

SIGNOR ALFREDO MANTOLINI

Signor Alfredo Mantolini is an Australian. Is it doubted? Then let it be repeated. He is not only a signor but an Australian as well; truly, completely and emphatically both. Melbourne he was born in and Melbourne was the scene of his early efforts where, under the truly Milesian name of Patrick O'Brien, he entered into competition with those starry hosts whose names require such practised manipulation of the nasal and the guttural in order accurately to pronounce. Patrick O'Brien came out like a lion, only, alas!, with the speed of an antelope to return like a lamb.

Had he been a member of any other profession, doubtless he would have charged his failure to the government and sought success elsewhere. But musicians are men of bows and strings and it would be hard, indeed, if they did not have two strings to their bow. If a prophet is not received in his own country, whose fault is that? Certainly not the prophet's! So if the prophet is wise in his generation he will call himself a foreign prophet and, like Signor Alfredo Mantolini, reap the benefit of his ingenuity as well as his talent.

Signor Alfredo is a tenor; he must be, for the experiences of no other vocalist would be worth recording, even in a few words. A tenor is the essence and the end of music, the sum and substance of art, the cause and effect of every opera. It is the tenor who draws the public together; it is the tenor at whose absence it demands its money back, and Signor Alfredo Mantolini would never have entered any profession had he not felt himself competent to occupy a front rank.

The signor has been a prodigy since his birth. As an infant his warblings of "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" found appreciated ^{IVE} audiences in domestic circles, and now he appeals to the wider sympathies of an indulgent public with warblings about the guiding properties of the same bright object. His path from one to the other has been one of much vicissitude; the gates of prosperity have not been closed to him and neither has the road to ruin, but it has required the financial assistance of his patrons in the one case and the affection of his relations in the other to keep him respectably afloat.

Some years ago, snubbed by the managers, maligned by the critics and neglected by the public, Patrick O'Brien sought consolation in dreams of the big provincial towns the populace of which was waiting expectantly to welcome him.

He would address himself, he thought, to the rusticated mind, and the gushing eglid of nature would be the eager recipient of the professional philanthropy of Patrick O'Brien.

However, before leaving Melbourne to its unhappy fate, he determined on one more attempt to win the begrimed and besotted citizens to the true appreciation of the beautiful. And so it came to pass that Melbourne was ostentatiously informed by all the advertising mediums that Patrick O'Brien, before proceeding on a provincial tour, would give a farewell benefit concert "when the public would have the opportunity of hearing his celebrated music fantasia, including many pieces widely and deservedly popular".

He was very young in the profession then, but today he is better acquainted with the harmonic spheres. For Patrick O'Brien is Signor Alfredo ^{Mantolini} ~~Mantolini~~ now, and Signor Alfredo Mantolini is wiser than Patrick O'Brien and with his waxed moustache and trim goatee beard, looks much maturer, and that which he adopted from necessity he continues from choice.

Melbourne managers today may offer him splendid engagements in fine city halls, but Signor Alfredo Mantolini mentally - not physically, for that would be rude - connects the thumb of his right hand with his organ of olfactory sensibility, and continues to take his own risk in halls of his own choice. If the people of Melbourne wish to hear him they must suit their convenience to his, for it must be admitted that his revenge did not originate without a cause.

The last occasion on which Patrick O'Brien appeared before a Melbourne audience was at the benefit concert before alluded to, and nothing was ^{on his part} wanting ~~to make~~ to ensure a brilliant success. A large hall was appropriated to the enterprise and press advertisements blazed with the name of Patrick O'Brien and the wonderful things he would do. The programme was a masterpiece. Patrick O'Brien would appear twelve times, and a footnote intimated that "In the circumstances of his early departure for the provinces and in deference to the wishes of his audience, Patrick O'Brien would waive for the evening his well-known objection to encores".

But in defiance of the unparalleled arrangements and the enthusiastic advertisements, for some extraordinary unexplained reason the audience expected must have forgotten the date. When he appeared before the footlights to make an announcement the deserted stalls echoed to his opening words and the empty boxes treated him with silent contempt. He gazed unbelievably at the emptiness before retreating backstage to faint in the bosom of the company.

It is doubtful how long he may have lingered in this state but for the kindly offices of his prima donna who, being the only one present who was engaged at a stated fee, was much more interested in his coming to than the others. This she achieved by standing in front of the prostrate singer and peremptorily demanding her fee forthwith, and the stricken Patrick O'Brien, awakened to a sense of the gravity of his position, summoned sufficient strength to attain the perpendicular and discuss a settlement with the lady. Then taking his hat and greatcoat he bent his steps towards his boardinghouse in the East Melbourne vales.

Senor Alfredo Mantolini is not the man to succumb to trifles, but Patrick O'Brien was. The one has learned to overcome obstacles by perseverance; the other bowed to destiny, and ~~was~~ sighed. But man is a creature of inconstancies, and it is not to be wondered at that, urged by the conflicting emotions which accompanied him on the way that night that he reasoned in his mind whether ^{a leap} into the moonlit river would not be a quiet way of ridding himself of his obligations. But a chilly blast from the stream immediately reverted his great mind to his great high B flat and the serious consequences of catching cold upon the upper octave of his register. Happily for the music-loving public of today thoughts of the hereafter fled his mind, and he delayed not by the river. Soon, safely housed in his lodgings, he rolled himself up in his bed and slept soundly.

Sleep! Ah, what a sleep was that! It was in that sleep that Patrick O'Brien and Senor Alfredo Mantolini met; it was that sleep which shaped his future prosperity. He dreamed that the largest hall ever erected was crowded to excess and that the critics were honestly disposed (what a dream!), and that thundering applause greeted each of his items. He had visions of fresh bills announcing a repetition in consequence of unparalleled success, and he saw his prima donna looking kindly at him as he hinted at a permanent engagement.

Of course, as all dreams come true it would not be fair to make Patrick O'Brien an exception to the rule and, as circumstances so important naturally took some years to develop, there were minor incidents which occurred without delay.

For one thing he changed his name. He retired the night before as Patrick O'Brien and he arose that morning Signor Alfredo Mantolini, usurping the distinguished name of an undistinguished Italian purveyor of vegetables in the Fitzroy neighborhood where he was born. And not many hours had passed over the arisen Mantolini before his prima donna thought it prudent to afford him an opportunity of meeting her demands; and although she had more than once declined, in her most

dramatic form, to become the lady of Signor Mantolini, feeling that perhaps after all, Madame Mantolini would sound better than Maggie Buckley, the name she had hitherto borne, and seeing that the adoption of such a course would offer the only likely means of securing the amount already due, she was reduced so as to capitulate as to realise another item of his dreams.

Two incidents therefore, involving matters of such tremendous import as the alteration of two names, having been reduced to a certainty in as many hours, it was but natural that the remainder of the morning should be spent in speculative rather than active arrangement for the development of the others.

Madame Mantolini, whose assumption of that title was to date from the earliest possible period, in addition to having considerable powers as a vocalist, played in a masterly fashion on the grand piano - not, mind you, upon an upright, on one of which her execution in her tender years drove her Collingwood neighbors frantic. Madame has spent years in the study and practice of the pianoforte, and once she is in a room with a grand, the great instrument appears to creak and groan as though it were girding up its loins for the fray. So, therefore it is not to be wondered that Signor Mantolini should be as pleased with his new matrimonial acquisition as if he had completed a similar alliance with a complete orchestra.

After having consulted a map of Victoria, it did not take the signor long in the exuberance of his spirits, to decide that, after certain legal formalities with his prima donna having been satisfactorily arranged, the towns of substance along the coast would receive their undivided attention during the summer months, and those in the north and in Gippsland would receive them in the autumn. There was no doubt in the mind of the awakened artist that the inhabitants of these rural centres would throng the halls.

It is not, however within the province of this short history to follow the interesting details of this ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ campaign in the interest of art. Suffice to say that the fine characteristics of Patrick O'Brien are strengthened in Signor Alfredo Mantolini. The same discrimination which led to his matrimonial triumph stands him in good service for the selection of times and places, and the poetic faculty, which is always more or less allied with musical genius, has greatly aided him in facilitating both the variety and charm of his advertisements.

As a true artist the spirit of poetry has never left him, and if any man is equal to any emergency, that man is Signor Alfredo Mantolini. Thus, when after blazing announcements of a flying visit to some expectant rural centre, the provincial

press expresses its regret that Signor Alfredo Mantolini is suffering indisposition consequent upon over-exertion, the walls of the town will glitter in the morning sun with the latest bulletin, in which the desired information is associated with a selection from his programme indicative of such pieces as he intends to sing, --

"Sound an alarm, your silver trumpets sound,
Alfredo Mantolini his upper C has found!"

Beside the bulletin, as large as life and as true to nature as a sister art can make it, is the representation of an exemplary parent, from the mouth of whose youthful offspring at his side comes, apparently in a cloud of vapour --

"Thou art so near and yet so far --
Take me to hear Mantolini, papa".

Criticism has been disarmed by indisputable power, and the only point upon which the critics are divided is in deciding the relative merits of the signor and his lady. Deservedly popular at holiday time in all the rural retreats they favour on tour, they are now saving for the purchase of one of the sunny nooks which this country affords. And it is not improbable that when they desire to retire from public life, they will once more change their name in order the better to ensure that retirement which, after their lengthened labours in the cause of art, they so richly deserve.

What their new name will be must remain a matter of speculation, for it would be manifestly unfair to the signor and his lady to make public the very means whereby they hope to secure privacy and rest. It is enough, therefore, to indicate by the signor's own words just sufficient to give the intelligent reader a clue which, for antiquarian purposes, may one day be useful. He says that Patrick O'Brien was the name under which he learned all the great lessons the hard way, and that Alfredo Mantolini is the title which has accompanied him to fame. He feels, therefore, that the name under which he is to enjoy the fruits of both should in some way recognise its origin.

So, if the reader should some day come upon the name of O'Brienini or Mantolobrie, or any like combination, he may be sure that he is on the right track and, should he eventually succeed in finding the signor, a moderate scrutiny of a very limited radius will be sufficient also to discover his happy lady.