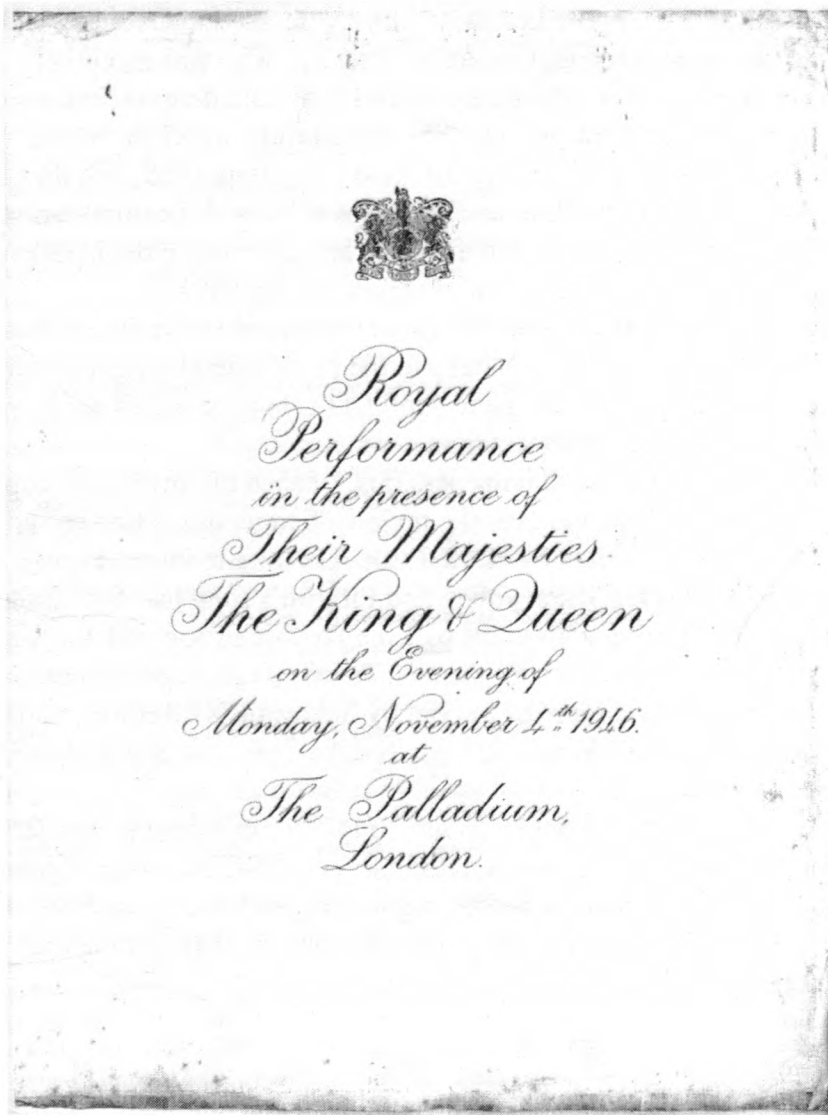


G&T GAZETTE

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Front & back covers: By courtesy of Winifred Natzka.

This issue of the Gazette is almost entirely devoted to Oscar Natzka. This situation was brought about by Peter Fry who was recently in touch with his widow Winifred. When Peter visited her in Tauranga she produced a folio of programmes and cuttings which he was allowed to borrow for study, prior to them being deposited with the Turnbull Library in Wellington. When I was offered the opportunity to go through them I jumped at the chance and after much deliberation chose Royal items which adorn our front and back cover. As far as the meat in the sandwich was concerned this influx of material renewed my interest in Natzka to the point whereby I got out my recordings by him, including the Atoll CD's, both of which are accompanied by a booklet of information. During my reading and playing sessions, I fished out my bound copies of *The Gramophone* and read the review of some of his first recordings. These were written by H.V.F. Little. Looking them up, I noted that Natzka's *Myself when young* and *Pilgrim's song* had been issued in March 1939 along with items by Lina Pagliughi, Richard Tauber, Ninon Vallin and Heinrich Schlusnus. To my great chagrin, I noted that Mr Little was somewhat put out by Schlusnus's offerings, finding the music not to his liking - whereas Natzka came out of it with flying colours! We conclude this issue with a tribute to Pat. It may come as a relief to know that Pat's sister Diane is willing to give SRG members access to Pat's collection of records before negotiating with Slowboat Records with the remainder. I will notify everyone once a visiting time and date has been settled upon.

OSCAR NATZKE

by W. S. Meadmore

As printed in *The Gramophone* May 1940

A voice on the telephone suggested that I might be interested to hear a remarkable singer. Who was it? A name was pronounced which I did not catch. Dubiously I said I had heard so many remarkable singers. So have I, the voice continued, but this really is an exceptional one. 'Already prepared for disappointment, late that afternoon I went to the Kingsway Hall to find that the Parlophone Company were in the full swing of a recording session. Straggling across the stage and part of the auditorium a small orchestra straddled on wooden chairs, an organist sat in the organ loft looking down on us over his shoulder and a choir of men were grouped on one side of the stage. Standing slightly apart from them was a tall, dark headed, muscular young man. Mr. Braithwaite of Sadler's Wells climbed into the conductor's rostrum and tapped with his baton. A bell rang. It rang again and, without further ado, organ and orchestra broke into the preamble to "In a Monastery Garden." My heart sank. Was it for this that I had abandoned my comfortable fireside and braved the rigours of a return journey home in the black-out? I resigned myself to listen to the hackneyed if melodious music. But the next second I was sitting up in my chair in excitement. The dark-headed young man had opened his mouth and his singing was indeed something exceptional and remarkable a powerful, resonant voice with notes as deep booming and as sonorous as the organ accompanying it, a voice that could make almost any music come to life and be interesting. It made me think of the wonderful Russian bass singing I had heard in happier days, of Chaliapin, and this feeling became more vivid and realistic when, the last bell having been sounded in the monastery garden, the singer began the mournful cadence of "The Song of the Volga Boatman." The song finished, a buzz of conversation in the orchestra, and Walter Legge said to me "Do you know Oscar Natzke? Oscar Natzke? That was the name which had eluded my ear on the telephone. I did not know Oscar Natzke, but over a cup of tea in the artistes' room, I began to do so. His obvious enthusiasm for singing and his sincerity attracted me. Later I was to hear his story. It is as strange and romantic as any I have heard. I was shown his press cutting book, begun when his foot had hardly touched the first step of the ladder and when he was a boy in New Zealand. Almost the first cutting is an article by Chaliapin, headed "I Have Known Poverty and Hardship, that is Why I Say Thank God for Success!" "One can imagine Natzke reading that and saying "What one man has done, so can another. And so will I!" "I may be wrong, but Natzke certainly gave me a tremendous impression of a flaming determination to make good and succeed as much as it is possible for a singer to succeed. Franz Oscar Natzke was born in Matipara, New Zealand, in 1912. Long before then, in the early 'eighties, his father, a Russian born in Germany, had come to seek his fortune in New Zealand and acquired a farm of some 3,000 acres. Music had always been in the family and on both sides. Natzke's great grandmother had been a famous Russian soprano, his father had a passion for playing wind instruments, while his mother (a descendant of English colonists) was a concert singer. When a girl her voice had been exceptional and urged by friends she had wanted to come to England to study. Her father would not hear of such nonsense. He said a girl's place was in the home to grow up into a woman, her job to cook and clean and then, in good time, to have and rear children. The old man was a character, an inventor of ingenious agricultural machinery which was to make his fortune, but although these inventions behaved splendidly at trials, the devil got into them when they were tried before interested speculators and they then always failed dismally. In his youth he

had built a windmill of brick and wood, for the rest of his life he tilted against imaginary ones. As a boy Natzke worked on the farm with his two brothers and had little time for schooling. That was to come later. In those days he didn't sing much either. But he remembers the farmhouse and a room full of company, himself standing at a piano, his mother gripping one of his hands like a vice so that he couldn't run away (as he would have liked to do), and playing an accompaniment with her free hand while Natzke sang: "Do I want to see my mother any more?" adding sotto voce, but with intense feeling, "No, I don't," so much did he hate the proceedings.

The world depression settled on New Zealand like a blight some twelve years ago. Farming was ruined, the Natzke family did not escape. The farm had to be given up and other means of making a livelihood sought. Soon after, Natzke's father died and it became imperative that the boy of fifteen should somehow contribute something towards his keep. At Freeman's Bay, New Auckland, where great petrol containers spread over the landscape and the masts of scores of careened ships slant skyward, there was (and still is) a blacksmith's shop; where the forge burnt brightly all day and there was no lack of horses to be shod. Natzke was apprenticed to the old blacksmith and in the soot coated forge swung a fourteen-pound hammer for three and a half years for a wage of ten shillings a week. For the first few weeks Natzke despaired of ever being able to stick the exacting and laborious work; after each day's work he could hardly move a muscle and was physically exhausted. But soon his muscles began to harden and he found that he could use the hammer with ease.

When he had served his apprenticeship, he went as a fully fledged smith to the Challoys Phosphate Company. Meanwhile his voice had broken and developed into a basso profundo of astonishing sonority and power: encouraged and coached by his mother, Natzke began to sing and was soon fulfilling engagements at local concerts. But this did not satisfy Mrs. Natzke. She knew her son had an exceptional voice and she determined that it should have a chance. She became haunted with the desire that her son should study with some celebrated teacher in Europe. The family's financial embarrassments made such an ambition appear fantastic, it seemed impossible, but not so to Mrs. Natzke. She would find a way!

Galli-Curci at this time was in New Zealand on a concert tour. Mrs. Natzke wrote and asked if she would be kind enough to hear her boy sing. Galli-Curci replied that she unfortunately was indisposed but her husband, Homer Samuels, who was also her accompanist, would be pleased to do so. The audition took place in the Lewis Eady Hall. Homer Samuels sat at a piano on the floor level. Not far from him, Mrs. Natzke, worried and anxious that her boy would give of his best, occupied a front seat in the auditorium. Oscar, in his rather shabby best clothes, stood on the platform above them. Samuels looked a little bored—until Natzke began to sing. Afterwards he said that Natzke's voice, with its unusual quality and range, was one ideally suitable for grand opera.

That opinion was worth having but it didn't move Natzke a step nearer Europe. His mother tried again. She wrote to John Brownlee, the Australian baritone. He was more helpful. Impressed like Samuels by Natzke's voice, he gave him many free lessons, and said if only Natzke could spare the time and get the right tuition his future was assured. These two factors remained the apparently unsurmountable obstacles.

The rest of this part of the story is best told in the words of Anderson Tyrer, the English pianist, composer and conductor: "When I was visiting Auckland in 1934," Mr. Tyrer said to an interviewer, "I was asked to hear a young fellow sing. At first I did not wish to, as I was having a busy time. At length I made an appointment to hear him at 5.30 one evening. But he did not turn up. The next day, excuses were made, another appointment was arranged, and the young chap turned up. He brought his songs with him. I turned them over and selected 'O Star of Eve.' At the first note I sat up startled. It was years since I had heard a voice of such singular strength and beauty. And the range—he was basso and baritone in one. I was so pleased with the young man that I cabled Trinity College asking them whether they would be good enough to grant a scholarship to the finest voice I had ever heard. The reply came at once. The scholarship, giving Natzke free tuition in everything necessary,

including languages, would be granted."

A great step had been accomplished, there remained the obstacle of the fare to England and of funds to support Natzke while he was studying. This was happily and quickly settled by the generosity of musical enthusiasts in Auckland who subscribed to a fund which eventually amounted to over a thousand pounds. Natzke landed in this country early in March, 1935. It was so cold that he was wearing three overcoats. "Had there been a boat going back to New Zealand, I should have been strongly tempted to have got on it," he said to me. Mr. J. B. Wright had been entrusted by the trustees of the fund to look after Natzke's affairs, and when Natzke reached London, his first call was on him. Natzke was shown into his office. "My name is Natzke," he announced himself. Mr. Wright looked at him in amazement. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "I thought you were a Maori!" Indeed from the correspondence he had received from New Zealand, he had been so convinced of this that he had even advised the landlady of the rooms he had taken for Natzke in Hampstead that her lodger was black. When Natzke arrived, travelling bags in hand, the family at the last moment had lost their courage and fled from the house. But a timid servant girl assured Natzke that it was all right, he was expected, and no doubt somebody would soon be in. The landlord was the first to return. "Thank God!" he said, when he caught sight of Natzke, "that you're a white man and speak English. Now I can persuade my wife to come back home!"

At Trinity College, Natzke was fortunate enough to study with Albert Garcia, grandson of that famous Manuel Garcia, who, in 1840, published an essay on the voice that marked an epoch in its modern science, in 1855 invented the laryngoscope as an instrument of investigation, and lived to be 101. Garcia was soon enthusiastic about his pupil and Natzke became almost one of the Garcia family at Golders Green, Garcia freely giving him of his time outside the official hours of the College. In 1937, Natzke won the Hammond Prize at Trinity College, scoring 96 marks out of a possible 100, a magnificent achievement. This included 49 out of 50 for interpretation and general effect. Natzke's examination number was 350; one can estimate from this that the total number of entrants must have been unusually large.

Friends who had subscribed to the fund in New Zealand were now anxious to hear for themselves how their protege's voice was progressing; it was therefore arranged for Natzke to record some songs and for the records to be sent to New Zealand. At the recording studio, Natzke met Oscar Preuss, Parlophone's recording manager. Preuss thought so highly of the records which Natzke made that he there and then offered Natzke a contract to sign. The records which Natzke has since made for the Parlophone Company have been so highly praised in these columns that there is no point in my stressing their merits.

One more romantic page of Natzke's life remains to be recorded. One afternoon Vladimir Rosing was walking along Wigmore Street, when he abruptly stopped, amazed and delighted at the quality and volume of a bass voice singing part of the Verdi Requiem. Rosing dashed into the studios from whence the sounds proceeded and discovered that the singer was Natzke. Rosing introduced himself and asked Natzke to attend an audition at Covent Garden on the following morning. Natzke did. When he had been heard, Rosing and Percy Heming offered him the leading part of *De Fulke*, in a new opera "The Serf" by George Lloyd which was to be produced at Covent Garden that autumn. Natzke also signed in his contract to appear in *Faust*, *Rigoletto* and *Die Meistersinger*.

On October 10th, 1938, Natzke made his first appearance in grand opera, singing Wagner in *Faust*. Ten days later he appeared as lead in a new and unknown opera, a trying ordeal indeed for a youngster of 26. He should have been a mass of nerves: no doubt, underneath, he was, but it was not apparent. He sang like a veteran and when, in the first interval, the gallery rose to its feet and clapped and cheered him to the echo, it was obvious that he had made a great success. Surely even Mrs. Natzke in her wildest flights of imagination had never visualised him bowing to the storm of the gallery's pleasure in front of the curtain at famous and historical Covent Garden Opera House? The critic of the *Evening Standard* wrote: "The finest singing of the evening came from Mr. Oscar

Natzke as De Fulke, the old feudal lord of the manor. Here at last is a genuine bass voice, rich in colouring, noble in enunciation." All the press was lavish with praise and the Yorkshire Post commented on the dignity of his acting.

Half-way through the writing of this article I had to pause to answer a telephone call. "I just rang up to say good-bye," a voice said. I knew at once that that deep booming voice could only be Natzke's. "Why good-bye?" I asked. "I'm off tomorrow." "Off tomorrow," I repeated. "Off where?" "New Zealand. Going for a year's concert touring." "Lucky devil," I replied. "The best of luck!"

Operatic and Foreign songs

Oscar Natzke (Bass with Herbert Greenslade at the piano: Myself when young from *In a Persian Garden* (Liza Lehmann) and *Pilgrim's Song* (Tolstoi-Tchaikovsky); sung in English. Parlophone, E11397 (12in., 4s.).

Oscar Natzke is twenty-six years old; his mother came from British stock; his father was a Russian who emigrated to New Zealand and took up farming. Fate was not too kind at first and Oscar was swinging a blacksmith's hammer as a lad of fifteen. His voice is a powerful basso profundo, reaching down to an octave below bass F. Thanks to the generosity of a number of musical people in New Zealand, as well as the directors of Trinity College of Music, London, Oscar Natzke has been able to study for several years under Mr. Albert Garcia. He is to be heard at Covent Garden some time this year; his singing has been warmly admired by Vladimir Rosing, Sir Thomas Beecham, Percy Heming and many others connected with the opera. I owe this information to the kindness of the Parlophone Co., for whom Mr. Natzke is recording; in quoting it, I am saved from embarrassment by the fact that I, too, warmly admire both voice and singing in this, the singer's gramophone debut. The sound pours forth easily, smoothly and steadily in a fine resounding manner. The songs are intelligently shaped and phrased the singer makes a praiseworthy and reasonably successful effort to pronounce his words clearly and naturally. There are no mannerisms; there is no suggestion of self-consciousness. It looks as if Mr. Natzke is a distinct "find" and that more of his records will soon be needed.

The above review of Natzke's first Parlophone recording was written by H.F.V. Little in the March 1939 *The Gramophone*. Further readings of Little's ability to review records impartially gets a bit of a dent the following month when he reviews Heinrich Schlusnus's *Heimliche Aufforderung* (Richard Strauss) and *Heimweh* (Hugo Wolf).

"This record presents me with a difficult problem. I hesitate to recommend it, since I completely fail to appreciate either sound as Schlusnus presents it; at the same time I recognise the careful phrasing and conscientious treatment that each song receives. It seems highly probable, therefore, that what appears dull and disappointing to me may seem highly commendable to others

OBITUARY

Patrick James Byrne (1933-2012)

This is not the first time I have recorded the passing of a record collector in the *Gazette*. Beginning in 2000 with an article on Ray Hedges, followed by a similar piece on Don Cameron in 2003 and finally in 2010 for Dennis Brew. My last conversation with Pat prior to his departure to Scandinavia was at Des Wilson's, during Peter Meechen's programme on the 15th of May. During our discussion with one another, I was taken aback by his pallor and breathless enunciation. Although I would never have had the effrontery of voicing my concerns about his health and the strenuous nature of his impending trip, I knew it would have been impossible to persuade him from postponing this venture which he'd planned down to the minutest detail.

My personal association with Pat goes back to the time he joined up with our group in the late 1970s when he held the position of accountant at the National Museum of New Zealand. At the time I was teaching at the Wellington Polytechnic and had occasion to drift across the distance of our two institutions to check out some facts for a publication I was working on where I would bump into him and exchange a few words in his office which was just inside the staff entrance. Later in the 1980s when I had my gallery in Ghuznee Street Pat would be a constant visitor during his lunch break and was one of my better customers for buying photographs to add to his collection.

Amazingly, I don't think we ever had a conversation about who he liked when it came to collecting records. Des Wilson commented to me recently that he thought Pat had a very high regard for the Danish tenor Lauritz Melchior, but I can not recall him ever saying so in one of his programmes. When he retired from his job at the museum he bought a house in Silverstream. Prior to that he and Ray Hedges lived opposite one another in Wallace Street. Besides our SRG Pat was a life long member of The Recorded Music Society and valiantly soldiered on when its numbers were reduced to a handful.

From what I've been told by various friends, it seems on the eve of his departure he suffered some discomfiture in the night which evidently indicated a heart problem, but somehow doggedly got himself to the check-in desk at the airport where he was refused a boarding pass. Returning home, an ambulance was summoned and conveyed him to Hutt Hospital where he was found dead on arrival.

The funeral was well attended and was suitably rendered for the occasion by the organist playing a selection of operatic arias intermingled with some ecclesiastical pieces. What surprised us was to learn of the close proximity of his sister Diane living in Wainuiomata. As far as I am aware, he never mentioned this to anyone during all the years we knew him.

We shall miss his company and if my instincts are correct, we will never forget him as long as we live - especially if some of his recordings find their way into our collections through the generosity of his relatives. If that comes about then there will be no better way of remembering him.

PROGRAMME (continued)

17. SEA SHANTIES Decor by ALEC SHANKS

OSCAR NATZKE

And the following Vocalists from the "High Time" and
"Piccadilly Hayride" Companies:

ALAN BAILEY, DICK BEAMISH, SAMMY CURTIS,
BERNARD DUDLEY, JOHN FRANCIS, LLEWELYN
GRIFFITH, ALGY KINGSLAND, HARRY KNIGHT,
PHIL JACKLEY, PHILLIP LIEVSEY, HENRY,
LEMOINK, JERRY NICHOLS, MAT NEWTON,
DENNIS O'SULLIVAN, GEORGE PATTERS,
VICTOR RANGER, ALEC THOMAS, ARTHUR
VOLLUM, LAWRENCE WILLIAMS, HUMPHREY
WILLIAMS, BERNARD ALLBROW, FREDDIE
COSTELLO, HARRY HART, PETER MORTON,
EDDIE TYLER, FREDERICK WOOD

Under the Direction of BOBBY HOWELL



18. FINALE Decor by HERBERT GOOD

BAND of the Training Ship "Arethusa" and

THE ENTIRE COMPANY

God-Save The King
