

Lillian Blauvelt Exhibit

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In February, 2007 an exhibit titled "From Brooklyn to Buckingham Palace" opened at the Library of Gettysburg College chronicling some of the highlights of the career of Madame Lillian Blauvelt, "a singer who dispels the clouds and scatters seeds of cheer – a most brilliant singer." The exhibit included photographs, newspaper clippings, performance announcements, and personal memorabilia.



Photo by Dorothy Ralson

Described as "A handsome young woman with brilliant dark eyes and very dark hair, under medium height and petite in figure," Lillian Blauvelt was born on March 16, 1873 in Brooklyn, New York. Her father was Dutch (a Blauvelt) and her mother Welsh. Her mother's family was celebrated for generations for their excellent voices, and they reached their pinnacle with Lillian, once called "America's First Soprano." A gifted musician, she began playing the violin as a young child. At the age of seven she played her first concert in New York and continued to perform on the violin for the next eight years. Her singing career began at the age of 14 when she began studying voice at the National Conservatory. She went to Paris at the age of 15 to study under M. Jacques Bouhy and remained his student for three years. Her Paris debut was at the Theatre de la Monnai and was soon followed by a tour of Russia. At 18 she went to Brussels for her operatic debut and performed in several operas over the next 6 months. She was said to have preferred concerts to operas, not only because the money was much better, but also because it gave greater opportunity for travel and artistic expression. At the end of this tour, she fell ill and returned to New York where she played at Carneige Hall, among other venues.

In 1898 she returned to Europe. Her first performances were in Italy where she performed for

and was honored by Queen Margherita. She then went to England where she debuted at Queen's Hall and sang at Buckingham Palace for King Edward and Queen Alexandra. In 1899 she gave a command performance for Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle for which she received a brooch from the Queen. She toured and performed in all the principal continental towns in England, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Switzerland and Hungary. In 1900, she sang at the

Crystal Palace in London for a crowd of 20,000 people. The following January, 1901, she was the featured soloist at the Memorial service for Queen Victoria. In April of that year she was honored by the Royal Academy of St. Cecilia, a musical society founded in 1585. Of the eight recipients of this honor throughout its history, she was the only woman, and the only English speaking person ever so decorated.



Photo by Dorothy Ralson



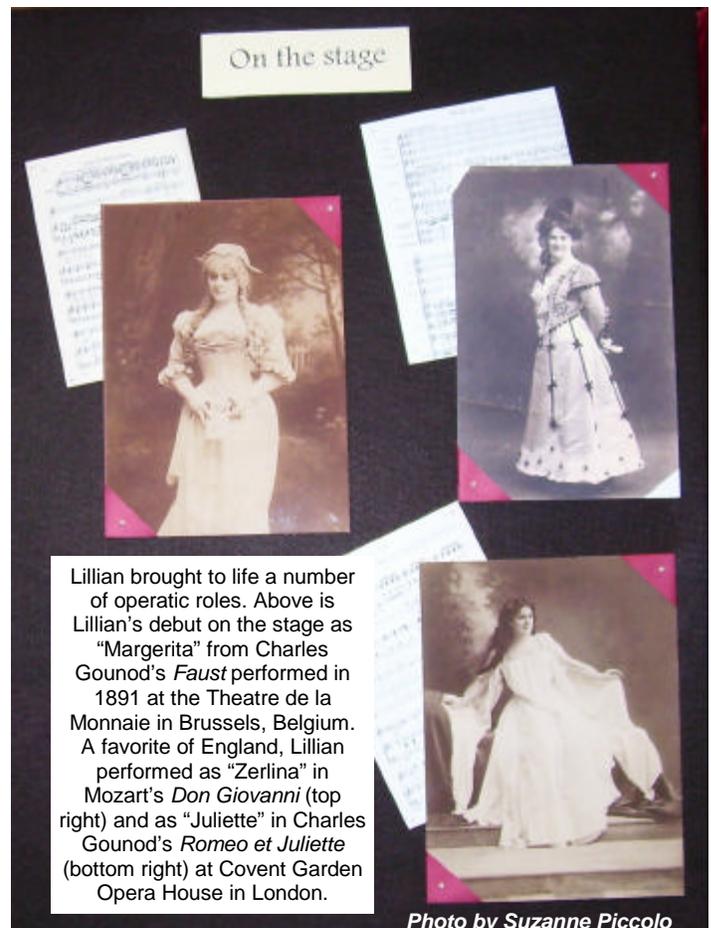
Photo by Dorothy Ralson

The award was presented for learning Verdi's Requiem in only four days and performing it in Latin accompanied by a symphony orchestra. One version of this story was that the scheduled performance was sold out when the soprano who was to perform it fell ill. Eight other singers were auditioned, and none were deemed worthy. A friend of Count de San Martino, the producer, heard her playing the piano and singing just to pass the time in the lobby of the Hotel de l'Europe. Her stay in Italy had been extended because her aunt, who was accompanying her, had broken her leg in a carriage accident the day before. This woman was so impressed by her voice that she told the Count she had seen a person who would be able to do the concert – and, by the way, could she have a free ticket! When the orchestra heard her first rehearsal with them they stood up and congratulated each other, but not Lillian, because they had found their soprano.

In December, 1903, she began her American Concert Tour which included performances at the Harlem Philharmonic Society in New York, and the Morning Musicale at the Waldorf Astoria. She again toured England in 1904. At the end of 1905, she signed a

contract for over half a million dollars to appear in concerts in the U.S. under Fred Whitney. One of her appearances was in Ogden, Utah with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. She also appeared on Broadway starting in December 1906 in two plays: "The Magic Knight" and "Dream City." In addition to her performances, she also recorded for Columbia Records, the first ever series of Grand Opera Recordings, and also recorded on the Victor label.

Lillian, the woman, was said to have been a "cheerful giver." She donated her talents for numerous fundraisers for churches and civic groups. A friend, the rector of the Calvary Episcopal Church, said: "Madame Blauvelt has three graces, and the greatest of these is charity..." after she performed at a very successful concert to benefit the church organ fund. She was close to her younger sister, Florence, who traveled with her and documented her career for several years until she married and returned home. Lillian herself was married, first at age 16 to Royal S. Smith in New York. This marriage ended in divorce. In February, 1899 she married a broker who also became her manager, named W. F. Pendleton in Rome. She died in 1947 at the age of 74.



Lillian brought to life a number of operatic roles. Above is Lillian's debut on the stage as "Margerita" from Charles Gounod's *Faust* performed in 1891 at the Theatre de la Monnaie in Brussels, Belgium. A favorite of England, Lillian performed as "Zerlina" in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (top right) and as "Juliette" in Charles Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette* (bottom right) at Covent Garden Opera House in London.

Photo by Suzanne Piccolo