

## ARCHIVES OF EMMA ALBANI

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Emma Albani was the first Canadian-born singer to achieve international fame. Born Emma Lajeunesse in 1847, in Chambly, Quebec, near Montreal, she received her first music lessons from her mother, Melina Mignault, and subsequently from her father, Joseph Lajeunesse, before she was four. Although she studied piano, harp, composition and singing, it was the last in which she truly excelled. By 1862, it was obvious that she had a voice of exceptional quality, but that she required further training. Unable to raise enough money to send his daughter to Europe, Joseph Lajeunesse took his family to the United States in July 1865 in order to accumulate funds through tours of concerts and recitals. They stayed longer in Albany, New York, where she was soloist at St. Joseph's Catholic Church. In 1868, assisted by the congregation and with the encouragement of the parish priest, Emma left at last for Europe.

After studying in Paris with Gilbert-Louis Duprez for eight months, she went to Milan to work with Francesco Lamperti, who arranged for her debut in Messina on December 22, 1869, as Oscar in *Un Ballo in maschera*. This was followed shortly by Amina in *La Sonnambula* and Alina in *Alina, regina di Golconda*. At the suggestion of her elocution teacher, she adopted the name Albani as her stage name, borrowing it from an old Italian family then extinct. News of her successes in Messina, Acireale, Cento, Florence and Malta soon reached London which she visited in June 1871. She was immediately engaged by the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden, directed by Frederick Gye. Returning to Italy, she continued her studies with Lamperti and then visited Paris to perfect her interpretation of the title role in *Mignon* with the composer, Ambroise Thomas.

After more triumphs in Florence, she made her London debut at Covent Garden on April 2, 1872 in *La Sonnambula* and became immediately one of the stars of the company. She established this great London house as her home base and sang there almost every season until 1896. As the years progressed, she added all the major Italian coloratura

heroines to her repertoire and, as the voice deepened and darkened, expanded into late Verdian and Wagnerian roles such as Desdemona in *Otello*, Elsa in *Lohengrin*, Elisabeth in *Tannhauser*, Senta in *Der Fliegende Holländer* and Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde*. She sang in other European capitals: Moscow in 1873, Paris in 1876, Berlin in 1882, and in the major opera houses of the world, including La Scala in Milan in 1880 and the Metropolitan in New York in 1891. In addition to her career as an opera singer, she toured extensively as a recitalist and an oratorio singer. She met and worked with some of the most important composers of her day, including Charles Gounod, Antonin Dvorak, Arthur Sullivan and Franz Liszt, singing their works in their presence or under their direction.

Although she never returned to live in Canada after 1865, the basis of her training and technique had been acquired here and she made frequent visits. She toured large portions of the country in 1883, 1889, 1890, 1892, twice in 1896 -- including a tour with



ALBANI

(EMMA LAJEUNESSE.)

-From the 1874 biography by E. Legendre

her own company which took her from Halifax to Victoria – 1901, 1903 and her farewell tour of 1906. Even though she officially retired from Covent Garden in 1896, she continued to give recitals and perform in oratorios in England and around the world (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ceylon and India) until her last public recital at the Royal Albert Hall on October 14, 1911. She continued teaching into the 1920s, and one of her most famous pupils was the French-Canadian soprano, Eva Gauthier (1885-1958). She died on April 3, 1930 at her home on Tregunter Road in Kensington and was buried in the neighbouring cemetery of Brompton.

Emma Albani's career spanned four decades and was international in stature. As the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* (second edition, 1992) states:

Her exceptionally beautiful voice, the solid musical and vocal training she acquired in her youth and later developed in conjunction with the best teachers, her mastery of French, English, Italian, and German, and her quickness in assimilating a new score all contributed to her strong appeal to conductors and composers and made her one of the most sought-after singers of her time.

Until recently, very few archival materials documenting the life and career of this great Canadian artist were available for research in institutions accessible to the public. The City of Chambly, Quebec, inherited some items from Albani herself and, since 1980, there have been various exhibitions to make the public aware of these musical riches. These are mainly photographs, of members of the British Royal Family and of the English nobility who were friends of Albani, and of Albani as a girl, a young woman and in some of her early operatic roles, as well as of her husband and son, Ernest and Frederick Gye. Among the correspondence, which consists largely of business letters of Ernest Gye, there is an autograph letter and manuscript from Charles Gounod to Albani. The Eva Gauthier Papers in the Music Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts contains extensive correspondence between Gauthier and Albani during the period (in the first decade of the twentieth century) when Gauthier was her student. In the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, some correspondence with Albani is found in the archival papers of Sir John A. MacDonald, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and William Lyon Mackenzie King, all Canadian prime ministers who were acquainted with her and admired her accomplishments. Finally, the Music Division of the National Library of Canada

acquired various documents between 1970 and 1990 through auctions and second-hand dealers, eventually amassing a collection of some 10 centimetres of photographs, correspondence, salary receipts and posters from Covent Garden, programmes and clippings.

In August 1878, she married Ernest Gye, who had just taken over the management of Covent Garden from his father. When he died in 1925, her financial situation was insecure. Ernest had tried to supplement their income after retirement but his various ventures in speculating were unsuccessful.

It may be that one of the reasons for the lack of substantial personal archives of Albani in one location was the need of the singer to sell off some of her possessions in the last years of her life as a means of raising money. Nonetheless, descendants of the Gye family in England do possess a large collection of materials: 12 scrapbooks of clippings, programs and photographs covering her career from 1874 to 1914; personal diaries of Frederick Gye from 1841 through 1877, as well as of his daughter, Clara (who lived with Albani and her husband), from 1860 to 1927 and of his son, Frederick, from 1878 to 1879 - one hundred and eight items in all. Although these documents are still stored in the family home, they will be deposited with a British library in the near future and the National Library of Canada hopes to be able to procure a microfilm copy. Also in private hands is the correspondence between Albani and the Parisian publishing house of Heugel. Some one hundred and fifty items in the Heugel archives, document Albani's relationship with the French composer, Ambroise Thomas. Finally, the Montreal music critic and writer, Gilles Potvin, has been an admirer of Albani since his youth and has built up a personal collection of several dozen letters and photographs.

Between 1990 and 1991, the Music Division of the National Library was able to take advantage of rare opportunities to make accessible to researchers perhaps the largest collection of documents concerning both the personal life and public career of Albani. At the Sotheby's auction of November 21, 1990, the Music Division procured a lot of documents concerning Albani. These consisted of autograph letters to Albani from musicians including Charles Gounod, Joseph Joachim, Hans Richter, Charles Villiers Stanford, Sir Arthur Sullivan and Ambroise Thomas. There was also a large collection

of items dealing with Albani's son, including personal correspondence from Albani and her husband to their son and various documents giving details of his diplomatic career.

On May 17, 1991, an even large lot of Albani materials was purchased by the National Library of Canada at another Sotheby's auction. Among the hundreds of documents were: autographed photographs of Johannes Brahms, Gounod and Franz Liszt; autographed scores of Dvorak, Edward Elgar, Sullivan and Thomas; program-books of various concerts and recitals autographed by composers and conductors such as Elgar, Stanford, Sullivan and Richter; Albani's manuscript cadenza book containing cadenzas composed for or by her for operas such as *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Sonnambula* and *Norma*; over two hundred programs; and about twenty photographs pertaining to Albani's family and career. These acquisitions contained documentation concerning Albani's career and family which had never before been available.

On July 1, 1991, the Music Division of the National Library of Canada acquired from Richard Macnutt, the British dealer who had acted for the Library in the acquisition of the two Sotheby lots, a smaller collection of documents which included: Albani's heavily annotated copy of the piano/vocal score of *Tristan und Isolde* in which she premiered in her final season at Covent Garden in 1896; twenty-eight photographs from her family life and career; a scrapbook concerning a London Farewell Concert given in her honour in May 1925; and, further family correspondence. Finally, on September 16, 1992, eight items were obtained from a dealer in Vancouver, including several letters from Albani to various of her friends in the nobility, requesting loans from them until her husband's financial position becomes more secure.

The Music Division of the National Library of Canada is now the proud custodian of an Emma Albani archival collection consisting of 62 linear centimetres of textual documents, seventy-four photographs and nineteen photographic negatives. Over the years, the Library has acquired photocopies of all the documents concerning Albani held by the National Archives of Canada as well as by Heugel, and of some of the documents in the possession of Gilles Potvin. It also has a microfilm copy of the

Albani correspondence in the Eva Gauthier Papers in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Thus, this Albani collection is the largest available assemblage in one location of material on the life and career of this famous Canadian musician, and will be extended when the Library has added the microfilms of the scrapbooks and diaries still in the possession of the Gye family.

We hope that the existence of such a splendid archival collection concerning Albani will encourage a new study of this singer. Her autobiography was published in 1911, and a few incomplete or general biographies appeared in the 1920s and 1930s, but no recent serious biography has been written about this Canadian with an international reputation. It is time that this situation was rectified!

*The next issue of the CAML Newsletter will include reports and summaries of sessions from the Windsor conference and Annual General Meeting.*

*Please send other news items, letters and comments to the editor by Sept. 30, 1993. Address information is on the back of the title page.*