

This biography was translated from the published German biography by the late Mrs. Lilly Meyer of Jackson Heights, New York.

It was translated as literal as possible and therefore some of the writing may appear somewhat awkward. This was done to maintain the accuracy of the contents.

Note that it was written in 1900, one year before Selmar Cerini made his first recording.

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S E L M A R C E R I N I (Steifmann)  
Chief Cantor of the Breslau Jewish Congregation

Biography written by A. Mirsky\*

\* This biography has been commissioned by the Londoner Verlagsgesellschaft. The author has used original sources and has interviewed many persons who were close to Cerini.

London, 1900.

He who says: I strove and succeeded – believe him.

From the Talmud

The name Cerini and the reputation enjoyed by this enormously gifted artist conjures up the image of a hot-blooded Italian born and educated in the land of the muses, an artist admired and envied by many and one who has gradually and through the rigors of a planned course of study attained the heights of fame. Unlikely as it seems, however, Cerini (whose original name was Steifmann) was born not at the banks of the Tiber but of the Vistula. There were no trained pedagogues to supervise his education nor was there a connoisseur of the arts to recognize the future virtuoso in the boisterous, exuberant boy and to help him along in his career. Left to his own resources, persecuted and harassed by fanatics and by those envious of him, maltreated and pressed by questionable, superstitious characters Steifmann was forced to clear his thorny path all by himself. Surprisingly, the thorns did not sting him. Not unlike the legendary king who bestowed the precious ring to none other than the valiant diver who had retrieved it from the depths of the sea – fate grants its most precious treasure only to those who possess the strength to brave all misfortunes, to clear their paths of all obstacles, and to pursue their goals with courage and determination. Cerini was one of those utterly courageous men.

Only those who heard Cerini's voice can understand that he possessed a great gift. If music is the divine language which the human voice is unable fully and truly to reproduce, Cerini came closest to it. Critics did not tire of praising this artist with great enthusiasm and for all the world to hear. They used such flowery epithets as "king of tenors" and "rising star" and compared him to Mierzwinski, Götze, and Tamagno. Yet, words

cannot begin fully to convey his great talent. The true enjoyment comes only to those who have heard him perform; have heard the sound of his mellifluous voice.

It is no doubt of interest to know something about the life of this man, the struggles and triumphs which dot his career like a crown of glory.

Steifmann was born in Wulka, a village in Russo-Poland in the district of Pultusk under the governorship of Warsaw in the year 1861 into a fairly well-to-do family. From his earliest youth he rebelled against the intolerance of his fanatically religious parents who considered any intellectual progress a violation of religion. Taking advantage of his father's absence one day he left home at the age of eleven. At this early stage he had already begun, in his subconscious, to search for something great and lofty. He went to the district town of Pultusk walking the three Russian miles with one ruble and fifty kopecks in his pocket. He intended to study the Bible and the Talmud in the Putulsk Beth Hamidrash [Jewish institute of learning]. One Saturday when he sang the traditional Sabbath melodies it was discovered that he had a magnificent soprano voice. The cantor became interested, put him in the choir and gave him his first lessons in music. The eleven year old boy earned his livelihood by singing.

But he did not stay. There was something in the boy that drove him on. He was lured to Plonsk in Poland by the Plonsk cantor. When he sang in the choir his voice would ring out and was heard with great interest. Young Steifmann soon found himself the center of attention. Vague images of the future gradually became bold dreams and occupied the youth's

imagination. In a Plonsk synagogue at the age of twelve he sang the prayers alternating with the choir and earned unexpected admiration. Experts assured him of a great future. But all too soon with his change of voice all hopes were gone and all the ambitious plans the young singer had for the future were destroyed. The neglect he suffered with his voice gone, the pain and the desperation made the young man who was then fifteen years old physically ill. Depressed, his spirit broken, feverish and with a nervous breakdown he saw himself forced to what was probably the worst for him - - return home. Anyone familiar with the attitude of fanatically pious Jews toward the profession of a singer can imagine the reception and the treatment accorded the youth during the year and a half that he spent at his parents'. He was considered by his family the most undutiful of the children. But the boy suffered patiently. He realized that sooner or later his masculine voice would emerge. After half a year of rest he took daily walks to nearby woods to test his voice. He did this for about a year. Villagers who heard him thought him out of his mind and used to say that he was searching the woods for his lost voice.

Steifmann's parents who considered him unfit for the profession of either a rabbi or a merchant waited impatiently for the time when their son would have to serve in the military. They felt that only the Russian "rod of iron" under which young men at that time had to serve five years of military training could change him for the better.

But the moment the young man discovered he had a tenor nothing could hold him back. He made his way to Warsaw. His voice however had not yet matured and he was not accepted into the choir. He decided to wait.

The misery and privation he suffered during that period are beyond words. In order to make his meager means of about 20 rubles last longer he spent many a cold winter night in the waiting rooms of railroad stations thus saving both the required registry fee and the cost of lodgings. But he willingly endured these hardships as long as he did not have to return to his parents' home.

Finally, after many months of deprivation and starvation he was accepted in the synagogue choir. In the two years he stayed he also studied music. Then he went to the town of Gombin near Plock where he sang in the synagogue choir until his voice had reached full maturity. Friends who saw in him the future artist advised him to have his voice trained by professionals in a conservatory. He tried to think of ways in which he could finance this training since his parents still did not want to hear anything about it and he had no means of his own. Try as he might he did not see any avenue open to him. There was only one possibility then - - marriage. He could use the money made available to him from the dowry to study. Yet, such an arrangement presented problems. A girl who would value his talent and be prepared, of her own free will, to marry him would have to come from a wealthy home and be herself well educated.

The young man had a stroke of luck. The daughter of a wealthy family who had invited the young singer into their home was enchanted and fascinated by his voice and secretly began to fall in love with him. Frequent meetings and conversations had their effect on the two young people and at last the girl was ready to marry him. When he asked the parents for the hand of their daughter they indignantly rejected his proposal. The

profession of a singer was as hateful to them as it was to his own parents, although they liked the young man very much as a person. It would be going too far to describe the frustrations the two young people suffered until at last the girl's parents gave their consent. The conditions, however, were explicit: Steifmann must give up his singing career and become a merchant. The young couple was very happy and determined sooner or later to go through with their plans regarding the young man's singing career, notwithstanding parental demands.

Meanwhile the time for military service had come. Young Steifmann was pronounced physically fit and sent to Kazan in East Russia. The girl's parents thinking that they were finally rid of him welcomed this turn of events. The girl, however, remained faithful and was willing to wait for him the five years it would take until he was discharged. In Kazan his voice soon attracted the attention of his superiors. He was treated well and instead of being subjected to the rigors of military training was put to work at the office. He sang at festivities, for officers, and in synagogues and became very popular in the city of Tatars. Owing to both the special benevolence of his superiors and to a temporary eye ailment he was pronounced unfit for further military service and was sent home after his first year.

Steifmann was then 21 years old and the couple was married. Since his in-laws had made the condition that he becomes a business man they used the money they had pledged to open a distillery for him. He never lost sight of his goal, however, to continue where he had left off and waited for an opportune time. Fate soon lent a helping hand. In 1882 a wave of

persecutions of Jews began in Russia and both Steifmann and his in-laws were among the persecuted. His house was ransacked and his property destroyed. Once again he had to depend on his natural talent, his voice. At this point his in-laws no longer objected. In fact, they were happy that their son-in-law after having lost his money had something to fall back on to earn a living. Steifmann was offered and accepted the position of cantor and shochet [slaughterer] in the town of Zagorow (governorship of Kalisch) and stayed there for three years. He suffered harassment and hostilities from extremist and fanatical Jews and his income was so meager that it hardly sufficed to support his family (the couple had already two children at that time). Because of these conditions and of his never relinquished aim at perfection, he decided to take one last chance and try his luck in Lodz where he sang the Sabbath prayers in one of the synagogues. His performance was magnificent and the following Sabbath people came in such numbers to listen to him that police had to be stationed around the synagogue. While he was negotiating a contract with the board of directors, friends and patrons pressed him to continue his training instead. When negotiations reached an impasse, he decided to leave Lodz and go to Breslau. In that city he was to go through yet another trying period. The time of aimless probing and striving for an unknown, nebulous goal had come to an end and a period of storm and stress with the pursuit of a very definite goal had begun. Steifmann was determined to become an artist, no matter what the cost. He had pretended that he needed medical attention and thus received permission to go to Breslau but was made to promise to return within two weeks so that his family could be paid his salary in full. The congregation in its pettiness, however, stopped payment

of his weekly wages of seven rubles immediately after his departure. Steifmann, incidentally, had no intention of returning.

In Breslau he went to see the renowned chief cantor Deutsch to have his voice tested by this expert and get his opinion. Deutsch was fascinated by Steifmann's voice which he felt was great enough to be heard on the stage. He advised him to go to Berlin or Vienna for voice training. Steifmann, who wanted the reaction of yet another expert, went to the office of Brandes, the then director of the City Theater. But his Polish-Yiddish jargon so disgusted the secretary that he was not admitted. Likewise, at Brandes' private residence he was denied admittance and had to wait in front of the house until the director came home. Steifmann pleaded with him and implored him to listen to his voice until finally the director relented. Since Steifmann did not know German he sang in Hebrew. Brandes was astounded and completely taken by the powerful voice and the ease with which the young man sang coloraturas and trills. He solemnly confirmed what Deutsch had told him earlier, that he possessed an enviable gift and that he must use it with prudence. It was not without a hard inner struggle that Steifmann made a decision. On the one hand he agonized over the fact that his family in Poland was without any means; on the other he found himself irresistibly drawn to continuing on the path on which he had so far progressed, for which he had made so many sacrifices and endured so many hardships. He finally took comfort in the thought that in the future, once he had reached his goal, he would be in a position to support his family properly. Meanwhile he would have to leave them in the care of his in-laws. With Brandes' recommendation in his

pocket he went to Hamburg to see director Pollini. While Pollini fully agreed with Brandes' judgment, he did not think that Steifmann's hard jargon could ever be modulated enough so that it would sound like the High-German used on the stage. He was unwilling therefore, to train Steifmann for the stage. He felt it would be too great a risk at the expenses involved.

Steifmann now went to the Royal [musical] Academy in Berlin. Professors Engel and Adolph Schultze to whom he introduced himself were astounded at the phenomenal voice of this beginning artist. Steifmann was immediately given a scholarship, a living allowance, and private lessons by Professor Engel. But even now he could not put his mind at ease. No sooner had he found this haven than a new problem arose. Because he had no passport, the police ordered him to leave Prussia within 24 hours. The mortal dread that took hold of him during the months he was forced to hide from the police can hardly be described. It took great courage on the part of his wife who succeeded in securing for him the required passport, but not without enormous difficulties since it was virtually impossible to get a passport with the applicant not present. Not until he could present his passport (and because he had some protection) was he able to get the expulsion order revoked. From then on he could devote himself to his studies in peace.

The brothers Louis and Gustav Sachs, directors of the board of the Berlin Congregation and known also as art lovers and philanthropists, together with their brother-in-law Adolf Ginsberg took a special interest in Steifmann. Like a father they not only took care of him but of his family as well whom Steifmann had immediately sent for. To this day Cerini feels

deep gratitude and indebtedness to these men in whose house he was like one of the family.

Although by nature Steifmann had a gift for music, studying operas nevertheless presented great problems since he could not read German. He had to copy the operas IL Trovatore, La Juive, and Stradella in Hebrew characters in order to study and memorize the libretto. The fact that he could play no instrument was another disadvantage because he was forced to study his roles from the score. Anyone in the musical profession can appreciate the difficulties he had to overcome. Not only hard work but patience and endurance were needed as well. Along with his musical studies he also studied German and made fast progress.

At the same time he was engaged as the soloist in the choir of the great temple in Berlin under the direction of Professor Lewandowsky. He was so sensational that the temple was filled to the last seat every Saturday. Scherenberger, director of the onetime Victoria Theater heard him and signed him up for the solo of the Muezzin in the third act of the comical opera Ali Baba. This role is sung in a mosque behind the scenes and the singer who cannot be seen does not have to wear a costume. There was thunderous applause and the audience kept demanding encores. Since beginners were not allowed to perform in public, Steifmann's name was not listed in the program. But after the critics, Professors Ludwig Pietsch, Heinrich Ehrlich, and Schmidt-Cabanis demanded the name of the artist, the director had the name Cerini (a famous Italian singer) printed in the program as a pseudonym so that Steifmann would not incur a penalty. Oddly enough, Professor Engel did

not recognize the voice in the theater and advised his pupil to go and listen to it. It is in those days that the road to fame began for Steifmann alias Cerini.

He became one of the most sought-after singers in Berlin and participated in the company of other famous artists in a great many musical events, such as concerts in the newly opened concert hall “Königsbau” [royal edifice] where Johann Strauss among others gave concerts. In 1889 Cerini appeared in a concert in the Kroll Theater given in honor of an international convention of 7,000 physicians.

After three years of study at the Academy during which time he had also taken private lessons with the famous singer Madame Stieber-Barn, he made his stage debut in Halberstadt where he was immensely successful in the roles of the troubadour and Stradella. He enjoyed equal success in five guest performances in Stettin. This led to a five year engagement in Leipzig. However, his strong and unshakable conviction not to deny his Jewish origins and to adhere to the Jewish dietary laws could not be reconciled with the life of an artist in a city where racial hatred prevailed. Without performing he left Leipzig.

Having returned to Berlin in January of 1891 he ran into director Brandes of the Breslau City Theater. Brandes was startled when he saw Cerini. He hardly recognized the young Polish cantor who, only three years earlier, had approached him and who was so self-conscious then and had talked such gibberish. And now Brandes found himself in the company of a well-dressed gentleman who spoke German well and intelligibly. He gave

Cerini an audition and a tentative three year contract as first tenor at the Breslau City Theater.

Cerini was soon immensely popular and admired in this city where both the public and the press celebrated him as a “divine artist”. The applause after his first performance as troubadour was so overwhelming that Brandes changed the contract from to tentative to valid right there and then. With each performance his success increased. As all his performances were sold out, he was a great box office success for the City Theater. He sang the following leading parts: Eliazar (La Juive), Raoul (Les Huguenots), Arnold (William Tell), Radames (Aida), Manrico (IL Travatore) Edgardo (Lucia di Lammermoor), Turiddu (Cavalleria Rusticana), Lionel (Martha), Stradella (Stradella), the duke (Rigoletto). Since these operas were demanded over and over again, Cerini, who only two years with the City Theater, never had occasion to sing other parts he had rehearsed, such as Lohengrin (Lohengrin), Masanielo (La Mulette de Portici), Faust (Faust), Don Jose (Carmen), Almaviva (Barber of Seville), Tamino (The Magic Flute), Don Octavio (Don Giovanni), Vao de Gama (L’Africaine), Johann von Leiden (Le Prophète), Count Richard (Un Ballo in Maschera).

His three guest performances at the Kroll in Berlin where he appeared with the famed Lola Beeth were also great successes. Soon his fame spread all over Germany and during his brief stage career he performed in the following cities: Halberstadt, Köslin (Pommerania), Stettin, Magdeburg, Posen, Strassburg (Alsatia), Metz, Flensburg, Kiel, Mainz, Glogau, Bunzlau, Liegnitz, Kattowitz, Görlitz, Betheun, Gleiwitz, Ratibor.

There is one fact which contributed to his popularity but for which his critics and biographers did not sufficiently credit him. Cerini is a high-principled man of firm and unbending character. To abandon a moral principle or give up an ideal for the sole purpose of material gains - - as so many unexpectedly successful artists will do - - was not part of Cerini's credo. In the course of his operatic career, while he was cheered and catered to wherever he went, he found it necessary to shed some of his peculiar habits which had been with him since childhood. He was, however, firm on one point: his religious conviction. Quickly and willingly he had adopted language, dress and the social graces. But beyond this point he would not assimilate and neither entreaties nor threats were of any avail. Invitations for guest performances in other cities were declined if they fell on a Saturday or holiday, because he would not ride the train on those days. If on his travels he could not find a place where Jewish dietary laws were observed, he made do with dry food. Once when he performed in Kiel and Flensburg during the Passover season, he lived on Matzos only, even though he had to work each night. On the high holy days he stayed away from the stage and sang the prayers in the Berlin Concert Hall before some 2000 people. His strength of character which was equal to his artistic talents was greatly admired in Breslau circles. In Vienna, Berlin, and Dresden where he auditioned he also enjoyed enormous success but soon realized that despite his splendid prospects he would encounter the same situation he had in Leipzig. Not only was he advised to keep his religious affiliation a secret, it was also hinted that it might be wise to consider conversion. Cerini declined the offer, of course.

It was around this time that Deutsch, the renowned chief cantor died and the congregation had its eyes on Cerini who, unaware of it, was still winning his laurels on the opera stage. The congregation approved of him. It was common knowledge that as a man of high moral principles and as a family man Cerini found it difficult to socialize with his colleagues from the theater.

Cerini went through a hard inner struggle before he made his decision. On the one hand success and fame, a career in which the doors of royal palaces were open to him, where he was welcomed in aristocratic circles, and where moreover, he was financially successful. Yet, this life was at the same time not without frustration and moral suffering. On the other hand was a chance of a quiet life with privacy in which he could devote himself to his religious principles and live for his family. He retired from the stage and accepted the coveted position as chief cantor of the "Kultusgemeinde" [religious congregation] of Breslau.

But now a new difficulty arose. His contract could not be confirmed by the authorities because he was a foreigner. Envious colleagues who had informed on him gloated over the discomfiture in which his hope had ended. Cerini's situation was indeed extremely precarious. Added to the insult was injury - - the inevitable financial problem. To find another engagement at the stage was impossible as the new season had been under way for some time. Also, his absence from the stage had resulted in a certain neglect of his art. All this combined to make him miserable but he did not despair. He knew that he had to fight another last round with the only means at his disposal - - his voice. He went to Strassburg (Alsace)

and performed in the City Theater where he met with the greatest success possible: they did not want him to leave. As a matter of fact, the theater administration offered him an engagement and was willing to accede to all his conditions. Meanwhile his name had become known in the salons of the aristocracy. He was invited by Minister [Secretary] von Puttkammer and by the President of the district and won acclaim for his performances as well as the patronage of some high-ranking persons. Cerini took advantage of this opportunity and became a naturalized Alsatian, although there were difficulties and much aggravation before he was finally granted citizenship after a long delay. Meanwhile the Breslau congregation was besieged by applicants who did their best to obtain the coveted position, but their best was not good enough - - the congregation waited for Cerini. When he returned as a German citizen he was cheered and installed in his honorable post as chief cantor. For the past six years he has been holding this position and enjoying ever increasing success and popularity. It should be noted that many non-Jews come to the synagogue to listen with great interest to Cerini's voice.

Cerini frequently sings at benefit performances. His name is enough of an attraction to secure box office success.

When some time ago the board of directors denied him the privilege of a life time position – one of the very reasons why he had left the opera stage – he decided to return to the stage to prove that he was still a great artist. As a participant in a concert in Gräfenberg, where he had unqualified success, as can be seen in the subsequent reviews. A producer who happened to be in Gräfenberg at the time engaged him for an opera and

concert tour with a salary of 50,000 marks and expenses paid for a 15 months period. When Cerini asked the board of directors for his release, they offered, instead, to agree to all his conditions: a position for life and an increase in salary. Under these circumstances Cerini preferred to remain in Breslau. Although his position was less remunerative, he would rather be with his family and watch over the education of his children.

A large number of laurel wreaths from enthusiastic admirers can still be seen in Cerini's study as a remembrance of past achievements and successes.

Loyalty to one's principles is not necessarily a hollow phrase; it can occasionally be applicable even to artists. As a respectable Berlin newspaper once wrote, Cerini's voice is pure and his character even more so.

Following is a collection of press reviews in which the reader will find ample evidence that all has been said in this biography about Cerini the artist is fully justified.

# P R E S S   R E V I E W S

## Note from the translator:

*The press reviews are without exception enthusiastic. The quality of Cerini's voice especially in the high registers, the perfect trills, the mellowness (often called "pure gold") of his voice matched by his perfect enunciation, his ability as a performer, and his almost immediate surefootedness following his debut as an opera singer – all these praises consistently recur in the reviews; the flaws, occasionally pointed out by some critics are minor and in the opinion of those critics easily corrigible. While such reviews were no doubt most gratifying at the various times they appeared, they sound repetitious when read as a whole. In the English translation, therefore, **a selection was made of those reviews that seemed most representative** of all phases and facets of Cerini's career as a great and renowned tenor.*

## CERINI ON THE STAGE

### 1. AS A STUDENT:

Opera: Ali Baba

City: Berlin

Theater: Victoria Theater

The Lokal-Anzeiger (reviewer: Dr. Max Bauer): Mr. Cerini, singing Muezzin's song behind the scenes was sensational. The voice of this singer is as phenomenal as it is pleasing. Producers will soon talk about him and be only too glad to approach him. A frantic audience demanded encores.

Ulk [meaning:Frolic] supplement of the Berliner Tagblatt (reviewer: Schmidt-Cabanis): The muezzin is never shown

But when he sang his part,  
His strong and rich and golden tone  
Went straight to every heart.

Vossische Zeitung (reviewer: Ludwig Pietsch): A tenor voice of extraordinary self-possession, richness and sweetness can be heard in the third act of Ali Baba. Who is the enviable possessor of that voice?

A concert in the Königsbau:

Allgemeine Konzert-Zeitung: A Russian tenor, Selmar Cerini appeared in the concerts in the lovely Königsbau which are performed to a distinguished audience every evening. Cerini's performance met with such tremendous success that we would be remiss in not mentioning him. The new tenor is unique when it comes to coloraturas. His trills are perfect and he sings them as well as his passages with a precision and ease that we have never heard before. Besides, the voice has strength and beauty, especially in the higher notes. With intense and continued study there is no doubt that this singer can look forward to a successful stage career.

## 2. AS AN OPERA SINGER:

Opera: IL Trovatore

City: Halberstadt

The Halberstädtische Zeitung writes: Yesterday's performance of Verdi's IL Trovatore was an interesting one in that a new tenor made his stage debut. S. Cerini is the name of this rising star among tenors. In the role of Manrico Mr. Cerini gave ample proof of his musical know-how. He knows how to modulate his strong voice which, particularly in the higher positions, is brilliant and effective. He sang the final allegro in the third act so well that he had to do an encore.

Mr. Cerini did not neglect to include in this aria the traditional high C which Verdi did not, in fact, write into his music.

The Halberstädtische Bürgerzeitung writes: Mr. Selmar Cerini is endowed with a pleasing and well-trained tenor voice. While he sang this part for the first time, it must be admitted that he does not sound like a beginner. His serenade behind the scene earned him immediate recognition and more of it as the evening went on. The high point was the stretta in the third act. The audience became so enthusiastic that the artist did a da capo. We predict a brilliant future for Mr. Cerini and have no doubts that within a short time he will rank with such names as Mierzwinsky and Bötzel and will be one of the most popular guest tenors.

Opera: IL Trovatore

City: Stettin

Theater: Stadttheater

The Neue Stettiner Zeitung writes: According to the notices that had appeared the Stettin audience was prepared for a great star ... The applause which was immediate when Cerini first began soon became frantic ... His voice, we believe is great and more so in the higher registers in which it possesses richness and volume. The listener is most pleased with the highest notes as they are sung with the least effort. The artist is fully aware of his ability and out of the richness of his voice he offers more than one can reasonably expect. As an actor he cannot hide the fact that he is a beginner; nonetheless, he is more at ease and more natural in his performance than is generally the

case with beginners. His stature stand him in good stead and since he possesses that most important requirement of all great singers, a musical ear, he will soon be one of the small number of great tenors.

Opera: Tell

City: Breslau

Theater: Stadttheater

The Schlesische Zeitung writes: The two performances of Rossini's Tell this season (November 30, 1890 and February 8, 1891) are, in their most important parts, like evening and morning, fall and spring, fading and growing. The part of Arnold was sung in the first performance by Mr. Nachbaur, in the second by Mr. Cerini. In November 1890 theater attendance was rather small; applause was unenthusiastic and sporadic and followed by a sense of dissatisfaction. By contrast, last Saturday's performance had a full house and rousing applause. Mr. Cerini's magnificent voice and his considerable training have repeatedly been pointed out. The part of Arnold afforded the artist yet another occasion to prove his proficiency and himself in the best light. Thus the pièce de résistance "O, Mathilde! du Engel meiner Triebed" came off splendidly. Mr. Nachbaur sang the aria in G-flat major even as a reprise. Mr. Cerini sang the reprise in A-flat and achieved a high- C of thorough freshness and beauty of tone. He was also very successful in the duet as well as the trio in the second act. He generally left a most favorable impression through the assurance with which he came through the musical part of his role.

Opera: Rigoletto

City: Breslau

Theater: Stadttheater

The Breslauer Morgen-Zeitung writes: The production of Rigoletto is one of the very best the management has offered this season. The duke was sung by Mr. Cerini with his characteristic ease and elegance. His acting did justice to the role, the frivolity of the aristocratic rake. The singing part was as always handled masterfully by the artist; due to his amazing technique Mr. Cerini was able to sing even the more difficult parts of his role effortlessly. In short, every aspect of Mr. Cerini's performance was highly satisfactory.

Opera: Lucia di Lammermoor

City: Breslau

Theater: Stadttheater

The Schlesische Zeitung writes: ... Mr. Cerini ... sang the part [of Edgardo] for the first time. There is definite progress in his performance, the kind of progress attained mainly through assiduous work and patience rather than practice since he has been on the stage for such a short time. This is a great plus for this gifted artist and will help him to reach great heights. His Edgardo had much to be praised, in particular the aria in the fourth act because of the beautiful falsetto and the generally tasteful presentation.

Opera: Les Huguenots

City: Breslau

Theater: Stadttheater

The Breslauer Morgen-Zeitung writes: ... it was Mr. Cerini, singing the part of Raoul, who gave yet another proof of his unceasing diligence and his great talent. He was particularly good in the Romance of the first act which he presented with great taste. The audience was electrified and demanded encores. The duet with the queen ("Süsse Eintracht") in the second act and in the quartet is omitted at most opera stages because of the musical difficulty. Mr. Cerini sang it with impeccable purity. In the septet he sang the high-C with complete confidence and smoothness. His crowning achievement was the duet in the fourth act. He showed the greatest possible command of the musical part and was superb in the falsetto. He sang the Cavatine in G-flat major twice softly (piano) and with power the third time. The words "ach komm" at the end of the Cavatine with the high-D-flat came forth beautifully in a full chest tone. His acting was equally successful and one could forget that Mr. Cerini is a beginner. The applause at the end of the opera was overwhelming. Mr. Cerini had about 8 curtain calls.

Opera: Aida

City: Breslau

Theater: Stadttheater

The Morgen- Zeitung writes: This opera is one of the best productions of the season. Mr. Cerini sang the part of Radames for the first time in his life and his performance was extraordinary. He sang the part with beauty of tone and played it with strength and feeling. His presentation of Radames and his own imposing presence on the stage made for a captive audience, and indeed, the combination of the beautiful and powerful voice, the depth of feeling, his sweet-sounding tone and the clarity of his diction made his performance an artistic achievement and a thrilling experience for everyone who heard him. He sang all his parts equally well and his acting was very pleasing. The duet with Aida in the third act which he sang in the manner of an Italian was very effective and so was the subsequent trio with Amonasro. When he sang the words "Sei ruhig Priester: Radames bleibet dir" the audience burst into roaring applause. With great warmth and feeling he did the dungeon scene in which he sang the high-Bs very softly. An appreciative audience applauded for several curtain calls.

Opera: Cavalleria Rusticanna

City: Breslau

Theater: Stadttheater

The Breslauer Morgen- Zeitung writes: Mr. Cerini created a splendidly successful Turiddu. The part seems to be especially written for him. The greatest contribution to the success this opera has had in Breslau was made by Mr. Cerini since the part of Turiddu requires great voice material and great endurance. It also demands great ardor in playing. Mr. Cerini took great pains (as did the entire cast) to help make this opera as successful as it was. Hearing him sing the Siciliana behind the scene was enchanting and one could sense that the artist would give an extraordinary performance. The powerful high registers of his powerful voice were beautifully evident. He gave a solid performance, and his conscientious and correct singing deserves special praise. Some of his more characteristic moments in the duet with Santuzza can hardly be surpassed. He was most effective in the drinking song and the high-G at the end had a strong quality. Both his singing and his playing were exquisitely moving in the farewell scene with mother Lucia, because he succeeded in conveying the tragic quality of that scene. Since Mr. Cerini's performance as an actor matched that of the singer, it was not surprising that he drew frantic applause both during and the end of the performance.

Opera: La Juive

City: Berlin

Theater: Krolls Theater

The Berliner Tageblatt writes: The performance was of interest not only ... but also because of the singer who sang the part of Eleazer. He achieved considerable success with his performance. The dramatic tenor from Breslau, Mr. Cerini, who has only recently made his debut on the opera stage was most interesting as Eleazer. This artist possesses such powerful voice material, especially in the highest registers, and yet sings in those registers with such ease and elasticity that he rightly deserves the epithet of "knight of the high C". Added to this is a considerable talent for acting. Both were particularly evident in the great aria at the end of the fourth act. Frenzied applause forced Mr. Cerini to do an encore of the prayer "Gott erleuchte meine Sinne". The performance was very animated and showed considerable talent but in some places should have been a little quieter, as for example in the second act with Eudora. But the duets with Recha, the Passover prayer, the trio in the second act and the duet with the cardinal were of entrancing beauty. The audience was grateful for the excellent performance of this artist who, consequently, had numerous curtain calls.

Opera: La Juive

City: Berlin

The Berlin Tageblatte writes: Again Mr. Cerini sang the part of Eleazer. The clear tone and great splendor of this sweet-sounding tenor and the artistry of his interpretation of the part of the Jew transported the audience and inspired it to frantic ovations. The new star tenor sings himself into the hearts of Berlin audiences and should soon become one of its social favorites; by next season the Cerini-enthusiasm will have replaced the Bötzel-cult.

Opera: Alessandro Stradella

City: Görlitz

The audience greeting Cerini as Stradella was larger yet than that of Wednesday night when he performed in the Troubadour. Those who saw him then were looking forward to last night's performance and those who had not heard him were immediately taken with him. His voice almost seemed too powerful for the part, but his lieder showed that his technique is masterful. In the domain of the lied this artist rules with unlimited sovereignty. How he can convey the spirit of the words and bring the content to the heart of the listener! A great future can be predicted for Mr. Cerini who so conscientiously and diligently strives for perfection and possess such great artistry. If his precious voice suffers no harm he will in a few years be one of the greatest tenors of the civilized world.

Next to his singing we noted with special satisfaction that Mr. Cerini does not try to stand out from the ensemble but rather, as a true

artist, adapts to and works for the whole of the performance. Although he undoubtedly knows his worth, his instinct tells him that the deliberate attempt of one of the cast to stand out detracts from the work as a whole. As far as the soloists are concerned this performance of Stradella would have done honor to the most famous opera stage ... The audience was looking forward to Selmar Cerini's forthcoming Troubadour.

Opera: Tell

City: Kiel

Theater: Stadttheater

The center of attraction was Mr. Cerini who was unusually successful in the role of Arnold. The clear tone of his voice is extremely sweet and flexible, possess rare volume and enormous power. Volume and power of his voice grow in direct proportion with the increasing warmth and emotion in his acting. Cerini, still a young artist, is a man of great artistry who considers it most important to please and satisfy the ear of the listener. Few are the opera singers who perform with such exquisite taste and tender intimateness. His performance as an actor is highly creditable although he has been on the stage for a few months only. In the trio of the third act he did not seem a beginner at all. Thunderous applause and several curtain calls rewarded the artist.

Opera: Martha

City: Mainz

Theater: Stadttheater

The Anzeiger writes: All's well that ends well – should be the feeling of both the theater audience and the theater management at the end of this season. A full house and an excellent performance marked the end of this season last Sunday night ... Guest performer for the third time was Mr. Selmar Cerini from the Breslau Stadttheater. As Lionel this esteemed artist once more delighted the audience with the lovely sound of his magnificent voice. His acting matched his brilliant singing performance. In particular, the perfect rendition of the arias “Ach so fromm, ach so traut” and “Mag der Himmel Euch vergeben” inspired enthusiastic applause, but ovations were also given throughout the performance.

### 3. AS A CONCERT PERFORMER

City: Magdeburg

... The audience was a distinguished one. Mr. Cerini is an artist with a very special talent. His specialty is a great gift for coloratura which he presents in such a way that his listeners are downright stunned and startled. The artist, a dramatic tenor whose rich voice possesses such enormous heights can be certain of a great future. His pièce de résistance was the presentation of the aria from The Barber of Seville (Act 2) as well as a Russian song. Here he displayed such an

amazing technique which has probably never been heard in a male singer; the audience was stunned by his thunderous trills. The romance (in B) from Les Huguenots, the aria from Faust (Gounod), a French serenade, a finally a lied by Carl Loewe earned him frantic applause from the audience who then demanded two more encores.

City: Posen

The Association of Young Merchants held its annual winter festival last Saturday ... Mr. Cerini was the singer of the evening and began his repertoire with the romance from the opera Les Huguenots. Due to the fact that he had to sing immediately after he arrived, his voice was at first slightly indisposed. His subsequent presentations, however, were highly successful. Mr. Cerini's vocal material is magnificent, his diction is clear and distinct and his presentation as a whole is most impressive. This singer's voice is a gift from God and the frantic and continued applause he received demanded encores. His pièce de résistance was the coloratura aria of Count Almaviva from the opera The Barber of Seville. While this is a particularly difficult aria to sing, Mr. Cerini handled it with the greatest of ease. The presentation of this aria showed clearly the artist's great talent for the opera stage.

City: Strassburg

At a soirée last night at the house of one of the leading personalities we had occasion to hear Mr. Selmar Cerini and can say with certainty that in the last twenty-five years no such amazing tenor voice was heard in this city. Mr. Cerini began with a wild-romantic Russian song followed by Count Almaviva's aria from The Barber of Seville which was composed by Rossini after the opera and which because of its musical difficulties is never sung in Germany and rarely in Italy. In these two presentations he developed coloraturas which in their fluency and skill can only be compared with the most experienced soprano coloraturas. His trills are indescribably beautiful – they start with the highest notes in his softest piano voice and gradually increase in volume until they swell to a climax in fortissimo. Mr. Cerini also sang the Bravura aria from Tell (Act 4) which contains a dozen high- Cs and the passage "O, Mathilde" from the duet, both with perfect pitch, and with a rare combination of vigor and mellowness. As a special favor to the hostess he sang the duet from Cavalleria Rusticana with her and the Siciliana which he sang with enrapturing sensitivity.

#### 4. AS A CHIEF CANTOR

City: Breslau (Charity Concert)

Mr. Cerini, one time first tenor at the Stadt-theater here and now employed as chief cantor at the synagogue gave a charity concert the day before yesterday. His former admirers responded to his appeal and appeared in droves ... Mr. Cerini delighted his audience. While

the voice sounded slightly husky at first from the cold air, it soon assumed its usual splendor and inspired repeated rousing applause. Mr. Cerini sang an aria from Ponchielli's La Gioconda, the "Ach Moskwa", an interesting Russian composition, and he also sang "Zwei Sternlein" and two selections from "Syrische Lieder". The audience was fascinated with the warmth and intimacy of his presentation and the sparkling coloratura which he developed in the Russian piece and da capo calls demanded an encore.

City: Ratibor

The concert came up to the expectations in the fullest measure. Mr. Cerini was and still is a dramatic tenor of the first order whose lovely singing is fascinating. He has left the stage a year ago but has not forgotten his art nor lost his skill. Dramatic opera parts are his specialty. He sang the "Preislied" from Die Meistersinger, an aria from La Juive, and one from The Barber of Seville (Act 2). The latter, which is quite unknown, gave him a chance to show his masterful rendition of Rossini coloraturas. One of the lieder he sang was in Russian and quite remarkable for its wild-romantic quality. It abounds in coloraturas and Cerini may just be one of a hundred tenors able to sing it. The trills which the singer developed in this piece required sustained breath control, a feat which astounded the audience. Cerini received a rousing ovation and an encore was inevitable. This evening will long be remembered.