



Rosa Raisa: A Biography of a Diva with Selections from Her Memoirs

Charles Mintzer

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One of the greatest dramatic sopranos of opera's first Golden Age, Rosa Raisa (1893-1963) was legendary for her imposing, powerful and wide-ranging voice as well as for her highly dramatic and emotionally stirring stage presence. A renowned star of the Chicago Opera, Raisa sang over 1000 opera performances and concerts around the world. Held in high esteem by composers, conductors and colleagues, she was Puccini's choice to create the lead roles in "La Rondine" and "Turandot". In this biography of Raisa, Charles Mintzer provides a revealing portrait of a warm-hearted, generous artist whose career and complex personality were shaped by a life that crossed Jewish, Italian and American cultural boundaries. Mintzer blends together his narrative with selections from Raisa's unpublished memoir and excerpts from contemporary critical reviews to present a well-rounded picture of this extraordinary woman and to trace her incredible journey to operatic fame. Born Raitza Burchstein in the Polish ghetto of Bialystok, she fled the 1906 pogroms and settled in Italy, where she studied under Barbara Marchisio at the Conservatory of Naples. After her operatic debut in 1913 as Leonora in "Oberto" during the Verdi centenary celebrations at Parma, she immediately joined Cleofonte Campanini's Chicago Opera and, renamed Rosa Raisa, achieved instant acclaim. Mintzer recounts her great successes in Chicago and on the company's national tours, as well as several seasons in South America, Mexico and Italy. He discusses Raisa's most famous roles, describes the La Scala premiere of "Turandot" with Arturo Toscanini conducting, and offers fresh insights into her controversial Berlin engagement in a "Tosca" performance with Adolf Hitler in the audience. Mintzer also chronicles her marriage to baritone Giacomo Rimini, her illnesses and miscarriages, her financial collapse, her lifelong commitment to Jewish organizations and causes, and her puzzling burial in a Catholic cemetery. Illustrated with over 50 photographs, many of them previously unpublished, the book includes an authoritative chronology of all of Raisa's performances, her concert repertoire and an annotated discography.

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