

VAN GORDON IS AMERICA'S OWN

Prima Donna of Chicago Opera Company Succeeded Without Prestige

SINGS HERE APRIL 14

Ilse Forster Also on Local Program

Cyrena Van Gordon, prima donna of the Chicago Opera company, who will be heard in recital at the Skokie school, Winnetka, on the evening of Saturday, April 14, is the young American contralto who leaped into stardom almost in a single night by her spectacular performance of Brunhilde in "The Valkyrie," several seasons ago.

Less than twenty years ago she was a long-legged little girl in pinafores, taking part in church entertainments in the town of Morning Sun, O., and rather shocking the congregation by operatic heights without the prestige of a foreign name or a European reputation.

Faured for Her Future

Today she is proclaimed a second blowing kisses to the deacon. Nordica, and the most beautiful Brunhilde on the stage. A Junoesque beauty, it has been said of her that she "looks as if she were the first cousin of a princess." But what is more, she has proved that one can rise to

As a young girl, she sang in the church choir at Camden, O., and when she left for Cincinnati to study music, and, if possible, to become a "play actress," the neighbors all predicted a bad end for her.

It was while singing the contralto role in the big missionary pageant, "Darkness and Light" in Cincinnati that Maestro Campanini heard her and engaged her for the Chicago Opera company, where she made her debut as Amneris in "Aida" and was understudy for Mme. Schumann-Heink.

Miss Van Gordon has been with the company ever since, and is still, in

point of years, its youngest member. Her great opportunity came after the war when Wagnerian opera was revived, and she was selected for the role of Brunhilde.

The critics, however, shook their heads. Here was a role that only a few of the great artists had attempted, among them Nordica, Galski, and Matzenauer.

"Her youth is against her," said the critics. "She will never last out the performance." They attended the opera with misgivings.

Captures Opera Critics

Now that Cyrena's day had arrived, the home folks forgot their prejudices, and attended in a body. The curtain rose on the second act. A golden voice rang out in the famous war cry. The house reechoed with applause.

Miss Van Gordon fitted into the role as if she had been born for it. The picture she made silhouetted against her snow-white steed was one not soon to be forgotten. The critics confessed themselves amazed. The singer's youth, instead of being a detriment, had proved her greatest asset.

She was heard last season not only as Brunhilde but as Kundry in "Parsifal," the Spring Fay in "The Snow Maiden," and Amneris in "Aida."

On the program with her Saturday

will be Ilse Forster, who will sing some charming songs in costume; Harold Ayres, violin virtuoso; and Alma Putnam and Stella O'Neal, accompanists.

Gives Children's Songs

In the morning, Miss Forster, assisted by Anne Branyan, reader, will give a program of children's songs, appearing as a Chinese princess, a Colonial maid, Daffy-Down-Dilly, and Raggedy Ann.

Patronesses of the festival include Mrs. Clarence A. Burley of Winnetka; Mrs. William C. Boyden of Winnetka;

Mrs. Winthrop Girling of Glencoe; Mrs. F. H. Copeland of Brown Gables, Winnetka; Mrs. Charles M. Higginson of Kenilworth, and Mrs. Joseph J. Siddall of Wilmette.

A limited number of reserved seat tickets for both recitals are now on sale at the Winnetka Pharmacy, Winnetka; the Rennecker Drug Co., Wilmette; the Hubbard Woods Pharmacy, and A. E. Clyde's, Glencoe.

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