete* (Meyerbeer), Fricka in *Die Walkure* (Wagner), Graf in *Der Trompeter von Sackingen* (Nessler), Katisha in *The Mikado* (Gilbert and Sullivan), Leonora in *La Favorita* (Donizetti), Magdalene in *Die Meistersinger* (Wagner), Marcellina in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Mozart), Martha in *Faust* (Gounod), Mary in *Der fliegende Hollander* (Wagner), Orfeo in *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Gluck), Orsini in *Lucrezia Borgia* (Donizetti), Ortrud in *Lohengrin* (Wagner), Ritta in *Zampa* (Herold), the shepherd boy in *Tannhauser* (Wagner), Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung* (Wagner), and the witch in *Hansel und Gretel* (Humperdinck).

In 1893, at 31, Ernestine divorced the long-absent Ernest Heink and married Paul Schumann, actor and director of the Thalia Theater in Hamburg. Thereafter reporters and critics called her Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink. By taking a second husband while her first was still living, Schumann-Heink could no longer receive communion in the Roman Catholic Church. In later years she prayed and sang in churches of many denominations. She thought the essential truths of all religions were more important than their differences. "I believe in God," she said. "I am a Roman Catholic. My husband, Paul Schumann, was a good Mason. But what does it matter what one is, if God is in one's heart?"

Paul Schumann taught his wife to interpret songs by speaking the words before she sang them. Her phrasing, diction, and understanding of lyrics owed much to her husband's insights. She sang the witch in *Hansel und Gretel* after her husband convinced her of the role's dramatic possibilities. Though she claimed her husband had helped her understand the content of lyrics, critics found some of her interpretations to be insincere and

tarnished by stylistic flourishes. Significantly, critics found these flaws to be more noticeable after the death of Paul Schumann in 1904.

Walter Schumann, her husband's son by a prior marriage, and Ferdinand (1893), Marie (1896) and George (1898), who came later, brought the number of her children to eight. The advent of her children meant Schumann-Heink was rich in milk; however, the opera tours prevented her from nursing her own children. Twice she made good the situation by nursing babies of mothers who had no milk of their own.

Bruno Walter, assistant conductor to Gustav Mahler at the Hamburg Opera from 1894-98 recalled Schumann-Heink as a singer who combined remarkable talent with willful disposition. In spite of a tendency to resist, "she could be depended upon to use her gifts in a thoroughly artistic manner." Schumann-Heink did not yield gracefully to direction. As she said to her biographer Mary Lawton, "For me there was no conductor. He never existed in a sense for I always knew what I was about." Such sublime self-confidence must have been a sore trial for Gustav Mahler and Bruno Walter!

Music critic George Bernard Shaw was captivated by Schumann-Heink's fine contralto voice, and the power and passion of her delivery at the Bayreuth Festival of 1896, but was less taken by the summer gown and fashionable sleeves she was wearing under her black-blue Valkyrie armor as Waltraute in *Gotterdammerung*.

Schumann-Heink's American debut took place in Chicago on November 7, 1898 as Ortrud in *Lohengrin*. She had taken a leave of absence from the Royal Opera House in Berlin to become a member of the Maurice Grau Opera Company. Four weeks later she gave birth to a boy in the Belvedere Hotel in New York City. At the suggestion of the doctor who assisted in the birth, she named her son George Washington Schumann.

The Metropolitan debut took place January 9, 1899. Henry Krehbield of the New York Tribune, claimed that though her high register was not as beautiful as her low, she won admiration for her thrilling use of tonal color and her ability to depict a character who was "half woman, half witch and all wickedness personified."

In the summer of 1899, while a member of the Maurice Grau Company, she appeared before Queen Victoria in a condensed version of *Lohengrin* at Windsor Castle. Afterwards, the Queen told her in German how much she liked her voice; but probably not in the manner in which Schumann-Heink related the incident to a reporter for the Toronto Daily Star, February 16, 1931: "About the children, the Queen more than once told me that it was because I was a great mother that it helped me to be a great singer; and she said that my voice about my children was sweeter than all my voice in all my concert halls."

Less discreetly, Edward, Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) asked her how she could have so many children and still find time to sing. Schumann-Heink was piqued, but made no reply.

That same season, hearing that her baby George was dying, she broke her contract with Covent Garden to rush to her home in Germany. By so doing she forfeited future appearances at Covent Garden.

In the 1902-03 season Maurice Grau put on a Der Ring des Niebelungen cycle at the Metropolitan with Schumann-Heink as a Rhine maiden and Erda in *Das Rheingold*, a Valkyrie and Fricka in *Die Walkure*, Erda in *Siegfried*, and a Rhine maiden and Waltraute in *Götterdämmerung*. The use of a singer in more than one role in a Wagnerian opera would not have been allowed at Bayreuth.

Successes in Chicago, New York City, Pittsburgh, Boston and St. Louis prompted Schumann-Heink, in October 1903, to buy off her contract with the Berlin Opera Company for \$5,000. She could make more money singing in the United States than she could in Europe. After her defection to the United States, German critics took to calling her "Sängerin von Dollarland."

During her 1903-04 concert season, the prosperous singer gave 102 recitals in the United States and in the 1906-07 season, 129. She visited Europe in the summers to sing at Bayreuth and to visit Villa Tini, her country home, at Koetzchenbroda, near Dresden.

Disregarding the advice of her husband, in September 1904, Schumann-Heink forsook the operatic and concert stages to tour in *Love's Lottery*, a musical comedy. Fred C. Whitney, her manager, had promised her an income of \$240,000 for 40 weeks of appearances plus a 5 percent share of the gross receipts. Composer Julian Edwards and lyric author Stanislaus Strange followed the singer during her 1903 concert tour to become acquainted with her voice and stage manners. Using the knowledge thus obtained, they created the role of a buxom German washerwoman in love with an equally robust English sergeant. Schumann-Heink supplied the stilted English and heavy accent that convulsed her audience.

Critics in the *New York World* and the *New York Herald* were gentle in their comments, but a critic in *Leslie's Weekly* could not hold back his scorn: "Madame Schumann-Heink is not an unalloyed joy. Her comedy is pathetically heavy and her one idea of humor (?) is to mock her own broken English by saying repeatedly, 'Ist mein English goot?'"

In a bid for public sympathy, Schumann-Heink said she had deserted grand opera so she could get enough money to bring her ailing husband and her children to the United States. Paul Schumann died in Germany, November 28, 1904. Though, toward the end, her husband had been unable to work, her time with him was the happiest in her life.

On February 10, 1905, Schumann-Heink took out United States naturalization papers in Cincinnati. That same year, on May 27, she married William Rapp, Jr., a Chicago lawyer, who had become her business manager and was 13 years younger than she.

An attack of tonsillitis forced the diva to close her season with *Love's Lottery* in November 1905. Physicians had told her she would lose her voice permanently if she continued to sing. It cost her \$5,000 to be released from her contract.

In February 1906 she returned to Germany where she succeeded in getting six of her eight children out of the country. August, a merchant seaman, and Charlotte, the wife of Doctor Grief in Leipzig, remained behind. According to German law, Schumann-Heink, by marrying a foreigner, had forfeited her property in Germany. Also, her boys were required to serve in the army before they could leave the country. The German courts decided the boys and daughter Marie could accompany her to America and that she could retain one-third of the money in Germany as she, rather than her deceased husband, had earned it. Her home in Germany was confiscated, and she had to buy it back.

Schumann-Heink chose a 78-acre estate, consisting of farm and woodland, on Caldwell Mountain, near Montclair, New Jersey, to be her principal American home. She called her two-story, stick-style home *Villa Fides*, after the forgiving mother in Meyerbeer's opera *Le Prophete*. Besides her husband, children and a staff of seven employees, she kept over 200 hens, six horses, five dogs, two pigs, a donkey, a pony, and a pair of Austrian doves. An awestruck reporter in *Musical America*, October 6, 1906, wrote a closet holding the singer's wardrobe "was larger than many New York bedrooms." The sojourn at *Villa Fides* lasted from April 1906 to December 1911.

In July, after getting her children settled, Schumann-Heink resumed singing at the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth, after which she appeared at a Wagner-Mozart Festival in Munich and as a soloist on the concert stage in Paris and London. In her memoirs, soprano Nellie Melba related how Schumann-Heink committed a faux-pas at an afternoon concert in Paris by appearing in an evening dress. Her singing of Vitella's aria from Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* so overwhelmed her audience that the inappropriate dress was forgotten.

Returning to the United States in October, Schumann-Heink embarked on another concert tour that she ended in March 1907 by appearing as Fricka and Waltraute in *Die Walkure* at the Metropolitan Opera. A reviewer of a recital in Carnegie Hall, writing in the *New York Sun*, October 21, 1906, found that despite her 45-years Schumann-Heink was singing in her usual splendid, if mixed, manner. "She has all her old merits, all her old faults. She still indulges occasionally in bad attack, in spasmodic and ejaculatory phrasing in cantabile passage, and in failures to take intervals faultlessly. But, on the other hand, she has still the splendor of tone, the magnificent sweep of utterance and the stimulating appearance of reserve power which made her singing a constant joy in days now well remembered."

Schumann-Heink resented Metropolitan Opera Heinrich Conried's bossy treatment of his star singers and objected to his staging of *Parsifal* outside Bayreuth, an act Wagnerites regarded as sacrilege. Glad to be free of the officious Conried, in 1907-08 she joined the Manhattan Opera Company for its second season. Its manager, the mercurial Oscar Hammerstein I, discovered the star singers he had engaged—Lillian Nordica, Emma

Calve and Schumann-Heink—were costing too much. He behaved so badly toward Nordica that she resigned. It is not known how he got rid of Calve and Schumann-Heink. It is known Schumann-Heink sang only one performance, that of Azucena in *Il Trovatore* on January 27, 1908. Apparently her Italian was rusty as she sang the role in German while everyone else sang in Italian. Idle for the rest of the season, she made up her losses by touring the United States and Europe.

On January 25, 1909, Schumann-Heink sang the role of Klytemnestra at the premiere in Dresden of *Elektra* (Richard Strauss). She complained the vocal parts were "a thunderous medley of groans, moans and sighs," and feared she had harmed her voice. On his side, Strauss was disappointed by her wooden acting and Wagnerian style of declamation. Three weeks after her vocally-damaging performance as Klytemnestra, she sang the less demanding "Danza" (Chadwick) and "The Rosary" (Nevin) before Kaiser Wilhelm II and Queen Alexandra of England, who was visiting Germany at the time. Queen Alexandra blurted out, "I know where you learned your English. You learned it in America because everything you say is slang."

Pleased with her success, Schumann-Heink said she had reached "the top of the hill." Money coming in from recitals, opera appearances and recordings for the Victor Talking Machine Company went out in investments in stocks, bonds and real estate.

In January 1910, while on tour of the Pacific coast, Schumann-Heink decided to live in Grossmont, an undeveloped tract of land overlooking El Cajon Valley in East San Diego. Local businessman Ed Fletcher and William B. Gross, a former actor and producer, owned this land, but Fletcher managed its development. He sold Schumann-Heink 500 acres for \$20,000. Besides a lot near the top of Grossmont, the lots included a 14-acre orange and lemon grove and several acres in El Cajon on which eucalypti were to be planted. The 1910 visit represented a turning point in Schumann-Heink's life. She could now provide homes for herself and her grown-up children, and could oversee the future direction of her children's lives.

William Rapp, Jr., the singer's husband, opposed her plan to perpetuate her children's dependency, so he was sacrificed, to the relief of the children. Confident of both her riches and power, Schumann-Heink said, "I do not see why my children should work hard when I have plenty to provide for all of them. I do not want them scattered. I want all of them near me all the time." On December 10, 1911, Rapp left the New Jersey home. The next month Schumann-Heink announced her intention to sue for divorce.

Following a bitter trial, in which each party accused the other of adultery, the divorce became final, October 5, 1915.

Dell W. Harris, a San Diego architect, designed Casa Ernestina, the Grossmont home. It consisted of a basement foundation of granite rubble, a plastered main floor, and a roof of red cement tile. On the north side of the living room, French doors opened on a terrace commanding a view of El Cajon Valley and the mountains. The home cost about \$7,000 and opened for occupancy in 1913.

Son Hans moved on a 15-acre ranch on the slopes of Grossmont where he planted orange, lemon and olive trees. His mother arranged for Ferdinand to take over a 40-acre ranch near Lakeside, but Ferdinand resisted so Hans got the ranch. He used the land to raise hogs and grow fruits and vegetables. Eventually, with his mother's backing, Ferdinand took over the management of a cattle ranch in Imperial Valley and a butchering business in El Cajon. Daughter Marie married Hubert Guy of San Diego in 1915.

Delighted that Schumann-Heink had chosen a residence in the vicinity, San Diego reporters played up her image as a devoted mother.

The following tribute is typical of many:

"Madame Schumann-Heink is above all things else the mother, the great-hearted woman who has risen above the petty struggles, above the heart aches and reverses, and at the prime of her life is surrounded by loving children, eight in all, whose adoration for the 'little mother' is the strongest thing of their lives."

Along with her image as a doting mother of adult offspring, the singer cultivated an image as a patriotic American by flying a large American flag over her various homes and by proclaiming her love for her adopted country at every opportunity. "I love America and I love Americans. I cannot tell you how much I love them, the great-hearted people, and they love me. I want my children to be Americans, to marry Americans, and to live in America."

The Schumann-Heink without whom the others would not exist was Schumann-Heink the artist. She knew her talent required constant exercise. By the time she came to Grossmont she had developed her style and repertoire and did not change them drastically after that, except to include patriotic and sentimental songs in English.

To attract large audiences, she insisted the price of admission to her recitals be kept as low as possible. She knew instinctively how to gain public support. Upon her well-publicized arrival in new towns, she would wait for a large body of citizens to gather round. Then, spreading her arms wide, she would announce emphatically in her accented English, "Dis is my town. Here I am at home!"

In the pre-World War I years, 1913-1916, Schumann-Heink's name became a household word. Magazines and newspapers printed intimate details of her life. She toured the United States, made money, supervised her children and grandchildren, and devoted a portion of her time, talent and money to philanthropic causes.

The Redpath-Vawter, Redpath-Horner, and Redpath-Chicago branches of the Chautauqua Lecture Circuit handled the concerts in the Midwest. She sang under canvas tents. Henry P. Harrison, a manager, recalled a rained-out concert in a small town in Ohio. At curtain time, the local manager discovered his gate receipts would not cover the cost of the concert. Informed of the situation, Schumann-Heink said she would make up the \$300 loss out of her own fee. Her reason was practical: "If you stay in this business, is one

thing to learn. Never let them lose money on you. If Schumann-Heink go out now and sing like the angel, and that man, he loses money, then Schumann-Heink, she no good! Her voice, it is kaput. But if Schumann-Heink go out and sing off key and the management make money, then he tell everybody, Schumann-Heink, she sing like the angel."

Walter Schumann incurred his stepmother's displeasure in September 1913, when he eloped with a shopgirl in Paterson, New Jersey.

As soon as Schumann-Heink was settled in Grossmont, civic leaders asked for endorsements. Did she favor bonds for the upcoming Exposition? Her first answer was wary, "Is it a check you want?" Then she gave the hoped-for response, "If the Exposition will bring people to San Diego and the bonds are necessary to the Exposition, I am for the bonds."

Many cities and towns besides San Diego profited from the diva's generosity. She had a farm in North Dakota and maintained residences in New York City, Chicago and Caldwell Mountain. Great at thinking up promotional schemes, such as a home for retired actors and singers, she left their realization to others.

While she was singing in the 1914 Bayreuth Festival, World War I began. She ordered her chauffeur to put an American flag in front of her automobile. The flag placated officials looking for enemy agents and enabled her to reach the American consul at Coburg. After a roundabout route which took her to Copenhagen, she, her son George Washington, her daughter Marie, and her accompanist, Mrs. Katherine Hoffman, finally sailed for America on a Holland-American liner out of Rotterdam.

To recover from a bout with pneumonia, the diva decided to spend 1915 resting at Grossmont. But such interludes were rare. Taking advantage of her presence, managers of the San Diego Panama-California Exposition declared March 22, 1915 "Schumann-Heink Day." Some 6,000 schoolchildren sang "America" before the singer at the Balboa Park Organ Pavilion. Mayor Charles O'Neill presented her with an honorary citizenship award. In return, she promised to give a free concert at the Exposition in June.

On the evening of June 23, the eagerly-awaited event occurred. For the over 27,000 people at the Pavilion, it was the event of the year. A San Diego Sun reporter reached for the limits of hyperbole: "The greatest organ, the greatest voice, the greatest chorus, the greatest outdoors on earth, she's golrious (sic)." At the diva's request, attendants allowed children under 16 to enter the grounds free.

San Diego's newly-appointed "honorary citizen" gave a concert as well planned and executed as any she would give in a concert hall. Selections were "But the Lord Is Mindful of His Own" (Mendelssohn); "The Rosary" (Nevin); "My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice" (Saint-Saens); "Die Forelle" (Schubert); "Weigenlied" (Brahms); "Heimweh" (Wolf); "Spinnerliedchen" (Anon.); "Dawn in the Desert" (Ross); "The Cry of Rachel" (Salter); "Agnus Dei" (Bizet); and "Stille Nacht" (Gruber). The concert concluded with

the audience joining the diva in singing "The Star-Spangled Banner." As Schumann-Heink had not yet learned the words for the latter, she sang the notes of the scale, causing some of her hearers to wonder in what language she was singing.

Also in June, August, her eldest son, a sailor on the Hamburg-American line, came to San Diego to see his mother. Despite her protests, he insisted on going back to Germany to be with his wife and children and to join the German Navy. His mother kissed him and made the sign of the cross over his forehead at the Santa Fe Railroad Station before he left, never to return.

In October, son Henry, who was a recorder at Paterson, New Jersey, was charged with embezzling funds. His mother made good the missing money and the matter was dropped.

In December, on hearing that son Hans was ill with lobar pneumonia, his mother rushed to San Diego from Chicago to be at his side. It seemed he might recover, so she sang at the reopening of the Panama-California International Exposition on the afternoon of January 1, 1916. The respite came to a cruel end January 5, when her son died.

After a 13-year absence from the Metropolitan Opera, on February 17, Schumann-Heink sang the role of Erda in a matinee performance of Siegfried (Wagner). Critics praised her pure diction and the power of her lower register, but noticed the middle and upper registers were showing signs of weakness.

Back in San Diego, in September, she attended a Pioneer Days meeting at the Exposition where she told descendants of San Diego's early settlers that she had bought a plot for her grave next to her son's in the cemetery at San Diego. (As Hans was cremated and the ashes placed in a vault, his mother's statement was not accurate.)

At midnight, January 1, 1917, the diva sang "Auld Lang Syne" at the closing of San Diego's Exposition. Auditors recalled that she also sang "A Perfect Day" by Carrie Jacobs Bond, her neighbor and friend at Grossmont. This number was not mentioned in newspaper accounts. Before her singing, Exposition president G. A. Davidson gave Schumann-Heink a jewel medal set with stones found in San Diego County. Engravers had etched on the medal: "To our beloved Schumann-Heink from the San Diego Exposition, 1915-1916."

That same month Schumann-Heink announced a plan to make the Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park the setting for a summer festival comparable to Bayreuth's. To get things moving, she deposited \$10,000. The editor of the *San Diego Union* was ecstatic: "The establishment of this 'American Bayreuth' will bring in its train a host of the collateral arts, all drawn after their sister muse to a city permanently fitted by climate, scenery and the temperament of its inhabitants to stand as a monument to the things that make life worthwhile." Schumann-Heink had forgotten that on June 17, 1907 she had told a New York Time's reporter: "It is impossible to establish an American Bayreuth." It is doubtful the diva's plan could have been realized because of the inadequacy of the Spreckels

Organ Pavilion for the purpose and because of the remote location of San Diego from the population centers of the United States.

In any case, the United States' declaration of war against Germany, April 6, 1917, brought plans for cultural improvement to a halt. As a naturalized American of Austrian origin with a brother in command of an Austrian warship, a son in the German navy, and two sisters living in Germany, Schumann-Heink found her love for her new country clashed with her love for her old. By putting the welfare of the United States first, she became a symbol of national motherhood.

Anti-Germans spread the lie that Schumann-Heink had concealed gold on the grounds of her New Jersey estate to pay for espionage. Others active in spreading rumors claimed William Besthorn, her gardener, a former reserve officer in the German navy, and a German citizen, was operating a radio apparatus in Grossmont. In response to such speculation, the Department of Justice posted a guard outside the Grossmont home. Infuriated, Schumann-Heink put a guard inside the grounds to watch the one outside. The situation became so ridiculous that both guards were called off.

Henry Schumann-Heink and George Washington Schumann joined the U.S. Navy. Ferdinand Schumann became a member of the U.S. Army, 242nd Artillery at Camp Funston, Arizona. Walter Schumann enlisted as a cook in the U.S. Navy. The Army discharged Ferdinand after his lungs had been weakened by pneumonia. A German submarine torpedoed the transport George was on off the coast of France, but he survived. An American destroyer rammed the submarine August was on, June 15, 1918, resulting in the drowning of Schumann-Heink's eldest son.

Putting aside whatever sympathy she may have had for Germany, Schumann-Heink devoted her energies toward promoting an American victory. She never indulged in anti-German rhetoric, but she refrained from singing songs in German during her recitals. Ironically, Geraldine Farrar, an American soprano, refused to surrender to anti-German hysteria and continued, despite public opposition, to sing songs by Bach, Schubert and Brahms.

When asked what was her attitude toward the war, Schumann-Heink responded, "Hatred is a horrible thing. I have read about all those awful things Billy Sunday has been saying. But he will not make American boys hate. They just don't know how. It isn't in them." "Don't write the boys anything but cheerful letters," she told mothers. "They are going to face something worse than anything that is happening to them at home. Forget those little troubles and tell them you are proud of them and that you are happy because they are your boys."

As long as the war lasted, Schumann-Heink crossed the county, entertaining military men, and appearing at fund raisers for Liberty Bonds or for the Red Cross, Knights of Columbus, Young Men's Christian Association, and Jewish War Relief. During stopovers in San Diego she sang, reviewed troops, and dined with sailors and soldiers at military camps in Balboa Park, Camp Kearny and North Island. After she sang "Ave Maria"

(Gounod) and "Agnus Dei" (Bizet) at a military mass at the Balboa Park Organ Pavilion, July 9, 1917, Colonel J. P. O'Neill decorated her with the colors of the 21st Infantry Regiment and named her an honorary colonel. She responded in her typically expansive manner, "These boys of the 21st are now my boys. I love them all and will be a mother to them."

Taking advantage of her proclamations of motherly love, servicemen sent letters to their surrogate "mother" asking for money to tide them over emergencies.

A recital by Schumann-Heink at the Balboa Park Organ Pavilion, July 27, cleared \$2,000 for the Associated Charities of San Diego. As her home at Grossmont was adequate for her and her family's needs, she sold her Caldwell Mountain home in New Jersey in November. Having finally been taught the words of the "Star-Spangled Banner" by Captain Werner during her visits to Camp Funston to see Ferdinand, Schumann-Heink sang this song and "When the Boys Come Home" (Speaks) at the municipal tree on San Diego's City Plaza on Christmas Eve. Later that evening, she sang at midnight mass at Camp Kearny.

At a fund-raising concert at the Balboa Park Organ Pavilion, May 27, 1918, Schumann-Heink told her audience of about 15,000 people that she was going to France where she would work in the canteens and sing in the trenches. It is not clear why the promise was never kept; however accounts released later claimed the State Department would not let her go because she had boys in the service. Still another explanation claimed the French government vetoed the trip.

As she did in 1917, so in 1918, Schumann-Heink sang on Christmas Eve in the San Diego City Plaza and at Camp Kearny. At both places her audience wore face masks to ward off deadly influenza germs.

San Diego was not the only city to profit from the diva's generosity. She converted her home in Chicago into a canteen for servicemen; visited the wounded in hospitals; and gave pep talks at rallies for Liberty Bonds. At one such rally in New York City, October 1918, she sold \$200,000 in bonds.

In 1918-19 the Grossmont home became the temporary home of Zelda Schumann-Heink (widow of Hans) and Elsie Schumann-Heink, whose husband Henry was stationed at the San Pedro U.S. Naval Base. Following the end of hostilities, George became a bookkeeper in San Diego and Henry a sales agent for stocks and bonds. Kaethe Heink, widow of August, settled in San Diego. Ferdinand left ranching to seek work in the packing business or in newspapers (the indecisiveness was characteristic). Walter remained in the East and Charlotte in Germany. Happy to have so many members of her family close by, Schumann-Heink purchased the former William B. Gross home at Grossmont for Henry and homes for George and Kaethe in San Diego.

During the first part of 1919, Schumann-Heink championed a campaign to raise money to build a war memorial in Balboa Park. This plan evolved into the laying out of Pershing

Drive in the park. The drive was to be lined with shade trees and marked with plaques containing the names of San Diegans who died in the war. There was much talk, but little action. After a May 24 recital at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion for the memorial, the exasperated fund-raiser lectured the audience: "If you in San Diego, who have conceived this great memorial, would stop your scrapping among yourself and advance in one body for the good of your beautiful city, what could you do! You have been first to recognize the honor due to our sainted dead. Let us continue in this spirit."

Schumann-Heink must have sold her Chicago home in late 1919 or early 1920 as references to it no longer appear in surviving documents.

On being informed of the death of Captain Werner, who had taught her the words of "The Star-Spangled Banner," Schumann-Heink sang "The Lord Is Mindful of His Own" (Mendelssohn) and "Taps" (Pasternack) at his funeral in Kansas City, Missouri. Her description of this episode, as related to Mary Lawton, is exceptionally melodramatic and contrary to fact for Schumann-Heink claimed she did not know it was Captain Werner until she saw the body in the casket.

Schumann-Heink left Vancouver, British Columbia, April 29, 1921 for a tour of the Far East. Son Ferdinand, baritone George Morgan, and pianist Katherine Hoffman accompanied her. The tour took her to Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Batavia, Manila and Honolulu. At the outdoor concert in Batavia, thousands of bats flew about eating mosquitoes close to the singer's head. "It's fine," she said, "as long as they don't take me for a mosquito."

Wherever Schumann-Heink went, she was applauded wildly, dined and feted, and showered with gifts. Unfortunately an attack of bronchitis in July forced the diva to cancel the tour. Weak and eager to rest, she arrived in San Francisco August 6.

Her energies having returned, on November 7, 1921, the 60-year old singer gave a concert at the Spreckels Theater in San Diego to raise funds to finish the roof of the Civic Auditorium in Balboa Park. To her captivated audience it seemed Schumann-Heink's lustrous voice could never grow old. At one point in the concert she and her accompanist Arthur Loesser seemed to disagree over who should go first. She turned roguishly to the audience and said, "I behave just as bad everywhere."

Finding Coronado more congenial than Grossmont, in 1922 the diva sold the last four acres of her property at Caldwell Mountain in New Jersey and purchased a three-story, gray stucco mansion in Coronado from John D. Spreckels. Son Henry, his wife and family continued to live in the Grossmont home.

That same year, Schumann-Heink began giving benefit concerts for the San Diego Rest Haven Home for Undernourished Children. On August 10, 1923, an estimated 30,000 people paid their respects to President Warren G. Harding, who had died in office on August 2, at a memorial service held at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion. Schumann-Heink sang "O Rest in the Lord" (Mendelssohn) as her contribution to the program.

Again at the dedication of the American Legion War Memorial Hall in Balboa Park, June 12, 1924, the diva sang appropriate patriotic songs before some 2,500 people.

The most remarkable event in 1926 was Schumann-Heink's return to the Metropolitan Opera on February 25 to sing Erda in *Das Rheingold*. Henrietta Straus wrote in the *Nation*: "Her voice, though impaired in the heights, still rolled out, rich and controlled. And her art worked its old magic."

The 65-year old singer told a *San Diego Union* reporter, August 21, that she would retire from the stage in 1928 and begin teaching to pass her knowledge on to others. On December 16, Walter Damrosch conducted the New York Symphony in a "Golden Jubilee" celebration of the 50th anniversary of Schuman-Heink's first appearance on the stage in 1876. To show she still was capable of rich dramatic and vocal effects, Schumann-Heink sang Erda's "Warning" from *Das Rheingold* and Waltraute's "Narrative" from *Gotterdamering*. Olin Downes wrote in the *New York Times*: "The voice had to be used with special care, but there are not many contraltos now singing Wagner who achieve such an artistic impression. . . . If one had expected to witness a memorial service, they were corrected long before Schumann-Heink had ended."

In January 1927, *Good Housekeeping* magazine ran a series on the singer's life, as told to Mary Lawton. The next year Macmillan Company published the articles as Schumann-Heink: The Last of the Titans. Schumann-Heink painted a provocative picture of herself as a person who rarely admitted she had made a mistake; who did not take kindly to direction from her parents, colleagues and directors; who had an impish tendency to clown; and who ridiculed and spread malicious gossip about people who had incurred her displeasure. With such wayward impulses, it is no wonder Schumann-Heink left the operatic stage after her earnings multiplied.

In July 1927 Schumann-Heink returned from a visit to Germany where she saw her daughter Charlotte Grief, who was living in Leipzig, the wife of a physician, and where she attended the wedding of a granddaughter.

Farewell concerts took up the remainder of 1927 and the greater part of 1928. The Chicago farewell took place October 15, 1927, the New York City farewell, December 10, the San Diego farewell, January 20, 1928, and the Los Angeles farewell, February 7. Reviews complimented the quality of the singing and the manner in which she displayed her personality.

Schumann-Heink had reached the stage where the character of the singer was more important than the character of the song. As flowers showered down, the diva responded by weeping. Tears also flowed during the singing of songs showing a woman's love and sorrow, such as "Danny Boy" and the "Song of Rachel." The sight of their favorite "mother" overcome by emotion aroused her audiences to peaks of enthusiasm.

In honor of Schumann-Heink's final San Diego appearance, Lieutenant William Van Dusen flew an Army airplane over her Coronado home while dropping flowers.

By the time the farewell concerts were over, everyone discovered they were not over. Sure enough, on June 12, 1928, Schumann-Heink sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the Republican National Convention, prompting comedian Will Rogers to remark he wished she could have sung the keynote speech. Republicans were less pleased with their invited singer when she told a reporter she was a Democrat and a supporter of presidential candidate Al Smith.

On July 27, Schumann-Heink sang at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, on August 15 at Russ Auditorium in San Diego for the Rest Haven Home, and on August 19 at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion for San Diego's Civic Orchestra. The diva's latest protege, Miss Laura Townsley McCoy, sang at the San Diego concerts.

In April 1928, Schumann-Heink deeded her Grossmont estate to Mayor George E. Leach of Minneapolis who was to administer it as a haven for disabled veterans of the war. The gift was a way of saying thank you to Minneapolis veterans who drank a toast to "the son who went down in the U-boat," June 11, 1923, during one of the singer's fund-raising rallies in the city. As veterans never occupied the site, Mrs. Marie Fox, Schumann-Heink's daughter, acquired the estate in 1932 by paying back taxes and accrued expenses.

On October 19, 1928, a jury convicted Henry Schumann-Heink of using \$3,000 in securities deposited with his stock and bond firm as security for a personal loan. His stealing stemmed from the expense of "keeping another woman." The Second Appellate Court of California, April 12, 1929, reversed the judgment and sent the case back to the Superior Court. A second trial, March 3, 1930, reconfirmed the first jury's verdict. The Fourth District Court, on May 26, denied Henry a new trial. Henry's theft of corporation funds resulted in the collapse of the firm and losses to costumers of about \$21,000. The Court granted him probation on condition he repay the stockholders for their losses. As she had done before, Schumann-Heink made good her son's mistakes.

In a letter to Alfred Wuest, February 7, 1928, on file in the San Diego Historical Society Research Library, Schumann-Heink indicated her primary concern was for Henry's wife Elsie and the children. "What he is I know. . . . God will punish him and this rotten woman in time. . . . Elsie shall divorce him - not lament - he laughs at her, lowers her in the eyes of the world. All laughs."

On January 21, 1929, at 67, Schumann-Heink appeared at the Metropolitan as Erda in *Das Rheingold*. Olin Downes, in the *New York Times*, was impressed, but not as overwhelmed as he was by her singing at the Golden Jubilee in 1926. He wrote that by recognizing the limitations of her voice and by emphasizing tonality, sonority and inflection, Schumann-Heink delivered the warning to Wotan in "a masterly fashion." The slackening of verbal rhetoric paralleled a slackening of the singer's vocal powers.

In February, the contralto announced 1929 would definitely be her last concert year. In May she sang at the Cincinnati Music Festival. In June she conducted a class for singers at the Horner Conservatory in Kansas City. And, in July, she sailed for Europe to see her sister in Graz and her daughter in Leipzig. The European trip was the shortest ever for in

September she was back in the United States. The stock market crash of October 1929 wiped out her investments. To support herself and her family, she put aside whatever wishes she had to lead a life of leisure.

A guest appearance at the Russ Auditorium, February 25, 1930 in a performance of *Elijah* (Mendelssohn) conformed to her established pattern of giving short, intermittent recitals. Her appearances in vaudeville, beginning in June, at New York City's Roxy Theater represented a new venture. The schedule called for 30 performances consisting of four shows a day. She followed this with another nine-week's tour with "Roxy and His Gang."

Reverting to a less-demanding plan, she decided in October she would teach 40 American women in New York how to sing for \$25.00 a half-hour with another \$50.00 for the application.

On December 18, 1930, the National Organization of Gold Star Mothers made Ernestine Schumann-Heink an honorary member, a singular distinction for the mother of a casualty on the opposite side. Schumann-Heink had conveniently forgotten that her son Hans died as a civilian. At times she said he was a soldier in the U.S. Army.

In January 1931, the diva concluded a 25-year association with the Victor Company by recording "My Heart Ever Faithful" (Bach) and "Taps" (Pasternack).

Good Housekeeping, in February, listed Schumann-Heink as second in its list of outstanding American women (Jane Addams was the first). The reason behind this selection was never more adequately demonstrated than on May 3 when the singer publicly rebuked members of her audience for protesting the appearance of Chinese and Negro children in the dedication ceremonies of the Memorial Auditorium in Sacramento, California. Turning her back on the audience, she sang a lullaby for the children. Then she told the audience: "It is up to the war mothers to teach their children the love of law and not make a difference between black or yellow or brown or white skins. You make war among yourselves through your children."

In June, Schumann-Heink told a *San Diego Union* reporter that she made between \$4,000 and \$6,000 a month through her vaudeville appearances, vocal instruction, and radio broadcasts. She gave this money to her children and grandchildren. She kept a chauffeur but had given up her secretary, maid and house servants.

In October and November she appeared in the East as Katisha in a road-production of *The Mikado*. The show closed in Cincinnati when Schumann-Heink became ill. Audiences gave her prolonged ovations whenever she appeared on the stage. Since it was her presence that sold the tickets, the other singers were probably resigned to the interruptions. Writing in the Washington Post, October 20, 1931, of a performance in the capitol city, critic Nelson B. Bell was careful not to rile her adoring fans:

"Madame Schumann-Heink's *Katisha* is an amusing creation that omits much of the strenuous business by which the part is usually characterized. Her upper and lower registers retain much of their former glory. It is in the middle registers, in which practically all of her recitatives are written, that she is least secure. In a brief speech of thanks at the close of the first act, she confessed to a prodigious attack of stage fright, singing the role in English. Her reception must have been reassurance enough."

Bell was saying that though Schumann-Heink did not do the role justice, her hold on her audiences' affections was all that mattered. At this stage in the singer's life, with a voice weak in upper and middle registers, she could not deliver smoothly the rapid patter in English of a Gilbert and Sullivan song.

On March 11, 1932, the grand old singer took her leave of the Metropolitan by singing Erda in *Siegfried*. Always susceptible to her artistry, Olin Downes, in the *New York Times*, commented that she projected Erda's prophecy to Wotan of the coming of *Siegfried* "with an eloquence that took the breath away."

In August, Schumann-Heink sang at an outdoor concert at the Greek Theater in Griffith Park, Los Angeles. A writer in *Musical Courier* compared her voice to "a humanized viola tone to which by some wonder of modern technique an enunciated sound track had been added." In other words, the resonant deep voice was there, but it was not being used to produce vocal music.

In 1932-33, Schumann-Heink went on tours of Fox, RKO, and Loew's State Theaters. The veteran trooper sang four to five times a day, stopping at times to joke with and to scold people in her audience. "I could not retire," she said bravely, "unless I lost my voice. I want to work. I want to be useful. I want to go on singing."

Aside from the dance team of Fanchon and Marco, the names of the comedians, singers and dancers with whom she shared the stage are not given in press announcements. For one who was forever saying disapproving things about the lax behavior of American college women, Schumann-Heink was surprisingly tolerant about the casual attitudes of the young performers around her. "I want to say this: As God is my judge, those girls on the vaudeville stage, all those people are fine, clean, even religious men and women, home folks, the women good cooks with children and many cares. Those pretty young things, they must go out with only a rag of chiffon, almost bare, but it is only part of the stage picture. Away from the stage they are modest, quiet girls. I love them."

(Tell that to the Rockettes!)

Schumann-Heink was probably the only performer in the world who could sing Mendelssohn's "O Rest in the Lord" and "The Lord is Mindful of His Own" to a vaudeville audience and be greeted with wild applause. Of course, if the audience did not applaud, the indignant singer would say, "You are the worst audience I ever saw, cold! I am mad with you." Describing one of her performances, a writer for the *Boston*

Transcript, October 1930, asked ambiguously: "Is it not the chief glory of her final years that she can persuade us to take the full singing will for the diminished vocal deed?"

When she was not singing in vaudeville or teaching, Schumann-Heink sang on the radio, served as opera advisor for the National Broadcasting Company, and advised college women to forego politics, bobbed hair, smoking, unchaperoned dancing, lipstick, jazz, and bridge, and to devote themselves to bringing up children. She offered to become the godmother of the children born to Smith College women who had given up smoking. There were no takers!

Ferdinand had become addicted to morphine while being treated for pneumonia in the U.S. Army. He was like Henry in his proneness to temperamental outbursts and in his ineptitude at handling money, but unlike him in his indifference to women. He resorted to wheedling, rather than taunts, to enlist his mother's support. "We miss you, we love you, we adore you, Mammy mine, and how we miss you, you can't conceive it possible." (Letter, December 18, 1934, Honnold Library, Claremont, California)

To keep watch on Ferdinand, who worked as a writer and actor for the motion pictures, and on Henry, who had found a job as a stage hand at the RKO studios, Schumann-Heink began spending her free time in Hollywood. She visited Stevens Point, Wisconsin, as often as she could, to see her granddaughter Ilse, daughter of August Heink and one of her eleven grandchildren.

When asked if her next step would be the films, America's favorite singer gasped: "Me in the pictures? Not me, I'll not diet for anybody. I'm going to keep these good solid pounds I now have and I'm going to eat three meals a day."

In 1933, Schumann-Heink took time from the vaudeville circuit to work for President Franklin D. Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration and to denounce the Nazis in Germany because of their persecution of the Jews. Her enunciation while singing was as clear as ever and her voice still had force in the middle and lower registers. To a writer for *The Long Beach Morning Star* it wasn't the singing that held the audience: "It isn't singing as much as talking to the people across the footlights in the most beautiful of tones. And between songs she stops to hold a conversation. And the crowd catches on and talks back."

To explain her scorn for the Nazis, she told a *San Diego Union* reporter, August 29, 1933, "Maybe part of my feeling is the Jewish part of me. I am not ashamed of that. I know that much of the artist in my heart, my deep love for people and the little fire that is in me, I owe to my little old Jewish grandmother."

In 1934, at 74, Schumann-Heink embarked on a career as a motion picture actress by appearing as a music teacher in *Here's to Romance*, produced by Fox studios, in which she sang "Wiegenlied" (Brahms). In September, Metro Goldwyn Mayer presented her with a three-year contract. When the two studios who wanted to hire her filed suits against one another, the delighted singer retorted: "It's very comic, this quarreling among

the motion picture men who call me terrific, colossal and gigantic—I think I don't like that gigantic very much, hah?"

Hollywood's newest discovery confessed to a *San Diego Union* reporter that Wallace Beery was the love of her life and that though she did not wear make-up, for Wallace Beery she would put on lipstick.

On July 21, the California-Pacific International Exposition' invited Schumann-Heink to be their "guest of honor" at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park. As she had done at San Diego's expositions in 1915-16, she sang "The Star-Spangled Banner." She then listened to a performance of *Elijah* (Mendelssohn) with her current protege Elsa Mayer, in the contralto role.

At an American Legion convention in St. Louis, September 23, the "mother" of the Legion stammered "the United States of America—the country we love" when being handed a citation. Then she collapsed and had to be assisted from the stage.

In October, Schumann-Heink sold her home in Coronado and moved to Hollywood. She assured her devoted San Diego fans that she was not leaving the city as she intended to buy a cottage close to her former home at Grossmont, then the home of her daughter Mrs. Marie Fox.

Floyd McCracken, in the *San Diego Union*, July 11, 1971, recalled the effect of Schumann-Heink's singing at a concert in Anaheim in 1936, " At times it seemed her voice was gravely hoarse, but the audience didn't care. It refused to let her go."

The writer of an article in *Readers' Digest*, April 1936, stated Schumann-Heink was eagerly anticipating her role as a poor grandmother in a film being made of Kathleen Norris's story *Gram*. The grandmother finds out, after a fling a luxury, that money isn't everything. The writer added the diva had stopped giving away her earnings and that George, her youngest son, was managing her affairs. Schumann-Heink's aspirations never came to fruition for she was sick of leukemia the greater part of 1936. On November 17, in her Hollywood home, at the age of 75, the spirit of the great singer entered Valhalla.

Prominent people in every country in the world except Germany mourned the passing of Schumann-Heink. The Nazis in command there had no use for a woman who said a month before she died: "I am old now, but I would go through every bit of sorrow and struggle again to march in a great crusade against war. In war every drop of my blood is my country's. There is nothing she could ask of me I would not do. But, oh, how much more gladly would I shed my blood to buy peace for her—peace to all eternity."

Dr. Frank Lowe, pastor of the Central Christian Church of San Diego, and Monsignor John M. Hagarty, rector of St. Joseph's, paid tribute to Schumann-Heink during evening services, November 18. Hagarty repeated a tale of the diva's poverty in New York City, which he claimed he had from her lips. He had the diva, on the brink of starvation, singing in a Bowery Settlement House. Either he or Schumann-Heink had a talent for

yarn-telling almost as good as Charles Dickens! The program at St. Joseph's included the singing of Verdi's "Requiem", said to be the first performance of this work in San Diego.

On November 20, Los Angeles paid its respects to Schumann-Heink with a funeral held in the clubhouse of Hollywood Post No. 23 of the American Legion. American Legionnaires and Disabled American Veterans stood watch over the body. Chaplain Hjalmar Carlson, of the Hollywood Post, delivered the invocation and benediction and Rabbi Edgar D. Magnin the eulogy. Rabbi Magnin words were as simple and direct as the woman he praised: "She was a grand old darling. That's the word, Darling. There's no use being high-falutin' in this moment of our grief." He went on, "She loved them all, white and black, American and European, Jew and Gentile. In this she showed herself a master of the greatest of all arts—the art of living." Though Schumann-Heink had referred to herself as a Roman Catholic, no Roman Catholic clergy were present at the service. At the conclusion, veterans escorted the body to Union Station. Here the Redcaps, who had come to love the diva during her trips across the country, placed the body in an observation car.

As the train rolled to Santa Ana and San Clemente, American Legion honor guards stood silent and solemn facing the train. At San Diego, a police motorcycle escort, a U.S. Marine Band, and members of the American Legion and Disabled War Veterans accompanied the casket from the Santa Fe Station to the Johnson-Saum funeral chapel. The Gold Star Mothers, World War Mothers, and members of the auxiliaries of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled War Veterans occupied seats in front of the casket. National Guardsmen from San Diego's 251st Coast Artillery stood watch while Dorothy R. Snyder, harpist, and Merrill Baldwin, cellist, played Gounod's "Ave Maria," Brahms's "Wiegenlied" and Bohm's "Silent as Night."

On November 21, the San Diego chapter of the Disabled American Veterans conducted a brief service. In his eulogy, Richard Raun said: "Of all the honors conferred on this great and noble soul, she rejoiced most in the title of 'Mother', the term struck a responsive chord in the heart of this great character whose unselfish love of mankind was manifested by her works in their behalf."

Veterans placed the casket in a hearse and members of the family and representatives of service groups followed it to Greenwood Cemetery. Here a military squad fired a volley and a bugler sounded taps as undertakers took the body to the crematory. Schumann-Heink's ashes were later placed in a niche, but not in the same columbarium as those of her son Hans.

In November 1937, the Superior Court of Los Angeles admitted Schumann-Heink's will to probate. At this time appraisers placed a gross value of \$33,932 on her estate, the bulk of this being in jewelry. Schumann-Heink had left her estate to four of the surviving children—Mrs. Marie Fox, San Diego; Mrs. Charlotte Grief, Leipzig; George W. Schumann, Los Angeles; and Ferdinand Schumann, Hollywood. Having cost her emotional stress and exorbitant sums during her life, Schumann-Heink had left her son Henry out of the will. She also, for unknown reasons, excluded her stepson Walter.

On Memorial Day, May 30, 1938, Barbara Heink, granddaughter of the diva, unveiled a bronze five-foot square tablet honoring Schumann-Heink at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park. People in San Diego had subscribed money to purchase the tablet. Superimposed upon the tablet, an inscription on an open book, topped by a lyre and rising from a huge star, reads:

In loving memory of

Mme. Ernestine Schumann-Heink.

A Gold Star Mother.

A Star of the World.

Critics Henry Krehbiel, W. J. Henderson, and Olin Downes regarded Schumann-Heink as a member of a group of extraordinary singers, among whom are Enrico Caruso, Jean and Edouard de Reszke, Lili Lehmann, Nellie Melba, Lillian Nordica, Pol Plancon and Luisa Tetrazzini. These singers had long and hard apprenticeships. They welcomed opportunities to do bit roles. They nurtured their voices carefully and took pains never to force them beyond their limits. They learned their techniques from one another and deepened their understandings of parts through their association with the great composers of their times. They were not one-day wonders.

In opera, sopranos get the best roles, mezzo-sopranos and contraltos are supporting singers. Still the contralto range between tenor and mezzo-soprano is rich in color and contrast. In her younger years, Schumann-Heink sang mezzo-soprano roles and scaled the hills and valleys of coloratura arias in the mezzo-soprano range with ease. She sang many dramatic and comic contralto roles in opera and a number of deeply emotional art songs in German and English with intensity, with her face and body as well as her voice. Her skill at interpreting art songs and her ability to convey a warm, friendly disposition have seldom been equaled. She gave the same force to feeble songs, such as "The Rosary" (Nevin), "Before the Crucifix" (La Forge) and "The Cry of Rachel" (Salter) as she did to the most subtle and polished songs in the classic repertoire, such as "Die Mainacht" (Brahms), "Der Tod und das Madchen" (Schubert), and "Allerselen" (Richard Strauss). As her focus was on individual songs and her desire was to please non-musical members of her audience, she did not probe deeply into the composer's intentions. Sometimes she added fillips, such as pauses, sobs, quavers and trills, that would have exasperated the composer. While she defended her choices, she, like John McCormack, sang many songs of temporary importance to keep on good terms with her audience. Among these sugary plums are "Trees" (Rasbach), "By the Waters of Minnetonka" (Lieurance), and "When the Boys Come Home" (Speaks).

Outstanding contraltos are rare. Louise Homer, Margaret Matzenhauer, Maureen Forrester, and Kathleen Ferrier are names that are known in musical circles. The singer who, like Schumann-Heink, developed a distinguished repertoire and occupied the public stage for a long and celebrated time is Marian Anderson, the Negro contralto. Schumann-

Heink probably never heard of Marian Anderson. She did not apply to be one of Schumann-Heink's pupils. This was probably for the best as Schumann-Heink's coaching skills were limited and her lessons were offhand.

Anderson went to Europe to continue her education. Here she became a sensation. A comparison of these two outstanding people is beyond the scope of this work. Differences that suggest themselves are that Schumann-Heink was a public personality, a mother and a woman with down-to-the-earth opinions who enjoyed expressing them. Marian Anderson was a private, deeply religious person who kept her opinions to herself and who was happy to let her art speak for her. When her singing could no longer meet her artistic standards, she retired from the concert stage.

Both singers were humanitarians, but Marian Anderson's many acts of charity were not done in the glow of the spotlight. Marian Anderson was a concert recitalist without experience on the operatic stage. She chose her lyrics carefully and delivered them in beautiful tones with a sometimes quavering rubato. Schumann-Heink became a concert recitalist to get away from the demands of the operatic stage. She chooses sentimental and flamboyant songs because her public liked them. She added tricks and effects to her singing when she found they would please. Marian Anderson had no need to resort to razzle-dazzle. She was simultaneously restrained and intensely alert to the meaning of her songs. She never made fun of herself or broke down in tears as Schumann-Heink did. Nonetheless, her audience was no less impressed by her projection of hope, reverence and sorrow.

As a woman, Schumann-Heink was a contradiction. She represented an independent, self-made person eager to be known and to lead, yet she advised other women to stay at home and look after their husbands and children. She did not think women should vote or take part in politics, but, when the time came, she did both. As an artist she claimed to be indifferent to politics, yet, as her years in the United States lengthened, she became a proponent of national recovery and national defense and an opponent of prohibition and of Nazism. She admired Eleanor Roosevelt, who was the antithesis of homebody.

Tributes to Schumann-Heink centered around her roles as compassionate mother, staunch patriot, and sympathetic friend. If she were not first of all a talented artist, these supporting roles would not have mattered. She overacted on the opera stage, but on the concert stage she was dignified or folksy as circumstances warranted. Her effect on her audience was magical. When she sang "Wiegenlied" (Brahms), men and women felt they were receiving the blessings of an archetypal mother. As a writer for *Commonweal* put it: "The American people liked her because she was natural." It did not matter to those who heard Schumann-Heink's tall stories, earthy jokes and saccharine songs if she were sincere because her vitality was contagious.

To a *San Diego Union* reporter, August 13, 1933, Schumann-Heink was the apotheosis of benevolence: "An hour with Madame Schumann-Heink is like bathing in the stream of life. One comes out refreshed, one's mental cobwebs blown away with her rich humor;

one's faith in God and the essential fitness and worthwhileness of life renewed; one's courage shamed into new being."

During her best years, from 1898 to 1903, Schumann-Heink was hailed as "the world's greatest contralto." Her claim to fame extended beyond this period. By singing at war rallies, bond drives, benefits for veterans, concerts for children and people who were destitute, she won the admiration of people who did not go to operas and concerts. Beginning in 1926, her singing of "Stille Nacht" (Gruber) on the radio was as much a part of Christmas as Santa Claus. Though not beautiful, she turned her plainness into an asset by playing the part of an ideal, self-sacrificing mother who loved her children—that is everybody—yet scolded them when they did not come up to her expectations. She once said that her lack of good looks enabled her to avoid temptations that might have been enjoyable.

While adept at creating haunting moods of sadness and at evoking frightening images of terror when she sang art songs by Schubert and Brahms, Schumann-Heink could not hide for long her joy at being alive and being among friends, even if these friends were strangers. Her sparkling eyes, captivating smiles, and broad laughs were part of her nature. She enjoyed talking about mundane matters in a disarmingly frank, jocular way and was not put out if others considered her corny. It was her mixture of engaging and contrasting qualities that made Madame Schumann-Heink a legend in her time.

Though a legend in her time, the memory of Schumann-Heink as a singer and as a person has receded over the years. Today's American Legionnaires and Disabled American War Veterans no longer remember the contributions she made for their fathers and grandfathers. However, as long as the recordings survive, the memory of Schumann-Heink's abilities as an artist is likely to endure. Her 56-year record on the concert and operatic stages is still one of the longest of any well-known singer.

No less than members of the public, celebrated singers like Marilyn Horne are apt to repeat anecdotes about Schumann-Heink's size and appetite, most of which never occurred, such as the often-repeated incident when she charged through an orchestra, upsetting the players and their instruments. Upon being asked by the conductor why she did not come in sideways, she is supposed to have replied, "With Madame Schumann-Heink there is no sideways."

In the 1920's Schumann-Heink was second to coloratura soprano Amelita Galli-Curci in audience appeal. Schumann-Heink's singing was suspect for her voice was in a state of decline, her fidelity to pitch insecure, and her enunciation of American and English texts distracting, conditions to which Galli-Curci was also susceptible. Today there are many reissues of Galli-Curci's singing and few of Schumann-Heink's which indicates the lasting importance of both singers. Both singers must have known of one another, but there is no record that they ever met. Both lived at different times in San Diego. They are still the most famous of the many interpretative artists who have called San Diego "home."

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