



"There is a certain something deep down within you that is stagnant, and you must let it out."—ANNA RUSSELL

ANNA RUSSELL WILL SING(?) FOR NZBS

MOST New Zealanders who have heard her recordings would agree that as a singer Anna Russell is out on her own—quite a long way out. The knowledgeable have already acclaimed her as a masterly musical satirist and now (or rather in the coming autumn) all will have the chance to hear her in the flesh when she tours New Zealand for the NZBS. In the meantime, her advance publicity, some of which we print below, should help to get listeners in the correct frame of mind.

THE LISTENER acknowledges with gratitude permission to quote from *Das Welt und Schmerz's* musical column the following appreciation of Anna Russell by its critic, Ossip aus der Kindeldonck.

"To few people is it given more than once in a lifetime to hear such an artist as Anna Russell, with a voice that has both the piercing splendour of a bugle and the gritty warmth of a 'cello. To hear her is to say: Is it possible? The whole world of music is her oyster: and whether she is portraying Brünnhilde, a French singer of art songs, an entire Gilbert and Sullivan production, she is completely and utterly *zeitgeist*."

"Never before has so blitzkrieg a Brünnhilde tramped the boards of a stage. Fraulein Russell is unforgettable and, as she tells in song the *ewigkeit* story of Mrs. Fricka Wotan, of Siegfried and his aunts, and of the funeral pyre that sets fire to all Wagner's world she clamps our emotions in a vice of steel. And how *schlumperei* is her costuming of the role, with orange braids that dangle to her knees and toasting fork for spear!

"The *gemutlichkeit* of Anna Russell's other creations is beyond description, and after witnessing them with tears rolling down my cheeks, I smashed five beersteins in tribute to them and to her at the nearest *hofbrauhaus*."

Commenting on her own career, Miss Russell has written to the NZBS as follows:

So many illustrious divas recently have bared their bedazzling charms in print I think it only fair I should do something similar. I well remember the words of my dear old maestro, Heinrich von Schlubach, of Upper Thuringia. "Anna," he said, looking at me with what I shall always proudly recall as a leer, "why should you be so *schlumpf*?" In other words, why should I be so dumb, or silent, when I have so much to say, so much that is inconsequential to give to whomever will listen. So moved was I by the words of my beloved old teacher that I have dedicated to him my song "Schlumpf ist mein Gesitzenbaum," or "Dumb Is My Sitting Tree."

I shall begin with my opera début. It was with the Ellis Island Opera Company and the opera *La Ponte Legerezza*, written especially for me by my dear old friend Eleuthero Respighandi who, only a few months before, had heard me giving a barouche driver what-for beneath his window. He plunged madly out of his house and followed me for blocks to tell me my voice was incredible. In the opera I played the role of Scorbuta, a peasant girl whose tongue had been torn out by hungry ravens and was therefore unable to make a sound. Next day every critic who came shouted that I was supremely well cast. It was a triumph!

Triumph, in fact, followed triumph. That darling old *bon vivant* Jack Ripper sent me orchids made of coloured paper every evening, and I drove the famous financier Constantino Wigglesworth insanely jealous by flirting with

the Baron de Charlus over the supper table at Schrafft's after the opera performances.

But enough of me and the glamour I knew. What of the young singers now creeping up the thorny path of the concert and opera singer? So many of them come to me and say, "You have got away with it, and if you have, so can we. How did you do it?" Their admiration pleases me very much. To each one I say, "There is a certain something deep down within you that is stagnant, and you must let it out." And I give them advice born of my rich experience.

Those who have overwhelming artistry and no voice I tell to sing either German *lieder* or French art songs, depending on their figure. To those with loud voices and few brains I recommend operetta. If they are tone-deaf, there is only one thing for them—contemporary music. They are most grateful to me.

And now that I have had my say about the young singer today, let me add something about myself at the close of this memoir. The other morning early I turned on the radio by my bed and heard the recording of some singer.

"Gracious!" I said aloud to myself, "who is that singer screeching away?"

It was me!

I was very pleased.

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ONE of the most amazing things about Anna Russell is that originally she had no intention of being funny. She comes of a distinguished military family, and studied voice, piano, composition and 'cello quite seriously at the Royal College of Music, London. If audiences hadn't laughed uproariously at first contact with her exuberant cheerful personality, at the sight of her tall and

generously curved figure, if she hadn't broken up a performance of *Cavalleria Rusticana* in which she was singing Santuzza when the tenor, half her size, gave her a shove and she slid into a prop church at the back of a stage and knocked it down, then she might never have turned into the hilariously relentless satirist that she is. A producer said to her, "I may be wrong, but you look funny to me. You'd better do a comic sketch." That started it. Now, with her face as flexible as a collapsed deck chair, she becomes a one-woman Gilbert and Sullivan show, a psycho-neurotic popular singer who concludes her song inevitably in a strait-jacket, a lecturer on the technique of French horn virtuosity and the bagpipes and, of course, an authority on the almost unfathomable intricacies of Wagner's *Ring*.

Next March Miss Russell will visit New Zealand under contract to the NZBS, as the first stage in a tour which will take her on to Australia, Singapore, Hawaii and back to the United States.

