

Rosa de Vries: A Dutch Diva and Nineteenth-Century Trans-Atlantic Operatic Culture

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Abstract

In an arduous, twenty-year international career, Dutch opera soprano Rosa de Vries née van Os (1824–89) performed both French and Italian opera repertory with leading companies on both sides of the Atlantic. Experiencing triumphs and disappointments while managing both career and family, de Vries represents a class of mid-century opera singers, celebrated in their time but little remembered today. This article tells the story of de Vries's life and career, and in doing so aims to contribute to an understanding of transatlantic operatic life at the time. This reconstruction of Rosa de Vries offers a gateway for further studies of the cultural heritage of an important period in the history of opera and the strenuous demands of an international operatic marketplace.

In 1849, the young Dutch diva Rosa de Vries (née van Os, 1824–89) ventured to the United States, no doubt attracted by the promise of riches in the “El Dorado of the musical world.”¹ De Vries was a skilled vocalist with a three-octave range who sang both lyric soprano and significant mezzo roles, sufficiently well regarded to be compared frequently to Jenny Lind (1820–87).² Although her fifteen-month tour with a troupe under the direction of the conductor Luigi Arditi (1822–1903) is well documented, little attention has been given to her career as a whole.³ An examination of de Vries's European training, her professional setbacks and triumphs, and the emergence of a de Vries operatic dynasty brings alive a trans-Atlantic operatic culture that is little understood today.

Youth in The Hague; Study and Marriage in Paris

Previous scholarship has misstated the place and date of de Vries's birth, now known to be The Hague, 12 April 1824.⁴ It is no surprise that she was reported to be younger

¹ *Musical Review*, 17 August 1845, quoted in Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, [1993] 2001), 142.

² According to an early review from a Dutch daily: “People who have heard Miss Jenny Lind assure us that Mrs. de Vries-van Os demonstrates the most similarity to that famous Swedish singer, with respect to melodiousness and vocal range, taste and feeling, and performance.” *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 26 January 1846. All translations are by the author.

³ See Thomas Kaufman, “The Arditi Tour: The Midwest Gets Its First Real Taste Of Italian Opera,” *Opera Quarterly* 4/4 (Winter 1986–87): 39–52; Preston, *Opera on the Road*; Vera Brodsky Lawrence, “William Henry Fry's Messianic Yearnings: The Eleven Lectures, 1852–53,” *American Music* 7 (1989): 382–411; Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong, Volume 2: Reverberations, 1850–1856* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and George W. Martin, *Verdi in America: Oberto through Rigoletto* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011).

⁴ Birth certificate no. 563, 15 April 1824, The Hague City Archive. Many reference works erroneously list her birthplace as Deventer, a small town in the east of the Netherlands, and her birthdate

than her actual age—this is an old and widespread practice on the part of artists and their managers—but it remains a mystery as to why her birthplace was reported as Deventer. Perhaps once she became known outside the Netherlands, the soprano may have wanted to hide her poverty-stricken background, as she was born in a poor Jewish Ashkenazi community in The Hague, where both her younger sister and father died prematurely.⁵ De Vries reportedly sang in local cafés as early as age thirteen, probably to supplement the income of her widowed mother and her two younger brothers.⁶

The cellist and teacher J. van Gelder soon recognized her talent and took her under his wing, teaching her the rudiments of music. The next logical step would have been for her to enroll at the Royal Music School in The Hague, where van Gelder taught and where tuition was free for students from low-income families, although it cannot be confirmed that de Vries attended, as early school records do not include pupils' names.⁷ As a cellist at the Théâtre Français in The Hague, van Gelder, who predicted her fame one day, may have helped her become a paid choral member at this theater.

King William II (1792–1849) provided the first springboard to her career. William II, who enjoyed attending the French-language opera, financed both the Royal Theater and the Théâtre Français in The Hague until his death in 1849.⁸ (The Hague prided itself on its international French climate, with the upper classes speaking French and following the latest French fashions.) With the King's financial backing, the Théâtre Français soon developed an excellent reputation, ranked artistically as third after Paris and St. Petersburg.⁹ The King also financed talented musicians and composers so that they could study abroad, and among those selected was de Vries (then still van Os).¹⁰ Baron Sirtema van Grovestins, the King's general director of the Royal Theater, drew up a contract for her to study for two years at the Paris Conservatoire, starting in October 1843.¹¹ Because single women then were legal

as 25 February 1824. Probably the first source to publish de Vries's vital statistics incorrectly was *Caecilia* 20/4 (15 February 1863): 49. This information has been repeated for well over a century. See, for example, Karl-Josef Kutsch and Leo Riemens, *Großes Sängerlexikon*, vol. 2 (München: K. G. Saur, 2003), 1148–51; Elisabeth Forbes, “Devriès [De Vries],” *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie, in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁵ Death certificates of Saartje van Os, table ‘Loenen-Smit,’ card 8/32, no. 338, The Hague; her father, Manasse or Mennasse van Os, The Hague, nos. 1–285, fiche 147, plate 19, The Hague City Archive.

⁶ Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, supp. vol. 1, 267.

⁷ This first Dutch music school was founded by royal decree in 1826. National Archive, The Hague: archive of the Royal Conservatory, inventory nr 3.12.02.01. See also [G. A. van Haeften], *Koninklijk Conservatorium voor Muziek te 's-Gravenhage 1826–1926* (The Hague: n.p., 1926), 7 and 99.

⁸ Paul Korenhof, “Het Théâtre Français in de periode 1804–1919,” *De Koninklijke Schouwburg (1804–2004): een kleine Haagse geschiedenis*, ed. Paul Korenhof (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2004), 93.

⁹ This ranking is by theater director Marcel-Briol in a brochure published in 1860. See C. H. Slechte, “Een onvoltooid paleis; onder koninklijk beheer; een gedwongen verpachting,” *175 jaar Koninklijke Schouwburg*, eds. C. H. Slechte, G. Verstraete and L. van der Zalm (The Hague: Kruseman, 1979), 24.

¹⁰ For the sake of consistency this article will refer to the soprano as de Vries, the name she used for most of her professional career.

¹¹ A. G. A. Ridder van Rappard, 8 October 1843, inventory no. E8-Ic-40, Royal Dutch House Archive, The Hague.

minors until age twenty-five, her widowed mother signed the contract, stipulating that her daughter was to sing with the Théâtre Français for two years following completion of her studies in Paris.

Paris was the music capital of Europe when de Vries, her mother, and her two younger brothers arrived. The young soprano's scholarship was likely the main financial support for the family; they lived close to the Conservatoire, where she studied with Fromental Halévy, Daniel Auber, and Marco Bordogni, a former Italian operatic tenor who had been appointed professor at the Conservatoire in 1820. Bordogni enjoyed an excellent reputation as a teacher; no doubt de Vries used his singing method and practiced his many sets of vocalises, which remained in use for over a century.¹² Realizing that successful divas needed to be good actors, she wrote in 1844 to King William to request for funds to pay for acting lessons; her request was granted.¹³ It was in Paris that she also met David Moses de Vries (1816–72), a Dutch man from Amsterdam—like Rosa, he was the eldest child of a Jewish family—who had been studying voice with Jean-Antoine Géraudy, a well-known professor of voice.¹⁴ When the two were married de Vries was accorded official status as an adult.¹⁵ By the time the young couple returned to the Netherlands in the fall of 1845, they had a young daughter.¹⁶ That de Vries was able to combine a full-term pregnancy with a heavy workload characterized her career.

An Unpleasant Start

Soon after returning to The Hague, de Vries introduced herself by giving the traditional three debut performances. Her official debut took place on 11 December 1845 at the Royal Theater in The Hague, as Rachel in *La Juive*. The theater was full, everyone eager to witness for themselves this young native singer.¹⁷ A week later, she sang at a special concert for the royal family, and the King expressed his satisfaction.¹⁸ Her second debut was on 27 December as Alice in Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, and the third was on 31 January 1846 as Pauline in Donizetti's *Les Martyrs*. The press was positive, although reviewers felt she needed more experience.¹⁹ In January she made a successful first appearance in Amsterdam at a concert at Felix Meritis, the leading Amsterdam music venue until the opening of the Concertgebouw in 1888.

De Vries's promising start in the Netherlands was soon marred, however. She was aware of her obligation to sing with the Théâtre Français for two years after

¹² Marco Bordogni, *Méthode de chant* (Paris, 1840). See also M. Bordogni, *Trente-six vocalises: selon le goût moderne*, ed. G. W. Teschner (Berlin: Schlesinger, ca. 1888).

¹³ Letter by R. van Os to King William, 4 November 1844, inventory no. E8-Ic-46, Royal Dutch House Archive, The Hague. To help cover costs for her return to The Hague in 1845, she again received extra financial support. Letter by R. de Vries van Os, 30 September 1845, inventory no. E8-Ic-51, Royal Dutch House Archive, The Hague.

¹⁴ Birth certificate 3–52V, Amsterdam City Archive; *Journal de La Haye*, 21–22 June 1841.

¹⁵ The two were married sometime before 30 September 1845, when she used her married name in a letter to King William. Inventory no. E8-Ic-51, Royal Dutch House Archive, The Hague.

¹⁶ *Weekblad van het Regt*, 30 November 1846.

¹⁷ *Journal de La Haye*, 14 December 1845.

¹⁸ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 22 December 1845.

¹⁹ *Journal de la Haye*, 4 January 1846.

her training in Paris, but to her dismay Baron van Sirtema Grovestins presented her a contract as an understudy, at an understudy's salary. She refused to sign, arguing that she was the sole source of income for her family and that the amount offered (4,000 francs per year) was insufficient. The baron, in response, took her to court. The case, filed in April 1846, was not settled until December, with the court handing down a mixed decision that the claims of both plaintiff and defendant were unsustainable. Both parties saved face, but de Vries's position as a young, upcoming opera star battling a powerful figure in The Hague had gained national attention, and the general impression was that the soprano had won the case. When the leading Dutch music periodical *Caecilia* referred to this court case many years later, it asserted that it had been decided in her favor.²⁰

Meanwhile, rather than wait for the verdict, de Vries, her husband, and presumably their daughter had left the country at the end of April 1846, traveling on funds donated by an unknown benefactor. They went to Lyons, the second city of France, where she made her three debut appearances to enthusiastic audiences at the Grand Théâtre on 22, 24, and 30 June, respectively, as Rachel in *La Juive*, Alice in *Robert le Diable*, and Valentine in *Les Huguenots*. She signed a seasonal contract, reportedly for 9,600 francs, and appeared nineteen times in the title role of Rossini's *Semiramide*.²¹ In retrospect, the court case may have been a blessing in disguise, as it had pushed her abroad.

Toulouse, then back to the Netherlands

After Lyons, de Vries went to Paris, where she was offered a contract as *prima chanteuse forte* at the opera house in Toulouse.²² There she fulfilled the customary three debut performances, again as Valentine in *Les Huguenots* and Rachel in *La Juive*, and now in a new role, Léonore de Guzman in Donizetti's *La Favorite*. Her salary (20,000 francs plus a benefit for ten months) indicated her powerful position at the box office, with the local press noting that unfortunately she would probably soon leave, drawn by lucrative offers from Paris. In fact, at the end of her contract de Vries and her family did return to Paris, where opera stars commanded high fees and several theaters presented opera virtually all year round.

The political situation in Paris, however, did not lend itself to operatic production (in February 1848 King Louis-Philippe abdicated and a French Republic was established, but unrest was rampant), and by October 1848 the family returned to the Netherlands.²³ In November, Rosa and David de Vries gave two concerts in Amsterdam, with additional appearances elsewhere during the following months.²⁴ The critical response was telling: she continually earned superlative comments; his singing, in contrast, was described only as improved since his stay abroad.²⁵ In spring 1849 the young family moved to Brussels, where their second child, Marcel,

²⁰ *Caecilia* 17/7 (1 April 1860), 73n1.

²¹ *Rosa de Vries, Esquisse Biographique (d'après Le Kunstkronijk)* (The Hague: Belinfante, 1860), 9.

²² *Rosa de Vries, Esquisse Biographique*, 9; and *Nieuw Rotterdamsche Courant*, 13 August 1847.

²³ *Nieuw Rotterdamsche Courant*, 24 October 1848.

²⁴ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 3 November 1848.

²⁵ *Nieuw Rotterdamsche Courant*, 10 November 1848.

was born on 6 May 1849.²⁶ In reporting this birth, David de Vries recorded his profession as “artiste dramatique”; he was identified on the birth certificate as “David de Vries van Os”—a combination of his and his wife’s surnames, and perhaps an attempt to enhance his status. His wife’s profession was not recorded.

An important turning point occurred the next month in Paris, where de Vries visited Giacomo Meyerbeer at his home, perhaps hoping for a recommendation. In his diary Meyerbeer recorded “Visit from a Dutch (Jewish) singer, Madame Devries. She has a strong, vibrant voice, but her intonation is uncertain, and her singing seemed only average to me”; a mere seven weeks after giving birth, de Vries had apparently not regained top form.²⁷ Meyerbeer, however, reportedly advised her to accept a proposal to sing at the Théâtre d’Orléans in New Orleans for two seasons as *prima donna assoluta*. Pierre Davis, manager of this theater, was in Paris at the time to recruit singers for the 1849–50 season.²⁸ De Vries must have realized that in New Orleans she could continue to perform the same leading French-language roles she had learned in France and the Netherlands; moreover, she would have an advantage as a European diva, since opera fans in the United States judged foreign singers as superior to Americans (the same prejudice as in the Netherlands).²⁹ De Vries took Meyerbeer’s advice, signed the contract, and entered a new and important phase of her career.

Setting Sail for the New World

In the fall of 1849, the couple and their two toddlers set sail for the New World, arriving in New Orleans on 5 November after a journey of some forty days on the ship *Vesta* out of Le Havre.³⁰ Often described as the Paris of America, New Orleans could boast of the Théâtre d’Orléans, a fine venue seating about 1,300 that had introduced grand opera to the city. At the same time, New Orleans was obviously very different from Paris, not least because about a fifth of the city’s 115,000 residents were slaves or free people of color.

De Vries arrived at the right moment. The prolonged economic depression in America was finally coming to an end and opera was booming in New Orleans.³¹ Critic Louis Placide Canonge praised her debut on 12 November 1849 (as Léonore de Guzman in Donizetti’s *La Favorite*), describing her as “a fine talent in all the meanings of the term.”³² In January she undertook the role of Héléne in *Jérusalem*, her first Verdi opera. When she became ill in early February, the run of this opera

²⁶ Birth certificate, Brussels City Archive. The entry “Devries, familie,” *Algemene Muziek Encyclopedie*, vol. 2, ed. J. Robijns and M. Zijlstra (Bussum: Unieboek, 1980), 363, reports his birthdate correctly.

²⁷ Robert Ignatius Letellier, trans. and ed., *The Diaries of Giacomo Meyerbeer; vol. 2: The Prussian Years and Le Prophète, 1840–1849* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 356.

²⁸ Belsom, “Reception,” 123.

²⁹ Laure Schnapper, “Bernard Ullman-Henri Herz: An Example of Financial and Artistic Partnership, 1846–1849,” in *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700–1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists*, ed. William Weber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 135.

³⁰ See www.ancestry.com, New Orleans Passenger Lists, 1820–1945.

³¹ Jack Belsom, http://www.neworleansopera.org/about_us/history.html, 2007.

³² Jack Belsom, e-mail correspondence with the author, 1 May 2008; Belsom, “Reception,” 123.

was interrupted, but soon continued for a total of twelve performances. Three months later (1 April), de Vries appeared in her first mezzo role, as Fidès in the American premiere of Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* (one year after its first performance at the Paris Opéra). With this opera Meyerbeer launched the role of mezzo as a principal female operatic character and also introduced the figure of the mother into opera plots.³³ The libretto would have appealed to de Vries, with its setting in the Netherlands and her role as a loving mother.

In fact, de Vries was in the final stages of her third pregnancy and a scant thirty hours after her sixth performance as Fidès, on 22 April 1850, gave birth to another daughter, aptly named Fidès.³⁴ A mere seventeen days after Fidès's birth, de Vries was back onstage, with *Le Courier* announcing that her "indisposition" had not harmed her beautiful voice.³⁵ Although the critic for *Le Courier* believed that the role did not suit her voice, he nevertheless commended de Vries's performance of the famous aria "Ah, mon fils" for its "exquisite and profound sentiment which belong only to grand artists."³⁶

New York

After the opera season closed, de Vries left New Orleans for New York. She made her debut on 4 September 1850 in the title role of *Norma* in a benefit performance under Max Maretzek at Castle Garden, a performance space located on the southern tip of Manhattan that catered to an economically heterogeneous audience.³⁷ The following month (8 and 14 October) she appeared at the Astor Place Opera House with a rather makeshift cast in a mixed bill consisting of parts of *Norma*, a scene from Verdi's *I Lombardi*, and the fourth act of *La Favorite*, again under Maretzek.³⁸ Then in November she again appeared as *Norma* in a pick-up production staged by Maretzek, with her husband taking the role of *Norma's* husband Pollione. David was destined to fulfill the role of the "husband of the prima donna," and was probably financially dependent on her. Such circumstances plainly deviated from accepted antebellum norms, when men worked outside the home and women were responsible for homemaking and raising the children.

When the couple returned to New Orleans for the 1850–51 season, de Vries was sufficiently popular to hold her own against the vocal star with whom she had often been compared, Jenny Lind. Although Lind pulled in huge audiences to her concert performances at the St. Charles Theater, de Vries continued to attract crowds at the French theater.³⁹ Lizzie Randall, a young woman visiting

³³ See Caroline Harder, "The Roles of 'Mothers' in Opera as Exemplified by Fidès (Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*), Kostelnicka (Janacek's *Jenufa*), Mrs. Patrick de Rocher (Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*)" (D.M.A. diss., University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2009).

³⁴ Office of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths for the Parish of Orleans and City of New Orleans.

³⁵ *Le Courier de la Louisiane*, 8 May 1850.

³⁶ *Le Courier de la Louisiane*, 5 April 1850, cited in Belsom "Reception," 133.

³⁷ George Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 6 (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 100.

³⁸ *New York Daily Tribune*, 30 September 1850.

³⁹ *Le Courier de la Louisiane*, 10 April 1850; *Bee* (New Orleans), 12 April 1850, cited in Belsom, "Reception," 34.

New Orleans, wrote to a friend in Connecticut, “Here we have heard the Opera constantly—with Mad Devries as Prima Donna—+ seen Meyerbeer’s ‘Prophet’—Verdi’s ‘Jerusalem’ + ‘The two Foscari’—Norma—beautiful incomparable Norma + ‘Robert Le Diable’—I have not time to tell you now of half the enjoyment these operas have given me.”⁴⁰ The working class also admired her, as is illustrated by this comment: “Monday morning, Mme. Casimir or Mam’selle Victorine comes to sew all day like wild for seventy-five cents, and tells us how splendidly Rosa de Vries (the prima donna) sang ‘Robert, toi que j’aime’ last night. She always goes, ‘Oui, madame, toujours,’ to the opera Sunday.”⁴¹

Sometime during her second season with the Théâtre d’Orléans, de Vries made a major decision to switch from French to the Italian opera repertory. By 1847 Italian opera had become the dominant style in the United States, and outside New Orleans there was virtually no audience in the United States for French-language opera.⁴² If she wanted a career beyond this city, she needed to learn Italian. For the 1851–52 season, she returned to New York, joining Marezek’s huge Artists’ Union Company at Castle Garden. This engagement suggests her increased familiarity with the operatic world in the United States: not only was she familiar with Marezek, as she had sung under his direction the previous year, but she also knew members of the company, many of whom were Italians who had sung in New Orleans with the Havana Opera Company under Luigi Arditi.⁴³ A critique of her portrayal of Norma during this engagement gives a sense of her style: “When she commences one of the chain-lightening roulades of hers, she attacks the note from which she starts with a precision and accuracy that are truly marvelous.”⁴⁴ The London *Musical World*, comparing her to Jenny Lind, noted, “the lower register, unlike Miss Lind’s, is rich in contralto quality.” Her Norma, the critic continued, was “one of the most spirited and impressive we remember to have witnessed in this city.”⁴⁵ Although openly sarcastic, comments by George Templeton Strong, a New York lawyer who posthumously became famous for his richly descriptive diary, illustrate her powerful voice. “The louder this lady screamed,” he wrote in his diary, “the more uproariously they applauded, and her solitary windpipe was a fair match for the vociferous bravos of her 5,000 admirers.” Strong also described audience’s delight with de Vries’s potent characterization of Norma’s denunciation of Pollione for his betrayal of her for the younger Adalgisa: “In the grand explosion scene of the second act, where that unhappy man Pollione has to be bullied and repudiated by the two ladies together, Norma holloed [*sic*] so, and fell foul of her recreant lover in such desperate earnest, and so made the fur fly, that the exaltation of the audience knew no bounds, and the triumph of the Signora became a fixed fact.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Letter by Lizzie Randall to Mary Lawrence, 11 March [1851], Mss. 1326, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge.

⁴¹ Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 68.

⁴² Preston, *Opera on the Road*, 141.

⁴³ These individuals included Cesare Badiali, Geremia Bettini, Angiolina Bosio, Domenico Coletti, and Domenico Lorini.

⁴⁴ *Mirror*, 2 September 1851, quoted by Lawrence, *Reverberations*, 167.

⁴⁵ *The Musical World*, 25/44, 2 November 1851, 712.

⁴⁶ Lawrence, *Reverberations*, 168.

In 1851–52 Maretzek mounted productions both at Astor Place in New York and in Philadelphia, where they were billed as the Max Maretzek Italian Opera Company at the National Theatre.⁴⁷ On 7 October 1851, de Vries starred in *Norma* in Philadelphia, with tenor Geremia Bettini as Pollione under conductor Luigi Arditi. The next evening she sang Leonora di Gusman in *La Favorite*, and the following Sunday she appeared in this role twice, at four o'clock and again at eight o'clock, with the *New York Times* reporting that she had a "triumphant night," singing "far better" than her *Norma*.⁴⁸ Maretzek and part of his cast then continued on to Baltimore, where de Vries again sang the title role of *Norma* at the Holliday Street Theatre.⁴⁹

A Short-lived Opera Company

By December 1851 de Vries and other Maretzek singers had arrived in Savannah, Georgia, where they performed for two weeks with Arditi as conductor. According to Strong, the manager's failure to make arrangements for their trip back to New York was the proverbial straw to break the camel's back. De Vries, Arditi, and a number of other singers decided to set up a rival company back at Niblo's Theater, calling themselves the "Artists' Union Italian Opera Company" (AUIO). The AUIO first staged *Norma* at Niblo's on 14 January 1852 with de Vries in the title role, and shortly after she sang the title role in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* and Donna Anna in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.⁵⁰ Competition between the AUIO and Maretzek's company, both with European-trained casts, was fierce, reducing ticket prices to a mere 50 cents. Maretzek complained bitterly: "Their object evidently was to cut my operatic throat with the expenditure of the cash which I had paid them," and both companies were soon financially ruined.⁵¹ Members of AUIO, including de Vries, had to scout around for work and went up to Boston to sing Rossini's *Stabat Mater* at a sacred concert on 29 February, where they were assisted by excellent musicians from the Germania Musical Society.⁵² On 2 March de Vries also starred at Germania's nineteenth subscription concert in Boston.

De Vries's whereabouts between March and December 1852 are now unknown, but her fourth child, Maurice, was probably born in this period.⁵³ In December she was in New York City, where she and other unemployed AUIO members were hired

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, 27 September 1851, reported that de Vries was replacing Teresa Parodi (1827–78) in Philadelphia.

⁴⁸ *New York Times*, 10 October 1851; Frank Hamilton, ed., "Opera in Philadelphia," <http://frankhamilton.org/ph/>. Perhaps her appearance in Philadelphia inspired Hans Krummacker to compose the 1854 piano piece, the "Rosa de Vries Waltz."

⁴⁹ *New York Times*, 18 October 1851.

⁵⁰ Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, 165.

⁵¹ Max Maretzek, *Crotchets and Quavers or Revelations of an Opera Manager in America* (New York: Da Capo Press, [1855] 1966), 200; Lawrence, *Reverberations*, 230. See also Preston, *Opera on the Road*, 399n156; and Karen Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815–60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 145–47.

⁵² Nancy Newman, *Good Music for a Free People: the Germania Musical Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010), 81.

⁵³ Once source states that Maurice was born in New Orleans on 1 August 1852. See Gerard Keller and Philip Kruseman, eds., "Vries-van Os, Rosa de," *Geïllustreerd muzieklexicon* (The Hague:

by William Fry to sing for his well-known series of subscription lecture-concerts at the cavernous Metropolitan Hall.⁵⁴ She participated in five of these concerts, with the *Courier and Enquirer* reporting that at her first appearance she offered “a brilliant performance of the Rondo from Verdi’s *I Lombardi*.”⁵⁵ On 8 February 1853 Fry scheduled an extra lecture-concert, free for subscribers, with de Vries heading a huge cast in the Finale of the first act of Fry’s grand opera *Leonora*. The *Tribune* described the Finale as “a bravura of unsurpassed difficulty in 3/4 time, unaccompanied” and that “Madame de Vries had to return and give it again, which she did with brilliancy and accuracy.”⁵⁶ A mere two days later, de Vries assisted the internationally renowned pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–69) in his American debut on 10 February 1853, with a “most refined” audience that included former president Martin Van Buren.⁵⁷ She also appeared with Gottschalk at his second concert at Niblo’s on 17 February. Among those present this time was the phenomenal German soprano Henriette Sontag (1806–54); perhaps the basis for future cooperation was born that evening between de Vries and Sontag, who had also studied with Bordogni in Paris.

At a benefit concert for William Fry at Metropolitan Hall on 1 March 1853, soloists included de Vries and Sontag’s bass singer Luigi Rocco, plus tenor John Frazer. After this last appearance with Fry, de Vries headed to Philadelphia to appear again as supporting artist for Gottschalk, singing “Leise, leise, fromme Weise” from Weber’s *Freischütz* at the recently enlarged Musical Fund Hall.⁵⁸ According to a contemporary Dutch source, Marietta Alboni (c.1824–94), a talented Italian contralto who had arrived in New York in June 1852, heard de Vries sing at this concert and invited her to give some concerts together; they performed Arditi’s showy duet, “Una notte d’amore.”

After Maretzek returned to New York from an adventurous Mexican tour, he gathered remnants of his opera company, including de Vries, for new productions. On 22 April 1853 she appeared in the title role of his lavish *Lucrezia Borgia*, together with Alboni and the unreliable tenor Lorenzo Salvi (1810–79).⁵⁹ The *Musical World* reported “overflowing houses” for this opera, that had “never been given in this country with half so extraordinary vocal resources, and with such overpowering effect. Fancy Alboni, Rose De Vries, Salvi, Beneventano, Rosi, and San Giovanni leading off a chorus!—the volume of tone is prodigious.”⁶⁰ The season’s final Maretzek production was Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, with de Vries reaping compliments for her Donna Anna.

Kruseman, 1932), 872–73. However, the New Orleans birth registration index from 1849 through 1856 holds no record of his birth.

⁵⁴ Lawrence, “William Henry Fry’s Messianic Yearnings.”

⁵⁵ *Courier and Enquirer*, 8 December 1852.

⁵⁶ Lawrence, “William Fry,” 384.

⁵⁷ *New York Herald*, 12 February 1853.

⁵⁸ Frederick Starr states that Gottschalk then set off for New Orleans, touring along the way with de Vries and baritone Herman Feitlinger, but there is no evidence that she accompanied Gottschalk. S. Frederick Starr, *Bamboula! The Life and Times of Louis Moreau Gottschalk* (New York: Oxford University Press 1995), 139.

⁵⁹ Lawrence, *Reverberations*, 340.

⁶⁰ *Musical World and New York Musical Times*, 5/18 (30 April 1853), 274.

TO
Mrs. Virginia Jones, and
Miss Constance Warwick.

Una notte d'amore
"A Night of Love."

DUETTINO SENTIMENTALE

Sung by
Madame Marietta Alboni AND Sig. Antonio Sangiovanni
and also by
Madame Rose De Vries, and Signora Vietti.

English Version by
HENRY C. WATSON, ESQ.

Music Composed by
LUIGI ARDITI.

30 Cts. net.

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Figure 1. Title page of *Una notte d'amore* by Luigi Arditi [sic], "sung by Madame Marietta Alboni and Sig. Antonio Sangiovanni and also by Madame Rose De Vries and Signora Vietti." New York: William Hall & Son, 1852.

The Arditì–De Vries Company

That year New York saw de Vries's last appearance on 26 May 1853 at a benefit concert for Arditì at the Metropolitan Hall. Participants also bid farewell to Alboni, who was returning to Europe.⁶¹ De Vries then teamed up with Arditì to become joint impresarios of an itinerant opera company on a strenuous North American tour lasting from June 1853 to August 1854.⁶² Theirs was one of the many self-sufficient Italian companies to operate in America in the 1850s.⁶³ The troupe, remarkably large, consisted of some forty members, including six principals, a chorus, and an orchestra. Their heavy schedule—feasible thanks to the many newly constructed rail lines—consisted of at least twenty-nine cities, including six visited a second time.⁶⁴ According to Thomas Kaufman's detailed chronology of this fifteen-month tour, the troupe began with two weeks in Montreal, followed by Toronto, where de Vries performed the title role in *Norma* at the Royal Lyceum Theatre on 8 July 1853.⁶⁵ In Toronto they rounded off their stay with Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, a custom, which according to critic George Upton, lent touring troupes "a certain odor of sanctity."⁶⁶

The troupe continued (chronologically) on to Buffalo, Cincinnati, Louisville, Cincinnati, Saint Louis, Chicago, Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Columbia (?), Augusta, Mobile, New Orleans, Memphis, St. Louis, Nashville, Louisville, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Buffalo, Syracuse (?), Toronto, and Rochester.⁶⁷ The first to stage opera in several cities, including Cleveland, and Buffalo, the troupe was also "the earliest to present Italian opera (in Italian)" in other cities.⁶⁸ In a punishing timetable de Vries sang a total of eleven leading roles, including the mezzo role of Amina in Bellini's *La Sonnambula*. In St. Louis they presented ten operas, with de Vries singing Maria for the first time in Donizetti's *La figlia del reggimento*, new to their repertoire. In Louisville she sang eleven principal roles, and in Cincinnati another ten, each within a three-week period. This punishing schedule, brutal by today's standards, was typical for itinerant opera companies of the period. The troupe performed on average every other day, and de Vries alternated with the second soprano, Elise

⁶¹ *New York Times*, 27 May 1853; Lawrence, *Reverberations*, 344n73.

⁶² Kaufman, "The Arditì Tour," 39–52.

⁶³ Katherine K. Preston, "To the Opera House? The Trials and Tribulations of Operatic Production in Nineteenth-Century America," *Opera Quarterly* 23/1 (2007): 48. Preston tallies some seventy Italian troupes active between 1847 and 1860.

⁶⁴ John F. Stover, *American Railroads* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 37–57.

⁶⁵ "Opera Performance," www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com.

⁶⁶ *Toronto Pilot*, 14 July 1853; E. H. Cropsey, *Crosby's Opera House, Symbol of Chicago's Cultural Awakening* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 1999), 33. Apparently the troupe was quick to tune into the latest hits, illustrated by the "rapturous applause" elicited by Arditì and his orchestra when they closed one evening with the recently composed "Prima Donna Waltz" by Louis Jullien, a popular French conductor also on tour; see *Daily Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 1 December 1853.

⁶⁷ Besides the dates listed by Kaufman, a number of additional opera performances and concerts have been identified in local newspapers. Performances in Columbia and Syracuse still need confirmation.

⁶⁸ Kaufman, "The Arditì Tour," 42.

Siedenburg, a German whom she may have gotten to know through the Germania Musical Society in Boston. On occasion they extended their stay in a city when the demand warranted it; they quickly arranged a second performance of Donizetti's *Belisario* in Richmond and gave an extra concert at Metropolitan Hall with Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and part of his *Moses in Egypt*.⁶⁹

The production costs for such a large troupe were high, and if possible, subscriptions were used to secure their finances. Noting that some of the artists commanded "salaries as high as from \$500 to \$800 per month," their agent H. D. Palmer explained that "The number of subscribers required for the five nights is three hundred, and out of our population if there is not that many who are willing to encourage this, the highest class of musical entertainments, we will be sadly disappointed."⁷⁰ Despite such talk of "the highest class of musical entertainments," newspaper ads for the Arditì-De Vries troupe were placed under the entertainment column, next to announcements for acrobatics, melodrama, farce, minstrels, and the like. Nor was attendance limited to the elite, and audiences featured patrons of different classes and races. Some cities offered cheaper, segregated seating sections called the "Quadroon Gallery" and the even less expensive "Colored Gallery."⁷¹ The troupe often had to mount productions in ill-equipped theaters. After staging four operas in December 1853 at Risley's Varieties in Washington, the last two performances were held at the National Theatre because the "inefficiency of place [Risley's] . . . prevented their doing justice either to themselves or the public."⁷² At the same time, opera was regarded by some as an art form that could elevate moral character by touching the soul with beauty.⁷³ A Richmond review noted, "It is really gratifying to witness the growing taste for music, and particularly for operatic performances in our city, among all classes. Its effect upon morale is most happy, while it will increase the desire among parents to give their children musical educations, and see them become proficient in a science which adds so largely to other accomplishments."⁷⁴

David de Vries, who accompanied his wife on this lengthy tour, was involved in various organizational tasks. At some point he seems to have acted as joint impresario with Luigi Arditì, with the above-cited notification of their move to the National Theatre in Washington signed, "Messrs. Arditì & DeVries, Directors of the Italian Opera Company." Similar to other touring groups, the Arditì-De Vries troupe often appeared under various names. In Washington, the *Daily Evening Star* even identified David de Vries as head of the troupe: "Signor De Vries' Italian Opera."⁷⁵

⁶⁹ *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 14 January 1854.

⁷⁰ *Nashville Union and American*, 13 May 1853.

⁷¹ *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 9 January 1854.

⁷² *Daily Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 29 December 1853.

⁷³ Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*. [*Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*] (1794) [1990].

⁷⁴ *The Daily Dispatch*, (Richmond, VA), 14 January 1854.

⁷⁵ *Daily Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 1 December 1853. They also went under the name of the New York Opera Company and the Italian Opera Troupe, or simply were announced without a troupe name. Their agent in Richmond was William Crisp; see *The Daily Dispatch*, 16 February 1854.

American reception of de Vries on tour was, on the whole, positive. A short write-up after her first appearance in Pittsburgh noted that in the title role of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, she “achieved a splendid triumph” before “a brilliant and crowded audience.”⁷⁶ A Richmond critic wrote: “Madame De Vries excelled all her past efforts here. Her Norma was indeed a superb performance. She acted the character with great spirit and fidelity.”⁷⁷ Although little of the tour is known, there was apparently one exceptionally nasty experience after a performance in Detroit. Thugs armed with clubs, apparently hired by the theater manager, had stormed into the ladies’ dressing rooms at the end of the evening, demanding more money than agreed upon in their contract. Faced with the threat of violence, they had to pay up.⁷⁸

Interlude: Henriette Sontag

Towards the end of February 1854, Henriette Sontag, who was in New Orleans, presumably contacted de Vries. Subsequently, Sontag, her assistants, and impresario Bernard Ullman joined the troupe in Mobile, Alabama.⁷⁹ After three concerts and four operas in Mobile, everyone headed to New Orleans for more joint performances, with Sontag engaging the entire troupe with its orchestra.⁸⁰ Shortly before their first scheduled appearance on 6 March at the Théâtre d’Orléans, the upstairs galleries collapsed, resulting in deaths and injuries among the audience. The performance was rescheduled at the St. Charles Theatre.

De Vries now had to play second fiddle to the more famous Sontag, who starred in most of the principal soprano roles, but on 10 March de Vries sang Norma, and on 31 March she appeared as Elvira in *Ernani*. On 22 and 27 March the divas appeared together in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, with de Vries as Donna Anna and Sontag as Zerlina. They also shared the stage at the Odd Fellows Hall on 23 March in Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*. The two women may have gotten on well together, as Sontag also asked de Vries to go to Mexico with her, reportedly offering her a hefty monthly salary of \$2,500. De Vries turned her down, and later in Louisville de Vries received a message that Sontag had died of cholera in Mexico City on 17 June 1854, aged forty-eight.⁸¹

After Sontag had left for Mexico, taking with her several of the best Italian singers, the Arditì–De Vries troupe carried on in New Orleans as best they could. De Vries now had to compete with performances at the recently restored Théâtre d’Orléans, where she had launched her American career in 1849. The troupe’s success was limited, so they continued on, making seven more stops on their way to Toronto for a second time.

⁷⁶ *Daily Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 19 November 1853.

⁷⁷ *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), 9 January 1854.

⁷⁸ *Daily Morning Post* (Pittsburgh), 22 November 1853, as reported by Kaufman, “The Arditì Tour,” 39.

⁷⁹ *Daily Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 4 March 1854.

⁸⁰ *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), 9 March 1854.

⁸¹ *Rosa de Vries, Esquisse Biographique*, 15.

On Without Arditì

After performances in Rochester in August 1854, de Vries and Arditì seem to have split up. Their fifteen-month collaboration had been arduous. In his *Reminiscences*, Arditì claims prime responsibility as impresario and does not mention David de Vries. He writes that after accompanying Alboni for eight months in 1852, he “became joint Impresario with Madame Devries, an epoch I cannot look back upon with anything like pleasure or satisfaction. The position itself involves a terrible responsibility. Apart from the loss of money, and of one’s normal allowance of good temper, an Impresario is compelled to make enormous sacrifices (*sous entendu* to the complete exclusion of his own interests) in order to bring about a satisfactory issue to his efforts.”⁸² Apparently, although Arditì named de Vries as a “joint impresario,” most of the managerial work and responsibilities had fallen on his shoulders.

While Arditì toured with soprano Giulia Grisi (1811–69) and tenor Giovanni Mario (1810–83), de Vries continued on a tour of her own. In fall 1854, she teamed up with the Belgian pianist Martin Lazare (1829–97), staging a benefit concert at the Old Cathedral in Saint Louis. Her rendering of “Inflammatùs” and the duet “Quis est homo” from Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*, accompanied by Lazare on organ, reportedly brought tears to everyone’s eyes and raised a considerable sum.⁸³ She then appeared at Chicago’s new Metropolitan Hall on 3 November.⁸⁴ The following month (8 December), “this great artist and her troupe” gave a concert at the Odd Fellows’ Hall in Nashville.⁸⁵ Besides Lazare, assisting artists were baritone Morini, whom she had met via the Havana Opera Company, and violinist Pasarelli (or Pzarelli). Her program well demonstrates the vocal concerts offered by lead singers at the time. She opened with the famed “Casta Diva” aria from Bellini’s *Norma*, and also sang the showy “Echo Song” by Carl Eckert, a virtuoso work popular on both sides of the Atlantic, originally written for Sontag and sung by many leading sopranos, including Lind and Adelina Patti.⁸⁶ By now she had added a popular favorite to her repertory, “Home, Sweet Home,” demonstrating her confidence in singing in English. “A large and fashionable audience welcomed Madame De Vries again to Nashville,” a critic noted, continuing, “We can do nothing but praise [her] singing . . . and if there was any doubt last night dispersed it, that she is indeed, one of the best singers who has ever visited this country.”⁸⁷

The beginning of 1855 brought de Vries to the east coast, in venues such as Carus’s Saloon in Washington on 6 February. The previous day, the *Evening Star* cited de Vries as a role model: “her face and figure are so particularly fine. . . . Her robust health is an example worth imitation, and the rich, full music of her

⁸² Luigi Arditì, *My Reminiscences* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1896), 17.

⁸³ *Rosa de Vries, Esquisse Biographique*, 15–16.

⁸⁴ Robert L. Sherman, *Chicago Stage: its Records and Achievements*, vol. 1 (Chicago: R. L. Sherman, 1947), 260.

⁸⁵ *Nashville Union and American*, 10 December 1854.

⁸⁶ Jack Belsom, “En route to stardom: Adelina Patti at the French Opera House, New Orleans, 1860–1861,” *Opera Quarterly* 10/3 (1994): 129n33.

⁸⁷ *Nashville Union and American*, 10 December 1854.

middle notes is so suggestive of sound lungs, that I wish every woman could look at, and listen to her . . . she looks like a queen and sings like an angel, and I have been in love with her over head and ears ever since I heard her Norma.”⁸⁸ Such an accolade was valuable, for it portrayed de Vries as a healthy and vigorous woman, in stark contrast with other foreign prima donnas, many of whom capriciously cancelled performances because of real or feigned illness. De Vries, her husband, pianist Lazare, and her two supporting artists then went to Richmond, where she appeared at the National Theatre with selections from popular operas. The *Daily Dispatch*, comparing her favorably to Jenny Lind, announced she would soon be returning to Europe.⁸⁹

Perhaps she and her husband first had to pick up their children in New Orleans, where they arrived in early March 1855. *Le Courrier* announced two final concerts on 9 and 16 March, both at the Odd Fellows Hall. Then on 5 May “Madam DeVries’ Opera Company” performed at the Metropolitan Hall in Chicago.⁹⁰ By June they were back in New York, where on 25 June she was to sing Donna Anna in an Italian performance of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* with the LaGrange Troupe under Arditi at the spacious, recently opened Academy of Music.⁹¹ Because the French coloratura soprano Anna de la Grange, who was to perform as Zerlina, suddenly became ill, this performance was postponed until 27 June. Critics praised the singers but were less positive about Arditi’s conducting.⁹²

Plans to return to Europe were probably thwarted by another pregnancy and the birth of their fifth child, Herman.⁹³ In fact, for almost a year de Vries’s whereabouts are again unknown. By the spring of 1856, tensions were fast rising between the North and South, and her career had reached a turning point similar to that of 1848, when European political turmoil had driven her to America.

London, Valencia, Turin, Milan, and Barcelona

De Vries was not the only artist to leave America in the approach of the Civil War. Many musicians, including Italian singers with whom she had worked, such as tenors Lorenzo Salvi and Geremia Bettini (1822?–65), and soprano Angiolina Bosio (1830–59), also returned to Europe. While in the United States, de Vries may have exchanged information with colleagues, perhaps learning that in London the pay

⁸⁸ Journalist Jane Swisshelm, quoted in the *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 5 February 1855.

⁸⁹ *Daily Dispatch*, 9 February 1855.

⁹⁰ Sherman, *Chicago Stage*, 279.

⁹¹ Kaufman, “The Arditi Tour,” 46, reports that she went to Montreal and Halifax, but this does not rhyme with her performance in New York.

⁹² Lawrence, *Reverberations*, 616.

⁹³ The year of his birth, whether 1855 or 1856, has yet to be established. New York City Municipal Archives, correspondence with the author, 8 May 2013. Reference entries on Herman Devries giving his birthdate as 25 or 28 December 1858 in New York are erroneous, as his mother made her debut at La Scala on 28 December 1858. See, for example, “Devries, Herman,” in *Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, rev. Nicolas Slonimsky, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 584. Establishing vital statistics of the five children has proved difficult. If the first-born child lowered her age for professional reasons, this would have had a domino effect on the other siblings. Moreover, with parents constantly on tour in foreign countries and vital statistics then malleable, myth-making opportunities seem to have been too inviting to ignore.

was good. Her debut there with the Royal Italian Opera Company at the Lyceum Theatre in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in June 1856 was not particularly successful, however. The *Spectator* stated, "We never before saw Mozart's masterpiece so lamely performed." De Vries was described as "a stout matronly lady, as unlike the heroine as can be imagined," although the critic allowed that, "she has a good voice, and sings like an artist."⁹⁴ Henry Chorley was less convinced: "The fine voice of the lady could not give the slightest interest to her performances."⁹⁵ On 1 August 1856, de Vries sang at the final concert of a new series at the gigantic Crystal Palace, which could hold some 6,000 people. The list of vocalists is impressive, including Giulia Grisi, Mario Matteo, and the bass Carl Formes (whom de Vries had replaced when he had fallen ill for an Amsterdam concert in 1849).⁹⁶ De Vries's contribution to the lengthy program was limited to Eckert's ever-popular "Swiss Echo Song."

In fall 1856 she headed to Spain, where she performed at least fourteen times in Valencia at the Teatro Principal, singing at least three new roles: Norina in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, Gila in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and Abigail in his *Nabucco*.⁹⁷ In November a number of singers who had performed in Valencia went to Turin, where de Vries is reported to have had a season's contract at the Reggio Theater.⁹⁸ A Turin periodical commented on her role Abigail: "your high tones . . . went so smoothly, so clearly, and so relaxed, that it would have been impossible to listen to you and not cheer with enthusiasm."⁹⁹ The summer of 1857 she returned to London for more performances with the Royal Italian Opera Company and then headed to Milan, where on 28 December 1857 she made her La Scala debut in Verdi's *Nabucodonosor*.¹⁰⁰ Directly after she went to Barcelona, where according to a Dutch newspaper, she made her debut on 8 April 1858 in *Giovanna d'arco*, probably at the Gran Teatre del Liceu.¹⁰¹ De Vries then returned to her native country, where she had last performed before leaving for the United States some ten years earlier.

A Star Back Home; Further Travels Abroad

During the 1850s the Netherlands enjoyed a period of economic growth; cultural life thrived. When de Vries arrived back in September 1859, she was welcomed as a star, enjoying honors comparable to Sontag and Lind. This time national pride was a key element in her success. Her performances, according to reviews, were greeted with exuberant applause, with bouquets and wreaths repeatedly thrown

⁹⁴ *Spectator*, 21 June 1856.

⁹⁵ H. F. Chorley, *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1862), 259.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Forbes, *Mario and Grisi: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1985).

⁹⁷ The *Diario Mercantil de Valencia* only listed performance dates and castings, and did not review the performances.

⁹⁸ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 24 November 1856.

⁹⁹ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 16 February 1857, quoting *Le Scintille, Giornale Teatrale con Caricature e Ritratti*, undated.

¹⁰⁰ Giampiero Tintori, *Cronologia, opera-balletti-concerti 1778–1977* (Bergamo: Grafica Gutenberg, 1979), 39. With playbills extant only as of 1920, it was difficult for Tintori to establish performance runs. The dates of de Vries's La Scala appearances are therefore limited to first performances, and more research is necessary.

¹⁰¹ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 22 April 1858.

onstage and men tossing their hats into the air; often the brass section honored her with fanfares from the orchestral pit. Other gifts followed, befitting her status as a national star: theater directors and royalty alike presented her with diamonds, pearls, and silver.¹⁰²

De Vries's stature in the Netherlands may also be measured by the musicians with whom she appeared. In February 1860 she assisted Clara Schumann at her Rotterdam concert, while in March she appeared with Alfred Jaell, and at a special concert by Hans von Bülow.¹⁰³ Dutch merchandisers capitalized on her renown, producing a special "Rosa de Vries" liquor with her portrait on the label, and a bingo game with cards portraying her in nine leading roles.¹⁰⁴ Sheet music for the Dutch national anthem was reissued "as sung by Mrs. Rosa de Vries."¹⁰⁵ For those who could afford it, two lithograph portraits were available, including one by the well-reputed Frederik Weissenbruch.

In spring 1860, de Vries made a farewell tour throughout the Netherlands, giving at least twenty concerts, among them a fundraiser in The Hague to benefit the widows and orphans of fishermen drowned at sea.¹⁰⁶ After one season in the Netherlands, de Vries departed for Berlin, where she made her local debut as *Norma*.¹⁰⁷ Although de Vries was scheduled until mid-March 1861 at Berlin's newly built Victoria Theater as first *donna soprano assoluta d'oblige* with Achille Lorini's Italian opera company (and with a reported contract for 50,000 francs¹⁰⁸), for some reason her agreement fell through and she litigated against Lorini. She won her court case, reportedly receiving 10,000 francs from him.¹⁰⁹ Her farewell to the Netherlands turned out to be premature, and in January 1861 she was back with the Amsterdam Italian Opera Company. Once again she created *Norma* evening upon evening to rapturous applause. Rossini's *Semiramide* and eight Italian performances of Meyerbeer's *Roberto il diavolo* followed; in the latter she switched to the original French for the famous aria, "Robert, toi que j'aime."

Upon completing her engagements in the Netherlands, de Vries spent the next few years performing to great acclaim in Italy and Portugal. In Naples she appeared as *prima di soprano assoluta* at the Teatro di San Carlo in Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. Regarding her 26 November 1861 appearance in *Nabucco*, *Il Corriere de' Teatri* wrote, "With her perfect accent, sonorous voice, with her unsurpassed acting, masterly in even

¹⁰² *Rotterdamsche Courant*, 8 March 1860; *Nieuw Amsterdamsch Handels- en effectenblad*, 14 March 1860; *Dordrechtsche Courant*, 31 March 1860.

¹⁰³ *Rotterdamsche Courant*, 18 February 1860; *Rotterdamsche Courant*, 15 March 1860; Henri Viotta, "Muzikaal overzicht," *De Gids* 58/4 (1894), 593–94.

¹⁰⁴ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 4 and 8 February, and 5 March 1860.

¹⁰⁵ Advertisements in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 19 and 22 March 1860.

¹⁰⁶ De Vries was assisted by violinist Frederigo Consolo, aged 19, and pianist Edoard Compta; *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage*, 4 October 1860. In this maritime country, artists traditionally contributed their services to victims of storms and floods.

¹⁰⁷ Dutch newspapers also reported her initial success in Berlin; see *Nieuw Amsterdamsch Handels- en effectenblad*, 23 October 1860.

¹⁰⁸ *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage*, 10 June 1860.

¹⁰⁹ *Caecilia* 17/24, 15 December 1860, 236; and *Caecilia* 18/2, 15 December 1861, 22.



Figure 2. Rosa de Vries, prima donna of the Hollandsche Opera in Amsterdam, lithograph by F. H. Weissenbruch (1828–87), based on a drawing by Joseph Schubert (1816–86).

the smallest details, she electrifies her listeners.”¹¹⁰ The following spring she created the title role in the world premiere of Ernesto Viceconte’s *Luisa Strozzi* at the same

¹¹⁰ *Il Corriere de’ Teatri*, 27 November 1861. The cast included the talented baritone Gottardo Aldighieri (1824–1906).

theater.¹¹¹ By winter 1862 she was back at La Scala, where she had made her debut five years earlier, singing Teodora in Mercadante's *Il bravo*; instead of Teodora's first aria, she inserted an aria from Mercadante's *Emma d'Antiochia* in the three performances of this opera.¹¹² The custom of insertion arias, mainly practiced by women, also benefited the opera house, as Hilary Poriss explains: "The better they sang, after all, the more likely they were to attract large audiences to the box office."¹¹³ In January 1863, de Vries appeared as the doomed female lead in La Scala's last opera of the season, Verdi's *Macbeth*.¹¹⁴ Her next stop was Lisbon, where she appeared at the Teatro de São Carlos in autumn 1863.¹¹⁵

Back to the Netherlands; The End of a Career

To honor her mentor, van Gelder, on 25 January 1864 de Vries took part in a concert celebrating his fiftieth anniversary as a cellist. The elderly man was particularly touched to have her at his side.¹¹⁶ During the coming months she performed in French-language productions with her first employer, the Théâtre Français in The Hague. Her schedule in The Hague and other Dutch cities was heavy, but with roles she knew well: Fidès in Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*, the title role in *Norma*, Léonore in *Le Trouvère*, Valentine in *Les Huguenots*, Rachel in *La Juive*, and the title role in *Lucrece Borgia*. Even as her career came to a close in the Netherlands, operagoers remained electrified by her, with reviews embodying what Karen Ahlquist has identified as "the nineteenth-century ideal of emotional-religious reverence."¹¹⁷ She was especially impressive in the first Dutch creation of Lady Macbeth, when the aria "La luce langue" "caused the entire startled audience to shudder."¹¹⁸ In a pivotal scene in *Le Prophète*, when Fidès's son is killed in front of her eyes and de Vries painfully dragged herself towards his body, one critic declared, "This was Fidès, the betrayed mother, this was truth."¹¹⁹

By 1865 Rosa de Vries's operatic career was drawing to a close. Spanning twenty years, it was filled with extensive and exhausting travel as well as crowd-pleasing performances in the leading roles of some twenty-five operas. She had also borne and taken care of five children during this period of great artistic productivity. But although at forty-one she was still able to move audiences with her performances,

¹¹¹ The premiere, on 25 March 1862, was not by Fidès Devriès as stated at www.amadeusonline.com.

¹¹² *Nieuw Amsterdamsch Handels- en effectenblad*, 12 January 1863, relayed that the *Gazzetta di Milano* and other periodicals carried positive reviews on her.

¹¹³ Hilary Poriss, *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas, and the Authority of Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.

¹¹⁴ Tintori, *Cronologia*, 42.

¹¹⁵ Three of her children later performed at the same theater, Jeanne in 1877–78, Fidès in 1884–85 and 1885–86, and Maurice in 1885–86 and 1890–91. Mário Moreau, *O Teatro de S. Carlos, dois séculos de história*, vol. 2 (Lisbon: Hugin, 1999), 1390 and 1398.

¹¹⁶ *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage*, 27 January 1864.

¹¹⁷ Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera*, 185.

¹¹⁸ *Nieuw Amsterdamsch Handels- en effectenblad*, 6 February 1860. In 1864 admirers offered her a chiseled dagger to commemorate this role. *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage*, 6 December 1864.

¹¹⁹ *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's-Gravenhage*, 10 February 1865.

her health was no longer so robust and, as veteran performer, she was increasingly confronted with competition by younger stars such as Adelina Patti. Consequently, she withdrew from public life and on 25 March gave a farewell concert at Park Hall in Amsterdam with the young German baritone Max Stägemann and pianist Henri Litolff.¹²⁰

Now that operatic performances no longer monopolized her time, de Vries could turn her full attention to the musical education of her five children: Jeanne (probably 19 or 20 at the time), Marcel (16), Fidès (14), Maurice (11), and Herman (7).¹²¹ All of the de Vries children, and one grandson, would become successful performers on the operatic stage, thus continuing the family tradition for the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The two daughters, Jeanne and Fidès, sang exclusively in Europe. Both were sopranos, and each of them went to Paris for further vocal training and subsequently enjoyed careers centered in Paris, Brussels, and other European cities. Fidès was the more successful of the two sisters; she created the role of Chimène in Massenet's *Le Cid*, and appeared as Salomé and as Elsa in the first Parisian performances of *Herodiade* (Massenet) and *Lohengrin* respectively.¹²²

Neither Maurice (baritone) nor Herman (bass) attained operatic stardom, but both had successful careers in Europe and the United States. After performing in Amsterdam, Paris, Milan, and Rome, Maurice moved to New York City, where he sang with the Metropolitan from 1895 to 1897. Three years later Herman also traded a successful career in Paris for a chance to sing in Manhattan; he performed with the Metropolitan from 1898 to 1900 and later toured with the Savage Opera Company, singing opera in English. At the Metropolitan, both brothers sang (under the directorship of Maurice Grau) in New York and on tour; after retiring from the stage both eventually settled in Chicago. The career of the second-oldest child, Marcel (tenor), is the least known to historians, but he performed operatic roles for some years in the Netherlands and France, and eventually settled in Paris. His son David (1881–1934), however, contributed greatly to the family reputation in the world of opera. He performed first at the Opéra-Comique in Paris and subsequently followed in the footsteps of two uncles and his grandparents by traveling to the United States and appearing successfully at Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House. The activities of her children must have filled Rosa de Vries with pride, for by the time she died in Rome in 1889, it was clear that she and her husband had created a significant operatic dynasty.

The Dutch opera singer Rosa de Vries was both exceptional and typical. She accomplished more in her career than most, but a nomadic existence, grueling travel schedule, and a broad repertoire was *de rigueur* for successful opera singers active on both sides of the Atlantic in the mid-nineteenth century. Few women

¹²⁰ *Caecilia* 22/7, 1 April 1865, 73.

¹²¹ Jeanne was reported to be nineteen when she made her Brussels debut in 1869. This would mean she was born in America in 1850, as is indeed noted by several reference works; she is even reported to be the twin sister of Fidès at www.hnoc.org/publications, Historic New Orleans Collection Quarterly. However, as stated earlier, she was likely born in 1844 or 1845.

¹²² Massenet declared her a “sublime” vocalist. Jules Massenet, *Mes Souvenirs* (Paris: Pierre Lafitte, 1912), 154.

of her time maintained such a busy performing career while raising a large (and musically accomplished) family and supporting a husband, but all faced similar prejudices and restrictive societal norms. The story of Rosa de Vries thus deserves our attention not only because it brings to light an extraordinary life and career, but also because it reveals a great deal about the power and appeal of opera at mid-century as well as the cultural connections between two continents, separated by an ocean but linked through music.

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