

My Journey of Discovery with Kathleen Lockhart Manning (1890-1951)

By Jane Foster



Kathleen Lockhart

Manning (1890-1951) was born in Hollywood, California on a ranch which is now incorporated into the property of Universal Studios. She began playing the piano and

composing at age 5 and as a young woman she traveled the world pursuing her art. In 1908 she studied composition in Paris with Moritz Moszkowski. During the 1911-1912 Season, she sang in London with the Hammerstein Opera Company. It is in her song compositions that she truly excelled, and for many of her compositions, the texts are her own. Mrs. Manning died in Los Angeles on March 20, 1951.

Biographical Sources:

[New Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians](#)

[Los Angeles Times](#), March 24, 1951

Through dusty files of loosely organized sheet music I searched for names - names of American women composers, perhaps once popular and now waiting to be rediscovered. Picking up and following leads as tenuous as fabled breads crumbs, I began my journey of discovery with American composer Kathleen Lockhart Manning.

It was the titles of her songs that first caught my eye: fanciful ones such as "Shoes", "The Tale a Garden Told" as well as ones of deeper promise: "Sketches of Paris", "Sketches of London" and "Sketches of New York". What did she see of these great cities? And then I was teased with the evocative alliteration of the opening line of "Maid of Mystery", one of the Japanese Ghost songs: "The faintest sound of sandaled feet". For several years I have followed this path, and through persistence and dedication, infatuation has turned to love.

As is essential to the complete education of the classical singer, I have studied the great German Lieder of Schubert, Schumann and Brahms and the beautiful French Mélodies of Massenet, Fauré and Debussy. I have been fortunate to study with fine teachers who love and respect this repertoire. But unlike opera, which can be painted with a broad brush and is accepting of many imperfections, Art Songs demand a sense of perfection. There comes a time in this study of these miniature masterpieces when the nature of the song calls upon the singer to have an innate knowledge of a homeland and culture. With few exceptions, that knowledge is the gift of the culture into which one is born.

So I searched for music from my homeland, from America. And finding the Art Songs of Mrs. Manning is in many ways, finding home.

Mrs. Manning's compositions help me to define "American Art Song". Her songs reflect a life of travel. Mrs. Manning is authentic to herself, genuine, honest and childlike. This is not a childlike naiveté, but a non-judgmental openness. And she is optimistic even when expressing her experiences of great personal loss.

To date, the biographical facts that have come to light about this composer are brief. Kathleen Lockhart was born in California. Her father, Otis Lockhart, was a Los Angeles pioneer. His ranch was located on the land now occupied by Universal Studios. She was a prodigy, composing and playing the piano at five years of age. Her early teacher was Elizabeth Jordan Eichelberger, an extraordinary influence on her life. To her memory she dedicates her "Vignettes" a collection of 25 songs that are her most personal expressions: "To the memory of Elizabeth

Jordan Eichelberger whose influence upon my early career has been the inspiration of my life.”

And it was Elizabeth Jordon Eichelberger who arranged for young Kathleen Lockhart to travel to Paris in 1908 to study piano and composition with Moritz Moszkowski.

Miss Lockhart was also a talented singer, and during the 1911-1912 Season, she sang as a prima donna in London with the Hammerstein Opera Company, listing herself on the program as “Kathleen Lockhart, Paris”.

World War I brought her back to the United States, where she married telephone company executive E.E. (Ned) Manning and settled in California. She turned her attention to composition and produced a body of work described on a G. Schirmer, Inc. promotional flyer: “Among her recent works are two full grand operas, one operetta in Mozartian style, a piano concerto two symphonic poems and a hundred new songs.”

My research has yielded approximately eighty of Mrs. Manning’s songs, several piano pieces, and copies of the books on which her operas were based. One of these novels, “Mr. Wu”, has a plot truly worthy of grand opera, and has attracted playwrights, novelists, filmmakers as well this composer.

I believe that sketches from the opera exist in the 5 songs of “Chinese Impressions”, each published separately by G. Schirmer, Inc. in 1931. A notice in *Musical America* for December 10, 1931 announced their publication and noted: “Done with a very deft touch, they have melodic variety and great charm, and should prove ideal recital material for the better class singer.” But this description does little justice to what was:

The Phenomenon of “Mr. Wu”

Begun as a play by H. M. Vernon (1878-) and Harold Owen (1872-1930), “Mr. Wu” opened at the Maxine Elliott Theater in New York on October 14, 1914.

In 1918, the story was turned into a best selling novel by Louise Jordon Miln. Mrs. Miln was a popular novelist whose books focused on the mysterious orient.

Begun in 1925 and finished in 1926, Mrs. Manning composed a grand opera based on the text by Louise Jordon Miln. This opera was auditioned for the Metropolitan Opera, but was never performed there.

In 1927, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer translated this story into silent film. Mr. Wu was played by Lon Chaney; Mr. Wu’s daughter, Nang Ping, was played by Renee Adorée. Mrs. Gregory, the Englishwoman, was Louise Dresser. Her son, the careless Basil Gregory, was played by Ralph Forbes. In the plot, it is ironic that Mrs. Gregory, who was sensitive to the Chinese culture, is asked to pay for her son’s insensitive treatment of Nang-Ping which brings dishonor upon Mr. Wu’s house.

This was Mrs. Manning’s first opera. This story of the clash of cultures is played out through secret romance, disgrace, thirst for revenge, and the ultimate power struggle – for life and death. Of course, the story includes elements of Giacomo Puccini’s grand opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904). But the struggle between Mr. Wu and Mrs. Gregory, two characters locked in a room and only one will exit alive, may be comparable to the struggle between Scarpia and the title character of Puccini’s *Tosca* (1900).

The manuscripts of Mrs. Manning’s opera have not been located, but using the novel as a guide, I am able to place two of the songs of “Chinese Impressions” in the story. The first song of the five, “Pagoda Bells” describes the great love Mr. Wu has for his bride, Wu Li Lu. Anticipating Lu Li’s arrival to his house, Mr. Wu built an exquisite garden for his bride:

“In her garden he lavished a wealth of care...until even in China there could scarcely have been another spot...so full of rapture.

There was a pagoda, of course, a bridge, a lotus lake, a sun-dial and a forest of tiny dwarf trees.

The pagoda had eleven storeys. Each storey’s projecting roof had eight corners, and from each corner Wu had hung a bell of precious blue porcelain, silver lined, silvered clappered. The slightest breeze that came must set one or more of the delicate things a-ringing, and by costly and ingenious device each motion of a bell threw down on the garden not only music, but sweet aromatic smell – a different odor, as a different note, from each bell.”¹

The song, “Nang-Ping”, I imagine to be sung by Basil Gregory, who sings it to woo Mr. Wu’s young daughter:

“A long low whistle pierced through the gloaming from beyond the wall.

Nang Ping’s tiny hand clutched excitedly at her sash....

The blackbird whistle came again, nearer, but very soft.

Nang Ping answered it with a high falsetto crooning, and in a moment more a man cautiously parted the bamboos that grew clumped beyond the wall, vaulted it and stood within the garden. Nang Ping ran to him with a gurgling cry, and he caught her in his arms.

No Chinese lover this....”²

Joy – the joy of love, of sensuous poems and expressive melodies, the joy of discovery of a sense of home, these are what I find in Mrs. Manning’s songs. When I peek into her soul as expressed through her songs, I find my heart and soul waiting there.



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¹ Miln, Louise Jordon, *Mr. Wu*, (A.L. Burt Co., 1920 by arrangement with Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1918) p. 54.

² Miln, p. 65.

Jane Foster has appeared in opera and recital in Europe and the United States. She made her European operatic debut as Gilda (*Rigoletto*) as a guest artist with the Silesian Theater in Opava, Czech Republic. Since this debut, Jane has added many roles to her repertoire including the role of Elsa (*Lohengrin*) which she recently performed in concert in New York City. Her New York Debut Recital in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall was devoted entirely to a program of French Romances & Mélodies. Of Jane’s debut recital, music critic, Leighton Kerner said: “. . . *Jane’s artistry enabled her to penetrate to the core of the song.*” For the past few years, Ms. Foster has devoted herself to the research, study, performance and recording of the Art Songs of American composer Kathleen Lockhart Manning.