



## RETURN OF GIGLI, DEBUT OF LARROCHA

**T**HIRTY-FIVE years and five months after he made his debut at the Metropolitan in November 1920 Beniamino Gigli returned to sing what was described as the first of three "farewell" recitals in Carnegie Hall. No doubt the audience that greeted him with waves and waves of applause mingled with shouts, bravos, and a few favorable comparisons with the long-departed Caruso was motivated in large part by sentiment; but there were more than a few moments later on when the lavish response was justified, whether the singer was sixty-five (at the least) or not.

The warmth of the applause, it may be noted, had a beneficent physical effect on the veteran tenor as well as a tonic spiritual one. When he first appeared it was in a slow waddle (he has acquired a paunch appropriate to his senior status among tenors of the world), and when he took his place to sing the right arm rested heavily on the piano for support. In the earlier selections he sang much of the time with head bent down, straightening up only to fire a direct hit of tone at the audience in a climax.

So it was in the opening "Io conosco un giardino" of Pietri, a "first group" shorter than the applause which had greeted his appearance. It worked up, nevertheless, to a B flat, flung out into the auditorium just to show the audience that he still had it. In the succeeding "Vergin tutt'amor" of Durante, the Brahms "Wiegenlied" (surprisingly clear German), and Schubert's "Mille cherubini," with its endearing lullaby, each song served a vocal purpose, exemplified a phase of the singer's virtuosity, while exercising the equipment in a calculated way.

In all of these there was—with a dimming of luster appropriate to the years—a sweetness of sound inimitably Gigli, a curve of line sometimes labored and never really effortless, but quite individual. In such matters as phraseology and breath-control it was enormously instructive.

Under the warming sun of applause, Gigli undertook, as encore, "O Paradiso," then went on to the scheduled arias from "Manon" ("La Reve") and "Roi d'Ys" (the Aubade), in a rising succession to "M'Appari" ("Marta," another encore) and "Rachel, quand du Seigneur" ("La Juive"). Each, of course, had its ear-tickling elements of sustained tones, an explosive forte or two, and, in the



Gigli—"the warming sun of applause."

Lalo ("Roi d'Ys") an enchanting octave jump from A to A, non-falsetto, repeated with an additional ping to the top A, in case it had been missed the first time.

By this time the audience was, in fact, just an extension of Gigli, and he responded with a performance of "La Donne e Mobile" that was artful, spirited, and—remarkable to say—humorous. Now he stepped away from support of the piano, faced the audience with head high, and marked off the measures with a spirit and brio any young man of today might envy. It had its dubious curly cues and its debatable liberties—assuming that one wants to argue text in such an aria—but it ranged up to a B natural that shivered with the pure, reedy Gigli timbre of old.

This was, of course, never a singer with a disposition to conformity, and much of what he did was unmistakably individualistic, also, if you want, egotistic. But almost everything he undertook came off, and there was, in this phrase or that, one effect or another, the echoes of the artistry of such legendary figures as McCormack and Tauber. He was doing what he loved and he loved what he was doing. The audience could hardly react other than it did. The efficient accompanist was identified as Dino Fedri.

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New pianists of the quality of Alicia de Larrocha, who made her New York debut in Town Hall recently, are sufficiently uncommon to be welcome at any time, April or November. As might have been antici-

pated from a recording or two associated with her name, Miss de Larrocha played the music of such composers of her native Spain as Granados, Albeniz, and Surinach with crisp rhythm, stylistic assurance, and the kind of flexibility in melodic statement that is hard for an outsider to simulate.

What was gratifying about her total performance, however, was the evidence it offered of a pronounced sensitivity to other matters, especially in Schumann's "Carnaval." This did not conform to traditional expectations in every detail: indeed, the points at which it accorded with a version, say, of Serkin or Arrau would have not been too many. But its deviations were always related to a firm musical esthetic, its points of stress and climax determined by an artistic awareness of a very conscious sort.

Miss de Larrocha does not have the kind of technical equipment in which the management of difficulties can be taken for granted; in consequence, there were, repeatedly, blurred details in passage work, a false note in a chordal cluster. But the conviction that Miss de Larrocha has a considerable artistic personality was enforced by her beautiful phrasing in such sections of "Carnaval" as "Papillons," "Reconnaissance," and the effectively molded "Valse allemande."

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The illusion that time could, just possibly, stand still—under certain conditions—was teasingly suggested in the notably successful opening of Ballet Theatre's fifteenth-anniversary season in the Metropolitan Opera House. Here were Antony Tudor, Alicia Markova, Nora Kaye, Hugh Laing, Alicia Alonso, and a lot of other people who had taken part in the very first performance of the company a decade and a half, a war and a half, ago. However less spry one or another might look, there was no question that each, without exception, was a greater artist than before.

To be sure, the eye that was gauging them is also fifteen years older, and no less susceptible to the aging process. But there seemed little doubt, from the applause that greeted Miss Markova's cunningly secure performances in "Les Sylphides," or the deeply emotional interaction of Tudor, Laing, and Kaye in the still-magnificent "Pillar of Fire," or the "Black Swan" pyrotechnics of Alonso and Youskevitch, that an objective judgment was being ungrudgingly rendered.

As well as showing a spectacularly fine group of principals—possible, of course, only under the special, "gala" conditions of this anniversary season  
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