

references to his poor intonation and hints that he did not try hard enough. His greatest success was as the Count di Luna in *Il Trovatore*. When he left the Company, that opera was taken out of the repertoire. His other roles were inherited by John Barrington and Henry Hodgson, both described as 'careful' singers. As the *Daily Southern Cross* remarked, 'it is generally admitted that the great want in the company is a bass'.<sup>34</sup>

The lynchpin of the 1876 company was Fanny Simonsen. Alone of the soloists, she took the stage on every one of the 202 performance nights. Her versatility was as extraordinary as her stamina. The *Otago Daily Times* view that 'we seldom, if ever, saw an artiste capable of filling so creditably such an extensive range of operatic characters' typified critical reaction to her abilities.<sup>35</sup> During the tour she was called upon to play sixteen different leading roles, ranging from the distraught, hallucinating Lucy Ashton in *Lucia di Lammermoor*, to the rustic Rose Moineau of *The Hermit's Bell*. She received excellent reviews in every venue, and for every role. Never once was she criticised for giving a less than whole-hearted performance. The *Southland Times* accurately reflected the attitude of the New Zealand press when it declared that 'Madame Simonsen shines in whatever she attempts'.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to her considerable musical and dramatic abilities, Fanny Simonsen was both diplomatic and resourceful. It was she who smoothed the ruffled feathers caused by her husband's irascible temper. When the chandelier at Auckland's new Theatre Royal caught fire during a performance—fire was a perpetual hazard in theatres lit by naked gas jets—she organised its extinguishing so calmly that many of the audience remained unaware of the incident. During the tour she presided over the opening of a new theatre and married off her oldest daughter. She also won a host of friends 'by her unaffected cordiality with all who have had the pleasure of her acquaintance'.<sup>37</sup> Auckland called her 'the Queen of Song' and showered her with bouquets at a benefit concert in her honour. Wellington admirers raised money to present her with a set of diamond jewellery. She charmed all who came into contact with her.

The 1876 Simonsen Company was, however, far more than a few talented individuals. Its high overall standard of performance particularly impressed commentators. Reviewing a performance of *Norma*, the *Otago Daily Times* noted that 'the chorus, band, and principals work well together, and there is a general smoothness throughout the entire performance which betrays a perfect understanding among all engaged'.<sup>38</sup> According to the *Evening Star* critic, attending the première of *La Fille de Madame Angot* in Dunedin, 'the whole opera was well put on the stage; the scenery, effects, and dresses were very fine, and reflect great credit on the management'.<sup>39</sup> Favourable remarks about the orchestral playing abound. By New Zealand standards it was, to quote the *New Zealand Mail*, 'of remarkable power and completeness'.<sup>40</sup> Mr