

EDITORIAL DIGEST & MANUSCRIPT FILE

PROJECT Negroes of N.Y.

EDITOR:

FILE TITLE & NO.: Biographies

REPORTER: DeMille

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By Arnold de Mille

CATERINA JARBORO

Caterina Jarboro took her last bow, received the congratulations from the other singers, and went to her dressing room. It was her big triumph, the one thing she had waited for all her life--the opportunity to sing on the American operatic stage.

But it was greater than she had expected. Little did she realize she would make such a tremendous hit, that she, of all singers who made their New York debuts with the Chicago Opera Company, would attract so much attention, that she would arouse the interest of more music and non-music lovers than any other singer ever to appear at the Hippodrome.

That day, June 22nd, 1933, was a great day for the box office. The telephone kept buzzing, telegrams kept pouring in, and spectators kept filing into the line. That night, the traffic on Sixth Avenue at Forty-third and fourth streets was jammed.

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Hundreds of people gathered in front of the theater trying to purchase tickets, and hundreds more were standing inside. Negroes in grand opera was something unheard of on the American stage, and they all wanted to see this girl, this Southern Negro girl who had come from a small town in North Carolina, Wilmington, who had struggled like other members of her race, who went to Italy to study, sang with the La Scala Opera Company in Milan and had made a tremendous success. They wanted to hear the colorful soprano voice which had charmed half of Europe; they wanted to see if she could be the Aida Giuseppe Verdi had in mind when he wrote his most famous and immortal opera. And they wanted to see how a white man would kiss a Negro woman on the stage.

But that first act. How difficult she had found it! She was nervous. She had sung to huge throngs in Paris, Milan and Switzland, but had never been so nervous before. It ^a was the thought of her racial status in America. A Negro singing with white singers to a white audience. . .

The big applaud the audience gave her when she entered the stage and took her first bow was encouraging; it gave her confidence, but she couldn't get control of herself. Still they thought it was great, simply grand. They applauded and applauded. The more she bowed the more they applauded. There were shouts, "Bravo! Bravo!" The conductor came upon the stage, bowed with her. The director came, bowed. Still they applauded. The director then took her hand, kissed it. The house roared, applauded harder than

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ever.

Then suddenly the stage became banked with flowers, beautiful flowers. There were so many, there wasn't room enough on the stage for them.

It wasn't until the third act that she really got started. She was better in the second than in the first. Her notes were fuller and rounder, but it wasn't until the third that she let herself go. And the kiss in that act-- when the leading ^{white} tenor took her in his arms and kissed her, and the audience applauded like mad, she had won her battle. Each line came out with grace and ease, each note so full and round and melodious.

And that last act, the tragic ending, where she and the leading tenor are sealed in a tomb waiting for death to come and take one, then the other, she was magnificent. "Seest thou the angel of death radiant to us approaches? He takes us to eternal joys under his golden pinions. Above us heaven has already opened; there every grief ceases; there begins the ecstasy of immortal love," was so full of passion and feelings. She sang it better than she had ever sung it before. And the audience went wild. They applauded and applauded, and she bowed and bowed, until she was exhausted.

"You were simply grand," said the leading tenor.

"Marvelous," replied the Mezzo soprano.

"Magnificent," explained the baritone.

"Supreb," complimented the director.

"Thanks," she said, and overwhelmed with emotion stumbled

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into her dressing room. She had created a new panel in the Hall of American Music, and had opened a new avenue for Negro singers in opera.

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