

Speaker 1:

... about eight girls, seven or eight girls, gracefully running down and making a big half circle. I suddenly heard, ^{she} I kept on running and doing the choreography and I heard giggles in the audience. The chorus was hiding their faces, laughing. What I didn't know was the girl behind me, happened to be Mary Smith, had tripped. [inaudible 00:00:42] ^{all} the girls behind her either skirted around her or fell over. I kept on going and finally the girls recovered and joined me and we finished the rest of the dance.

This was a broadcast. The Met had started broadcasting on Saturday afternoons with the famous Milton Cross doing the commentary. A gentleman I met later on, charming gentleman. My mother was listening and of course, I had to call her and tell her what had happened. This was, with ^{Raimon} [Rhine 00:01:29] conducting, ^{she} I never cracked a smile. It was a stage director, an Austrian man, [Herbert Graf 00:01:52]. [Herbert Graf 00:01:58] went on to have a long, prosperous career as first stage director and then as a teacher. He was friendly with Peter later on, I found out he was born in Austria, lived in Vienna. His father was a critic and as a little boy, he was taken, he was a bed wetter. When he was taken to the famous Sigmund Freud who tried to help him cure the bedwetting. # ^{she} said I'm not very interested. ^{she} This incident was written up in Freud's bio.

I loved [Graf 00:02:52] and he liked me. Used me in a lot when he needed ballet girls to do special things. He was doing Salome and it was a first of several versions of Salome. Later on we got a very famous Salome, [Luba Velich 00:03:24], who did her own dancing. The first Salomes, we were the veil girls and we sort of covered the movements of Salome. Salome was not too good at dancing. In the rehearsals, [Graf 00:03:51] was ^{Graf} trying to tell us what we were to do. He said "On this certain music cue, you are to come in waving your veils." Of course, we all went into convulsions of laughter and when we told him what we were laughing at, he joined in with us.

Another incident that involved me, by this time [Graf 00:04:28] knew me, knew me by name and it was several years into my years at the Met. We were called on for the opera [Manon Les Co 00:04:43]. In the third act, [Manon 00:04:50] was deported as a lady of the evening, a prostitute. She was deported and sent on a ship, supposedly from Paris. The ballet girls were going to be the other prostitutes. It was a very serious scene with, at the ship, with a man calling out the names of the various prostitutes. They would separate themselves from the chorus and march up the gangplank, being called by name. [Manon 00:05:43] at that time was [Dorothy Kirsten 00:05:46] and the ^{the lead singer} [inaudible 00:05:50] was the famed tenor [Musie Kierling 00:05:55]. We rehearsed and [Graf 00:06:04] kept selecting other girls to go. Certain names, Marie, Jean, whatever. He ignored me. I thought, "That's strange, he usually used me first." They kept on with several names, then suddenly he pointed to me and he said "Now is your entrance." The ^{PLEASE} man called out the name ~~Silena~~. He had no way of knowing that was my real name because the ship was heading toward New Orleans in Louisiana. The chorus burst into applause and burst into laughter. I had a very good laugh too.

Another incident, I had a short solo in the second act of [Carmen 00:07:10]. Very brief but I loved it. I had a very good dancer who remained friends with me for years, Joseph [Levenough 00:07:26]. He was about two inches shorter than me, so whenever we

^{Carmen}
Levenough

Carven
danced together, especially in ~~common~~, I had to dance all the time in plie, bent knees, so that I didn't tower over him. This particular performance I was dancing away and suddenly I felt something around my knees. I kept on moving and then I realized that it was my petticoat. My petticoat was slipping and it was going lower and lower. I knew if it got around my ankles I was going to trip. I did a vigorous shake, not intended in the choreography, and the offending petticoat came off. By that time I had maneuvered near the wings and as the petticoat dropped, I kicked it into the wings and kept on dancing. The show must go on.

There was another incident with our conductor that was very dear to me. The conductor was Bruno Walter, extremely famous. He was coming up to the Met for his first performance. On his first was *Orpheus* and he, as a lot of conductors were, [inaudible 00:09:30]. He had ideas about the staging and the use of the ballet. I had explained in *Orpheus*, we danced in every act. We were the chorus. The chorus was off somewhere singing but we told the story. The third act was the Elysian Fields. Story went that *Orpheus*, when he lost his beloved wife *Eurydice*, couldn't accept her death and so called on the prophet of love, *Amor*, to allow him to find *Eurydice* and bring her back to live with him. He was told he could do this only on one condition, that if and when he found her, he could not look back. He would lead her to the earth not looking back. Of course he did look back and there were two versions of *Orpheus*, one stopped at the third act when he looked back at *Eurydice* and she died again. *particular in the staging*

The other version was the version that the Met did and I later did with the New Orleans Opera, more on that later. It became a fourth act where he pled with *Amor* to not take *Eurydice* away from him again and *Amor* consented. The fourth act, there was a jubilation with everyone dancing, including the ballet of course, the return of *Eurydice*. Bruno Walter had special wishes for the third act. The Elysian Fields, where all of us were angels again but we had no wings this time, we were just angels walking around in human form, long blue costumes with sort of halo effect on our heads. We supposedly danced around *Eurydice*. Bruno Walter wanted for *Eurydice* to dance with us.

He approached the lady singing the role, a gorgeous lady, Slavic, [*Yomina Novat* 00:12:42], he told her he would like her to dance with us. She said "Maestro, please don't make me do this. I get winded and I won't feel comfortable singing later in the act." Walter decided that he would choose a ballet girl to, under a veil, to imitate *Eurydice* [inaudible 00:13:24]. He came up to the rehearsal hall and told our choreographer, by that time it was another choreographer, Laurent [*Novica* 00:13:38], the same [*Novica* 00:13:40] that my teacher, [inaudible 00:13:41] had worked with in Chicago many years before. Small world, this opera world. *JARMINA NOVOJNA*
Yomina Novat

Anyway, he approached [*Novica* 00:14:00] and [*Novica* 00:14:01] didn't like the idea too much but he was Bruno Walter. He said "Maestro, fine. Which girl do you want?" [inaudible 00:14:10] said "May I look at some of your girls and choose one?" [*Novica* 00:14:22] said "Of course." He took the taller girls and the darker girls. There were about four of us. He pulled us out of the line and walked down, stopped by me and pointed. He said "This is the lady." I was thrilled. Not only because I was doing a little extra solo work but that he thought I looked like [*Yomina Novat* 00:15:01]. [inaudible] *JARMINA*

Has

00:15:05] not so happy story about Bruno Walter and very true.

He was in Salzburg to conduct Don Giovanni and this was before the war. He was selecting his cast and he was offered several well known Don Giovannis. But as he said, not audibly, "These didn't look like Don Giovanni." He wanted someone singing that really looked like a Don Juan, a Casanova. He made a search and sent out notices that he was auditioning for the role of Don Giovanni and encouraged some of the young singers to come. He heard quite a few of them. He was in his home in Vienna. The doorbell rang and his maid went to answer the door, came back into his studio and said to him "Maestro, there's a very handsome young man. He wants to sing for you." Bruno Walter said, "I found my Don Giovanni."

It was Ezio Pinza who of course came to the United States later and became very renowned. He was a wonderful singer, a marvelous actor, a good looking man but he loved the ladies. At the time that Bruno Walter came to the Met, he had caused a scandal by hooking up with a famed soprano, Elizabeth [Refer 00:17:25] who took him under her wing and had been happily married but Pinza was the real Don Giovanni. They became an item and [Refer 00:17:42] ^{Her} husband was suing for divorce and Pinza was getting a divorce also, an Italian one, which brought about questions later. Bruno Walter, Pinza sang, of course, [inaudible 00:18:03] but the sad tragic story was that Pinza got involved with Bruno Walter's daughter who was married. There was a scandal and her husband shot her and himself because of Pinza and this scandal. [inaudible 00:18:35]

Bruno Walter

guest conductor

Back then, [inaudible 00:18:36] came to the United States to [inaudible 00:18:41] the opera was Don Giovanni and everyone was walking on eggs. The management, Edward Johnson, said to him "Maestro, you can have anyone you want in your ^{libretto} ~~libretto~~. Then he said "Mr. Pinza is the best Don Giovanni around and I will keep him as my leading man." Rehearsals were very testy. They didn't say much to each other but they worked very well together. This, ladies and gentlemen, this man Bruno Walter, was a musician and a true artist that put everything above personal tragedy.

There was another singer who played opposite Pinza as Leporello, Don Giovanni's manservant. They were both Italian, of course, Baccaloni was the exact opposite from Pinza, who was tall and slim and handsome. Baccaloni was the typical comedian. Very rotund, wonderful sense of humor and a very very smart man. Before he was a singer he was a teacher, a mathematician, a scientist. He had a brilliant brain but he and Pinza together in Don Giovanni, wherever they performed were always sotto voce, away from the audience, would make remarks, not all of them were clean, in Italian.

The story goes from Peter, that they were in San Francisco, actually they were in Washington state, and going into a hotel, Pinza and Baccaloni, they got into an elevator and Peter was with them at that time. He was working with the San Francisco Opera. Standing in the elevator, at that time the elevators were run by hand. This particular elevator operator was a very good looking female. Pinza and Baccaloni, with an eye for the ladies, were making remarks, not always gentle about the beauties of this lady all in Italian. When they reached the floor that they were getting off, they got off the elevator

and before she closed the elevator door, she said to both of them [Italian 00:22:37]. She was Italian and understood every word they said.

There was another story about Pinza, this one made the headline. I mean, almost internationally. It was during the war years. We were doing the opera ~~Locke~~ *La Bohème* [00:23:16] with the diminutive, lovely Lily Pons [inaudible 00:23:20] and very French of course. It was right around the time, right before Paris fell during the war. Now Pinza was Italian and sometimes his Italian background got the best of him. We were preparing for the second act, the ballet was in the second act, we had quite a bit of dancing to do. We were warming up backstage and I noticed Lily Pons ~~came on the stage~~ *came on the backstage*. As she came on the backstage, Pinza approached her and said something to her and suddenly slapped him in the face. What he had said was "We are going to take your little country, wrap it up" [inaudible 00:24:30] ~~and take it away~~.

What he said, to repeat, was "We're going to take your little country, wrap it up and tuck it away." That caused the slap. Of course we were all very amazed at all this happening. ~~At the~~ backstage also was Pinza's understudy. A young man, 6'4, Norman Cordon. We had been very good friends, we had even gone out together ~~some of the time~~ *some of the time*, sometime. Norman was from North Carolina. He was a former nephew of one of the governors in North Carolina. American to the core. He saw this, knew what had happened. When we came off the stage, Norman approached me. It was the end of the act. He said "Meet me at the Pen and Pencil." That was a little café down the street from, 40th street, from the stage door where we had coffee after rehearsals and so on. He said "Meet me, I have something very interesting to tell you."

After I got dressed, went on down. It was just about a half a block away. It was a place for performers from the Met and also newspaper men. Norman said "Watch the papers." He said "Pinza really overstepped his bounds and showed his affiliation with the Italian bigwigs, including Mussolini." Sure enough, a day or so later, Pinza was arrested, put under house arrest, as an enemy alien.

Look at another side of the story. Cordon was his understudy. At subsequent performances, when Pinza couldn't sing, Cordon got the role. Again folks, that's show business.

See Pinza Pinza was transferred to Ellis Island for six months as an enemy alien. ~~Was~~ my former friend and roommate, Doris [inaudible 00:27:37], who had married him a few years before, called on me to ask me to be a witness for him at a presumed trial to prove that he is loyal to the United States. I had to refuse under advisement from my boss, Edward Johnson, who said "His loyalty to the United States was under question." Of course, that was the end of a beautiful friendship. *with Doris.*

About Doris's marriage, that was sort of dramatic also. We were traveling 1940 on tour. She and Ruth Harris and I were rooming together. Pinza was calling her up for lunch dates, etc., she was constantly refusing him. It seemed he was in the market for an American wife. She kept refusing him. Later on during the summer she went home to Larchmont, she was the daughter of a dentist, a Park Avenue dentist. She was almost

engaged to another young boy but Pinza pressed his suit and evidently he won. In the summer of 1940 I was in New Orleans for a brief vacation. Miss Harding called me and told me that Doris was not returning to the ballet [inaudible 00:29:23] why.

But she didn't know

at the Met

When I returned to New York, before rehearsals for that year, I called her. We met for lunch at [inaudible 00:29:35]. I remember she was wearing gloves. I asked her why she was not coming back to the Met. She pulled off her left glove and showed me a beautiful engagement ring. Naturally my first question was, "Oh, who is he?" She had had a boyfriend and I thought maybe it was he. She said primly "I cannot tell you."

When rehearsals started a few weeks after, at the end of September, I was rushing into the stage entrance at the call of Miss Harding and I was stopped by my friend Norman Cordon. I had some mail in my hand and Norman said "Have you read your mail?" I said "No. I haven't had time." He said "I want you to open that envelope." It was a sort of white envelope, fancy looking. I tore it open and sure enough, it said "Dr. and Mrs. [Leek 00:30:51] announce the marriage of their daughter Doris [Neal Leek 00:30:57] to Mr. Ezio Pinza." It had happened the night before.

The reason I was called by Miss Harding was because I was a friend of Doris, Ruth was no longer in the ballet, there were reporters up in Miss Harding's office and they wanted to know the scoop because he had been very closely aligned with Elizabeth [Refer *Reckberg* 00:31:28], whom as I said was getting a divorce in order to marry him. She was on the [inaudible 00:31:36] watch. I went up, Miss Harding was like a little English Bulldog. She stood in front of me and parried the reporters that were hurled questions at me "Did I know this? Was it unprecedented?" Etc. I said "I had no idea. I knew he had asked her out several times on tour but that was it." We got rid of the reporters.

around watch

Later on, Pinza was released. I don't think he ever got a clean slate but he was released. Resumed his roles at the Met and performed beautifully. Still, marriage didn't change him much. He was still the Don Giovanni on stage and off stage. Later on, in the late 40s, he retired from the Met and went immediately on Broadway to the big hit, South Pacific as Emile de Becque, the older lover of the young Nellie. I saw the original performance with him in it. He was magnificent. Of course, the movies snapped him up for a while but again, he was not movie material. When he sang, not only One Enchanted Evening, which became a tremendous hit, but he also sang another song, This Nearly Was Mine. Talking about a sort of a hitch in his love affair. I remember sitting absolutely paralyzed as he sang this beautiful song. When he finished, the roof came off. Over five minutes of ovation, they could not stop the applause. It was really, truly sung by an artist, blemished or not.

Mary Moran

I had finished the first two years of my tenure at the Met. I was still in awe of some of the singers that I'd been closely attached to and even knew personally. Some of the great singers of that time. There was Rise Stevens, who came into the Met as an understudy from Europe where she had started her career. She was Rose Steinburg from Brooklyn. She became one of the great [inaudible 00:35:04]. Long tenure and just recently passed away just shy of 100 years old. She was a ~~Met~~ *Mezzo*. There were other ~~Met~~ *Mezzo* *Mezzo* *Mezzo*.

Steinburg

Carmen

Mezzo

Mezzo

Blanche Thebom. Beautiful woman with this luxurious, also a ~~Met-so~~ and did ~~(inaudible 00:35:30)~~ and was a gorgeous Delilah. She had this beautiful mane of hair that when she let it down, she could sit on it. She'd pin it up. She'd use it in roles, she could pin it up in her real life with these beautiful barrettes and combs. She worked with my husband, worked with Peter, he was an accompanist for her. She was visiting us once, my daughter was about three years old. She held my daughter on her lap and my daughter was just fascinated with the combs and brilliance. She began pulling at them. As she did, Blanche's hair tumbled down much to my daughter's glee. Blanche was also amused.

Dark hair
Met-so
small roles

Then there was a glamorous, we called her the glamor girl early on. Gladys Swarthout, also a Met-so. Something about ~~Met-so~~ voices make them attractive. Then, of course, there was the great Kirsten Flagstad. I've never heard a voice like that since. It was effortless. It made it so clear to me because I was often her page in ~~(inaudible 00:37:14)~~. It was in the second act, the bridal scene, was a particularly difficult passage for the soprano. Flagstad took it without ~~even singing (inaudible 00:37:31)~~. When other singers sang that very same passage, they huffed and puffed. The difference between good and great. Flagstad's partner for many German operas was the great ~~(inaudible 00:37:51)~~.

Mr. Lehmann
visible effort
Sauritz Melchior

~~He~~ started his career as a baritone then emerged as one of the great tenors of our time. He was huge. He had a very tiny wife that everybody called ~~(inaudible 00:38:10)~~. He was a wonderful man and very close to Peter. Then there was Margaret Harshaw whom I mention because I will mention her later, she became very important in my life. Then there was a series of ~~(inaudible 00:38:34)~~ singers. These were usually young singers, not always but usually young singers or singers with limited voices who were very essential. Young singers that sometimes made bigger careers but not so often. They were very competent but they sang smaller roles.

Remember Harshaw
potentia

Lucille Browning, Maxine ~~(Stellman 00:39:10)~~, Thelma ~~(Rena 00:39:11)~~. The first two were very attractive and rather young. Thelma was not. She was more mature with a gorgeous voice and a wonderful sense of humor. She made her mark though in one role. She was the witch in Hansel and Gretel. She was wonderful when she rode on her broom singing at the top of her voice.

Volupha

Now, it was 1940. End of my second year at the Met, September. The beginning of my third year and unbeknownst to me, a cycle had closed. The young boy in the Austrian Alps had wanted to be a conductor. A little girl who only wanted to go on the stage had finally met at the Met. At one of the first rehearsals of that season, a young man with scores bundled under his arm entered the ~~stage~~ ~~to accompany us in our rehearsals for the ballets in (inaudible 00:40:48)~~ ~~Bride~~. He was the new assistant conductor, assigned for the moment to Bruno Walter. His duty was to assure that the tempo of our ballets would coincide with the tempo of the orchestra when we had orchestra rehearsals. This would save time and money as the musicians at this time had a very strong union.

Bartered Bride

roof rehearsal ballet

The young man was of medium height, ruddy complexion, and just a hint of gray hair even though he was barely 23 years old. He had won the position by ~~playing~~ sight

Washower

reading, the ballet music from Wagner's [inaudible 00:41:59]. Miss Harding then introduced him. She said "This is Maestro Peter Paul Fuchs." Light applause. He sat down to play and as he did, he spread his feet quite wide apart, his toes turned out, which to us in the ballet was a perfect second position. Caused a few giggles. My friend [inaudible 00:42:42] was in the ballet at the time, had worked with Peter in a traveling ballet company. It was a small company headed by Lucien [inaudible 00:42:54] and Lydia [inaudible 00:42:57]. Those names should mean something. They were the same people whom I auditioned for my first day in Chicago and almost got the job.

Besla Volkova

Prudkov

Adova

Lele
He told me that he was Viennese. He had spent two years waiting for his visa and running from Hitler before he arrived in the United States in 1938. He also was married and had one son. Later on there was another son. Of course, we saw him often. He was backstage giving cues as part of his job and did travel with us on tours but that was the extent of my contact with him for a very long time, if for no other reason than my vow never to get mixed up with a married man. Where I worked, there was always that danger. Working so close and traveling sometimes caused meetings that were not always good sense.

I had spent my two summers, '39 and '40 in summer camp as a dance and dramatic counselor. Enjoyed it very much. I had to make my own costumes and make up my own programs but it was very rewarding. I also paid short visits to New Orleans to see my family, my mother of course would come with me. It was good for her to be with dad again. On one of these sojourns in New Orleans, I was sort of adopted by three young men.

Sery

One was my cousin, Lester [inaudible 00:45:38]. The other one was Irving [Washower 00:45:41] and the third was Max [Cray 00:45:44]. They called themselves the LIM gang, Lester, Irving, Max. They sort of adopted me and took me under their wing, I guess felt sorry for me. They would come by after I had my ballet lessons, take me for ice cream or just for rides in the car or to parties and to dances. Suddenly, for a while it was just the three of them. Suddenly I noticed, on many occasions, there was suddenly four. A tall blond young man by the name of [Al Shestakov 00:46:34] had attached himself to the LIM gang principally because he had met me and was attracted to me.

Shoelinski

He was a medical student going to Tulane, wanting to be a doctor and specifically a surgeon. Sadly he could never realize the surgeon part of his doctor degree because of very weak eyes. But he did become a doctor and predominantly a diagnostician because he could hear. He always couldn't see well. We had an off and on relationship. He was in New York, lived in New Orleans.

Don

in *but lived in New Orleans - I was born in New Orleans & lived in NY*