

Melissa Hayden

UAFS Under

one hand and conducted the orchestra with the other. Everyone who saw the performance was impressed at her skill, but her father was mortified and forbade her from repeating it. Compare the facts about Colonel Steiner's role in Emma's life with this quote from the St. Paul Daily Globe: "Her father is a well-known businessman of the Monumental City, and to his lavish expenditure of money in the development of the genius of his daughter, which he discovered while she was a mere child, is the world indebted for this consummate artist, whom many competent musicians look upon as a phenomenon" ("An Opera By A Woman." 20 Jul. 1891). There is no evidence that Colonel Steiner ever played a role in Emma's life beyond scorning her dream. It is telling of the way women were thought of at this time, the roles they were expected to play, that this reporter gave the credit for her entire career, her every achievement, to her father, to the man who was expected to be in charge of her life.

Emma's first job was as the music director under Edward Everett Rice. He was very progressive for his time, and booked *Clorindy*, the first musical written by African-Americans to appear on Broadway, in 1898. Emma began as a singer, and somehow caught his eye. From there, she began touring under several opera companies to perform light operas, including *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *Amorita*. She composed another opera, *Fleurette*, but couldn't get any managers to hear it, so she gathered a group of well known financial sponsors of opera, who adored it and pushed for its production. She toured with it in 1889 and again in 1891. Emma had a composition performed at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Then, she founded her own opera company, the Emma R. Steiner Gaiety Opera Company. Unfortunately, the company began losing money at alarming rates, including during the production of *Fleurette*, which was a net loss of \$6000 for Emma. The company was eventually liquidated, and the Emma R. Steiner Gaiety Opera Company was never heard from again.

so could do nothing and her company disbanded. This started a series of tragedies. In 1902, a fire started in a warehouse where her works were being stored, destroying most if not all of their remaining copies. This was before photocopying, so unpublished music had to be recreated by hand, a practice which Emma would not have had time to do. After this fire, Steiner contracted an unnamed illness that led to her eyesight failing, and had no money to continue to tour or compose. Incredibly

has been said at different times that I am the only woman in the United States who conducts a large orchestra; that I am the only woman who has produced and composed several comic operas; that I am the only woman who has written the complete instrumentation for operatic and other musical compositions. For myself I make none of those claims, for I know each of them to

home, not an institution of charity- in every State in the Union. That takes time and money. But we have heart.” The first of those homes was beginning to be developed in Long Island in 1926, just three years before her death. Unfortunately, Steiner died before the home could be finished or open. (“Orchestra Leader 50 Years.” 31 Jan. 1926, pp. 84-85).

Newspaper articles about Steiner’s antics show an unflinching, determined personality. She owned a dog, Mollie, and was walking to a corner store in New York in 1859 when the dog vanished and was held by a dog catcher. Emma immediately started attacking the dog catcher with a whip, and hit him in the face. A policeman was called and forced the catcher to return her dog. Emma was arrested in 1885 for whipping another man- this time, one who would not stop harassing a 16 year old singer who was in her care. Emma was a woman who never married, who lived exclusively with other women, was heavily involved in women’s issues, and was entirely uninterested in living the way a woman was demanded to in that era, with a husband who controlled her every whim and several children to look after. I think it is safe to make assumptions about her sexuality with this information, and because of her close collaboration with her “niece” in Alaska and Margaret MacDonald later in life. MacDonald wrote a tribute poem to Emma in ; “A woman of many parts; a woman of noble mind. One whose heart is filled with love, a queen among her kind. Strong of body and strong of soul, gentle and good and true. Rare attributes of man and woman, blend eternally in you. Sunshine and not shadow, tis your portion to impart, the tender sweetness of your smile cheers many a wearieMMmiMf Mf aMMMMMong f asbs mg fve \$among f asbs m i bt jc cDq

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