

Foreword

One of Lehmann's major biographers, the late Beaumont Glass writes of his personal and professional association with her.

I have been asked to write about my own experience with Mme. Lehmann at Santa Barbara. It began in the early spring of 1957.

I had just survived my second season as a stage director with the Northwest Grand Opera in Seattle, an unfinished



season that came to an abrupt stop when the company went broke.

Suddenly out of a job, I returned to my home in San Francisco. As I walked in the door, I heard the phone ringing. It was a baritone whom I had coached in the *Winterreise* and *An die ferne Geliebte*. He was now a pupil in Lotte Lehmann's master classes at the Music Academy of the West. He said: "Beau, dash to the airport immediately and take the next plane to Santa Barbara. Mme. Lehmann's accompanist is going to Europe, and you've got to get this job."

I did as I was told, without even stopping to take off my overcoat.

There was a ten-minute interview with Mme. Lehmann. Acting on impulse and intuition, as usual, she accepted me. My duties were still very vague and would not begin until the summer session; but meanwhile I was invited to attend

all her classes, which were on a more intimate scale during the “winter” session—is it ever winter in Southern California?—and only rarely open to the public.

I pulled up stakes in San Francisco and moved into a little cabin high up in the mountains above Santa Barbara. The view was magnificent, and the spot was so isolated that I could run around stark naked when the weather was warm enough. It was a nice feeling. Once in a while a tarantula would pay me a visit. Otherwise I lived up there completely alone, studying music and reveling in the lush nature all around me.

Incidentally, that telephone call that had brought me to this Paradise was based on false information. Lehmann’s accompanist was not leaving. There was no actual opening at all at the moment. But I sensed that destiny was at work, nevertheless. So I stayed on.

Twice a week I would go to the Music Academy to attend Mme. Lehmann’s classes. They were a revelation to me. She would demonstrate her interpretations of the lieder being studied, and would act out all the roles in the opera scenes. When she stepped in as Micaëla, for instance, she instantaneously transformed herself into a wholesome young girl from the country. Gray hair and wrinkles disappeared as if by magic. Or she would turn into the most hilarious Baron Ochs I had ever seen, snatching the wine away with a poisonous look of frustrated lechery when “Mariandl” was becoming too maudlin in her cups. The Supper Scene can never have been funnier. “Das Wunder der Verwandlung—the miracle of transformation,” to quote a line from *Ariadne auf Naxos*. I admired the elegantly off-hand way her sophisticated Tosca removed her gloves. Every character came to life in a uniquely believable way. The greatest privilege of all was to see her re-enact her world-famous Marschallin, with a thousand half-lights and nuances, “a tear in one eye and a twinkle in the other,” as Strauss had prescribed. Nothing that she did ever had the stale whiff of “routine.” Everything was freshly recreated, out of her mind and heart and soul, no matter how often she had performed it during a long career. Furthermore, she had the eloquence in her quaintly accented English to articulate her most subtle insights. Her students made fun of me because I used to write down all her comments in my scores. One day they presented me with a huge pencil, as a joke. But Viola Westervelt, one of Lehmann’s friends, who had dropped in for a visit, leaned over and

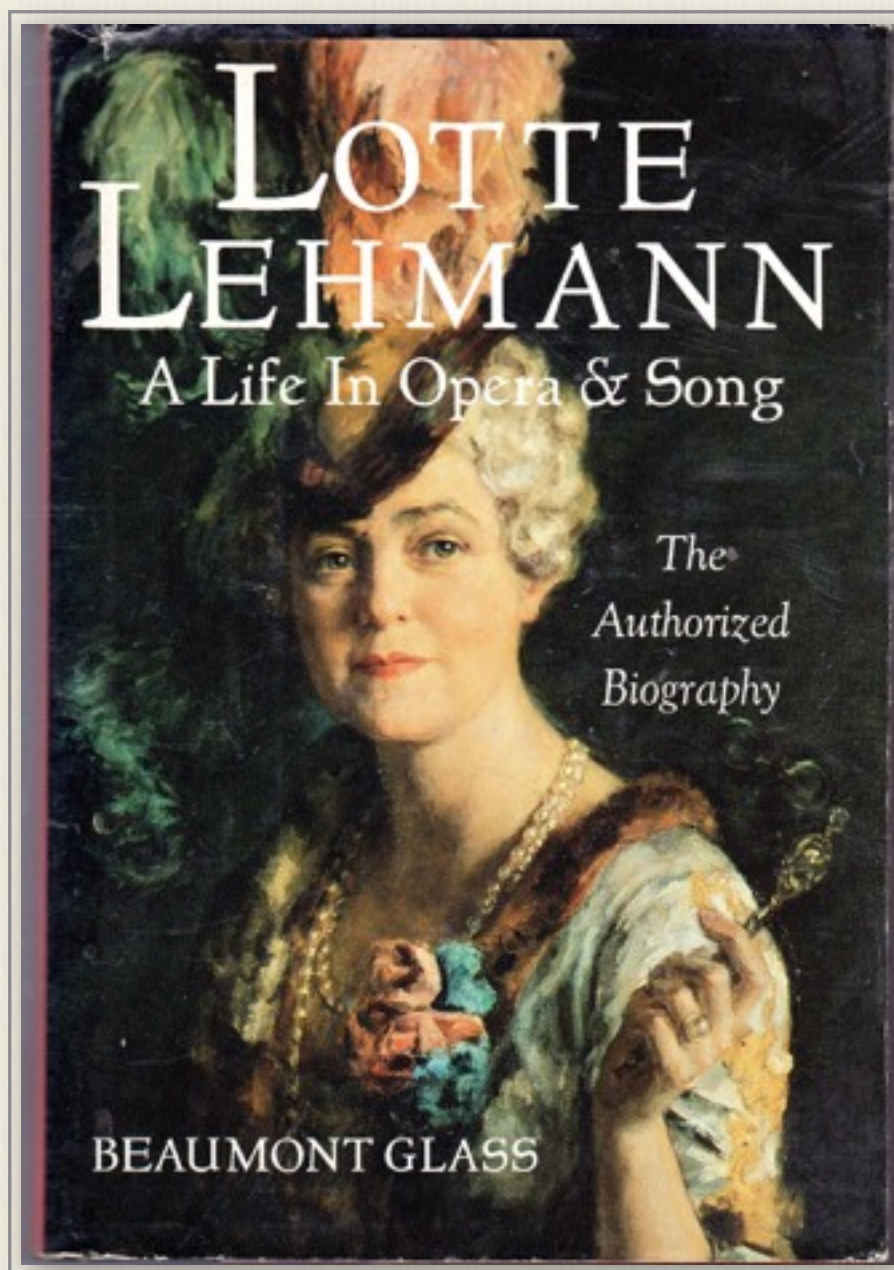
whispered to me: “Someday you’ll be very glad that you profited from her wisdom and experience; someday you’ll write a book about her.” It took thirty years for her prophecy to come true.

One day Mme. Lehmann suddenly asked me to accompany her in two songs by Hugo Wolf, “Gebet” and “Auf ein altes Bild.” That was a moment of destiny in my life and I did my best to make the most of it. I felt a rapport such as I had never felt with any other singer, although I had been accompanying singers since my early teens. I was swept into another world. Even the look in her eyes was electrifying, as she nodded for me to

begin the prelude to that simple, moving prayer. The first song was totally new to me, but it was not hard to play at sight, and a wave of inspiration seemed to guide my fingers. The second was already one of my favorites.

Evidently Mme. Lehmann was pleased with me, for she made a sudden, spontaneous decision. She announced that in the coming summer session she would have three separate master classes each week, instead of two. Jan Popper would continue to coach and accompany the opera class. Gwendolyn Koldofsky would continue to accompany the lieder class. And I would be the coach and accompanist for a third series, which would be devoted half to opera and half to lieder. I was overjoyed. I loved lieder just as much as I loved opera. And Lotte Lehmann was equally great in both.

So I spent my time preparing as much repertoire as I could, studying recordings, reading through opera scores and all seven volumes of Schubert songs,



three of Schumann, four of Brahms, and all the many small volumes of Hugo Wolf.

My first assignment for the opera class was the scene between Hans Sachs and Eva from Act II of *Die Meistersinger*. I felt very privileged to be able to work on such a masterpiece. I threw myself into the preparation, played and sang the scene over and over until I felt that I understood the poetic and musical essence of every phrase. Then I coached the two young singers until they were able to sing everything faultlessly and by heart. Their voices were of course far too light for the roles they were singing; but the performance would be in a recital hall, not in an opera house, and with piano, not with an orchestra. The great day finally arrived: my first public performance at a Lehmann master class. I started to play the opening music as I had rehearsed it a hundred times. “Louder, Beau, louder!” Mme. Lehmann called out. I started again, louder. “This is Wagner, not a Schumann Lied. Louder!” She sounded surprisingly impatient. I was devastated. During the course of the scene, Lehmann kept insisting on more volume. Must all of my exquisite details, the nuances I had come to love, be sacrificed to sheer loudness? I could hardly believe what was happening. When the intermission came, I slipped out into the garden, totally humiliated and demoralized. Fortunately for me, Gwendolyn Koldofsky came out and put her arm around me. “Don’t let it get you down; we’ve all been through that at one time or another.” I’ll never forget her kindness. It took me a while to swallow my intense disappointment. I had so hoped to impress Lehmann with my interpretation of one of Wagner’s great scenes! I’m afraid that I took out my resentment on an innocent baritone whose audition I was asked to accompany immediately after the master class. He had to bellow “Nemico della patria” over the loudest fortissimo I could pound out. When I was finally calm enough to analyze what had happened, a sense of perspective gradually returned. Obviously Lehmann, who had sung Wagner with all the greatest conductors in the world, whose teacher had actually sung the world premiere of the opera in question, must have missed something in the way I played that music. Who should know better than she how it was meant to sound? She expected a certain sonority, a certain deeper undercurrent, without which even the most refined nuances would count for nothing. It was a painful but valuable lesson. In retrospect, I am very grateful.

During that first summer I was one of three coaches. During the fall, winter, and spring of the next two years I was the only one. After that unfortunate experience with *Die Meistersinger*, I must have drastically improved, for Mme. Lehmann and I developed a warm, harmonious relationship as I gradually earned her trust. She saw that I worked well with her students.

Luba Tcheresky was one of Mme. Lehmann's most talented pupils. She had a lovely spinto voice and lots of Russian temperament. Before one important sing, Lehmann had invited her to spend the night at her house, to get a good rest. Luba was surprised and touched when Mme. Lehmann herself served her breakfast in bed. Years later, when I was with the Zurich Opera, Luba came there to sing *Donna Anna* and *Micaëla*.

Another very gifted pupil was a baritone named Douglas Miller. His idol was Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau,[i] and he took to lieder as a duck to water. I accompanied him in a recital that featured Brahms' *Four Serious Songs* and Ravel's *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*.

But the star of the Lehmann classes was undoubtedly Grace Bumbry. She was on the threshold of a big career. Mme. Lehmann reveled in the glorious sound of her voice and was enormously proud of having discovered her and having released her innate talent.

I shall never forget Grace's very first solo recital, at Santa Barbara. Dame



Judith Anderson had given her the simple, flowing gown she herself had worn as Medea in a famous production of Robinson Jeffers' poetic version of the play by Euripides. Grace looked like a goddess in it. Not yet twenty-one, she showed remarkable composure and dignity. Every song made its effect. Grace had the audience in the palm of her hand the entire time.

Mme. Lehmann thought that there were too many gestures. My impression was

that every movement was expressive, sculpturally beautiful, and fully motivated by the text and the mood of the moment.

Gwendolyn Koldofsky was the accompanist at that very first recital. In the many that followed before Grace left for Europe, I had the great pleasure and privilege of being her regular accompanist.

Mme. Lehmann made careful plans to launch Grace in the most effective way. She arranged for her debut recital in San Francisco to take place on Lotte's birthday, with a glamorous champagne reception to which all the influential people of the local musical world were invited. The Medea gown was copied in gold lamé. Lotte ordered magnificent flowers. The next day there were rave reviews of the recital from both of the leading San Francisco critics. Grace was definitely on her way.

Lehmann did not teach voice as such, only interpretation. For vocal lessons her students were sent to Pasadena to work with Armand Tokatyan,[ii] a former tenor of the Metropolitan and an excellent voice teacher. His pupils all swore by him.

One of my odd jobs by then was to chauffeur the singers to and from their vocal lessons with Mr. Tokatyan. One miserably rainy night I was driving them back to Santa Barbara. We were rounding a curve at a cautious speed when suddenly I saw a car speeding toward me in my lane. There was a mountain on one side and the ocean on the other. I had less than a second to choose. The next thing I knew I was spitting out teeth, half my lower lip was torn away, and the steering wheel was an outsize pretzel pressed against my jaw. The young baritone in the passenger seat was blinded by blood from his forehead. Grace Bumbry was unconscious on the floor of the back seat. My first thought was that the car might suddenly burst into flames, as I had seen in so many movies. I had somehow to get Grace out of that car, and in a hurry. I staggered out the door and found I could hardly walk. I slid around the side of the car and tried to drag Grace out, but I had no strength at all. Meanwhile a large crowd had materialized out of nowhere. Curious strangers stood around and gaped at me. Desperate, I begged for help. Finally a nurse appeared and we managed to get Grace out and all three of us into an ambulance. The baritone and Grace were soon released. She had only a small cut between her eyebrows. She had been sleeping in the back seat, and that

had saved her. The scar is there to this day. As for me, my jaw was broken and had to grow a new hinge. And muscle trauma in my legs kept me on crutches for several weeks.

A month after my car accident, I met my future wife. I was still on crutches, four front teeth were missing and my jaw was wired shut. She was absolutely gorgeous (still is, forty-three years later). I first laid eyes on her when she came to audition for Mme. Lehmann. I, as usual, was the accompanist. The first thing I heard Evangeline sing—omen of things to come!—was Grieg’s “I Love You,” in German, the nearest thing to a Lied that she knew by heart at the time. Then she let loose some glorious, full-blooded high notes in Santuzza’s aria. Mme. Lehmann accepted her as a pupil. And I scheduled her coaching sessions as the last in the



Beaumont Glass, as opera director, late in life, demonstrating

day, so that I could have as much time with her as possible, with no interruptions from other students arriving for their lessons. We worked on arias from *Lohengrin* and *Tosca*, then went for long strolls in the beautiful gardens that surrounded the Music Academy. We had met in January, became engaged in March, and were married in June. Our daughter Melody was born the following March, after her mother had performed a very pregnant Sieglinde under Mme. Lehmann’s direction in Act I of *Die Walküre*.

It was always an experience to be invited to the menagerie that Lotte Lehmann called home. Numerous dogs would beg for scraps at the table. We were encouraged to feed them, then to let them lick the plates. There were parrots, horses, all sorts of animals at one time or another. But my favorites were the talking Indian mynah birds. They seemed to know when their mistress was getting bored. They would say with uncanny clarity in a sing-song tone: “Time to go, time to go!” And we all had enough sense to take the hint.

After our baby was born we left Santa Barbara’s cozy Paradise for the real-life rigors of New York, to pursue mutual careers. Two years later, Lehmann invited me to come back and be her assistant in staging her final production, Beethoven’s

Fidelio. She was seventy-three at the time and troubled by arthritis. So she needed someone to move people around the stage while she worked on details of characterization with the individual singers. Besides helping with the stage direction, I was the chorus master and sang in the chorus myself. Evangeline participated in the master classes, making an outstanding impression in two scenes from *Die toten Augen* by Eugene d'Albert. One of Lehmann's greatest early successes had been the role of Myrtole in that opera. She showed Evangeline how to mime the immensely moving climactic scene where her character blinds herself by staring at the sun during a long and powerful orchestral interlude, a tour de force as Lehmann performed it, and as Evangeline re-created it under her guidance.

For Lotte teaching was a great satisfaction when she felt some response, a great frustration when that was lacking. Before every new series of master classes, especially those in a new place, she would be extremely nervous. Would the students be too good? Would there be nothing to correct? Or would they be so untalented that the class would be boring? Such thoughts tormented her beforehand; but the moment she stepped before an audience her theatre blood began to tingle. The old inspiration always came back. No matter how many times she demonstrated a song, no matter how many times she herself had sung it during a long career, it was always like a first time when she stood there in the bend of the piano and the accompaniment began.



Her master classes were a revelation, a glimpse at the inner workings of an incomparably creative artistic imagination. She never taught singing as such, only interpretation. Unlike many great artists, she was gifted with the ability to articulate her vision in words. She inspired a generation of young singers to surpass themselves, and former students of hers are singing on opera stages all over the world today.

The essence of her art was her total identification with what she was singing, and the mastery with which she communicated her feeling to the audience. Those who were privileged to hear her will never forget her.

[i] Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, phenomenally versatile Ger. bar., b. Berlin 1925. Op. deb. Berlin 1948, Salzburg 1956, Bayreuth 1957, Vienna 1957. One of the greatest and most-recorded lieder singers.

[ii] Armand Tokatyan, Armenian-Bulgarian/Am. ten., b. Plovdiv, Bulgaria, 1896, d. Pasadena, Calif., 1960. Met. Op. 1922-46, also San Francisco, Berlin, Vienna, and London.



Beaumont Glass with Metropolitan star Michele Crider



Lehmann writes: For Beau--I remember the happy years of our work together with much appreciation and affection.

Lotte Lehmann 1959

Mr. Glass maintained a strong friendship after working with Mme Lehmann at the MAW. He was a fine pianist as well as a writer, music editor, opera director, and professor.