

# NEW OPERATIC ROLES IN TUCKER'S FUTURE

By HOWARD KLEIN

**W**HEN the management of a firm presents an employe with a gold timepiece it is usually to mark the retirement of the loyal worker after many years of service. But this was not the case yesterday afternoon at the Metropolitan Opera when Rudolf Bing, general manager of the company, gave one of his leading tenors, Richard Tucker, the traditional gold watch.

Mr. Tucker made his Met debut on Jan. 25, 1945, and by counting the 1944-45 season as the first, this season turns out to be his 20th. And far from entertaining plans of leaving the operatic stage, the 50-year-old Brooklyn-born tenor is adding new roles to his list of 26 and is shifting gears into his "mature" period, the time when a tenor's voice normally becomes heavier and deeper.

The tenor's views were sought one day last week at his new Manhattan apartment. He was in town to work with his coach, Joseph Garnett. His wife Sarah,

who had come with him from their home in Great Neck, was scrambling eggs and setting out a sour-cream cake she had brought for lunch.

Mr. Tucker, who was looking hale in a blue suit, pale blue shirt and striped blue tie, was in high spirits. On the piano was the vocal score to Halévy's opera, "La Juive" and the tenor, who has been compared to Caruso, was preparing one of Caruso's great roles, that of Eléazar, which he would do for his first time March 12 in the concert version to be given by the Friends of French Opera.

"Eléazar isn't Faust, you know," he said. "In the Gounod opera, you're an old man for twenty minutes, in the Halévy you stay old for the whole opera. It's a problem. How do you sing old? Not only must the voice have the right weight, but the speed with which the words are said must also give the sign of age.

"For many reasons I would not have considered doing this role until now, even though

many American opera companies have asked me frequently to do it."

The conversation was interrupted at this point, as it was repeatedly thereafter, by the ringing of the white princess phone at the singer's elbow. It became clear that the tenor liked the telephone, for the interruptions did not displease him, but rather he seemed fond of the constant contact with persons not in the room.

Picking up the dropped thread, he continued, "Next year I'll do my first Radames in 'Aida,' at the Met. When I sang it with Toscanini and the N.B.C. opera in 1949, my voice was not heavy enough, so I left it alone. Now there is plenty of strength. Mr. Bing may do 'Juive' for me in the new Met at Lincoln Center, and I'm hoping to do some Wagner soon—Lohengrin and Walther especially."

Mrs. Tucker, who is the sister of another Met tenor, Jan Peerce, announced lunch. "Reub, come, please. Don't spoil my eggs." The nickname was for Reuben, Mr. Tucker's name before he came to the Met.

"I prepare a role by going through four steps of study," Mr. Tucker said, seating himself at the table.

"First, I find out what the story means. Then, I study each word. Next, I study the music, and last I put words and music together and polish. I try never to let a day in New York go by without learning and working. I worked with my teacher, Paul Althouse, until he died, God rest his soul. I wouldn't be without my coach now—vocalizing is like orange juice in the morning.

"The ruination of hundreds of fine young voices is this rushing into opera without sufficient study. Look at Mario Lanza. He had the voice of the century, but no training, and see what happened!"

"I didn't feel ready for the Met when Edward Johnson approached me after I won second place in the Met Auditions of the Air in 1943. I had never even been inside the place, and the only opera I'd sung was one 'Traviata' in the old Al Jolson theater. I was a cantor then, and had a business dyeing silk linings for fur coats.

"When I accepted, I decided I would only go in the front door as a leading tenor, not a comprimario. They offered me the Singer in 'Rosenkavalier,' but I held out and got Enzo in 'Gioconda' instead.

"You know, every time I sing a role, I sing it twice. Once on the stage and then in the car on the way back to Great Neck. My wife and three sons always want to know, why did you do this, or why did you do that?"

"And it's because of them that I'm dropping the role of Lenski in 'Eugene Onegin.' They just can't see coming in for an opera where I get killed in the second act."



The New York Times (by Sam Falk)

Richard Tucker: "Next year I'll do my first Radames."