

A Lesson from the Life of Jenny Lind

THE life of Jenny Lind (1820-1887) is, without doubt, the most useful model to be held up to the young student of singing, for although hers, with the exception of Malibran's, was the shortest operatic career of any great prima-donna, it was supplemented by beautiful and successful work in the concert field. Her career was one of the most brilliant owing to her indomitable energy and infinite capacity for taking pains. According to most writers, nature did not give her a remarkably beautiful voice or appearance but she worked and studied with unfiring and continuous effort to perfect both.

From, as she herself expressed it "a small, ugly, broad-nosed, shy, gauche, altogether undergrown girl" who first sang for the director of the Royal Opera in Stockholm at the age of nine years, she became, under the tuition received at the school attached to the opera house, a skilfull and expressive actress. The completeness of her training for the theater she thoroughly appreciated but her voice suffered from over-work in these early years. Between the ages of fourteen to nineteen she appeared constantly at the Royal Theater in plays and from nineteen to twenty-one almost as often in opera.

Garcia to the Rescue!

When she finally reached Manuel Garcia, the great singing teacher in Paris he said to her "It would be useless mademoiselle, to teach you, you have no voice left!"

She begged him to do so, however, and he promised to hear her again after six weeks, if she would not sing a note in the meantime and would speak as little as possible. She waited patiently, doing as he bid her, and, in the meantime studying French and Italian, till, when she returned to Garcia's studio it was to find that the rest-cure had done its work. The famous master consented to give her two lessons a week during the ten months she was to spend with him.

She tells in her letters how she had to "begin again from the beginning," but she had the courage to practice her scales and shakes very slowly and she rejoices in these same letters home over the gradual gaining of full control of her vocal organs. Garcia's insistence on proper breathing was of immense value to her for she had naturally little sustaining power. The three factors that we recognize in her success are talent, hard work and a good teacher. One without the other would not have sufficed.

Manuel Garcia once told another pupil of his renowned teacher, Madame Marchesi, that he had never had a more attentive, intelligent pupil than Jenny Lind!

The lessons to be learned from the life of Jenny Lind are those of modesty, hard-work, perseverance and piety. Certainly her modesty was the cause of continued striving for greater perfection. Hard work was the means by which she attained it. Perseverance, in spite of even temporary loss of her voice, gave her courage to regain and control it, and piety was the source of her infinite charity, which has caused her to be revered, almost as a saint among singers.