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Resources

Margery Mayer Voutsas

Obituary

1918 - 2014



Margery Mayer (Voutsas), a singer widely acclaimed for her portrayal of some of the most famous contralto roles in opera, died Monday, May 12, 2014 in Cupertino, California. She was 96. She had retired to Carmel in 1977 and lived there for over thirty years.

Born Marguerite Caroline Louise Mayer in Chicago on March 29, 1918, she was singled out early for her vocal potential by opera soprano legend, Mary Garden, who brought the 18 year old to MGM for screen tests as her protégé. With a passion for the stage, Miss Mayer debuted in 1938 with the Chicago City Opera Company, singing six roles that first season. The same year her radio performances of 'Lohengrin', 'Samson and Delilah' and 'Carmen' were carried nationwide across radio networks.

During World War II she was a regular soloist on 'Hymns of all Churches' and 'Serenade to America' radio programs and became a leading contralto at the Chicago Opera, and with San Carlo Opera on extensive tours of the US and Canada.

In 1946, Miss Mayer made her début with the New York City Opera. Especially notable, over a remarkably innovative decade for this fledgling company, were her appearances in a number of prominent works and American premieres. Her operatic repertoire spanned some 35 operas, including nearly 100 performances of Carmen (title), 'Aida' (Amneris), 'Il Trovatore' (Azucena), and 'Madama Butterfly' (Suzuki). Of her favorite role, the New York Times wrote in 1951, "Miss Mayer ... is now as satisfying a Carmen, vocally and histrionically, as is to be found hereabout ... her singing is even in quality and full of spirit."

Miss Mayer performed with the New York Philharmonic as well as the Chicago, Houston, Buffalo and Montreal symphony orchestras. She earned Broadway credit in Menotti's 'The Medium' and appeared for two seasons as featured soloist in the Easter Pageant at Radio City Music Hall. She sang several early broadcasts of televised opera including Douglas Moore's 'The Ballad of Baby Doe', an opera she reprised in 1958 with Beverly Sills at the Musicarnival in Cleveland.

Balancing roles as singer and mother of two boys, Mayer was also a dedicated teacher of voice to hundreds of students during her 28 years in the music department of Wagner College on Staten Island, New York. In 1977, she retired as a tenured Assistant Professor and relocated with her husband to Carmel, CA. Her zest for music and dramatic flair were still on view at her surprise 90th birthday party when she reprised her Carmen role with a full and warm rendition of "L'Amour! L'Amour!"

Margery Mayer Voutsas is survived by sons Lynn (Mary) Steen of Northfield, Minnesota, and Richard (Robin Cameron) Steen of New York, New York, two granddaughters and six great-grandsons. She was predeceased by her husbands, Dietrich George Berthold, Sigvart J. Steen, and George Voutsas.

Memorials may be sent to the "Margery Mayer and Sigvart J Steen Music Award" at Wagner College in New York.

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Guest Book

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