

Troubled World of Ganna Walska

She Has Shared It With Five Husbands Who Couldn't Make an Opera Singer Out of Her and a Sixth Who Turned Out to Be the Reincarnation of Guru Rimpoche, a Hindu God Without Money.



By Pat Frank

THERE are two worlds. One world is inhabited by some 2,000,000,000 people whose principal concerns right now are making a living and worrying about atomic fission. Then there is the world of Ganna Walska.

This frustrated opera singer recently divorced her sixth husband, Dr. Theos Bernard, a yoga follower.

The world of Ganna Walska is bounded on the east by the mystic rites of the Himalayas, on the west by a Shangri-La transplanted to California and on the north and south by the grand opera houses where her unreliable vocal cords failed to bring acclaim she so persistently sought.

Once Ganna wanted to drop an n from her name, because she thought two ns were giving her the wrong vibrations. Perhaps she should have done it. Ganna would have sounded natural enough in a world where the common language is full of words like yoga, lama and diva.

This world is peopled by such exotic personalities as Oom the Omnipotent. In this world you can also find the reincarnation of the Guru Rimpoche, an Indian scholar revered as a god, and the reincarnation of the mistress of Napoleon III.

In Ganna's world six husbands

are staked out like milestones along the gold-cobbled road she followed in a futile search for a grand opera career. Her quest, which has been going on for more than a quarter century, is potentially a legend, like Jason after the Golden Fleece.

Five of these husbands had several things in common. They were all older than Ganna, they were rich (two were fabulously wealthy) and while they showered her with cash, bonds and jewels, they couldn't do anything about her vocal cords.

Dr. Bernard was different. He was younger. Furthermore, while he claims to be the only white Lama, an intimate of the secrets of Yoga, and to have been hailed by Tibetan monks as the Guru Rimpoche come back to earth, he said he wasn't able to support himself.

That's what caused the latest trouble in the Walska world.

Back in 1942 Mme. Walska, 53, met Dr. Bernard, 36, a nephew of Dr. Pierre Bernard, the yoga cult leader-known as Oom the Omnipotent,

at a little session of the New York chapter of Lamaism, which is the state religion of Tibet. He lectured, demonstrated the yoga exercises, and she became convinced that "Truth of the Divine Laws, old as the worlds, had crossed the Himalayas." Perhaps she thought yoga would help her larynx. So they were married.

After an interval, the romantic looking Bernard sued for separate maintenance, which is a polite way of saying he wanted alimony. Mme. Walska filed a cross-complaint, and then won a surprise divorce in Santa Barbara, after agreeing to pay his \$5,000 attorney fees, and give him \$1,500 for alimony.

She charged that Bernard persuaded her to buy "Tibetland," a 38-acre estate in California valued at \$1,000,000.

Dr. Bernard's original idea in buying "Tibetland" was to furnish a retreat for Tibetan monks who presently would come to California as missionaries of Lamaism. When the monks failed to appear, Dr. Bernard explained it was because they couldn't stand low altitudes.

So she bought another place, this time up in the mountains.

Still no Tibetan monks or lamas arrived. Only local Yogis showed up.

The early history of the Walska

world, like that of most worlds, is hazy. The vivacious, black-eyed daughter of a Polish peasant, she first sang in obscure cabarets. Little is known of her until she married the Polish Baron Arcadie d'Elgnorn.

Her second husband was the wealthy American neurologist, Dr. Joseph Fraenkel, and her third, carpet king Alexander Smith Cochran.

Next came Harold F. McCormick, International Harvester heir and angel of the Chicago opera. Fifth was Harry Grindell-Matthews, the noted British scientist, perhaps the world's foremost authority on sound.

During this stage of her career, from husbands number two through five, her operatic adventures were repeatedly disappointing.

There was a demonstration in Havana when she attempted the leading role in "Thals." She mistook whistles, the Cuban equivalent of the Bronx cheer, for approval of her performance, and was perhaps saved from further indignation only by a quickly dropped curtain.

Once in Paris she rented a theatre and gave away free tickets, but not even the thrifty French would listen. Even in McCormick's opera house her performance of "Zaza" was cancelled after a rehearsal which ended with Macstro Gino Marinuzzi, the director, leaping from the podium into the bull fiddle in the pit.

Schabelitz

Illustrated by R. F. SCHABELITZ