

The Disappointed Diva Yodeling Now with a Yogi



After Failing Spectacularly to Become an Opera Star, Ganna Walska Is Still Trying to Strike the Right Note—Through the Mystic Science of the East as Preached by a Handsome White Lama

GANNA WALSKA, the would-be grand opera star whose vain, 25-year assault on the citadel of musical fame forms one of the most bizarre dramas of modern times, has at long last found consolation for her blighted career.

She has found it in Yoga, the occult science of the East. Or, to be more exact, she has found it in Yoga as preached by a fabulous and very handsome young American named Theos Bernard.

Mr. Bernard is called the White Lama. Lamas are monks of the Oriental creed, an offshoot of Buddhism, known as Lamaism.

So far as known, Mr. Bernard is the only white man ever to have been initiated into the inner mysteries of Lamaism.

The honor was accorded him a few years ago when he made a pilgrimage to the forbidden land of Tibet.

Visitors from America and other western countries are as a rule about as popular in Tibet as the plague.

But young Mr. Bernard, fresh from postgraduate work in philosophy at Columbia University, in New York, was welcomed with open arms.

He modestly ascribed this reception to the fact that the Tibetans thought he was a god.

According to tradition, Lamaism, the State religion of Tibet, was founded in the eighth century, A. D., by a great Indian scholar named Guru (or teacher) Rimpoche, now revered as a god.

Also according to tradition, Guru Rimpoche, after his death, was due to show up in Tibet again many years later in another incarnation. This second time, the sacred writings said, he was to have the form of a Westerner.

Nor, the writings went on, would this Westerner visit Tibet as an idle tourist, or one bent upon the acquisition of wealth or power. He would come as a "Tantrik," a man already familiar with the teachings of Lamaism.

Mr. Bernard fitted this description to a T(antrik).

"I had fortified myself," he declares; "with as thorough a knowledge of Yoga and Lamaist teachings (the two overlap) as can be acquired by a Westerner studying outside of Tibet. And the Tibetans were completely baffled."

Emerging from this state, he looked up their scriptures and decided that he was none other than the long promised Guru Rimpoche.

As a result, Mr. Bernard was invited to the sacred city of Lhasa by the King-Regent; he

was taken through every monastery and holy building in and around the city; he was allowed to witness, participate in and photograph the most important religious ceremonies; he was showered with priceless gifts and finally accepted into the religion itself.

He became a Lama, passing through all the mystical ceremonies. And when he at last took his departure, it was as the accredited spokesman of Lamaism to the Western World.

Whether he has wholly fulfilled his oriental sponsors' expectations is not known; but in Ganna Walska he has at least secured one convert of considerable stature.

Ganna Walska in One of Her Operatic Attempts, Wearing the Fabled Jewels of Napoleon III's Mistress. She Always Looked Like a Star But Couldn't Sing Like One.

When he is not presiding over intimate little meetings in her New York home, he is adorning her lavish Santa Barbara (Calif.) estate, which she has named "Tibetland."

Costing originally over a million dollars, Tibetland has been turned into a sort of Shangri-La, complete with lotus pond, beside which Mr. Bernard can sit cross-legged, contemplating his stomach or thinking up new paragraphs for the book on which he is currently engaged and which is expected to bring a little of the East's age-old resignation to the war-weary Western world.

Drabs and drabs of it, exhibited privately, already seem to have brought resignation to his hostess.

A few years ago Ganna was a profoundly unhappy woman. The daughter of a Polish peasant, she had come a long way from those humble beginnings, in fact, had cut such a figure as it is given to few to equal.

But she had failed miserably, time and again, at the one thing she really wanted to do.

She had been married five times to brilliant men whose total wealth has been estimated at more than \$125,000,000. She had enriched herself from these matches. She was beautiful and talented.

But none of this satisfied her, because the world would not accept her, as she was bound and determined it must, as a singer.

Her husbands—or at least all but the last—had believed she could sing and had backed

up their belief with cash on the line, in enormous amounts.

And the results? Well—

The mayor of Nice had issued an order forbidding her to warble again in his fair city, after her first performance, because he was afraid if she did it might start a riot.

In Havana, stepping onto the stage in the leading role of "Thais," her throat tightened and out came sounds which, through the years, have come to be known as "The Walska wail."

The Cuban equivalent of the Bronx cheer is whistling, but Ganna didn't know that. She took the storm of whistles that greeted her efforts for applause.

Her error produced such an uproar that she became furious and flung insults across the footlights. A major disaster was averted by the stage manager, who had presence of mind enough to ring down the curtain.

In Paris, she rented a whole theater, by the year, and gave away tickets to induce people to come and hear her. But the ungrateful populace stayed away in droves.

In Berlin she was openly laughed at; in New York she snubbed many times by the Metropolitan, and in Chicago—

Actually, one of the chief attractions of Harold F. McCormick, the International Harvester Company millionaire who became her third and most widely publicized spouse, was the fact that he was the angel of the Chicago Opera Company.

With his backing, she confidently expected to attain her ambition.

But alas! At the dress rehearsal of "Zaza," which was to have been her initial starring vehicle in the windy city, her throat produced a note so windy that Maestro Gino Marinuzzi, the director, leapt like a kangaroo from his stand and landed, not gracefully, in the wreckage of a bull fiddle in the orchestra pit.

So that production of "Zaza" was just declared off.

Even an ambition as burning as Ganna's was bound to be dampened in time by a succession of such incidents. By 1938 it was touch and go whether she would give up or make a last attempt. And it was then that she married her fifth husband, the English inventor, Mr. Harry Grindell-Matthews, who died a couple of years ago.

Unquestionably, love guided her to him. Nevertheless, it is impossible for students of her career to overlook the fact that each of her husbands had, in addition to his native charms, something which her peculiar ambition could use.

Before wedding the Polish Baron Arcadie d'Elgnorn, her first husband, she was an obscure cabaret singer; as his wife she could command auditions that might have been denied her before.

Her second spouse was the wealthy American neurologist, Dr. Joseph Fraenkel, who was in the happy position of being able to give her treatments for nervousness and also to back her financially.

Alexander Smith Cochran, the carpet king whom she married after Dr. Fraenkel's death,

was worth probably \$80,000,000. Period! McCormick had money and the Chicago Opera Company to boot, and Mr. Grindell-Matthews was perhaps the world's foremost expert on sound. He, if anyone, could tell Ganna what was the matter with her voice.

Maybe he did. In any case, they separated on their honeymoon, although each denied that the separation had an ominous meaning.

Mr. Grindell-Matthews explained that he had to get back to work on a new invention, a death-ray machine which, he declared, had already proven its value by killing mice at a distance of 64 feet.

Some people unkindly suggested that he might have turned the contraption not only on mice but also on Ganna's ambitions. She certainly made only a few public appearances afterwards.

Now, thanks to Yoga and her White Lama, she is reported to be in a happier frame of mind than she has enjoyed for a long time.

Leanings toward the occult have been observed in her before. For example, she used to say that she was the reincarnation of Countess Virginia Oldoini Verasis-Castiglione, the light of love of Napoleon III, and she spent years collecting the costly jewels which that ill-fated monarch had showered on his favorite.

Her meeting with Mr. Bernard seems to have crystallized these previous vague yearnings. Teaching that this life is nothing, that one incarnation just leads to another, and so on through the millennia toward some ultimate perfection, Lamaism no doubt holds solace for Ganna.

In its light she can look on her failures as fated and relax philosophically in expectation of becoming the Jenny Lind of the year 4000.

She can lift her voice in song at Tibetland, careless at last whether it is good or bad.

Neighbors, who have heard her practice notes drifting down the breeze, wonder if the White Lama is accompanying her on one of those strange musical instruments—rams' horns or ten-yard-long bugles—which are used in Lamaistic ceremonies.

One neighbor is said to have been particularly affected. He is Stanley McCormick, brother of her former husband, Harold. Stanley, who is worth \$52,000,000, has been mad for the last 35 years, and his huge estate is his private asylum.

It is said that one day on hearing Ganna's trills, he climbed a tree in order to catch the more altitudinous notes, and his keepers had a hard time getting him to come down.

Perhaps this incident shows that, now that she has stopped worrying about it, her voice has improved, or perhaps a tendency to applaud her just runs in the McCormick family.

People who know Ganna well point to the similarities—and differences—between her relationship with Mr. Bernard and with the mysterious little violinist, Walter Staram.

For years she was under the spell of Staram, who was credited with having hypnotic powers. Their association was likened to that of Svengali and Triby, only in this case Triby didn't seem to sing much better with her guiding spirit than without him.

Mr. Bernard, the white Lama, is said to be a beneficent sort of Svengali.

Yet it is a fact that he was sued a couple of years ago by one Wilfrid J. Donovan, New York department store executive, who claimed that his wife had been driven crazy by the Bernard brand of Yoga.

The case ended rather inconclusively out of court, so it is hard to say what lesson it might have held for Ganna.

Perhaps it only went to show that one person's Yogi may be another's bogey.



Theos Bernard, Only White Man Ever to Be Initiated Into the Secrets of Lamaism; Is Now Ganna's Guru, Or Teacher.