

*Special preview for the 150th anniversary  
of Hariclea Darclée's birth*

*Vissi d'Arte,  
Vissi d'Amore*

*The life  
&  
times  
of  
the first*

*Tosca*

**HARICLEA  
DARCLÉE**

*René Seghers*



## Notes for a Foreword

### THE ART, LIFE AND LEGEND OF HARICLEA DARCLÉE

As there is no recording of Hariclea Darclée's voice – no fragment, not even one bar from the thirteen operas that were composed especially for her – today, when we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her birth, we are simultaneously faced with a certitude and an enigma: the certitude of her unique place in the history of opera, and the enigma of the miracle of her voice and singing that have led to her immortal legend.

The situation seems hard to believe considering that Darclée used to sing with Caruso for instance, who has left behind a large number of recordings that are regarded as treasures of the world cultural heritage, whereas all that has been preserved in Darclée's case is an occasional recording of her voice towards the end of her life, just two short Romanian folk songs. But even this gives us an idea of the special timbre of her voice, of her charisma and remarkable spirit.

Yet, we do possess two means of grasping Hariclea Darclée's huge vocal and scenic personality.

First, that of examining the scores written for her voice, starting with those works that due to her have become part of the permanent opera repertory – Puccini's *Tosca* and *Manon Lescaut*, Catalani's *La Wally*, Mascagni's *Iris* – and continuing with all the others that she turned into great first night successes but which subsequently faded into oblivion.

All the scores dedicated to her point to a sumptuous voice of the *soprano drammatico d'agilità* type, an intense, flexible, majestic voice which, together with her uncommon intelligence, refined culture and genuine dramatic temperament ensured Hariclea Darclée's undisputed supremacy. Due to the *belcanto* approach to her art, she succeeded in conveying unparalleled interpretive values in *verismo* parts, the *post-Verdi*

style of the new generation of composers who worshipped her and kept writing new operas for their Muse; she would lead them to success and even triumph.

I have introduced my young friends to this repertoire during the *Master Classes* I hold in Braila every other year, alternating with the *Hariclea Darclée Festival and International Voice Competition* that I created in 1995 in order to honour the memory of the legendary artist, conscious that every page dedicated to her had been composed for an outstanding voice.

The second means of getting close to the truth of *Hariclea Darclée's* art, life and legend is an ample research in the archives of the great opera houses, opera magazines and newspapers in Europe and South America covering the years when she was doubtless the leading soprano of the world.

It is the merit of Dutch author René Seghers to have undertaken this research with immense skill and patience in his volume entitled *Hariclea Darclée. Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore...*, now under print. We are proud to offer here the first preview of an excerpt from this study. This book offers most valuable testimonies on the artistic and human destiny of the great Romanian soprano. And I am ever so happy to have been able to support René Seghers' great undertaking by providing him with the opportunity to examine no less than one thousand documents.

**Mariana Nicolesco**

One person seems to have noted the exceptional quality of her voice right then and there, and this was Mathilde Marchesi, the most reputed singing-teacher of her time, having taught among others Ilma Di Murska and Etelka Gerster (and later also Emma Calvé, Emma Nevada and Nellie Melba). Marchesi herself had been a pupil of Manuel García II, the most famous singing teacher of the mid 19th Century, son of Manuel García the Elder, the creator of Almaviva in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Junior was also the brother of two *monstres sacrés* among the 19<sup>th</sup> Century sopranos, Maria Malibran and Pauline Viardot-Garcia. While in Vienna, Marchesi had young Hariclea under her wing as choir master, she offered her free lessons on the condition that she would promise to dedicate herself to music. The girl is said to have replied: "*I don't know. It has never crossed my mind.*"

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June 29, 1888

Artulary, Hariclée, d'ArTulary, d'Ariclée, d'Arc...

WR 20110.  
 A h  
 Mme Artulary. Duo de l'opéra  
 M. E. Duvernoy qui accompagne dans  
 les opéras  
 Fragments du Stèle de Juliette  
 M. Gounod assiste à cette audition  
 La rampe devant scène a été allumée  
 pour cette seconde audition

The entry for Hariclea Hartulary's audition, rehearsal and performance ledgers of the Paris Opéra, June 29, 1888. (Courtesy: Archives Théâtre National de l'Opéra)

The logbooks of auditions and rehearsals of l'Opéra reveal that it was in the auditorium of that house where, on June 29, at 4 PM, Hariclea who became Hartulary by marriage to lieutenant Iorgu Hartulary (misspelled here Artouлары) on January 31, 1881, auditioned on the stage which was an exceptional occasion: stage lights were lit, and that

was not common practice, just as it was uncommon for the composer and the complete management to be present: next to Charles Gounod attended directors Gailhard, Ritt, Mayer, and conductor Vianesi.

After she delivered the compelling *waltz* of act I, *Je veux vivre*, with its ascending and long running legato-trills on "Ah!" in the final *cadenza*, the committee recognized the combination of a beautiful voice with great dramatic talents. They compared her with Giulia Grisi, Adalgisa Carlotta Marchisio and Marcellina Lotti della Santa – all great Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti sopranos of dramatic nature. Clearly, the management had found their Juliette, although they insisted that something had to be done about that impossible brick-à-brac surname of hers. For the first ever performance of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* at l'Opéra, something more catchy than "Hartulary" was required. Gounod then repeated an endless string of Hartularys and Hariclées before arriving upon D'Hariclée, which ultimately became D'Arclée and Hariclée Darclée."



It was Charles Gounod who gave Hariclea Hartulary her stage name – *Darclée*. The composer also dedicated a photo to her, inscribed: "To madame Darclée de Hartulary, in warm memories, and respectful homage, Ch. Gounod." (Photo: Courtesy Bucharest National Opera Archives)

distinct perfume in rhythms and texture that evokes the world of mythical *conquistadores* exploring either Brazil's golden coastline or the splendors of the Amazon, with brooding Indian campfires and seductively dancing savage girls. Moreover, Gomes was an innovator. In *Fosca* (1873) he introduced the *recitar cantando* for the soprano, and the opera is the true link between Verdi and the musical vein of verismo.

The Corti brothers commissioned *Côndor* from Gomes and, which its to their credit, they sought to bring it to the stage with all the splendor that a Teatro alla Scala world première required amid that in the context of the merciless competition between Ricordi favoring Puccini and Sonzogno, fighting for Mascagni. The cast for *Côndor* was stunning, with Darclée as Odalêa, emerging brilliantly from her 14 performances as Massenet's Chimène in *Le Cid*. Next to her, the rising star Giovanni Battista De Negri's *Côndor*, *tenore robusto* with stentorian high notes and the required stamina that the role asked for.

*Côndor* is a prophetic work. In it Gomes manifests himself as a *pur sang* avant garde composer, whereas the opera provides a fascinating kaleidoscope of the future of Italian opera – in the next twenty years. And Darclée was to create it – her first creation!

How Hariclea, as Odalêa, Princess of Samarcanda, must have felt when she first heard those playfull, hypnotizing harp *arpeggios*, accompanied by a French horn, in the first measures of *Côndor*'s prelude, evoking the mythical world of ancient Samarcanda!

December 21, 1891, the day of the première: a triumph. The newspapers, like *Gazetta Musicale di Milano*, hailed the sets by Zuccharoni and the costumes by Zamperoni/Hohenstein. The stage direction and the musical supervision by Leopoldo Mugnone were likewise acclaimed, And even the weather helped to evoke the exotic location, with a spring like sun warming Milan's operatic temple, wrote Virgilio in *Gazetta Teatrale Italiana*.

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January – February 1892

Ebben, ne andrò lontana...



Il pedone di Schnalz (Pietro Cesari), Wally (Darclée), and Walter (Adelina Stehle) in *La Wally*, Act II, scene I, Milan, Teatro alla Scala, January 20, 1892. (Photo: The author's archive)

When Catalani finally was allowed to play his *La Wally* to Ricordi on the piano, even the sceptic publisher had to admit that it was the Maestro's ripest fruit. And so he offered the weakened composer a shamelessly crafted contract, which stipulated that payments were to be made in three terms, the first after the 20th performance, the second after the 40th, and the last payment after the 60th performance of the opera; if the work failed, the risk was entirely Catalani's. The rehearsals for the Teatro alla Scala world première were affected by the same flu epidemic that had contaminated the *Tannhäuser* sequence. Catalani, resembling an old man even though he was only 38, was affected as well, and had contracted bronchites. His condition certainly wasn't improved by the stressful rehearsals, although he was happy enough with tenor Manuel Suárez, who seemed

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February – March, 1894

*L'ora, o Tirsi, è vaga e bella*



“To the celebrated artist, Mrs. Darclée, G. Verdi, March 12, 1894.” The date indicates that Verdi dedicated this portrait to Darclée after having seen her in Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* at Teatro alla Scala.

(Photo: Courtesy Biblioteca Academiei Române)



A grateful Puccini dedicated his portrait to Darclée on the evening that she came to the rescue of *Manon Lescaut* at Teatro alla Scala, with the words: “To the most splendid and beautiful of Manons, in admiration and gratitude, G. Puccini, Milan, 27 March, 1894. (Photo: Courtesy

Biblioteca Academiei Române)

Puccini’s dissatisfaction with the distorting Russian soprano Olga Olghina, which is said to have been the direct cause for him and Ricordi to summon Darclée to step in, is well documented. Nonetheless, Olghina went on to create both *Manon Lescaut* and Nannetta in Verdi’s *Falstaff* in Russia, and she sang Manon elsewhere as well. Whatever the truth, Darclée finished the important creation run at Teatro alla Scala, for which Puccini, especially for her added the aria *L'ora, o Tirsi è vaga e bella*. At this point in the chronology, Puccini’s biographer Giorgio Magri steps in, claiming that during these performances soprano and composer shared an affair that was as intense as brief. Marcus Góes, who convincingly redirected the rumors of a genuine relationship between Carlos Gomes and Darclée to the realm of fairy tales, also fiercely protested against the speculative nature of this alleged affair between Puccini and Darclée. However, in this case there is less to argue against. Both were there, in addition to which Puccini’s easily inflammable nature is well documented. According to Magri, the affair came to an end due to the fact that both Darclée and Puccini were dispersed in different directions immediately after the Scala run.



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January 1900

Tosca



Darclée's publicity shots for *Tosca* (Photo: The author's Archive)

The world premiere of *Tosca* at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome was one of those glittering occasions where the entire cultural, commercial and political world comingled; even Sardou had been announced, although illness prevented him from attending. At this former bastion city of the prominent music publisher Sonzogno and now the outlet of the burgeoning rival house of Giulio Ricordi, it was noted in the local press that ticket prices had risen to a staggering 400 lire, and 80 for *poltrone*! But to offer the première of a Ricordi–Mascagni opera such as *Iris* in Rome proved a wholly different challenge than to present a Ricordi–Puccini work like *Tosca* there. Apart from the rivalry between Rome and Milan, one had to reckon with Rome's Mascagni clique (a significant part of the audience was even said to have been there in order to celebrate Puccini's failure in Mascagni's home theatre), and some Franchetti admirers who thought their idol had been betrayed by a Puccini–Ricordi–Illica plot to lure the Sardou libretto from Franchetti's hands. The press arrived in a similarly hostile mood, since Tito Ricordi hadn't allowed them to witness the rehearsals. Those quibbles aside, the political unrest that swept throughout Europe held a more physically dangerous threat. Italy's economy had been experiencing a devastating period ever since losing the war against Abyssinia in 1896. In reply to the social unrest that followed, King Umberto I ruthlessly suppressed all public manifestations of protest. By June 1899, he even had dissolved the Parliament in an attempt to secure his position, if not his life; he had survived no less than two murder attempts. With Queen Margherita and Minister Baccelli in the audience, the première indeed seemed the perfect target for a politically motivated attack. Just a few minutes before his cue, conductor Leopoldo Mugnone was visited by an official, dressed grimly in black:

*"I am the superintendent of the police, active in this theatre because we have been informed of a conspiracy... There is talk of a possible bomb attack."*

In case of an attack, Mugnone was to strike up the Royal Hymn. Mugnone had actually survived a similar attack just before the trio of Act II of *Guglielmo Tell* in Barcelona, on November 7, 1893, when Santiago Salvador threw two bombs from the fifth