

OPERA RETURNS TO ACADEMY OF MUSIC

'Trovatore' Successfully Opens 'Festival,' With Florence Easton as Leonora

The war having greatly restricted the summer flight of song birds from America, excellent artists from both the Metropolitan and Chicago Companies were available for Impresario Davis's grand opera festival, inaugurated at the Academy of Music last evening. In other days the formation of such sterling organization this late in the season would have been impossible.

Such stars as Florence Easton, Francis MacLennan, Riccardo Martin, Maggie Teyte and Alice Gentle would normally be heading for London's Covent Garden, Paris's Academie de Musique or Buenos Aires's Colon Opera House. But sea wolves have overturned the operatic situation as well as several others. Philadelphia profits by the unusual circumstances and the Academy of Music opens its doors to a professional lyric drama troupe for the first time since Gatti-Casazza and Oscar Hammerstein contested for operatic supremacy in this city.

Last night's opening bill, although the conventional "Il Trovatore," was well suited to display some of the most authentic resources in Mr. Davis's company. Later in the week and during the last half of the fortnight's engagement less trite offerings will be heard. The old Verdi work, by the way, opened the Academy in 1857. Its familiar melodies, still abundantly admired, were vanced recently in this city at the Metropolitan on the final day of Mr. Gatti's season last April.

The Academy's performance last evening compared very favorably with the Metropolitan's effort and was \$3 less costly to the auditor. Florence Easton, one of the most richly gifted dramatic sopranos of the period, was superbly effective as Leonora. She is one of the prime assets of this attractive "festival" company and easily dominated its interesting inaugural. Alice Gentle's well-trained contralto exhibited the potent development of her art since the Hammerstein period, when she usually sang minor roles. Fer Azucena had both dramatic picturesqueness and lyric eloquence.

The Manrico of Forrest Lamont, substituted at the last moment for the programmed Andre Arensen, was virile and effective, although some of his tones were a trifle throaty. This artist is an American tenor, who shone conspicuously in Campanini's Chicago organization last season. Henri Scott, the admirable Philadelphia basso, was the Ferrando, and Carl Formes, the ultra-romantic Count Di Luna, winning inevitable favor for the tuneful "Il Balen," so beloved of operatic baritones. Josiah Zuro conducted a large and efficient orchestra.

Entirely adequate staging and capital chorus work were other features of this unique hot-weather venture, which assuredly merits the music lover's patronage. Tonight's bill is "Madama Butterfly."