

ON



# Madame Melba,

AS "LUCIA,"

AT LA SCALA, MILAN.

instinct. However, before forming a final judgment about her, the great Mad Scene was waited for. This piece was decidedly the "clou" of the evening, accomplishing the culminating point of the success of the diva. It was a scene of ever-increasing intense attention, admiration, and enjoyment. MELBA gave full evidence of inestimable treasures of voice, and truly superior art which she knows how to employ; that art of which the stamp is being lost for the operas of the old Italian repertoire. After the frantic cadenza, in which she put to a hard trial with her flexible throat, the sparkle of her dazzling notes, and brilliant scales and trills, the flautist, ZAMPERONI, who kept himself up to the level of the incomparable artist, there was a burst of applause, and frenzied cries asking for an encore, which was granted in the form of the last few bars of this extraordinary vocal episode.

After the Cabaletta, four enthusiastic calls signalled the complete triumph of the artist. It would be difficult to conceive a more exquisitely trained, mellow, or clear voice, gifted with such an extraordinary ease of production, such as MELBA caused to be heard. She makes no unworthy use of her virtuosity, introducing variations without ever descending to anything inartistic.

In fact MELBA is an extraordinary artist, and an almost ideally perfect Lucia.

## "LA PERSEVERANZA," March 18, 1893.

More imposing demonstrations of admiration, and greater manifestations of enthusiasm than those which Madame NELLIE MELBA obtained last evening at the Scala, singing before an extraordinarily select and crowded audience, I do not think any artist could aspire to in those rosy dreams of glory which are so often transformed into bitter delusions. Applauded after the opening Cavatina, in which she immediately made one appreciate again the rare beauty of timbre, afterwards with more fervour at the end of the Cabaletta, in which she evidenced wonderfully neat and fluent execution due to an exceptional throat and superlative art in singing; clapped with enthusiasm after the concerted piece, for which an encore was demanded but not conceded, MELBA reached the height of her triumph in the Mad Scene, during which the public could hardly contain their enthusiasm, and broke out, after the Cadenza, bristling with terrifying difficulties, into a noisy roar, and into deafening ovations which lasted for several minutes, quite an unusual thing at La Scala.

The famous artist appeared visibly moved by this prolonged applause as well as by the numerous offers of splendid flowers in bouquets and baskets which were handed to her on the stage at this moment. After the close of the Aria, she was called before the curtain four or five times by loud and general applause.

Madame MELBA has therefore every right to boast of this victory of hers.

Few artists can lay claim to having obtained such an uncontested and triumphal success on the stage of La Scala.

She also conquered the public yesterday evening with the beauty of her figure, to which are added the attractions of a graceful and lofty carriage, and the noble expression of her face, framed with an abundant wealth of hair with strange changing shades of burnished gold, tints from the Titianesque pallet, assisting greatly the other charms of the artist. Such a brilliant voice has not been heard at La Scala for a long time. For ease of production, bright as precious stones flashing in the sun, firmness of utterance, ductility of timbre, sureness and undanious confidence in her vocal means, for finish in modulation, and coloratura, for true artistic insight which—notwithstanding shakes, exceptional trills, and acrobatic flights—does not deface or spoil (because brought in with proper discretion), the purest manifestations of Donizetti's genius, the celebrated artist made one perceive that she had reached the highest pitch of perfection.

## "LA LOMBARDA," 16 March, 1893.

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR at the Scala has been one of the greatest successes of the season, and, with reason, for, from the point of view of individual interpretation and general ensemble, Lucia has been one of the finest performances this year.

I am glad to say at once that Madame NELLIE MELBA comes first in order of merit. The réclame with which she had been preceded had rendered her public more critical than sympathetic, but she was able to conquer them from the very first note. They encouraged her after her aria, warmly approved of her in the duet, and called her before the curtain at the end of the act. In the second act—having overcome her diffidence before the public—MELBA was able to display her art more freely, and so great was the effect which she obtained that an encore had to be given of the long Finale. But the culminating point of the evening was—as might be imagined—the Mad Scene. All the qualities which characterize MELBA as artist and singer find in this piece their fullest opportunities of interpretation. The voice—one of the finest which has been heard at the Scala for years and years—exhibits in piano singing its wonderful smoothness, its rare evenness, its exquisite timbre: in florid passages her flexible throat does wonders. If the finish of her singing roused the public to enthusiasm, its marvellous flexibility amazed them; they did not allow her to finish her last brilliant trill in quiet, but drowned the last note in an enthusiastic ovation, obliging her to grant an encore. The ovation was renewed after the encore and at the end of the scene, after which, MELBA had to appear four or five times in front of the curtain. I heard some of the old subscribers compare MELBA to Patti in her best days: certainly such a Lucia has not been seen at La Scala for a very long time.

## "IL COMMERCIO," March 16, 1893.

The first act impressed favourably, and it was acknowledged that here were exccutants out of the common; there were two calls. The celebrated Wedding Scene in the second act, which closes with the famous Quintet, was performed excellently, and drew forth warm applause; but the great success of the evening was the Mad Scene in Act III. Here Madame MELBA concentrated all her musical talent, and it can safely be said that it was a revelation for La Scala. This piece which gives free play to all virtuosos in singing, offered an opportunity to Madame MELBA to exhibit all her excellent qualities to their best advantage. A sweet, ample, and steady voice, most finished taste in vocalization and trilling, thorough knowledge of phrasing and time. Her success was great; the theatre broke out into frantic and intense applause, even before the last note had issued from the flexible throat of the singer. An encore was demanded and conceded. The virtuosity of Madame MELBA is of such finish and elegance as to distinguish her from many others who shine in the world of art. After the piece she had three calls.

## "L'ITALIA DEL POPOLO," 16-17 March, 1893.

We passed a splendid evening, for the entire public was immensely satisfied. The success was pronounced from the very beginning and increased enormously as the evening progressed. Immediately MELBA made her voice heard a sense of delight pervaded the whole Theatre. Rumour had been so busy concerning NELLIE MELBA, that naturally the first feeling of curiosity was inspired by her more as woman than artist. Her handsome and elegant figure, and sweet expression, at once awakened sympathy. Her voice is truly marvellous for spontaneity, equality, and liquidness of tone; a voice which charms with the beauty of its timbre, and the facility of its production; a voice such as has not been heard for many years, and which can only be compared with the voices of those individuals whose names are being continually flung in one's face by those people who, as regards art, will only concede the rights of judgment to antiquity. MELBA'S voice conquered everybody; she sings with great correctness, with purity of accent and style, she indulges in variations in abundance, but she impresses to such an extent by her faultlessness that she leaves no time for discussion. She had great applause after the Adagio, and an ovation after the Cabaletta. The Sextet roused the public to enthusiasm and an encore was demanded and granted. After the Finale all the artists were called several times in front of the curtain, but the culminating point was, as might be predicted, the Mad Scene. We do not remember having heard for a great many years such general and warm applause as was bestowed upon MELBA last evening after the Adagio. The Cadenza was not permitted to finish without being interrupted by an immense acclamation. And in fact MELBA performs prodigies of virtuosity; she attacks her highest notes firmly and in perfect tune, and this combined with her neat trills, her pearly runs, and perfect shakes, makes up extraordinary execution. It is needless to say that the Cadenza had to be repeated; MELBA was called an infinite number of times before the curtain. We heard some of the most critical subscribers declare that this performance was one of the most successful, and that it would be very difficult to find another such Lucia. It was a triumph.

## "IL SECOLO," 16-17 March, 1893.

Madame MELBA, new to our greatest stage, had more than a success—a true and great triumph. The numerous public of last evening, anxious to know this lyric celebrity, surrounded by a romantic air, had very soon to disabuse themselves of the doubts which are natural and reasonable in such cases, in order to admire the splendid voice and phenomenal technique of the artist, and especially in the "Scena" and "Rondo" of the third act, in which Madame MELBA was completely able to display all her exceptional means. For the rest, she reigned supreme for her dramatic intensity, rising particularly as singer and actress in the Mad Scene. On her account encores were given of the Concerted Piece in the second act and the Cadenza in the Aria of the third act, a Cadenza bristling with difficulties which only a privileged throat could venture upon.

## "LA PERSEVERANZA," March 16, 1893.

Milan was waiting in the chorus of praises sung in honour of the imposing talent of Madame MELBA; the dreaded Milan which often permits itself to question the judgment of the most important artistic centres of the world, and which has, as regards music, so much voice in the matter as to be able sometimes to compromise for ever the reputation of singers elsewhere looked upon as stars. The trepidation of Madame MELBA at the thought of having to present herself on this dangerous stage of La Scala, just at this critical period, when the constellation of divas, to which she belongs, has found the Milanese horizon dark and angry, must have been great; but certainly last evening her satisfaction must have been all the greater on this account at the extraordinary success obtained. I say this at once because, after a success so complete, warm, and uncontested from floor to ceiling, it is not possible to harbour any doubt about the impression on the public of La Scala; the diva has fully justified the appellation of celebrated, given to her in the preliminary announcements of her appearance among us. The fame with which she was preceded appeared exaggerated to no one, not excepting that of the sculptural beauty of her charming figure and noble and expressive face, which added not a little to the impression which she created on her first appearance before the audience of La Scala. In the first Recitative and afterwards in the Adagio of the Aria, she surprised agreeably by her beauty of tone and finish of expression, exciting that murmur of approval which at La Scala is nearly always the precursor of a sincerely admiring impression. Warm applause burst forth at the close. The Cabaletta, sung with superb confidence and a magnificent luxuriance of pearly runs, contributed to secure the first victory of the evening. The applause grew in warmth and intensity until it became frantic and insistent after the Duet with the tenor BERTLAND, who was an excellent coadjutor. In the second act, fresh applause and a call after the Duet with the baritone, FESSINA, who showed himself worthy of his task. The concerted piece was encored amid great applause. MELBA caused the beauty of her voice to be still more admired, and showed herself to be an actress gifted with the highest dramatic